

Bearing Strange Fruit: How Disinvestment and Disconnection Hinder Adult And Career Success

Pathways to Adult
Success National
Conference
May 18, 2022

A Moment of Silence

Roberta Drury, 32
Margus Morrison, 52
Andre Mackneil, 53
Aaron Salter, Jr. 55
Geraldine Talley, 62
Celestine Chaney, 65
Heyward Patterson, 67
Katherine Massey, 72
Pearl Young, 77
Ruth Whitfield, 86

We didn't have much, and you took what was left
- Phylicia Dove

The Great Replacement Theory

The perception that White people are facing existential decline- even extinction because of Jews, Blacks, Immigrants, persons of color and LGBTQ populations are taking their jobs and status in society

- Provides ideological justification for violence
- Develops belonging and solidarity
- Gives one significance

Strange Fruit

Written by Jewish school teacher Abel Meeropol, and was composed by Baltimore native Billie Holiday

- Brought awareness to lynching and racial oppression

Ideological frames and practices (ex. Replacement Theory)

- Morally justify violence and inequities
- Betrayal of government promises
 - “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”
 - “Thorough and Efficient Education System” and “adequate education”
- Block resources and opportunities
 - legitimizes inadequate resources in schools and neighborhoods
- Blames inequalities on marginalized groups

Strange Fruit in Education

My argument today is that
strange fruit is lynching
meaningful educational
experiences, high aspirations
and adult and career success

Overview of Presentation

1

Uprooting and Identifying the Strange Fruit

2

Elevate the Voices of Youth on the Topics of:

- Mundane Violence
- Aspirations

3

- Implications and Policy Recommendations

Capturing the Experiences

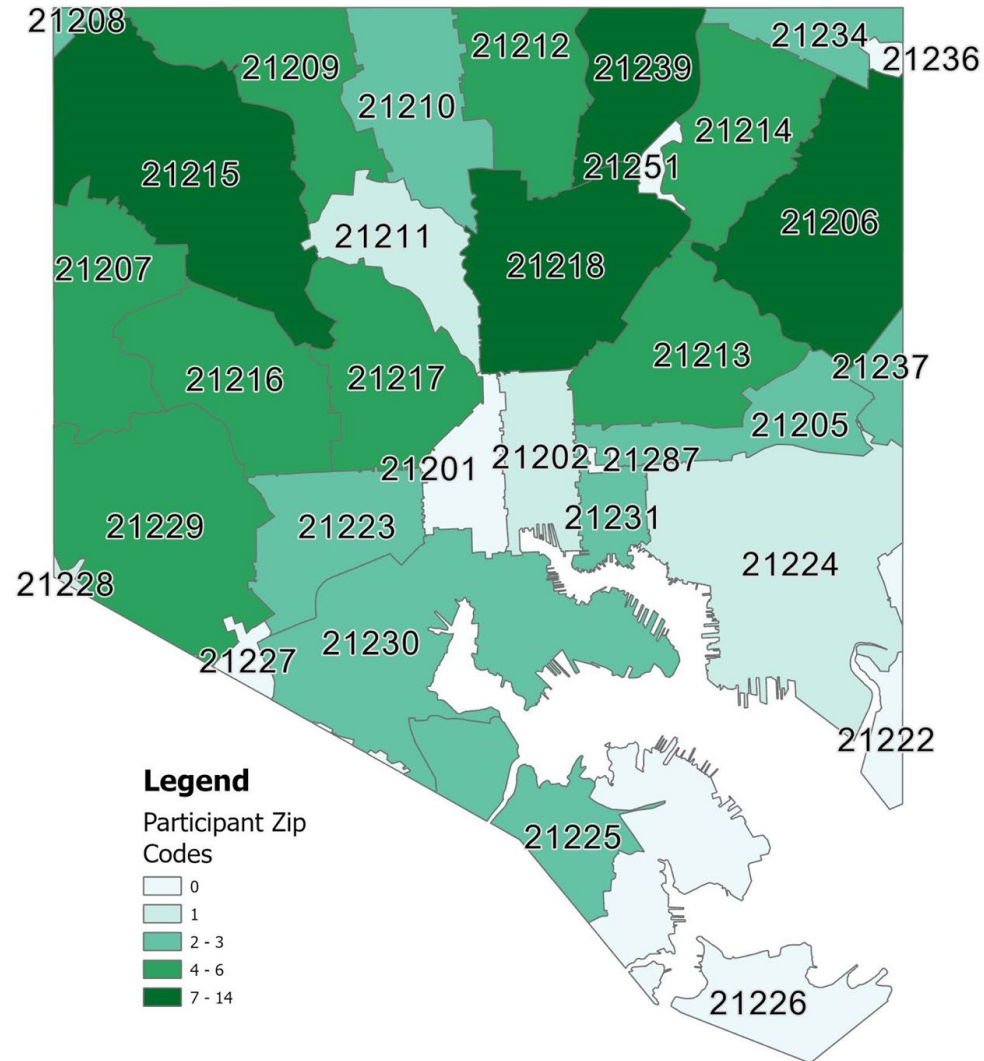
We have interviewed over 140 youth and their family members

