SCHOOL'S OUT (OF PLACE): SPACE, NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY, AND THE

CONTESTATION OF SCHOOL CLOSURES IN PHILADELPHIA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

School's out (of place): Space, neighborhood identity, and the

contestation of school closures in Philadelphia

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This dissertation examines the ways that neighborhood stakeholders inserted space and

place into the school closure debate in Philadelphia in 2013. I ask, specifically: (1) how

stakeholders invoked place in protesting and making sense of school closures, (2) how

they understand the significance of their location (their spatial position) in the context of

this debate, and (3) how they understand the significance of school closures for their

neighborhoods. The project is structured around case studies of three Philadelphia

neighborhoods that each had at least one school recommended for closure. I draw on

video and transcription records of public meetings held during the closure debate, as well

as interviews I conducted with neighborhood stakeholders in the wake of the closure

process. Political protest rooted in and leveraging place is particularly significant in the

context of policy regimes that prioritize mobility through the market mechanism of

individual choice. My analysis in this dissertation draws out three ways neighborhood

stakeholders leveraged place in a policy debate framed by such market logic: (1) using

place (i.e., spatial positionality) to critique structural inequality, (2) leveraging

productions of place identity as claims to space, and (3) naming the place implications of

broader systemic transformation. From a policy standpoint, this project considers the ways that the failure to acknowledge the spatial implications of the marketization of public education and the place-consequences of school closures obscures inequalities reproduced through these reforms. From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation is a study of the political capacity of situated actors and, specifically, the role of place and place identity in contesting spatial inequality.

Dedication

For Dad,

whose life taught me the importance of building institutions

that reflect the people we hope to become.

And for Hannah,

whose partnership I treasure.

Acknowledgement

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1 Introduction

1.1 Schools to close in Philadelphia

On December 17, 2012, approximately 200 students, parents, teachers, and community members gathered in the auditorium of Sayre High School in West Philadelphia (Langland, 2012). Standing at the front of the auditorium was the recently installed superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), Dr. William Hite, along with about 20 senior District administrators, lined up alongside him at the base of the stage.

Four days earlier, Dr. Hite had announced plans for a major restructuring of the school district that would include closing 37 schools—approximately one sixth of the District-operated schools in the city—in addition to other program closures and relocations. The recommended changes were anticipated to affect 17,000 students and 2,000 District staff, a shuffling and facility liquidation that would save an estimated $28 million annually (Graham, 2012k). The restructuring plan was not yet official, however, and awaited approval by the state-appointed School Reform Commission (SRC) in a vote scheduled for March 2013. In the meantime, the District sought feedback from a skeptical public.

The community gathered at Sayre on this Monday evening for the second of a series of community meetings the SDP would be holding at schools around the city through December and January to hear concerns and answer questions about the plan. In

his opening comments, Dr. Hite made a case for why schools needed to close and what would happen if they did not:

> *This is not some superintendent walking in, trying to assert their will on this city and on our students and on their families. This is about taking a necessary action that is absolutely required here in Philadelphia. […]¹ We have no other options. We must close schools. This past year alone, […] the School Reform Commission and the School District actually had to borrow $300 million to meet this year's budget. We may have had options in the past. Those options no longer exist. And now, […] if we don't take these types of actions, we're not talking schools closing, we're talking the possibility of the whole district closing.*

With this dire warning, Dr. Hite opened the meeting. After brief comments from a few of the other administrators, the mics were opened and people lined up to express their concerns about the closure plan. And for the next almost-two hours, officials fielded questions.

A string of students raised concerns about whether the plan will actually save the money it was purported to save and expressed alarm about social and logistical disruptions the closures will cause for their lives. A student from University City High School (UCHS) pushed the District officials on whether they had any idea what it felt like to find out your school was going to close:

> *So, out of all of you standing up here, right? I'm just curious. […] How would you feel if your high school was shut down, just out of the blue? Like, out of nowhere. Like, y'all didn't have to go through this and y'all don't understand what it's doing to everybody […]. I'm a senior in high school. People probably don't think that it affects me as much as the other kids, but it does, because I always want something to go back to. University City has been my home for four years.*

Others—teachers and community members—pushed District officials on the selection of schools, the claims of fiscal shortfalls, and provisions for the safety of displaced students.

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¹ For direct quotations of spoken words in this dissertation, an ellipsis in brackets indicates omitted words.

A teacher at Robeson High School named the funding inequities that underlay the District's money issues:

> *It struck me as odd that the conversation began with the assertion that there is no money. "We are broke. And as much as we'd like to help you, there's nothing we can do." This struck me funny because, where we are at Sayre, not three miles to the west, they spend $5,000 more per student per year. I have an issue with that. I think the people here have an issue with that. I* <u>think</u> *you guys all have an issue with that. [...] I'm not sure we can educate these kids on a shoestring budget. I'm certain we shouldn't have to.*

Pointing to suburban municipalities "not three miles to the west," this teacher named the intra-regional inequities that characterize public education in metropolitan areas around the United States, as urban school districts like the SDP struggle to meet greater social needs within their student populations with fewer resources to do it.

