Living on the Color Line:

2800 Cass in a Period and Place of Transition

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“Why, might it be asked, do Negroes continue migrating to Chicago in the face of a color-line? The answer is simple: 'That line is far less rigid than in the South.' It will be seen too that although Midwest Metropolis has a color-line, the Negro masses are not deprived of an education and are actually encouraged to vote. The color-line is not static; it bends and buckles and sometimes breaks. This process results in tension; but the very existence of the tension—and even of the violence that sometimes results—is the evidence of democracy at work.”

When we think about urban geography, we often think in terms of boundaries: some streets or other physical markers act as strict distinctions and psychological barriers between neighborhoods. In St. Louis, Delmar is often considered one of those boundaries: to the South, relatively wealthier, safer, whiter; to the North, relatively poorer, more dangerous, and blacker. The common perception is that city policies strictly dictated human movement to a point of stark separation. This sentiment is repeated in international media: a recent BBC report refers to Delmar as a dividing line, with gated communities to the south and poverty plaguing the north. These repeated reports of stark barriers confirms and replicates cognitive barriers within the community, with little questioning of the validity of that view. These conclusions rely on top-down statistical and mapping techniques that necessarily obscure the decisions and interactions made by individuals on the ground. Close analysis of human movement along these boundaries at a household level can reveal the more nuanced residential patterns that exist at city- and neighborhood-determined boundaries, and that the micro-level economic and cultural interactions at the household level can be a better predictor of residential patterns than the city’s macro-level boundary distinctions.

2 Kevin Lynch, Image of the City (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
4 For another discussion on the nuances of boundary distinctions, see Bill Rankin’s Radical Cartography, available at http://www.radicalcartography.net/. He states that using a smaller unit analysis allows us to see stark boundaries,
To demonstrate the micro-level view of the phenomenon of the boundary, 2800 block of Cass Avenue will be used as the location of analysis. This location lies on a number of physical and legal boundaries. A streetcar line cut the neighborhood in half along Cass. Beginning in the 1920s, Cass was also on the edge of a number of restrictive real estate boundaries. To the south was a region recommended for sale and rental to blacks, and later deemed “obsolete” by the city. To the north was a restricted region, part of which was affected by restrictive covenants. During this same period, the region experienced ethnic and racial change. The region consisted largely of first-generation Western and Central European immigrants from 1900 to 1910, shifting to Eastern European Jewish immigration in 1920. By 1930, African-American in-migrants from the southern states, nearly becoming the majority of the area’s households.

While Cass Avenue in this period had the physical and legal ingredients to make it a boundary in the same way Delmar is described today, the resulting residential patterns did not follow what would be predicted. Instead of blacks being confined to the unrestricted area and being completely shut off from the restricted areas, they moved to the north and south of Cass Avenue in ways not explainable by these covenants, realtor agreements, or city distinctions. Instead, Cass Avenue itself served as a better deterrent to African-American residence, resisting the shift to a majority black block for a decade longer than restricted areas. Instead of legal restrictions dictating movement of individuals, the commercial nature of Cass Avenue, the block-by-block ethnic composition, and varied housing stock of the region contributed to the direct the movement of African-Americans throughout the region, demonstrating that household-level decision-making based on economic and cultural considerations took precedence to, and are

gradients, and gaps more carefully, forcing “more nuance in the way we talk about urban geography,” and concluding that “a cartography without boundaries can also make simplistic policy or urban design more difficult — in a good way.”
better predictors than, legal distinctions in determining actual neighborhood-level racial presence.

*Constructing 2800 Cass*

The block of 2800 Cass is located within the Yeatman neighborhood of St. Louis, now known as JeffVanderLou. The buildings on the block of 2800 Cass were constructed in the 1880s, all two stories and of brick construction. Most were free-standing structures, with only a few row houses sharing walls. The block was majority residential, but still contained important commercial structures. Of the nineteen lots, four buildings had storefronts. Twelve were exclusively single-unit dwellings, along with two two-flats and a duplex. Census documents indicate that the corner stores had no second-floor housing units, while the other two did (see map 1). A streetcar line ran west along Cass, stopping at the corner of Cass and Glasgow Avenues before turning northwards.