Selection Criteria:

- Be a current or former Baltimore City Public School student
- Be a family member of a current or former BCPSS student
- “Youth” participants must be between the ages of 14 and 24 years
- For “family” participants, there are no age constraints

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Location of NAM Participants by Baltimore City Zip Code



Uprooting Strange Fruit in an American City

Bearing Strange Fruit

“Blacks should be **quarantined** in **isolated slums** in order to reduce the incidence of **civil disturbance**, to prevent the spread of **communicable disease** into the nearby White neighborhoods, and to protect **protect property values** among the White majority.”

J. Barry Mahool, 1910; Mayor of Baltimore

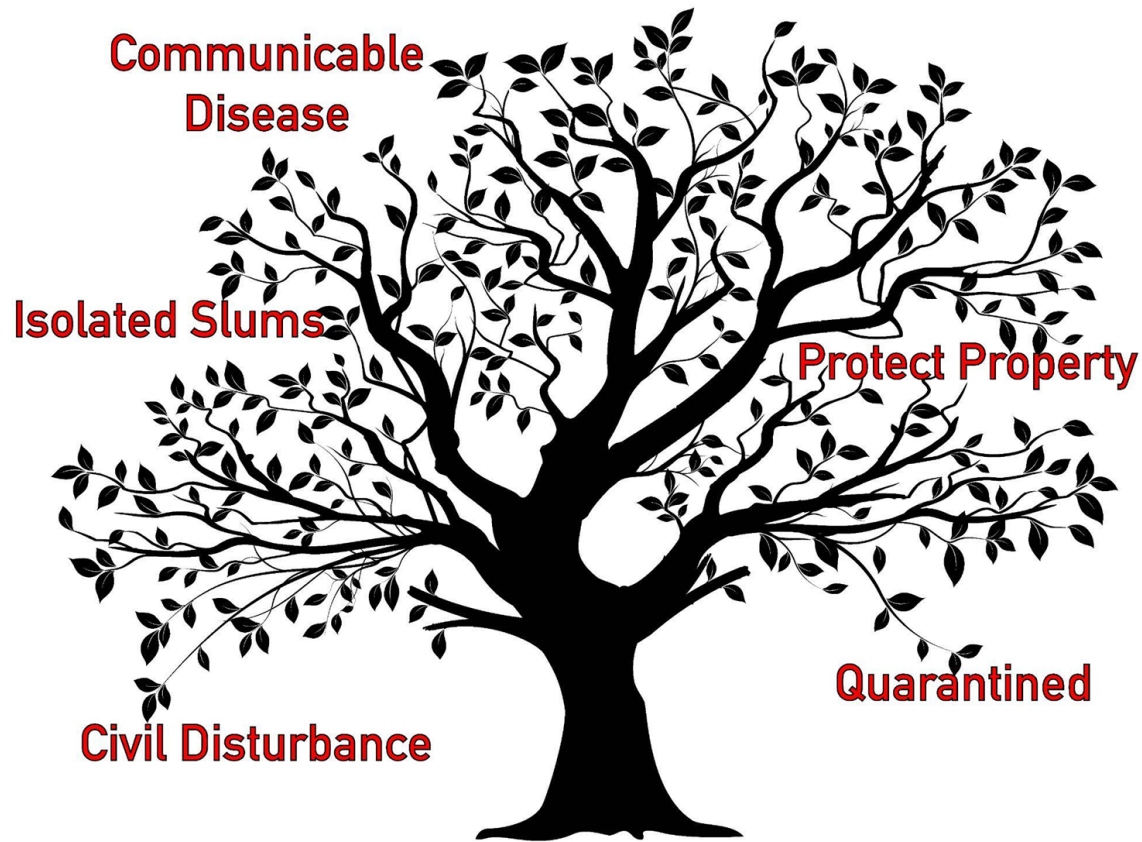
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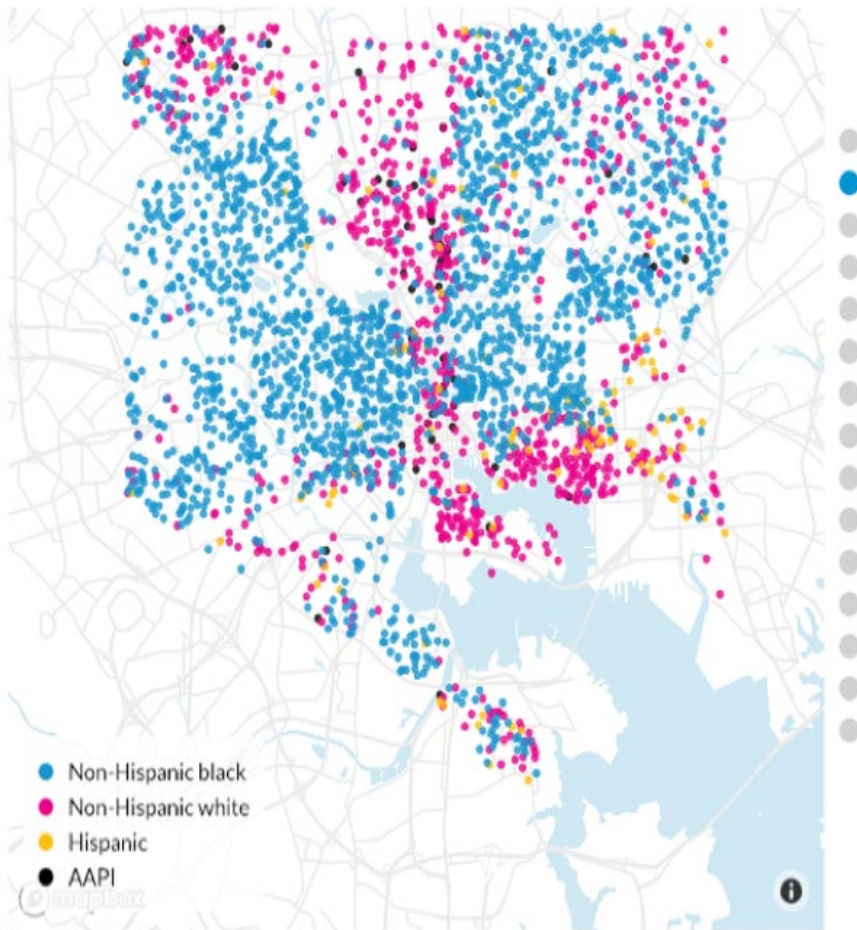