The other dynamic at play in Philadelphia, in addition to questions such as these about the adequacy of the state's support for Philadelphia schools, is that the charter school sector in the city had more than tripled in the preceding decade. At the time of the closure recommendations, 27% of all publicly funded students in the city attended charter schools. The pressure on the SDP to close schools cannot be understood outside of this expansion. Charter school growth in Pennsylvania siphons both students and dollars away from traditional public schools, a point that Deputy Superintendent Paul Kihn made at this evening meeting in responding to a UCHS alumnus:

> *We do not have any control over the charter school growth. We do not have control over where families are choosing to send their [...] children, except insofar as we can improve the quality of the District-managed schools to make them better options so families will want to keep their children in District-managed schools. So, if families are choosing to send their children to charter schools, we by law have to make payments to those schools. We have to write the check to them for the per-pupil allocation. And I can tell you, this is something that causes us heartburn, every time we have to do it.*

The framing of charter school expansion—and the attendant need to close schools—as a transformation driven by the market actions of individual families is here unmistakable. The charter sector's relationship to the District, as characterized by Mr. Kihn, is almost parasitic. Market competition was consuming the SDP, creating an existential crisis, as Dr. Hite contended, that could only be averted by jettisoning public school infrastructure.

It was in this context that the District recommended closing one-sixth of its schools, describing the process as one of resource consolidation through down-sizing that would allow the District to invest more adequately in the schools that remained. What is missing, however, in references to the market logic of charter school growth and the SDP's framing of the closure process as a consolidation—a market correction, of sorts— is the recognition that closures happen in particular places and are experienced by particular communities across the city. A school district does not float over the surface of the city, a cloud of seats to be realigned and reapportioned by the efficiencies of market pressure. A school district pursues education through the material spaces of buildings located in specific neighborhoods, institutions whose history, presence, and future are tied to the neighborhood in complex and contested ways. Failure to acknowledge the spatial reality of the closure process obscures the ways legacies of spatial inequality were reproduced through that process.

In this dissertation, I explore the ways neighborhood stakeholders inserted space and place into the school closure debate in Philadelphia. I ask, specifically: (1) how stakeholders invoked place in protesting and making sense of school closures, (2) how they understand the significance of their location (their spatial position) in the context of

this debate, and (3) how they understand the significance of school closures for their neighborhoods.

1.2 Significance

From a policy standpoint, this project considers the ways that the failure to acknowledge the spatial implications of the marketization of public education and the place-consequences of school closures obscures inequalities reproduced through these reforms. From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation is a study of the political capacity of situated actors and, specifically, the role of place and place identity in contesting spatial inequality.

The dominant focus in education policy in the United States over the past three decades—at all levels of government—has been on finding ways to marketize the delivery of public education through greater parent choice; school-, teacher-, and student-level accountability via standardized testing; private management of publicly funded schools; and school-level autonomy in pedagogy, discipline, and labor policies. The discourses supporting these strategies often suffer from a reductionism that disaggregates schools into collections of seats (i.e. individual students) and reduces learning to a commodity consumed by students and their families. The failure to recognize the contexts in which schools operate and children live remains a persistent weakness of this framework. Schools are multi-faceted institutions that have complex relationships and histories with local communities. Reforms that ignore this reality risk reproducing the spatialized inequalities they seek to address through the "equality" of context-blind market mechanisms. In this dissertation I explore the ways neighborhood stakeholders contested this dynamic by tying the closure debate to place.

The danger in making this argument is that knee-jerk support for public school systems that are—and have always been—mechanisms for the reproduction of racial inequality does not address the underlying issues and fails to acknowledge the experiences of communities saddled with under-resourced schools for generations. Requiring that students attend schools where they live is perhaps the most efficient way to ensure the reproduction of spatialized inequalities, confining children to the limitations of their neighborhood schools. However, the dismantling of systems of publicly-owned place-rooted schools removes an infrastructure that, conversely, also carries the *potential* to anchor and facilitate a community's development. With the liquidation of these public assets that potential is lost as well. In this research, I consider the ways stakeholders wrestled with and made sense of the mixed-consequences of school closures for their neighborhoods.

Finally, this dissertation centers on the political agency of people whose communities have been marginalized economically, politically, and institutionally. The spatiality of such marginalization functions in varied ways as the means through which it is perpetuated (Dikec, 2001). Critical urban theorists work to balance the recognition that the inequalities of urban space differentially position people and communities, with a theorization of the potential of situated actors to disrupt and transform the processes of their marginalization. In this dissertation, I explore how stakeholders invoked their positionality in contesting a school closure process that played out unevenly across space. In so doing, stakeholders challenged not only the closure of neighborhood schools, but also exerted claims to their schools and their neighborhoods—claims to belonging.

1.3   Organization

Chapter 2 develops the theoretical frameworks that guide and situate this project. I draw on interdisciplinary literatures across geography, urban studies, political theory, and education to engage the production of space, the politics of place, and the political capacity of situated actors in the context of marketizing school reform. In Chapter 3, I discuss research methods and provide introductions to the three case neighborhoods at the core of this research. Chapter 4 presents a backdrop for the empirical findings. I tell the story of the 2002 state takeover of public schools in Philadelphia and detail the 2013 closure process itself. Chapter 4 closes with a review of the historical geography of race in Philadelphia.

Chapters 5 through 8 report the project's findings. Their organization is not strictly scalar, but reflects a scalar tension between the particularity of local experience and larger, systemic processes that shape and differentially position local places. These four chapters frame three primary ways that stakeholders invoked place in the closure debate: Chapters 5 and 6 engage the naming of positionality within the political-economic and institutional unevenness of urban space, Chapter 7 reports the production and leveraging of place identity, and Chapter 8 concerns situating the consequences of systemic change in the particularity of place.

