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A SEGREGATED KANSAS CITY IS NOT GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH

Note: This article is the second in a series that will examine structural & institutionalized racism in Kansas City, Missouri. In this article, we examine the link between segregational real estate practices of the 20th century, how those practices linger today, and the link to lower life expectancy for all Kansas Citizens.

Race, place and socioeconomic status are closely intertwined throughout the United States, with recent national and international discussions on racial segregation pointing to Kansas City, Missouri as an example^{1,2}. Here, Whites and people of color largely live separate from each other, with negative effects on the economic, physical and mental well-being of Hispanic, American Indian and African American residents³. Since the early 20th century, segregation has been shaped by discriminatory practices, in which the real estate industry and federal, state and local governments have actively participated (see Figure 1)^{3,4}. Today's built environment is not due to a natural progression, but has been profoundly shaped by these practices.

Residential segregation did not exist before 1900^{5,6}. While African Americans were discriminated against, most neighborhoods were a mix of races up until the First World War. Around this time, there

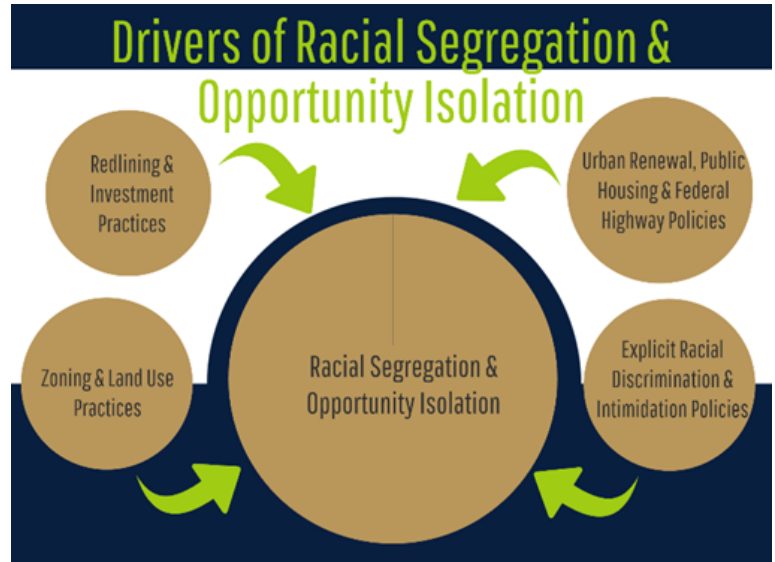


Figure 1. Drivers of Racial Segregation & Opportunity Isolation. Adapted from Reece, J. (2014, June). History Matters: Race, Place and Health Equity. Presentation to: The Ohio Collaborative to Prevent Infant Mortality, Columbus, Ohio

was a need for unskilled labor in Northern states, sparking a migration of African Americans from the South. Northern Whites saw African Americans as a threat to economic stability and used their resources to push them to poor neighborhoods. In Kansas City, African Americans were originally concentrated in the West Bottoms area, however, expansion of railroad and commerce left families looking for new housing with close proximity to public transportation. One of these areas of relocation was that immediately east of Troost Avenue². Whites continued to feel widespread concern about property values and fled to newer developments west of Troost where people of color were largely unable to purchase homes; this was done mainly through the use of racially restrictive covenants, perfected in Kansas City by developer J.C. Nichols^{5,7}. Nichols' focus on con-

trolling his own developments and “protecting” their worth reinforced disparities between neighborhoods⁷. By the 1940s, integrated neighborhoods were essentially non-existent⁵. Experts agree that racial segregation is the reason for urban disinvestment, employment discrimination, and the persistence of biased attitudes among Whites⁶.

The well-intentioned FDR-era New Deal became the catalyst for redlining practices, led by the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration^{8,9}. While both organizations were instrumental in preventing the foreclosure on and loss of homes for millions of Americans, they also had significant negative side effects. Redlining, the practice of denying credit to entire neighborhoods based on the race or ethnicity of the residents, became a cornerstone for both organizations in deciding who received mortgages^{6,8,9}. The denial of home loans kept many African Americans and Latinos renting, unable to accumulate wealth through home equity¹⁰. Those who were able to purchase homes only had access to those with lower values, a trend that persists today (see Figures 2 and 3).