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Historical Strange Fruit



Population distribution of residents by race or ethnicity

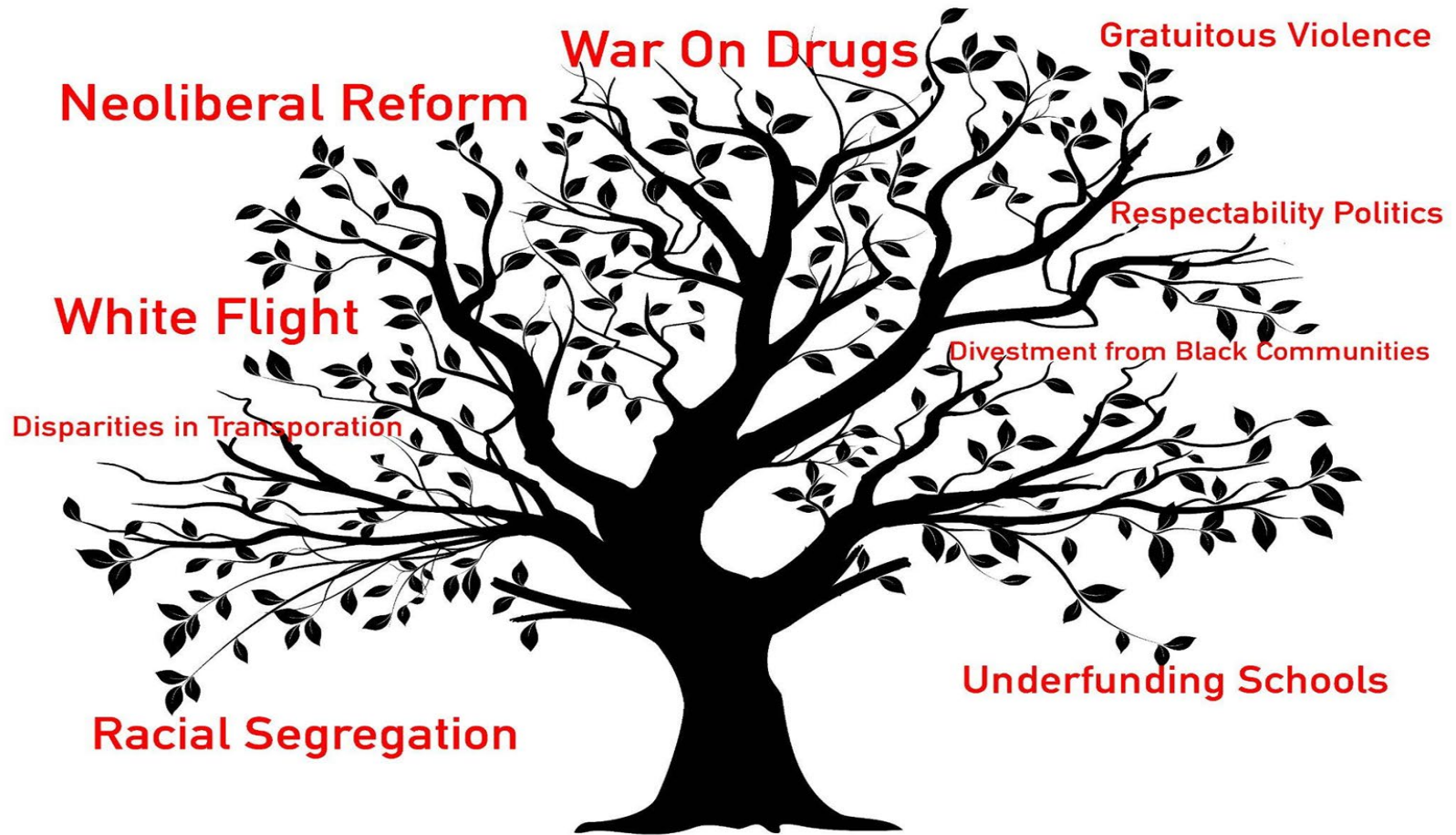


Source: 2012-16 American Community Survey data.

Notes: Each dot represents 200 residents. AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander.

- Early 1900s: Racial covenants
- 1930s to 1968: HOLC and Federal Housing Administration (Redlining)
- 1950s & 60s: Blockbusting in Baltimore
- Between 1950-1964 Aggressive urban renewal displaced 25,000 people, 85% of them African Americans
- Thompson v. US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2005)
- 2001-2009: Steering blacks into subprime lending – “ghetto loans,” “mud people”
- 2005-2007: White first-time buyers enjoyed net worth gains of 50 percent, while new Black homebuyers lost 47 percent
- 2015: Race is the most statistically significant factor in predicting mortgage lending in Baltimore (NCRC, 2015)
- From 2011 and 2016 four times less investment in communities that are 85% African Americans

Strange Fruit in Baltimore



Mundane Terror



Bearing Strange Fruit War on Drugs

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had **two enemies**: the antiwar left and **Black people**. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it **illegal to be** either against the war or **Black**, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then **criminalizing** both heavily, **we could disrupt those communities**. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did.”

– President Nixon’s Domestic Policy Advisor

John Ehrlichman

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The War on Black People

Democrats, including Black politicians throughout the United States adopted the War on Drugs and started calling themselves “General” of the War

- Black “corner boys” became their enemy

Current population of Baltimore: 585,708 (2020 Census)

Baltimore Number of Drug Arrests:

- 1980's: 99,561
- 1990's: 171,348
- 2000's: 271,413
- 9/10 Black people