Chapter 5 documents, not stakeholders' actions, but the unevenness in the landscapes from which they act. School closures were not evenly distributed across the city; they were concentrated in particular areas. This chapter characterizes the neighborhoods where schools were recommended for closure and the people who live in those neighborhoods. The unevenness of this distribution is represented by the variation

in shading on the abstract landscape in Figure 1.1; the arrow above represents the closure process.
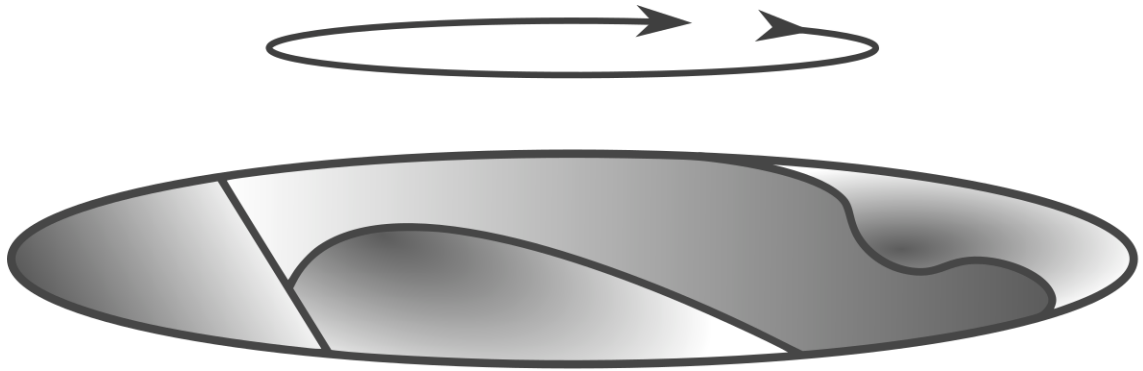
Figure 1.1: *An uneven process*

Chapter 6 lifts out the ways stakeholders named their position on this landscape—how they located themselves, their schools, and their neighborhoods vis-à-vis the spatial unevenness of the closure process. This is the declaration that closures are happening *here*, where we are, and not over *there*. It is about locating one's self and one's community on the map: the invoking of position to contest the political economic, institutional, and political processes that underlie that positioning. In Figure 1.2, the naming of positionality is represented by the large X and the arrow identifying its location.
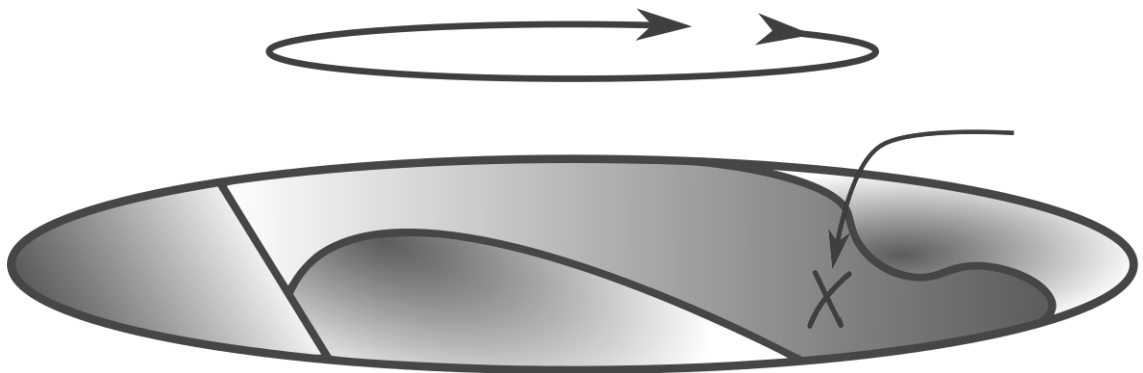
Figure 1.2: *Naming positionality*

Chapter 7 conceptualizes place as an ongoing social production—a spatial identity—and focuses on the ways stakeholders leveraged place identity in the school closure debate. The chapter explores how stakeholders engaged in the production of place through protesting and making sense of school closures in their neighborhoods. The four-point star in Figure 1.3 and the circular arrow surrounding it represent the ongoing production of place; the jagged arrow represents the leveraging of place in the closure debate.
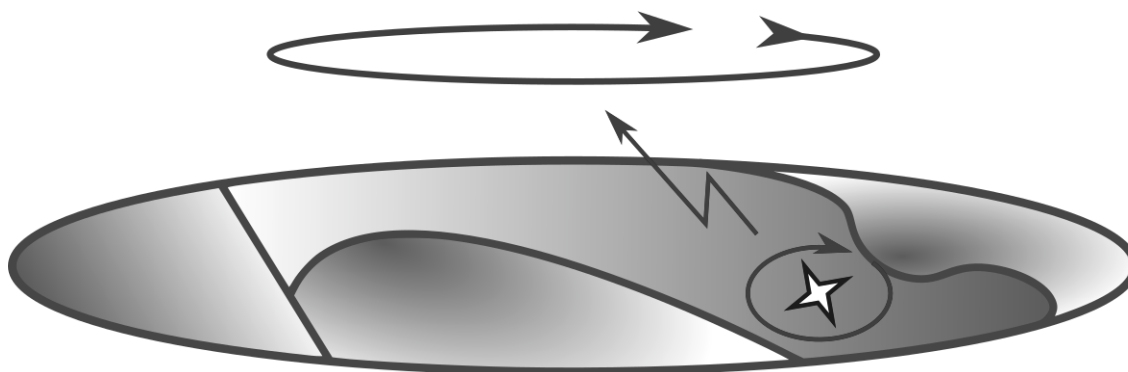
Figure 1.3: *Leveraging productions of place*