In the time after the Second World War, the Kansas City population began to shift as minority populations grew at a faster pace than the White population. The majority of this population lived in the area known as Southeast Kansas City, which was the target area of urban redevelopment projects and highway construction in the 1960s and 70s that displaced tens of thousands of resi-

RED-LINE /RED LIN/ V: TO DENY LOANS TO CERTAIN NEIGHBORHOODS BASED ON THE RACE AND/OR ETHNICITY OF ITS OCCUPANTS. THE IMPACT OF WHICH IS STILL EVIDENT IN AMERICAN CITIES TODAY.

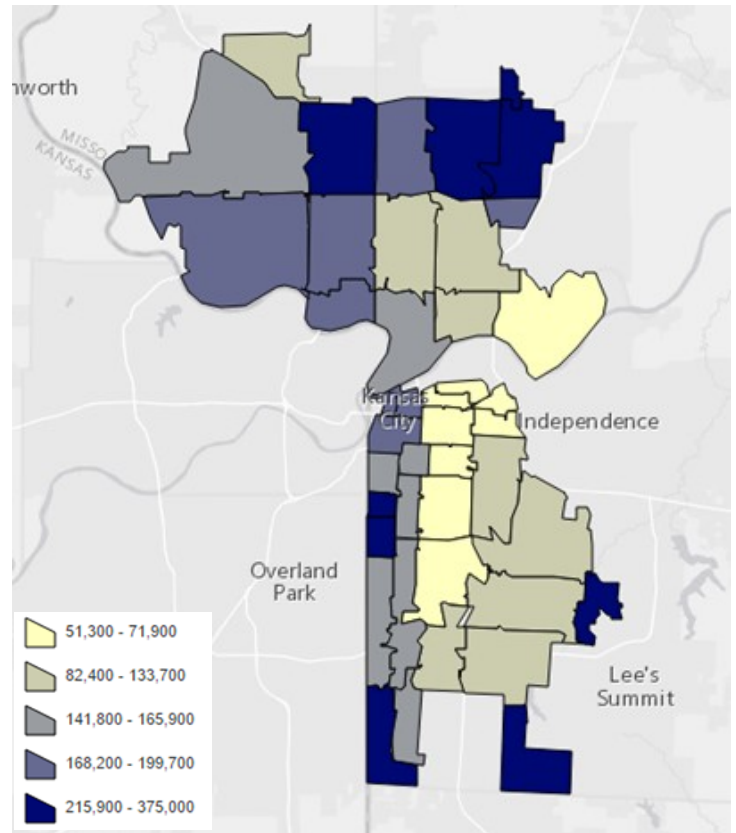


FIGURE 2. MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED HOMES BY ZIP CODE, KCMO 2011-2015