- 1980-2014: 536,005 Black people arrested

Incarceration in Maryland

1/3 of Maryland prisoners are from the city, although Baltimore accounts for less than 10% of the state population

MD has the highest rate of incarceration for Black men among the 50 states. Despite making up just 31% of the state's total population, 70% of the prison population is Black. (Gaskill, 2020)

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Terror with Police

“Honestly, I feel like that makes me just scared to just walk out and stuff. It makes me, like the perspective of cops that I know I shouldn't go against them or whatever. But it keeps on happening on repeat and stuff, so I have this mentality in my head that cops are bad. You know what I mean? So, I don't know.”

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Joel, 17

Terror of Unfairness

“First of all, I am scared of the law as well, because it's just so unfair. And I'm not scared of it because of the rules, but it's so unfair. The rules, okay, cool. But the people who enforce the rules, and the people who get to sentence you to this, the punishment, I'm terrified, because I know if I was in a situation like that, and I was innocent or whatever ... Whatever situation may be, I'm not going to get a fair trial, because of my skin color. And for real, for real, gender don't even matter anymore. It's just whatever color you are, and whatever action you were claimed to do. It's just, you're not going to get a fair trial. And it also depends on who's sitting up there sentencing you. It's just not fair.”

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Kandy, 21

Terror at Anytime

"The city is dangerous. But do I have to worry about it being directly [dangerous] to me? No. But being out and about, yes. Because anything can happen at any time. The crime rate, police brutality, a lot of racial stuff still going on.... You just got to be cautious in this city because it's dangerous, because you don't know nobody mindset. But here, it's every man for himself."