Chapter 8 centers on stakeholders' recounting of the implications of school closures for local places, emphasizing the real and specific effects that a centralized process of institutional restructuring has on particular places. The closure process was guided by the need to make a larger system more efficient. In this chapter, stakeholders point to the multidimensional effects of closures *for their neighborhoods*. The three-headed arrow in Figure 1.4 represents the act of naming these effects.
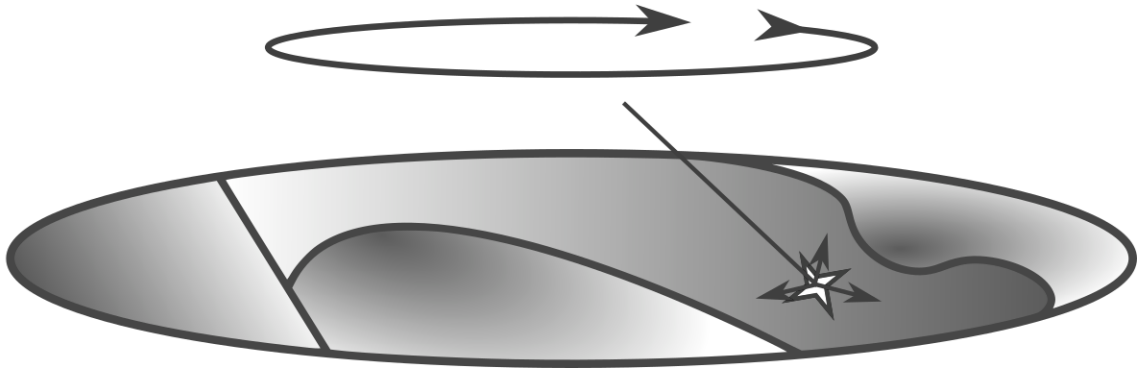
Figure 1.4: *Effects in place*

On one level, the organization of the empirical findings in this project reflect the inductive analysis of the voices that constitute the empirical center of this project—that is, the organization emerged from the data. On another level, I have maintained and refined this set of lenses because they serve to draw out and illuminate the tension within community development between the capacity of local communities for self-determination and the institutions, systems, and processes that operate across much broader scales to differentially position and shape local places. Central to urban political theory is the challenge of understanding how places at the most local scales—neighborhoods—fit into and are shaped by larger forces, including global capital investment, trade policy, regional development patterns, and environmental change. Additionally, this analytical framework emphasizes the many dimensions of place and its significance: from political economy, to personal history, to social networks, to institutional capacity, to questions of who belongs. In a policy debate that sidelined the spatiality of school closures and their implications for specific neighborhoods and the

people who live there, this dissertation lifts out the political significance of place in the debate and the importance of engaging questions of place in navigating the restructuring of schools and education.

2 Space, place, and the marketization of public education

2.1 Introduction

People and communities are differentially positioned in urban space. The spatial arrangement of the city reflects and reproduces the systemic relationships of advantage and disadvantage that order society. That is, inequality has spatial dimensions and the intersecting identifications of *who* and *where* you are shape life opportunities in substantive ways. In this dissertation, I explore the political capacity of situated actors, specifically engaging the ways spatial identifications are leveraged in political debate. This chapter structures the theoretical frameworks on which I draw in the empirical analyses of Chapters 5 through 8, working through theories of spatialized inequality and its contestation, the politics and production of place identities, and the ways marketized school reform changes the relationship between schools and place. This progression—from structural processes, to the politics of place identity, to outcomes in place—prefigures the organization of the empirical analyses that follow.

The chapter begins by framing two contrasting policy responses to entrenched neighborhood poverty: people-based mobility policies and place-based development strategies. Expanding on the critique that an emphasis on development in place misses structural analyses, I then engage the challenge of theorizing the structural reproduction of spatialized inequality in ways that nonetheless foreground the particularity and agency of people in place. I draw on scholars within political economy, critical race, and feminist arenas to frame a dialectic between the ways spatialized inequality situates people vis-à-

vis systems of privilege, and the possibilities for claiming spatialized marginalization—claiming difference manifest in space—as a place from which to disrupt the reproduction of those systems.

I then propose the "production of place" as a framework for conceptualizing how communities can leverage their spatial positionality in broader political debate. I outline three dimensions of place production: a *bounding* dimension, a *historicizing* dimension, and a *politicizing* dimension. In so doing, I forward a processual understanding of place that pushes us to move beyond understanding place as physical territory, a local stage for human activity, instead emphasizing the political potential of place identities and their implications for negotiating claims to space.

In Section 5, the chapter turns to the spatial implications of neoliberal, or marketized, charter school reforms that prioritize private management, market discipline, and increased choice for parents. Choice-based reforms are often promoted as a way to free poor communities of color from the limitations of place by creating more schooling options. I bring a critical lens to considering the spatial implications of this restructuring, emphasizing the fundamental change that occurs in the relationship between schools and local communities when education is provided through a portfolio of privately managed options.