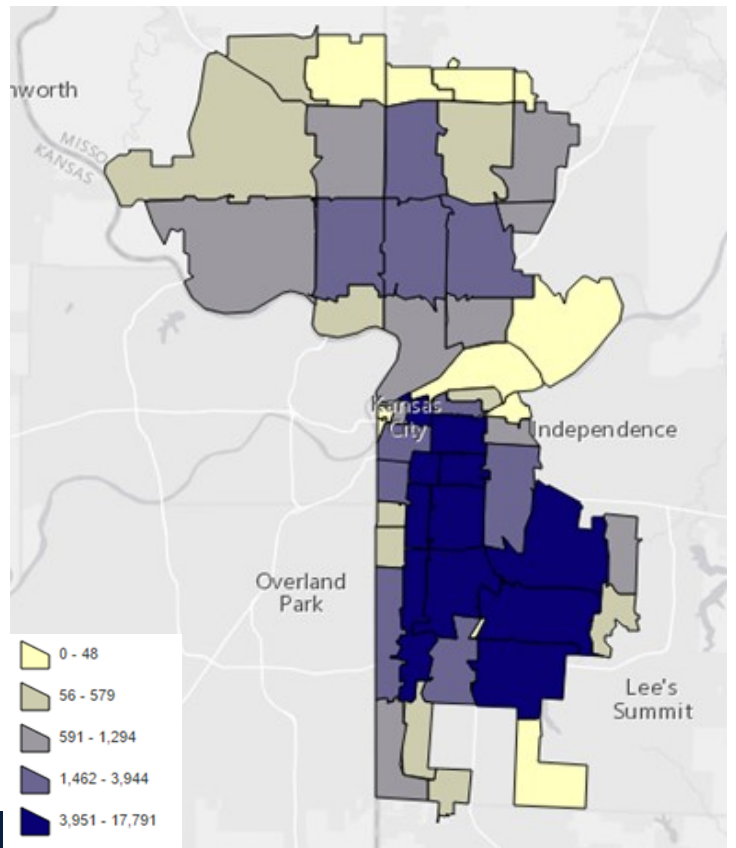


FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RESIDENTS BY ZIP CODE, KCMO 2011-2015

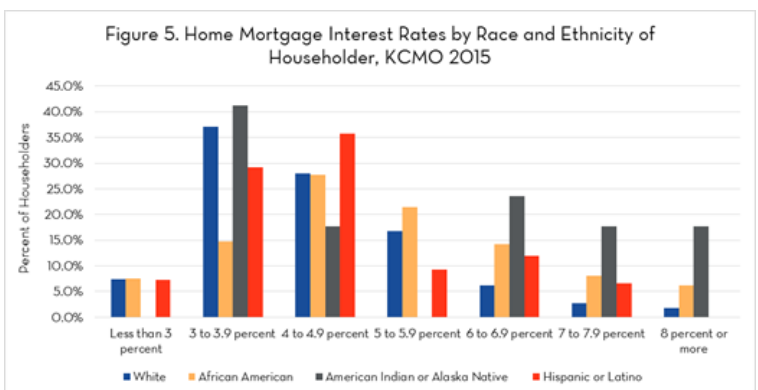
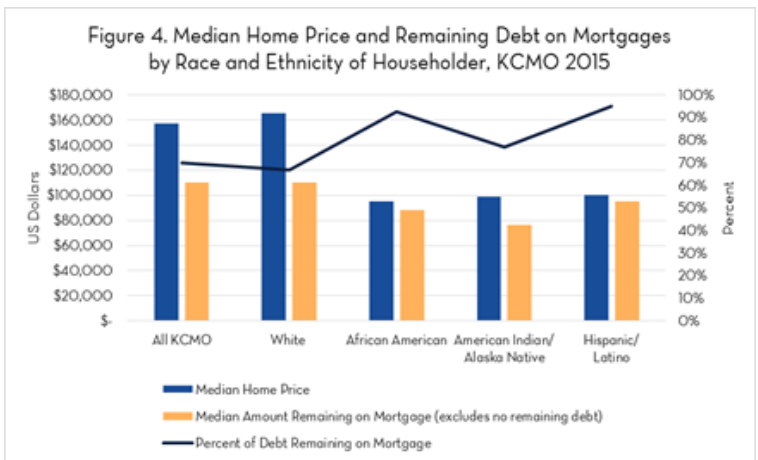
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

dents⁶. With a large number of African American residents looking for new housing, blockbusters seized the opportunity to define their movement into White neighborhoods as a harbinger of crime and decreasing property values. Blockbusting agents would create a sense of urgency among Whites to sell at deflated prices, only to resell to African Americans at inflated prices^{5,6}. To this day, declines in neighborhoods can be linked to the White flight that occurs when people of color, particularly African American and Latino, begin moving into a neighborhood. White homebuyers' biased perceptions create the belief that the neighborhood is in decline and begin to move away, even if the new residents are in their socioeconomic class¹⁰. White flight is a catalyst for the "downward spiral" of a neighborhood, with subsequent falls in property values, increases in taxes, and decreasing availability of public services, eventually resulting in a community that is susceptible to placement of highways, pollution industries, and businesses such as pay day lending and liquor stores¹⁰. In Kansas City, these practices resulted in widespread disinvestment in the area east of Troost Avenue and is likely one of the influential reasons the Highway 71 Parkway (Bruce R. Watkins Drive) was built in its current location, as opposed to the originally proposed location of the streetcar tracks along Brookside Boulevard¹¹.