- Tonya, 17

Terror on the Commute

“I could not even tell you the amount of times **students got jumped on the way home from school...** It was a very, very regular occurrence, especially **because we had to use the public school buses.** And so, my parents would say, ‘You should use the bus to get home, but if it's getting a little late, just call us. We'll come pick you up.’ I had several friends who were followed.”

- Theo

The Terror of Sexual Harassment

“A lot of times there’s people not actively smoking but you could tell that they were just smoking, and they will say or do inappropriate things and there’s not really someone to be a barrier in between that... Like sexual comments or grabbing you and stuff like that. Just weird sexual harassment I would say it is.”

Robyn, 20

The Terror of Deficit Framing

“They don't give transportation for especially buses, for kids to be able to make it to school on time, mainly because the **budget's being cut short and we're not getting a lot of funding because we don't have the best reputation...** So with the city's budget...that comes with...**our reputation being completely destroyed by the reputation of Black people**, due to our history and with our history being tied into now and how gang violence and drug distribution, mainly throughout the black community, black men, specifically. **That ties into how much the government wants to control our budget and how much money is flowing into our city because they don't necessarily want it to go into the wrong place.**”

- Jaleel

Pathways to Success

“One of the things that always sticks out to me the most about the differences in the parts of Baltimore is that if you go to the poorer parts of Baltimore, it’s really like a cracked concrete jungle. You feel like you’re in a city and you feel like you’re stuck in the city. It doesn’t feel like there’s any escape from the very short radius around where you are.”

- Emmanuel, 21-year-old Former BCPSS Student

Students Encounter Mundane Terror

1

Interactions with police

2

Interactions with peers

3

On the commute to school

4

Sexual harassment on commute to and from school

5

Deficit framing of Black youth

6

No Escape

Pathway to Working-Class Employment

Bearing Strange Fruit

The Betrayal of the Great Equalizer

Education, beyond all other devices of human origin is the great equalizer

- Horace Mann (1848)

Every state has in their constitution language to mandate the creation of a public education system

- “thorough and efficient”, “thorough and uniform”, “common schools”, “adequate public education”

Baltimore Employment and Wages

Employment Status of Black Men in Baltimore

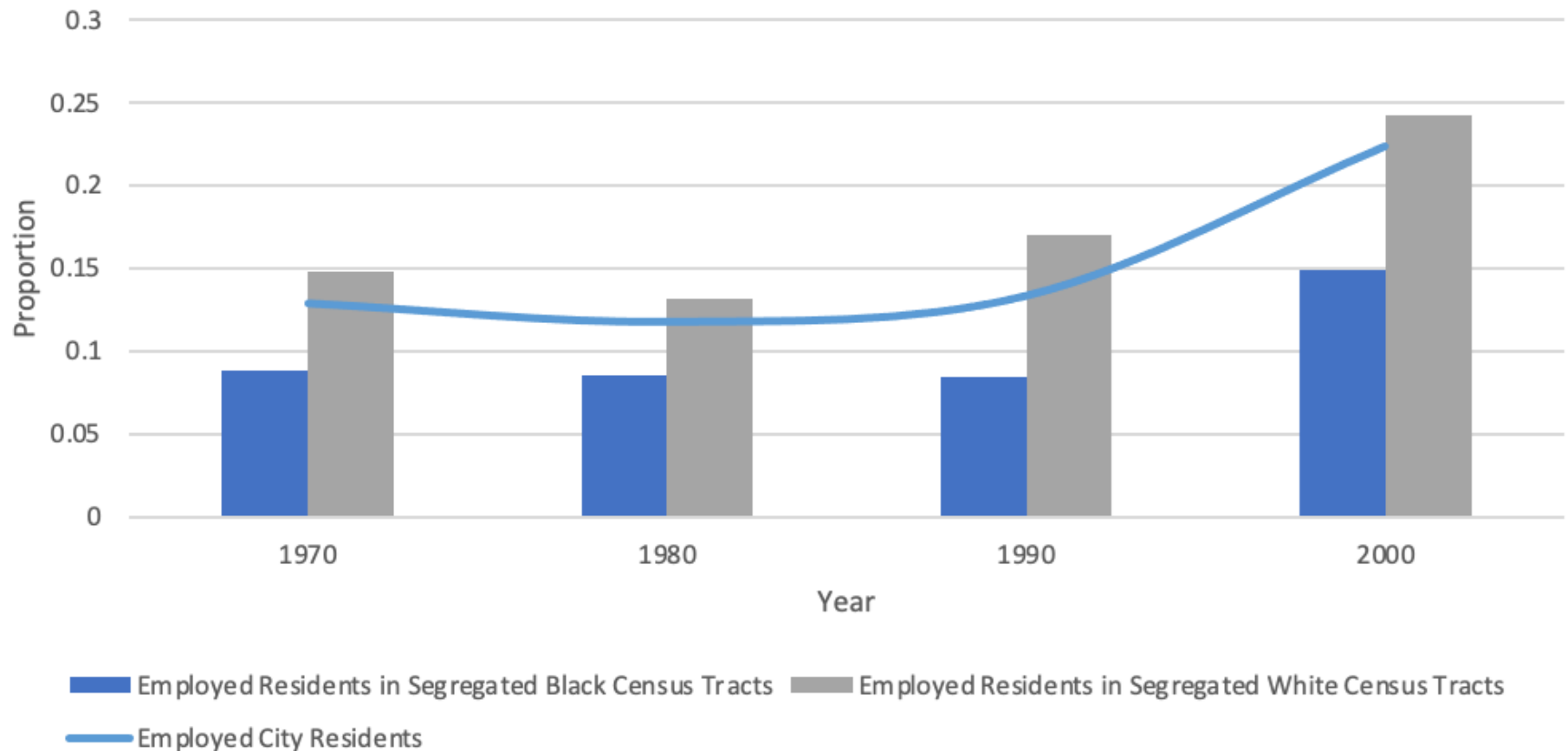
Year	1970	1980	1990	2000
Has a job	87	78	78	74
Unemployed	4	8	8	7
Not in Labor Force	9	14	14	19