Against this backdrop, I then consider the implications of the closure of traditional neighborhood schools in cities with rapidly growing charter sectors. I briefly review three relatively small bodies of work that have engaged these closures as *urban* processes (i.e., from the perspectives of urban studies, urban geography, and urban politics, as opposed to education's focus on educational outcomes). I highlight work that

has (1) framed closures as outcomes of the neoliberalization of urban space, (2) studied the politics and protest of school closure processes, and (3) engaged the implications of school closures for local communities, for place.

In a brief conclusion, I lift out the significance of these issues and how they motivate this exploration of the invoking of place by stakeholders protesting and making sense of school closures in Philadelphia in 2013.

2.2   Mobility, place, and neighborhood disadvantage

Over the past four decades, the return of capital and the middle class have transformed many urban neighborhoods in the United States. Nevertheless, the dominant trend is for patterns of neighborhood-level inequality to persist, particularly for communities of color (Sampson, 2012a; Sharkey, 2013). The isolation of poor African Americans in neighborhoods with high poverty levels became a focus of research and policy agendas during the 1980s, sparked in part by Wilson's (1987) description of an "underclass" in urban, African American ghettos that was geographically and socially isolated from opportunity and support. Wilson and other scholars at the time (e.g., Jargowsky, 1997; D. S. Massey & Denton, 1993) pointed to structural changes in the economy and institutionalized racism as key drivers of concentrated poverty, although popular and policy debates on the issue clamped onto the idea that the *concentration* of poor people—and the social pathologies that resulted—was itself the root of the problem (Crump, 2002).

The stubborn persistence of patterns of spatial inequality presents a challenge to scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. How does poverty become entrenched in place? And how can such trajectories be disrupted to improve the lives of those living

there? In the United States, race is a central character in this story, and the concentration of disadvantage in space frequently aligns with racialized people and places. Nationally, the landscape of racial segregation in U.S. cities has become more varied in the past 30 years, but "hypersegregation" (D. S. Massey & Denton, 1989) persists for many African Americans and Hispanics (Rugh & Massey, 2014), who also disproportionately live in high poverty neighborhoods and places (Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2012). That is, racial discrimination and economic disinvestment are intertwined with the processes by which places are shaped and reshaped over time. Figuring out how to unravel the strands of this braid is, arguably, a foundational objective of social policy. Strategies for doing so have tended to fall on one side or the other of a core rift within social policy debates about how to address the confluence in space of social needs with inadequate opportunities, infrastructure, resources, and services. This division is often framed as a debate between efforts to enhance people's mobility (i.e., to free people from the limitations of place) and strategies that focus on investing resources in neighborhoods (i.e., to transform place for people).

Mobility strategies are rooted in the awareness of uneven geographies of opportunity, shaped by long histories of class and race segregation. Scholars studying segregation and its social implications have traced broad and multidimensional consequences arising from segregated urban space (e.g., Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004; D. S. Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987). Seeking to de-couple people's life chances from the social, economic, and political limitations of their home communities, proponents of mobility policies advocate giving marginalized people access to more choices—options available outside the neighborhoods where they live

(Imbroscio, 2012). For example, housing voucher programs allow residents to carry their public subsidy with them to "better" neighborhoods (Varady & Walker, 2003). Additionally, mobility policies are conceived as efforts to mitigate the negative "neighborhood effects" and compounded social needs theorized to stem from homogenously poor neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (Joseph, Chaskin, & Webber, 2007). A large body of research has explored the many ways a person's home neighborhood environment might affect the quality of their lives and the scope of their life opportunities (e.g., Galster, Santiago, & Lucero, 2015; Sampson, 2012a; Sharkey, 2013).

Critics of mobility strategies have challenged these policies from a variety of standpoints. Some have disputed the contention that at the heart of neighborhood inadequacies lies a social pathology, exacerbated by the concentration of poor families in one place, that might be alleviated through "exposure" to higher income households in mixed-income residential spaces (e.g., DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010). Others have argued that mobility strategies destroy local communities and the relational networks they contain (e.g., Fullilove, 2004; Imbroscio, 2012). A third line of critique has centered on the argument that the landscapes of opportunity asserted by proponents of mobility strategies are, in fact, constrained in ways that reproduce historical race and class inequalities—that many people are not, in practice, able to access the neighborhoods or services that would transform their life circumstances and the opportunities they enjoy (e.g., Crump, 2002).

In contrast, place-based community development strategies prioritize investing and cultivating social, economic, and political resources in place—in low-income and

disinvested neighborhoods and communities. Spanning a range of normative motivations (Ganapati, 2008; Wolf-Powers, 2014), this work includes efforts to strengthen the local social fabric, to organize residents to affect external power structures, and to leverage resources into the community to meet local social needs—a trio of strategies sometimes framed as community building, community organizing, and community development (Sites, Chaskin, & Parks, 2007). Community *building* approaches advocate cultivating and enhancing neighborhood social networks, seeking to realize the resource potential present in the community itself. Many have framed this approach in terms of developing social capital within communities (see Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2001). Community *organizing* strategies seek to assemble political power through the mobilization of a local population to pressure external power structures to address a community grievance, a set of approaches often traced to the legacy of Saul Alinsky's mid-20th century organizing (see DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2010). Community *development*—in a narrow sense—has come to be associated with the infrastructure of third sector organizations and private philanthropic funding that has emerged over the past 40 years to leverage resources into local communities to address social needs, including housing, education, health care, and jobs (see Newman & Lake, 2006).