Neighboring areas were similar in physical make-up, but not the same. The majority of the neighboring blocks had a subset of smaller housing units, with less than the standard 25’ street frontage. Most blocks lacked the significant storefronts of Cass, with only one or two storefronts on a block, if any.

*1900-1920: Setting the Stage*

After the turn of the century, residents of 2800 Cass and the surrounding blocks were never exclusively white. In 1900, there were 28 black-occupied housing units, making up just over 5% of the households in the area.\(^5\) Almost all resided in one specific area at the corner of

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\(^5\) A housing unit is here defined as a unit marked in the manuscript census as having a separate address; for example, 2800 and 2800A would be two different housing units, and all the households within 2800 would be in the same
Howard and Glasgow. This corner contained the smallest housing stock in the study area with two houses per twenty-five foot lot. In general, whites lived in the larger housing stock, including the free-standing single family homes along most other streets, including Cass (see map 2). By 1910, the number of black households increased to 42. They were spread more freely throughout the area, no longer confined to the smaller housing stock at Howard and Glasgow. Cass Avenue still resisted this change, remaining entirely white (map 3).

By 1920, the number of black households in the area doubled, comprising just over 10% of area households. Almost all lived in regions of smaller housing stock, including a concentration at the corner of Howard and Glasgow as seen in 1900. Black residential density also doubled to almost nine blacks per housing unit, despite their concentration in smaller units. There are also two cases of blacks owning and occupying their buildings. During this time, Cass still remained entirely white (map 4).

Another demographic shift of note is that south of Cass, along the Sheridan and Thomas corridors, the census reveals a significant influx of Eastern European Jews, largely from Romania and Russia. These immigrants created a homogenous community in the region. Yiddish-speaking Russian and Romanian immigrants comprised over eighty percent of the households along both sides of Sheridan and the side of Thomas observed in this analysis in 1920. Some households contained lodgers of other languages and locations of origin, but the vast majority remained entirely of the same spoken language. Rates of ownership were slightly higher among Jews than other immigrant groups, and most units on these streets were subdivided into two-flats. The significance of this concentration and subdivision will be discussed in the following section.

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housing unit. A black housing unit is one in which every household and lodger within a given address is black. See Table 1 for all the data presented in this section.
Resisting a Demographic Shift

Starting around 1910, residents began placing restrictive covenants on housing deeds with the purpose of restricting owners or tenants of color from purchasing or occupying that property. Largely a response to the inability for a city to zone based on race, these covenants were for the “mutual benefit and advantage of all parties” and intended to “preserve the character of said neighborhood as a desirable place of residence for persons of the Caucasian race.” These covenants are often made in conjunction with the involvement of a more powerful party, such as a neighborhood improvement association and the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, increasing its power as a legally-binding document. Many were also made at a neighborhood level, and entire blocks were said to be covered by the covenant if signatories make up seventy-five percent of the land area of that neighborhood. In St. Louis, covenants were enacted during the period of 1910 to 1940, of which over seventy-five percent were signed between 1920 and 1930. Eight city blocks north of Cass, bound by Glasgow on the west and Elliot on the east, were under restrictive covenants during this time period, up to at least 1942 (map 5).

In 1923, the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange adopted the distinction of three unrestricted zones. The purpose was to keep black residents within these boundaries, which were historically black and contained eighty percent of the city’s African American population, by forcing realtors

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8 Research for this analysis did not reveal exactly when the covenants within the study area were signed. Since over 75% were signed between 1920-1930, I use that as the time frame of signing. Since black residents lived within the restricted area during the entire time period from 1900-1940, and no covenants were signed after 1940, the later discussion of these covenants would still be valid if this assumption proves to be false.
by threat of loss of license to not sell or rent to black residents outside of this area.\textsuperscript{10} The largest of these zones lay south of Cass Avenue, from Grand Avenue all the way easy to the riverfront (map 6). The effect of this line, in theory, would be to create a sharp divide across Cass, with black residents only residing south of the line in the unrestricted area.