Weekly Wages and Annual Income

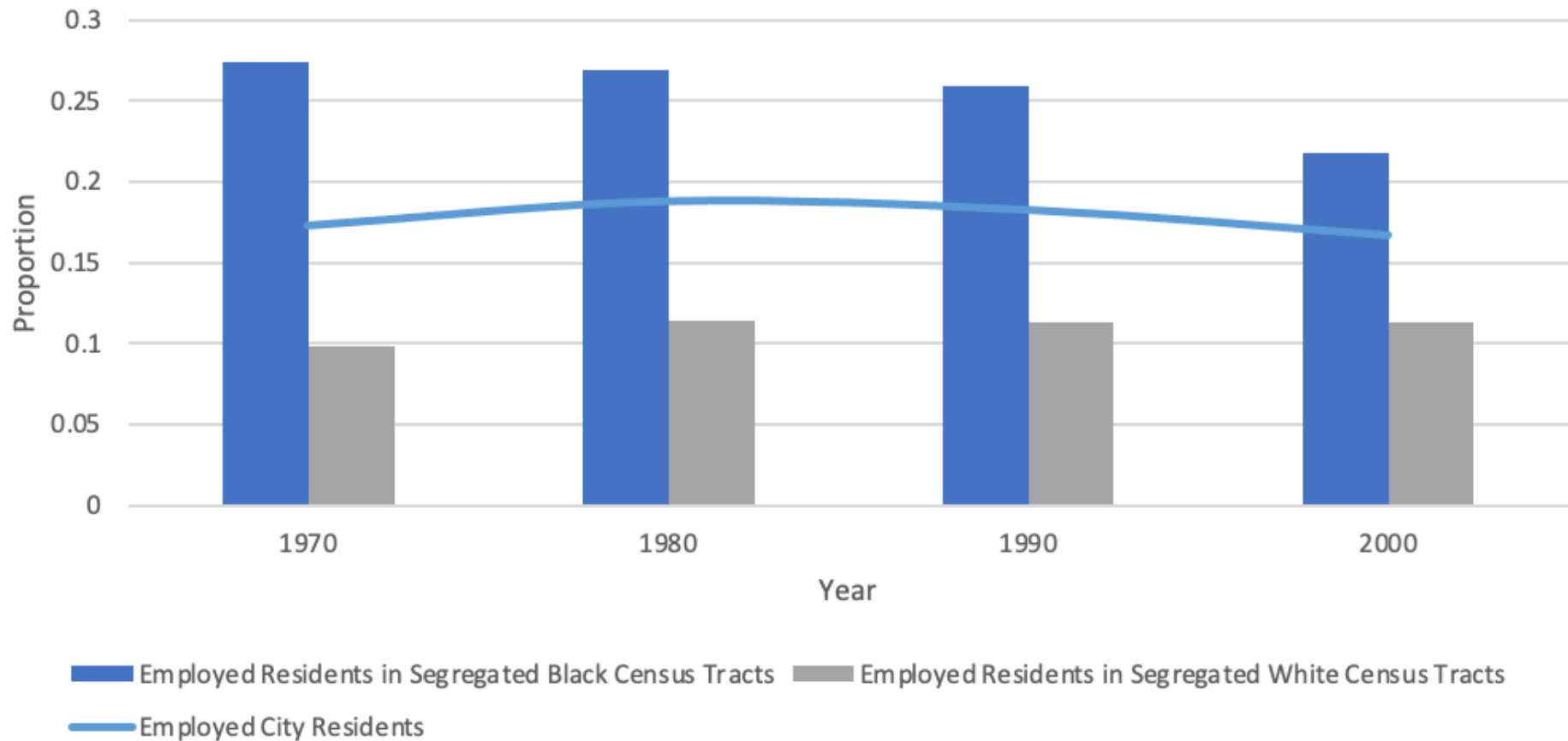
Weekly Wages: Percent of White Men's Wages Earned By Black Men				Annual Income: Percent of White Men's Income Earned By Black Men			
1970	1980	1990	2000	1970	1980	1990	2000
71	78	76	79	66	65	65	67