Critics of place-based development strategies have come from across the political spectrum, as scholars on the left and the right have critiqued the utility of focused interventions in place for the lack of a structural analysis. On the right, free-market advocates argue that local disinvestment reflects inefficient market conditions and isolation from broader markets (e.g., Weissbourd & Bodini, 2005). The solution, in this vein, is to open neighborhoods up to market opportunity and private investment,

reconnecting economic backwaters with the regenerative power of market forces (see Wolf-Powers, 2014). Scholars on the left, in contrast, have argued that local conditions must be understood as outcomes of broader, political-economic processes (e.g., Slater, 2013; Wacquant, 2008). Often drawing on Marxist analyses, they argue that localized disadvantage does not reflect the actions or inadequacies of local actors, but is rather the outcome of dynamics that function on a much larger scale, such as institutional racism, uneven development, job loss, and housing discrimination.

The crux of the matter then becomes how to address the particularity of spatialized disadvantage—of human suffering in place—in ways that acknowledge the larger structural processes through which it is reproduced. In the next section, I review theorizations of urban space and political agency that seek to do so: that foreground the structural reproduction of spatialized inequality, while preserving the capacity of situated actors to influence urban space as it emerges through and around their lives.

2.3 Spatialized inequality and the production of urban space

2.3.1 Class, race, and the production of urban space

Since the early 1970s, critical urban theorists have increasingly sought to explain the spatial organization of cities in terms of the processes of capitalist society, arguing that urban space can be understood as not merely the equilibrium of competing individual choices and claims to space, but rather as a manifestation of the underlying systems that organize society and social relations (e.g., Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991). That is, it should not be surprising that differences in where people live, work, and play are unjust, as the processes shaping urban space rely inherently on the reproduction of unequal relations.

Similarly engaging the reproduction of structured injustices, though drawing on distinct theoretical framings, critical race scholars have long argued that the identities of people of color differentially position them vis-à-vis systems of white power and privilege. In recent decades, geographers have lifted out the spatial manifestations and implications of such systems, drawing on critical race theory to explore the ways race and space are co-constitutive (e.g., Delaney, 2002; Holloway, 2000; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Price, 2010). These scholars have argued that race, as an unstable social construction, is contingent on the ongoing processes of the social world, processes that are inherently spatial and whose spatial reality must be recognized to understand the construction of race. In other words, the spatial patterning of the social world plays a central role in the racialization of people. Rather than thinking about the organization of urban space as *sorting* people by race, critical race theory sees the organization of urban space as *reproducing* distinctions of race, constituting race as a social identifier and tying it to systems of privilege and oppression that interpenetrate the social world.

2.3.2   Critical subjectivity on landscapes of spatialized race and class inequality

Whether bringing a class or critical race analysis, the challenge in theorizing the injustices inscribed in urban space remains naming the ways people are differentially and unjustly situated by larger systems while also claiming the political capacity of situated people to influence and transform urban space. The interface between the lives of local actors and the structuring processes of the political economy has been conceptualized in different ways.

For example, in *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois (1899) argued that in order to understand the conditions of the African American slum in Philadelphia, one had to look

outside the slum at the social and economic systems and customs that constrained the lives of the city's African American residents. Through this structural analysis, Du Bois argued that white society was, to a great extent, culpable for the social ills of African American slums, while maintaining that it was the responsibility of African Americans to "to raise [themselves] by every effort to the standards of modern civilization" (p. 388).

In *The Urban Experience*, Harvey (1989) described a scalar boundary beyond which people have little influence: "[T]here is a scale of action at which the individual loses control of the social conditions of existence in the face of forces mobilized through the capitalist production process" (p. 123). The centrality of circuits of capital in Harvey's analysis emphasizes the structuring power of capitalist processes and the inequalities and exploitation they inscribe on the urban landscape. However, the capacity of local actors to influence that production is diminished.

Another influential framing of this tension can be found in Lefebvre's spatial dialectic, which maintained that the creative, poetic spark at the heart of human life can only be temporarily held in check through the structures of industry and capital. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre (2003) foretold a coming inversion in which the ongoing living out of everyday lives would supplant the ordered delineations of industrial space. In theorizing the ongoing production of urban space, Lefebvre highlighted the participation of local actors in that production and the creative spark inherent in the living of human lives and saw therein possibilities for the transformation of urban society.

Dikec's (2001) effort to theorize the tension between spatially-situated disadvantage and political capacity is helpful here. He outlined a dialectic between the *spatiality of injustice* and the *injustice of spatiality*. The spatiality of injustice captures the

ways that social injustices are distributed and inscribed in space. The injustice of spatiality refers to the ways that urban space acts to stabilize and reproduce the injustices that have shaped it.