During this period, there is a significant racial transition. National movements of African-Americans northwards during the Great Migration, along with the limited housing stock available to blacks and white residents slowly moving westward, created both the demand for and increased supply of housing in areas like Yeatman. The number of black housing units more than tripled to 274 between 1920 and 1930, nearing 50% of the housing units in the area. The number of blacks owning their units also increases to eleven, spread throughout the area. One of these cases of black ownership is within what Gordon marks as being affected by restrictive real estate practices (map 7).

The 1930 example demonstrates that we cannot view the lines separating blacks from whites as strict lines of residential segregation. The distribution of blacks throughout the area can be better described as a gradient across boundaries. This can be compared to the pattern of Jewish occupancy in 1920 (map 8). Jewish immigrants self-segregated, tightly packing themselves into the few city blocks along Thomas and Sheridan. There were no legal restrictions against Jewish residents in St. Louis, as the restricted areas and deed restrictions only acted against persons of color. Discrimination against and segregation of Jewish immigrants appears to be minimal, if occurring at all, as no major complaints have been found concerning Eastern European or Jewish immigrants to St. Louis.\textsuperscript{11} James Neal Primm observes this phenomenon as

\textsuperscript{10} Gordon, \textit{Mapping Decline}, 84.

\textsuperscript{11} Extensive searches of digitized Post-Dispatch issues brought forward no cases of Jewish discrimination in St. Louis. Issues of unsanitary conditions or sub-standard housing stocks seemed to affect “immigrants” equally, with
well, noting that Eastern Jews remained in “fake ghettos,” remaining together despite lack of legal mandate.\textsuperscript{12} The fact that the line separating Jewish and non-Jewish residents is harsher than that separating blacks and non-blacks reveals that culturally-determined, household-level movement choice directed occupancy more than the city’s distinctions of areas’ restrictions.

The 1930 map also raises the question of why the 2800 block of Cass remained entirely white. There are three possible reasons for this resistance to change. First, the largely commercial nature of this block likely acted against black residence. A streetcar line ran along Cass, and there was a highly-trafficked stop at Cass and Glasgow. The corner stores on the block were largely successful. The Pauly Hardware Store occupied 2840 Cass for decades, expanding along Glasgow every few years. The Mound City Mattress Company occupied 2800 Cass for decades as well. Across the street, occupying four buildings from 2801-2807 Cass was Portman Storage, ranked as one of the most important companies of North St. Louis in the 1910s.\textsuperscript{13} This commercial success likely increased the perceived traffic and “status” of the block.

Second, the houses on Cass were not subdivided as extensively as the rest of the area. By 1930, most housing units on surrounding blocks were subdivided into two-flats, while over half of the units on Cass remained single-family homes. The rent was higher in these single family units than in a two-flat or rear unit. The higher prices served as a deterrent to African-Americans who earned less than whites. The lower rents in smaller units nearby were thus more attractive to African-American families of more limited means.


Third, blacks tended to move into areas that had high rates of Eastern European Jewish rentership and ownership. The blocks of Sheridan and Thomas had a high concentration of Eastern European Jewish residence (see map 8). One reason for this relationship is that Eastern European Jews subdivided their housing units much more extensively than Western European immigrant groups, as described in the previous paragraph, resulting in high rates of subdivision on Sheridan and Thomas. However, there are many reasons why the relationship is more direct as well. First, there is evidence in other cities that Jews were seen as “less desirable” than other white immigrants. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, in *Black Metropolis*, state that in Chicago, the presence of Jews lowered property values.\(^{14}\) If this was the case in St. Louis, lower property values in the immediate area would be more likely to attract black residents than areas of higher values along Cass. Second, tensions between blacks and Jews were much lower than with non-Jewish immigrant groups. Drake and Cayton state that, in Chicago, Eastern Europeans and Italians were less likely to discriminate against Blacks than Western European immigrants.\(^{15}\) Thomas Sugrue notes that in Detroit, blacks moving into predominantly Jewish areas faced “minimal overt racial tension,” especially when compared to the racism-fueled property damage faced in some Catholic neighborhoods. Instead of voicing their protests, many Jewish households just silently moved.\(^{16}\) The result is a quick turnover from a predominantly Jewish neighborhood to a predominantly black neighborhood, as is seen on Thomas and Sheridan avenues between 1920 and 1930. Jews in St. Louis were also openly opposed to segregation against blacks, fearing that it would lead to the segregation of all minority groups.\(^{17}\) Third, some evidence points to the higher likelihood of Jews renting to blacks. Anecdotal evidence from New York suggests that