Although many of the worst real estate and economic policies and practices are now illegal, the past still affects families today, as wealth (or lack thereof) is passed on from one generation to the next. The racial wealth gap gave White families a head start, and this gap appears to only have grown since the Civil Rights Movement¹¹, despite the changes in population over time. In Kansas City, the White population has de-

clined 15% from 1980 to 2010, while the African American population has grown 12% and the Hispanic population has more than doubled since 1990¹². Even with the growth of minority populations, a larger proportion of Whites are home owners, and have owned their homes longer; these two factors are considered the largest drivers of wealth. In Kansas City, African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics, on average have lived in their homes a shorter amount of time, have higher housing costs as a percentage of their total income, have higher interest rates on their home loans and owe a larger proportion on their home loan, despite a lower median home price as compared to Whites (see Figures 4 and 5)¹³.

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 devastated the wealth of most families in the United States, except for the wealthiest one percent. Much like life expectancy, extreme wealth inequality hampers economic growth for the community as a whole¹⁴, and disproportionately affects communities of color. A



2009 national survey showed that the median wealth (income and assets) of white families was \$113,000, compared to just \$6,325 for Hispanic families and \$5,677 for African American families¹⁴. Studies of the drivers behind this wealth gap indicate barriers to opportunities in the workplace, school, and community that “reinforce deeply entrenched racial dynamics in how wealth is accumulated and that continue to permeate the most important spheres of everyday life”¹⁴. These spheres include health. When we look at “hot spots” of outcomes like childhood lead poisoning, high rates of hospitalizations for asthma, low birth weight rates, and many other health outcomes across the city, including life expectancy, those communities are also those that have been marginalized (see Figures 6,7,8). Traditional public health interventions, like individual behavior change