How then do actors—situated in space—destabilize urban space and disrupt the reproduction of spatialized inequalities? Dikec (2001) draws on Lefebvre's right to difference, which he argues may be more appropriately translated as a "right to resist/struggle" (p. 1790), suggesting that difference be understood not as particularity, but rather as a right to differentiate oneself from one's structural positionality. As Lefebvre wrote in *The Survival of Capitalism*, the right to be different was "the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers" (as cited in Dikec, 2001, p. 1790). Scholars studying local political mobilization have probed this dynamic, drawing out the ways actors leverage situated identities and constructions of place to contest structural forces and centralized processes of development or transformation (e.g., Anguelovski, 2013a; Halvorsen, 2015; Lelandais, 2014; Martin, 2000; Mele, 2000).

Feminist geographers and critical race scholars have long argued that the ways women and people of color are differentially positioned in social and physical space constitute the manifestation of racist and patriarchal injustices *and also* the basis from which to challenge those systems and effect change (e.g., Bondi, 1993; Collins, 2000; Gilbert, 1998; Kobayashi & Ray, 2000; Peake, 1993). That is, situated subjectivity can be leveraged to critique oppressive structures. Though not explicitly spatial in much of her analysis of the politics of difference, Young (1990, 2000) engages the ways individuals are positioned vis-à-vis the social relationships, institutions, and structures that shape

privilege and power in society and argues that claiming one's positionality is essential for transforming unjust systems. Young conceptualizes a social world differentiated by accumulated structural injustice and sees that uneven topography as both the source of limitation and possibility:

> Persons are thrown into a world with a given history of sedimented meanings and material landscape…. We find ourselves positioned in relations of class, gender, race, nationality, religion, and so on, which are sources of both possibilities of action and constraint. (2000, p. 100)

Also invoking the metaphor of space and position, hooks (1990) similarly identified the political possibilities of claiming one's marginalization as a site from which to contest injustice: "I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility" (p. 153).

2.4   The politics and production of place

In her call to "choose marginality as a site of resistance," hooks framed positionality as a dialectical production—something imposed and also chosen. "We find ourselves positioned," as Young wrote, but we also have the capacity to shape, refine, and wield our position in political contestation. The positionality to which hooks and Young refer is not primarily spatial, but rather cultural and institutional. I suggest, however, that their conceptualization of personal agency in the articulation and leveraging of positionality has important parallels to issues of spatialized inequality (Keith & Pile, 1993). Spanning the mobility/place divide within social policy is the recognition that where people live affects the opportunities they can access. For people disadvantaged by the location of their homes, by the neighborhoods where they find themselves positioned, how can their positioning be a resource—a source of possibility

for action? In short, how can they leverage place toward the contestation of the structural forces that shape that place? Can *spatial* identities be critically invoked to disrupt the injustice of spatiality that Dikec described?

In this section, I propose that place be understood as an ongoing production in which local actors play central roles. Place, in this sense, is *situated* and *situates* those who live there, but place is also fluid and contestable. That is, I forward an emergent and political conceptualization of place, outlining a framework that involves three dimensions of place production: a bounding dimension, a historicizing dimension, and a politicizing dimension. Rather than a permanent stage on which life is enacted, place evolves *in and through* that enactment. This echoes Massey (2005), who laid out a processual understanding of space that is fundamentally relational, emergent, and the source of possibility. She suggested that place be thought of as a *spatio-temporal event*. For Massey, place is not a static entity or essence—some *thing* that exists in space—but is rather a multidimensional and ongoing set of spatial practices, coincidences, identifications, and narratives. In this sense, place is a social production: an ever-evolving and emergent negotiation of relationships in space. Massey's work reveals the contingent and accidental nature of place, but also the political significance of the production of place.

2.4.1 Bounding

Inherent in the production of place is a bounding dimension that involves the construction of belonging and exclusion: whose place this is and whose place this is not. This bounding entails the delineation of place in physical and social spaces, and also the marking of people as inside or outside those boundaries (England, 2008). The inscription

of such delineations on landscapes and people is intertwined; place and the relational identities involved in its manifestation are co-constitutive (D. Massey, 2005). That is, the processes through which we identify and give meaning to place are processes that also identify and give meaning to *people*.

In the United States, this dynamic has been particularly—and problematically—enacted through the interwoven racialization of people and places (Delaney, 2002; Holloway, 2000; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Price, 2010). Constructions of racialized bodies and their linkage to systems of privilege and injustice are given expression through—and are all the more enduring for—the ways they are tied to racializations of space. The racial identification of places cannot be separated from the production of the racial identities of people, and all that production entails (Delaney, 2002). For example, as Sugrue (2005) argued, mid-twentieth century efforts by white communities to defend the color lines in Detroit were not merely about preserving white neighborhoods but were in fact a process of racial identity construction: "The sustained violence in Detroit's neighborhoods was the consummate act in a process of identity formation. […] Through the drawing of racial boundaries and through the use of systematic violence to maintain those boundaries, whites reinforced their own fragile racial identity" (p. 234). The production of place, then, entails bounding processes that mark the edges of place in physical space and also in social space, demarcating who belongs and who does not and providing a powerful mechanism through which identifications such as race are produced and reproduced.