\(^{14}\) Drake, *Black Metropolis*, 175.
\(^{15}\) Drake, *Black Metropolis*, 180.
some Jews were very friendly to renting to blacks because of their shared history of
discrimination.\textsuperscript{18} Not all evidence points to the “friendliness” of Jewish landlords, though. Some
Jewish homeowners left neighborhoods that were becoming more populated by blacks to rent to
them. The demand for housing for blacks was high, thus pushing up rents for blacks. Jewish
homeowners took advantage of this fact and rented to blacks while residing in other parts of the
city.\textsuperscript{19} Since Cass did not have the same concentration of Jewish residents 1920 as seen on
Sheridan and Thomas, consisting instead of descendants of Western European immigrants, this
occupant transition could not have occurred. By 1930, however, a few of the white residents
were Jews and Italians, setting the stage for the transition by 1940.

\textit{1940: Failed Covenants}

In 1936, the City Plan Commission drew their blighted and obsolete map, with Cass as the dividing line (map 9). A blighted distinction simply meant that the area was an economic
liability, demanding more than it produced in revenues, while an obsolete distinction pinpointed
areas to be considered for urban renewal projects. While both distinctions were negative, an
obsolete distinction suggested a lack of any ability at changing conditions.\textsuperscript{20} This distinction was
drawn in confirmation of the 1923 Realtor’s Agreement lines, and followed very broad census-
tract distinctions in racial makeup, with south of Cass being over seventy-five percent black and
north less than seventy-five percent black.\textsuperscript{21} This, in effect, accelerated the shift from a
predominantly white area to a black area, and made that shift irreversible. While demographic
shifts likely informed these distinctions, much demographic change follows a blighting. As
Drake and Cayton, writing about Chicago, point out,

\textsuperscript{18} St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “Refriending the Negro,” 30 Jan. 1910.
\textsuperscript{19} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{20} Gordon, \textit{Mapping Decline}, 190
\textsuperscript{21} Gordon, \textit{Mapping Decline}, 95.
The superficial observer believes that these areas are “blighted” because a large number of Negroes and Jews, Italians and Mexicans, homeless men and “vice” gravitate there. But real-estate boards, city planners, and ecologists know that the Negro, the foreign-born, the transients, pimps, and prostitutes are located there because the area has already been written off as blighted. The city’s outcasts of every type have no choice but to huddle together where nobody else wants to live and where rents are relatively low.\footnote{Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 206.}

This is exactly what is observed here. By 1940, black residency jumped again, to over 80\% of the housing units (map 10). The block of 2800 Cass is almost entirely black. The housing units that are still white comprising two households that have lived in the area for decades, resistant or not able to move, and one Jewish immigrant household. This also reveals some stark differences in owner-occupancy rates: almost all of the owner-occupants are confined to the white blocks to the northeast. Housing values also plummeted, with self-reported values of owner-occupied units dropping from an average of $3600 to $1400. City officials also bookended this shift by changing two white schools in the area to colored schools: the Glasgow School at 1415 Garrison Avenue became Curtis School in 1936, and the Penrose School at 2824 Madison became the Dunbar School in 1943, the latter of which was within the area of restrictive covenants.