Source: (Kolesnikova and Liu, 2010)

Proportion of residents employed in professional & related occupations (\$481 median weekly earnings in 1985)



Proportion of residents employed in service occupations (\$216 median weekly earnings in 1985)



Outcomes



The high school class of 2009 had 4,280 graduates.

29%

enrolled in a
4-year college

23%

enrolled in a
2-year college

22%

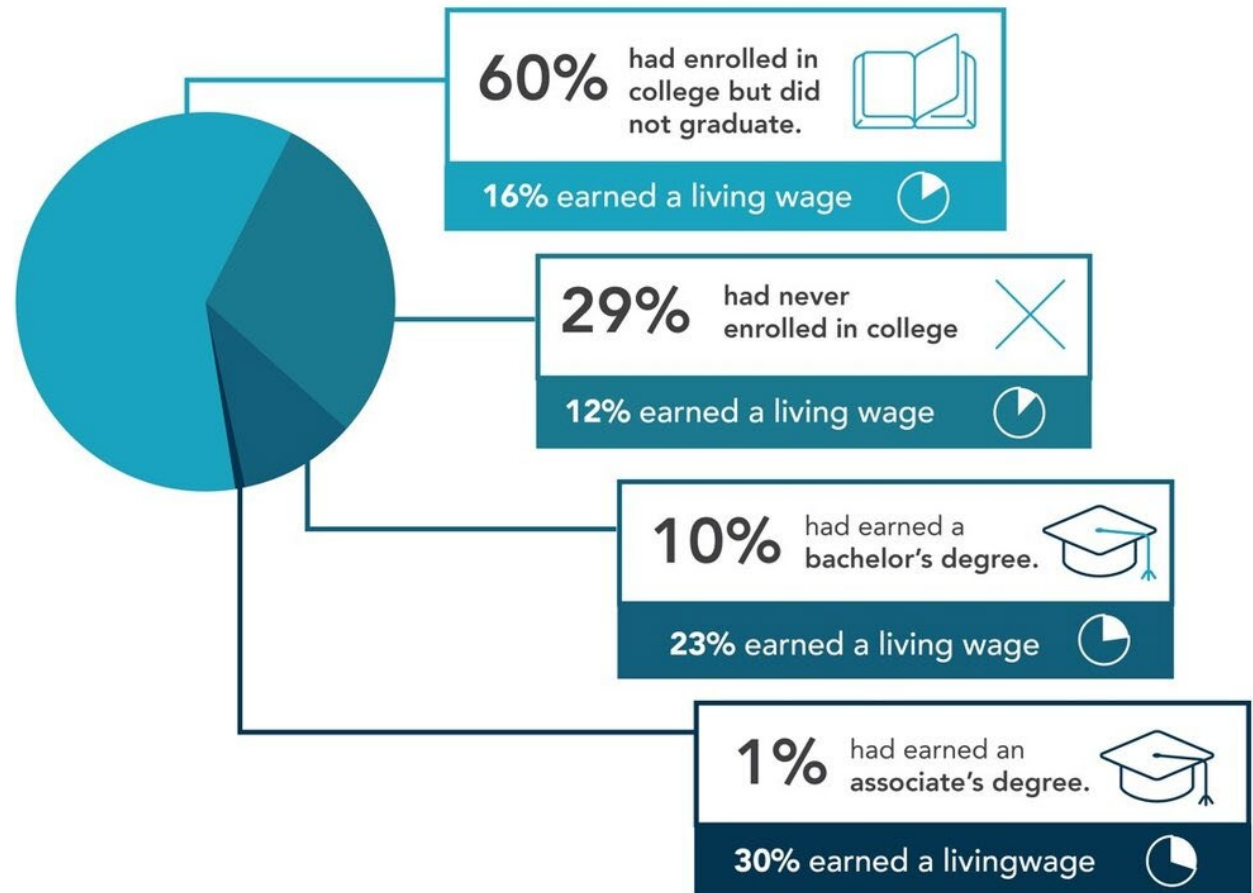
went directly into
the workforce

26%

did not enroll in college
and did not appear to be
in the Maryland workforce

(Baltimore's Promise, 2018)

After 6 years...