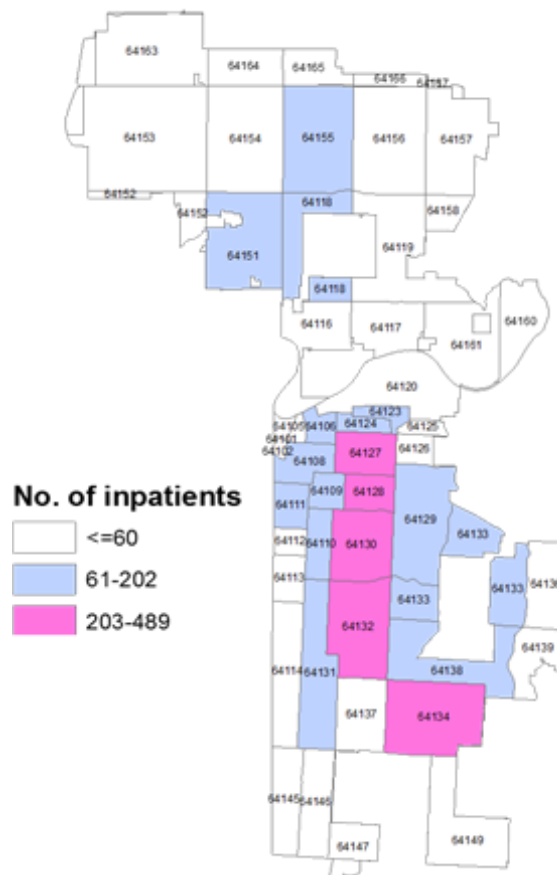


FIGURE 7. NUMBER OF PREVENTABLE HOSPITALIZATIONS DUE TO ASTHMA, KCMO 2008-2012

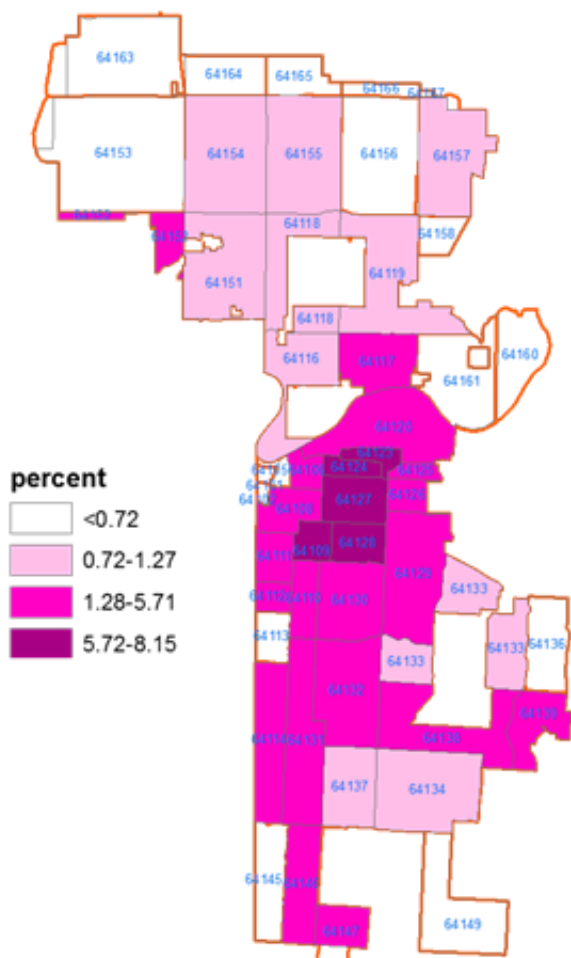


FIGURE 6. PERCENT OF CHILDREN WITH HIGH BLOOD LEAD LEVELS BY ZIP CODE, KCMO 2011-2015

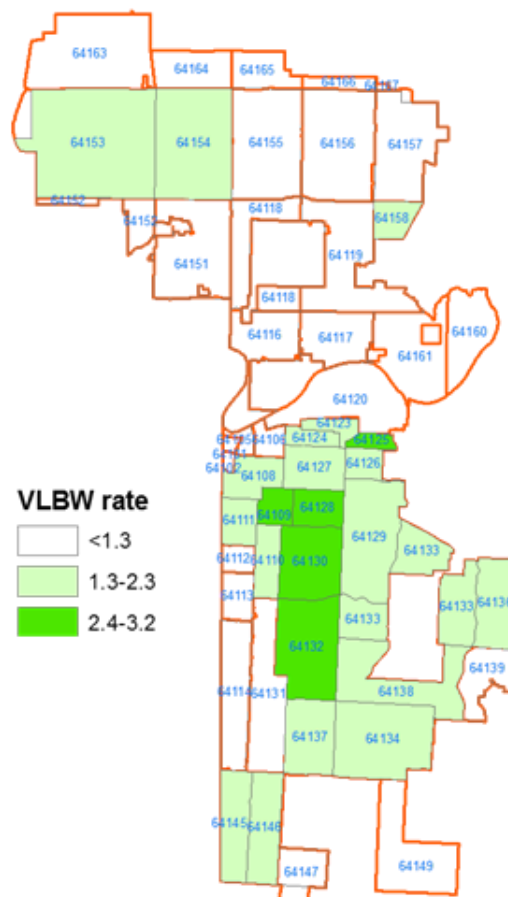


FIGURE 8. VERY LOW BIRTH WEIGHT RATE BY ZIP CODE, KCMO 2010-2014

and increasing the availability of affordable health insurance have done little to change these outcomes¹⁵. It is clear that something more is at play.

Research has shown that residential segregation, and wealth inequality are fundamentally linked to increases in health disparities, and continue to have lasting implications for the well-being of people of color and the overall health of a community^{16,17}. Segregation is a primary factor in racial differences in socioeconomic class, which in turn remains a fundamental cause of racial differences in health¹⁷. In Kansas City, neighborhoods with little diversity are a reality; this means that schools, public services, jobs and other opportunities that affect health are also segregated. In the neighborhoods that are cut off from opportunity and investment, we see poor health outcomes accumulate and life expectancy decrease. This is not a product of individual choice, but a product of continued bias that keeps people of color in neighborhoods with lower housing quality, higher concentrations of poverty and less access to opportunity. Just last year, in 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development settled with a local Kansas City bank for redlining practices¹⁸. As Kansas Citians, we must be aware of the ways that residential segregation may be a barrier to good health and opportunity. Solutions require creativity, collaboration and authentic engagement of all people in a community.