In other parts of the city, there were fairly successful community-supported restriction groups that placed pressure on African-Americans that tried to move in, forcing them out.\footnote{Gordon discusses a number of powerful organizations, including the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association and the West End Protective Association in “'The Steel Ring': Race and Realty in Greater St. Louis,” in \textit{Mapping Decline}.} For example, some groups raised money to purchase homes threatened with black ownership. However, these efforts are not seen in this area. The failing of the restrictive covenants north of 2800 Cass reveals important community dynamics in the area.
First, this neighborhood is much more transitional. Most rented their properties, making them more susceptible to both voluntary and involuntary movement year by year. Directory data supports this: Between 1918 and 1940, the average stay of a head household was 2 years, with about 60% moving out after just a year of residency, and just three households staying longer than a decade. The rate of turnover increased during the 1930s. The area was also fairly high in vacancies, especially by the 1930s, with vacancy reaching over 25% on Cass in the mid-30s.\(^{24}\) The high rate of turnover reveals that the area is a much more transitional neighborhood, with less community capital with which individuals could unify against what was seen as a “negro invasion” in other neighborhoods.\(^{25}\) Gordon cites another example of a “restricted but transitional neighborhood” in St. Louis with a failed restriction. The transitional nature led landlords to claim that “their lot was ‘worthless and without value as rental property unless it could be rented to negroes.’”\(^{26}\)

Second, the neighborhood was lower-class, especially by the 1920s. Most residents worked in low-skill jobs, or survived as peddlers, leaving no excess financial resources to do what some organizations did and purchase houses out from under black owners.\(^{27}\) Additionally, the area a sharp decline in housing values between 1930 and 1940, with the average value of an owner-occupied unit dropping from $3600 to $1400. Ownership decreased in this time as well, with owner-occupied units dropping from 134 to 83 from 1920 to 1930, then to 49 by 1940. This

\(^{24}\) This comes from a statistical analysis of the changes in heads of households, as derived from the St. Louis Red-Blue Book Reverse Directories from 1918-1940. See Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of this analysis.

\(^{25}\) One case of possible use of intimidation can be found near my study area, on the 3000 block of Sheridan. In 1918, a black family was reported to have moved in, and a community meeting was immediately organized. Two days later, it was reported to be a “mistake” and the “house would be vacated at once.” This is the closest case of community organizing against black residents found in Yeatman. See “Negroes move into house opposite Glasgow School,” 30 July 1918; “Miscellaneous: A committee of residents…” 1 Aug. 1918.

\(^{26}\) Qtd. in Gordon, Mapping Decline, 78.

\(^{27}\) Cases of communities purchasing homes to prevent black occupancy in South City and Northwest City can be found in the Post-Dispatch: “Home is offered to negroes after dooryard spats,” 21 July 1913; “Negro’s invasion rouses Cote Brilliante residents,” 10 March 1910.
low housing value, combined with the fact that it was some of the oldest housing in the city, pushed away the whites that could afford to live elsewhere, leaving vacancies available for the more desperate African-American households. By this point, landlords had no choice but to rent to blacks or risk leaving a unit vacant, as discussed above, even in the restricted areas.

Third, the history of black occupancy in the area was an impediment to success from the start. It is much harder to uproot dozens of households and move them out than to prevent the movement of one. An additional reason for this impediment is in the nature of covenants as necessarily responsive in nature, rather than preventative. Colin Gordon states that covenants “pinpoint the location of contested neighborhoods but do not necessarily describe actual patterns of racial occupancy.”\(^{28}\) In this case, the point of contestation occurred far too late to really do much about actual black residency. The restrictive covenants can only be said to have been successful to the northeast, east of Leffingwell along the 2700 blocks of Howard and Madison avenues. These blocks were entirely white in 1900 and remained entirely white until 1940. The fact that these blocks were historically white would serve as a factor for sustaining its unique demographic through 1940. The 2800 blocks, however, saw black occupancy from 1900, making its ability to transition to a new demographic, a homogenous and white demographic, much less likely as a result of the covenant. As such, the white areas within the boundaries remained white more so as a result of its historic racial makeup than the boundaries creating a demographic pattern. On the 2800 blocks, the covenants failed because they “could not be enforced where black occupancy had already eroded their legitimacy.”\(^{29}\) By this point, the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange decided to shift its energies away from the “failed” covenants to focus its resources on

\(^{28}\) Colin Gordon, Personal communication via e-mail, April 27, 2012.