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(Baltimore's Promise, 2018)

NAM Interviews

General Findings

- There is a misalignment between youth aspirations and school/city services for career readiness and opportunity

Structuring Aspiration

Interviewer: *What else do you want to achieve in your life?*

Danny: I want to move somewhere safer and provide for my family and just be really successful. You know, just like live differently from how I am living now live the, my imagined life, like my dreams.

Structuring Aspiration

“The biggest thing that I want you to take away from me is our curriculums that we’re getting taught. We need a better curriculum that aligns with the kid’s passions and what they want to do when they graduate.”

Tina, 18

Pathways that Eliminate Barriers

“Because the high paying jobs aren’t for people, like the people that work in high paying jobs in Baltimore don’t live here. They come in from different states and stuff, to work here. I just feel sad that the people that actually live here can’t work in those places.”

Marissa, 17

Pathways to Success

Interviewer: And for teachers who are looking to create that bond...what would you tell them that worked for you?

Ty: You got to ask your students, what do they like? What do they prefer? And stop always going by the rules. It's okay to just do your own thing as long as you're not harming anybody, it's okay to bring your own ideas into your classroom and see what works best for your students because everybody's different... It's too strict. It feels more like we're in prison, but we don't want to feel like we're in prison.

- Ty, 18-year-old BCPSS Student

Pathways You Do Not Need

“I’m not saying all of them got to offer the same thing, but it’s like, every school should offer something good. Because when you really get out here, you don’t even need what you learned in school. You don’t even really need that. You going to need that trade though, or need that associate’s degree, that high school diploma.”

Vince, 20

Pathways to Success

Interviewer: And where would you want that money to go to in schools?

Allie: Just better resources. I mean, say, maybe not relying on MTA buses, having more extracurricular activities that are available to all students across Baltimore... I think just investing more in the students. Also, maybe having more mental health professionals at schools...having that in elementary and middle schools I think could really help and just putting more money into our students and investing in Baltimore's youth because I think you can make a change with that.

- Allie, 21-year-old Former BCPSS Student

Pathways of Meritocracy

“So yeah, we could pull up our bootstraps, but if we have no boots then what can we do?”

Taylor, age 22

Pathways To Address Mental Health

“I think mental health isn’t something that’s discussed enough, especially within like a lot of urban populations. Most of Baltimore’s demographic is people of color. So, that’s something that’s not really discussed. It definitely could hinder a lot of students because then you’re like, all right, you’re already a teenager, which is the worst time of life. And then on top of that, you’re in high school, which is like, unnecessarily stressful, because it can determine so many things for you. And then on top of that, now you’re trying out public transportation, maybe you’re trying to get a job. Its like all these things stacking up against you.”

Cara, 17

Addressing Pathways

Racism has caused students to believe that they can't get meaningful work in the city

Students had high aspirations but were unaware of the multiple job opportunities

Misalignment with students' aspirations and educational experiences

Pathways must address mental health

Recommendations

1

- Discern and dismantle the strange fruit that justify structural or physical violence

2

- Acknowledge the resiliency and agency that students bring to schools

3

- Students need to heal from intergenerational trauma

4

- Experts, researchers, non-profits and school personnel must work together for policies to support teachers, administrators and students

Recommendations

5

- Youth need safe and reliable transportation

6

- Youth need livable wages after they graduate from high school and college

7

- Hold employers accountable for not hiring BCPSS students

8

- Work to provide safe, healthy and healing environments in schools that address mental health, and basic human needs

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When Violence Becomes Routine

- Beyond academics, violence as well as policing shape the daily lives of many youth in Baltimore:
 - Changes in daily routines to avoid both violence and criminalization
 - Bell (2019): “Violence undermines some of the most basic, but rarely invoked, privileges of American citizenship and of humanity: safety, friendship, and dreams.”

Juvenile Arrests

- Juvenile arrests have fallen, from 4,402 in 2012 to 2,217 in 2017.
- For youth of marginalized groups, the percentage arrested who are Black remains high (Baltimore Sun, 2018; Abell Foundation, 2018).

2016 Juvenile Arrests	Percentage African American
Girls	65%
LGBTQ & gender non-conforming	85% of 20% identifying

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Changes in School Policing

- Baltimore City School Police have adopted policies designed to limit arrestable offenses
- Changes have led to a 97% decrease in arrests of students

Academic Year	Number of Arrests
2007-2008	971
2017-2018	33