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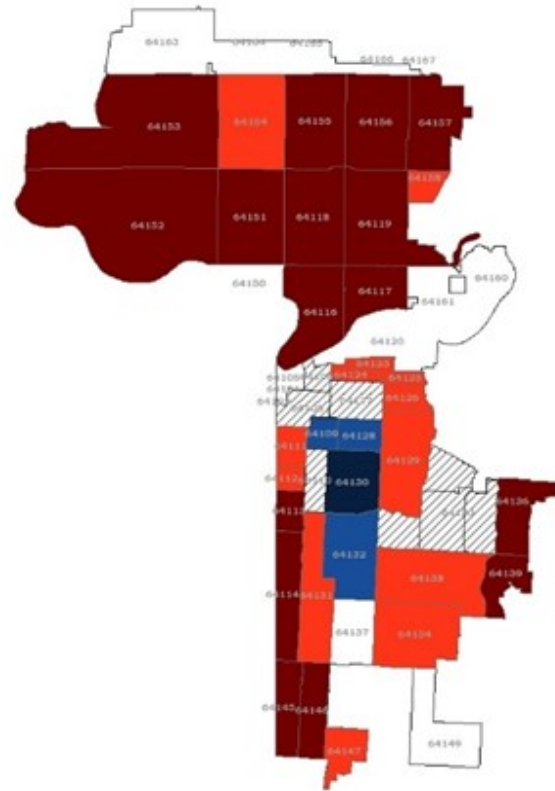
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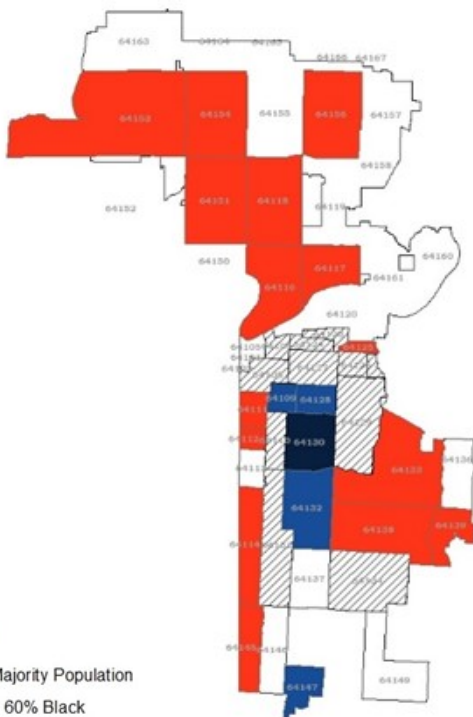
KANSAS CITY'S POPULATION BY ZIP CODE

In 1990, nearly half of Kansas City, Missouri's major zip codes were at least 90% white. Over the course of the next thirty years, these zip codes have slowly become more integrated, such that only one major zip code is at least 90% white. However, five zip codes in the heart of the city have remained at least 60% black since 1990. These are the same zip codes that have the lowest life expectancy in the city and some of the worst health outcomes. We can no longer let these zip codes remain isolated and segregated. The City of Kansas City is doing something about that: these five zip codes, 64109, 64128, 64130, 64132, along with zip code 64127 are listed as priority zip codes in the City Business plan, with the focus of increasing life expectancy.

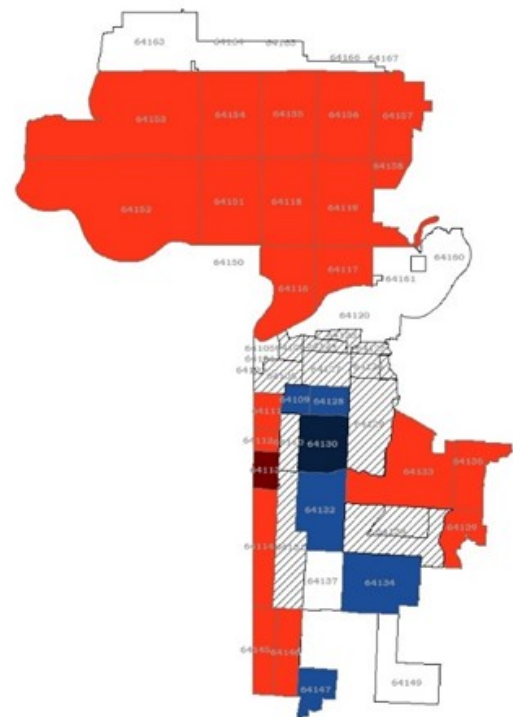
KCMO POPULATION, 1990









KCMO POPULATION, 2000



KCMO POPULATION, 2010



Legend

-  No Majority Population
-  Over 60% Black
-  Over 90% Black
-  Over 60% White
-  Over 90% White
-  No data