those areas more likely to be successful in its restrictions, leaving the covenant north of Cass with no organized realtor support.\textsuperscript{30}

Conclusion

The analysis of 2800 block of Cass and the surrounding areas reveal that residential choices follow household-level cultural and economic interactions just as much, if not more than, it follows neighborhood or city distinctions of blight or restrictions. The failed restrictive covenants and city officials’ recognition of this with the all-black Dunbar School show that it is the desperation of landlords and the weakness of community ties that direct movement. Additionally, the commercial nature of Cass worked as a better barrier to black occupancy than legal restrictions, and the demographic and housing stock on both sides of Cass influenced landlords’ rental and tenants’ movement decisions more than a consideration of restrictions. This analysis can be expanded to shed light on more micro-level movements of African Americans throughout St. Louis and other northern cities under restrictive real estate practices and among other immigrant groups.

This analysis forces us to reconsider what we mean when we think of a “boundary” or a moment of “transition.” Abstract, macro-level distinctions never make their way down to the ground to completely direct human movement, even if in theory they mean to create hard boundaries between areas and people. Instead of viewing Cass, Delmar, or any other street or line as a boundary, we must view them as pinpointing the center of an important gradient, a gradient that can hint at a difference across a line and reveal important decisions individuals and households make in negotiating that line, but can never completely define it.

\textsuperscript{30} Gordon, Personal communication, April 27, 2012.
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Table 1. Black and White Occupancy, Density, and Ownership Rates, 1900-1940

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Residents

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residents per unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites in white-only households</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks in black-only households</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulattos in black/mulatto households</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Owner-occupied units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent-occupied units</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>519</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White homeowners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black homeowners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average value of owner-occupied unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-owned unit</td>
<td>$3,595.68</td>
<td>$3,650.71</td>
<td>$3,245.45</td>
<td>$3,245.45</td>
<td>$2,222.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-owned unit</td>
<td>$1,407.45</td>
<td>$1,490.54</td>
<td>$1,222.22</td>
<td>$1,222.22</td>
<td>$1,222.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One white/black interracial marriage, one white family with black servant, one chinese/white household

** From 1910-1940, mixed-race households are comprised of black families living in the same housing unit as white families, as additional tenants.

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1900-1940 Manuscript Census.
Map 1. 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, covering entire study area.

Source: Sanborn Map Company. Sanborn Map Company. February 1909, St. Louis, Missouri, nos. 77 and 79; October 1909, St. Louis, Missouri, volume 3, nos. 4 and 6.
Map 2. Housing Unit Occupancy and Density by White and Black Race, 1900

Map 3. Housing Unit Occupancy and Density by White and Black Race, 1910.

Map 4. Housing Unit Occupancy, Ownership, and Density by White and Black Race, 1920.

Map 5. Restrictive Covenants

Map taken from Colin Gordon, Mapping Decline, page 74.
Map 6. Real Estate Exchange Restricted Zones, City Plan Commission (1923 & 1941)

Map 7. Housing Unit Occupancy, Ownership, and Density by White and Black Race, 1930, with restrictive covenant boundaries.

Map 8. Housing Unit Occupancy, Ownership, and Density by White and Black Race, 1930, with restrictive covenant boundaries, as compared to 1920 Jewish occupancy.

Map 9. Obsolete and Blighted Districts, City Plan Commission, 1936

Map 10. Housing Unit Occupancy, Ownership, and Density by White and Black Race, 1940, with restrictive covenant boundaries and blighted/obsolete distinction.

Appendix A. Using Directories to Derive Housing Turnover

Gould’s Red-Blue Book and Gould’s City Directory provide lists of individuals who lived at a specific dwelling in their reverse directories. Prior to 1918, Gould’s Blue Book reverse directory did not provide detailed information for many residential areas, limiting their listings to wealthier residential units. Beginning in 1918, Gould’s Red-Blue Book widened their coverage to working-class neighborhoods, which continued when the reverse directory was consolidated into the Gould’s City Directory in 1930. Placing one year’s directory next to an adjacent year can reveal who stayed at a given address, who moved to a different dwelling nearby, and who moved away completely. Combining this information for an entire block can reveal what level of housing turnover occurred in a specified region.

I analyzed data for the north half of Census Block 1845, which includes Cass Avenue property numbers 2800-2840, evens; North Leffingwell Avenue number 1425; and Glasgow Avenue numbers 1418, 1424, and 1432 for years 1920-1940. A dwelling was counted as turned over if the residents at that address, as listed in the reverse directory, did not appear anywhere in that block the following year or in a different dwelling, or if a resident occupying multiple dwellings vacated one or more but remained on the block, since this would introduce a net increase in residents on the block. Directories were missing for the years 1922 and 1934, so turnover rates for 1921, 1922, 1933, and 1944 are not included in this analysis.

Between the years 1920 and 1940, year-to-year turnover averaged 53%, with 47% remaining in their dwelling from one year until the next. The number remaining in their dwelling reached a minimum of 36% from 1931-32 and peaked at 68% from 1925-26. There was no major trend of increasing or decreasing turnover over this twenty-year span. (See Figure 1).
High turnover does not imply lack of longevity in dwelling occupancy. Some residents remained in their dwellings for over a decade, and possibly more if time periods prior to 1920 or after 1940 were included. While no resident remained for the entire span from 1920-1940, John Kelleher remained at 2820 Cass Ave. from at least as early as 1920 until 1936, and Nicholas Polito moved into 2810 Cass Ave. in 1929 and remained at least until 1940. Additionally, Gerhard Pauly’s Hardware Store remained at 2840 Cass Ave. for the entire twenty years, and Mound City Mattress Co. opened in 1926 and stayed open at least until 1940.

Rates of dwelling vacancy were also collected. Zero dwellings were vacant in 1923, 1924, and 1925. Peak vacancy was thirteen dwellings in 1936. Vacancies increased throughout the twenty-year span. (See Figure 2).

There are a few problems with using only the reverse directory to determine these turnover rates. First, some addresses do not include listings for every resident of the dwelling. Turnover rates do not include boarders not listed in the directory, occupants which may have a turnover rate of their own not accounted for in the directory. Comparing 1930 Directory data to 1930 Census data reveals that some addresses had multiple families, while directories only listed a single family. For example, the directory lists only the Scherer family living at 2814 Cass Ave, while the census lists three additional lodging families at that address. The turnover rates of these families are unknown. Additionally, these directories do not reveal if a building was vacant for any period of time between occupancy, obscuring mid-year vacancy rates.

Directories only provide an annual cross-section of dwelling residency. Comparing the 1930 Directory to the 1930 Census reveals that only 57% of the heads of household correspond, implying a turnover rate of 43% within the same year. Capturing year-to-year turnover with the directory obscures any turnover that occurs in the same year between directory enumeration.
Directories also obscure any reason for dwelling turnover. Some residents may have passed away, thus vacating the unit. Some may have moved away for employment reasons, which may have been to a new location, a housing upgrade due to a raise, or a housing downgrade due to unemployment. Moving could have been by choice or forced eviction. These reasons have important implications for the meaning of this block: its class status, its shifting ethnic makeup, its neighborhood coherence, all of which are important but lost in the directories’ lists of names.

While this analysis reveals an average year-to-year housing turnover rate or 53% for this block of Cass and adjacent units on Glasgow and Leffingwell, it is likely underestimating the true rate of turnover. The directories do not capture two important sources of resident instability. Same-year comparison of the Directory and the Census reveal that, within a year, turnover rates are quite high, the implication being that individuals do not live in dwellings year-by-year, but in time units of months. Additionally, lodgers or other live-in residents may move in and out without being captured by the directories. The directories must then be combined with other sources to find more accurate turnover rates and, more importantly, the meaning and implication of housing turnover for this block.
Figure 1. Percent of Households Remaining in Dwelling between given year and the following year.*

Note: Data for 1922 and 1934 is not included; as a result, turnover rates for 1921 and 1933 could not be calculated.
Figure 2. Number of Housing Units Vacant

Note: Data for 1922 and 1934 are missing; 1923-1925 are true zeros.