2.4.2 Historicizing

The production of place involves also a historicizing dimension, the tying of place to specific accounts of history and its significance. Assertions about what this place *was* bolster claims about what this place *is today* (D. Massey, 1995). Telling the history of a place is a political act that asserts what place means, who belongs, and why. The telling of place history, then, should be understood (as with all history-telling) as a deeply political project, one that differentially positions people in the present (Blokland, 2009; May, 1996). Claims of belonging that are rooted in place histories can be powerfully legitimating, in part because, while place is fluid and contested, the longevity of landmarks, buildings, and institutions links claims made today to something that transcends the present moment (D. Massey, 1995; Mills, 2006). Likewise, tying assertions of belonging to the prolonged dwelling of individuals, families, and communities in place constitutes an attempt to connect the meaning and identity of a place today to the lived experiences of people who have made that place their home (Dávila, 2004; Heidegger, 1993). In the context of deeply racialized space, invoking place history can serve as a means through which to name histories of racial oppression and to contest their reproduction. Conversely, claims to historical tradition can likewise be used to justify ongoing racial exclusion.

2.4.3 Politicizing

A third dimension of place production arises from the politicization of place, the leveraging of place identities—contingent, contested, and emergent—toward political objectives. In this vein, Martin (2003a) suggested that neighborhoods be thought of as *sociospatial imaginaries*, productions through and for social action. That is, constructions

of place constitute bases around which political mobilization can be built. Similarly, Madden (2014) argued that neighborhoods should be seen as "spatial projects," politically contested and contingent constructions that emerge through the ongoing and intersecting actions of variously positioned actors, including the state, capital, and community (see also Elwood, 2006; Escobar, 2001; Martin, 2000, 2003b; Mele, 2000). As these scholars have argued, productions of place serve not only to legitimate or contest disputed claims to space by sets of local actors, but are also employed in the context of larger debates more often understood in the realm of political economy—in arenas of policy, investment, and development.

I intend this formulation of the production of place through three dimensions of action as a framework for understanding the political salience of place and place identities. Place *is* political. Place is a manifestation of structural processes that reproduce legacies of disadvantage in space. But place is also a production that can be leveraged by those contesting spatial disadvantage—a resource for disrupting the injustice of spatiality (Dikec, 2001).

2.5 Marketized school reform: Charter schools and the politics of place

For poor communities, neighborhood schools in some ways embody the tension between the constraint and possibilities inherent in place. Schools—like people—are differentially positioned in urban space, and poor communities of color in U.S. cities have for generations fought the limitations of under-resourced neighborhood schools (Anyon, 2014; Squires & Kubrin, 2005). As neighborhood institutions, however, schools also constitute assets and sources of potential for local communities: social, physical, and institutional resources that can support communities in multidimensional ways that

extend beyond their primary role as educators of children (Vincent, 2014; Witten, Kearns, Lewis, Coster, & McCreanor, 2003). Community efforts to improve local schools have in some instances taken the form of fights for local control, demands for greater democratic accountability of neighborhood schools to their community constituencies.

The past three decades have seen the expansion of market-based mobility strategies into public education in many jurisdictions across the United States. Reforms that advance school choice—whether through school vouchers, magnet schools, or charter schools—represent, on one level, an effort to free families from the inadequacies of their neighborhood schools. In this way, choice-based school reforms align with the logics that motivate mobility strategies in social policy more broadly. While market mechanisms are promoted as a means to overcoming historical place-based inequalities, in practice the growth of charter sectors and the dismantling of traditional public school infrastructure manifest differentially across space and are very much shaped by the existing spatiality of injustice (Lipman, 2011a). In this section, I consider the implications for neighborhoods of choice-based mobility policies in public education.

2.5.1   Charter schools and the restructuring of public education

In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school legislation in the United States. The intent in laying the groundwork for publicly funded but privately run schools was to create space for educational innovation by allowing charter schools greater autonomy from school district bureaucracy. Additionally, by exposing these schools to the market pressure of parental choice, charter schools were understood to face more direct accountability for their performance (K. Bulkley & Fisler, 2003). Over the ensuing quarter century, the charter school sector has expanded dramatically, fundamentally

changing the landscape of public education in many cities across the country. Today there are over 6,800 charter schools across the country, enrolling an estimated 2.9 million students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016).

Advocates praise charter schools as flexible laboratories for innovation, in which market accountability compels educational effectiveness and fiscal efficiency (e.g., Hill, 2014; Kingsland, 2015). Critics have decried the shift toward private management of public schools, the constitution of education as a site for capital investment, and the transformation of parents from citizens into consumers (e.g., Buras, 2013; Cucchiara, 2013; Lipman, 2011b). Charter school expansion is often touted as increasing parental choice and, by extension, improving access to quality education for children at struggling neighborhood schools. However, the merits of these strategies are debated. Some scholars have found that market competition leads schools to divert resources into marketing efforts, instead of pedagogical resources or classroom innovation (Jabbar, 2015; Kasman & Loeb, 2013; Lubienski, 2005). Additionally, research suggests that theories of simple market discipline are inadequate to explain the regulation of the charter sector as, in practice, charter schools are often difficult to close, whether due to under-resourced authorizing bodies or the workings of local politics (Hess, 2001; Karanxha, 2013). Others argue that school choice policies exacerbate class inequities, as the responsibility for public education is transferred from local governments to parents, who are differentially positioned to take advantage of an education marketplace—an inequity not mitigated solely through increased choice (Billingham, 2014; Huff, 2013).

2.5.2   Charter expansion, markets, and community control

Restructuring public education around the freedom to choose from a variety of schools and private operators accomplishes a transformation of parents from *citizens*, who, as members of the public, receive services from a democratically accountable institution, to *consumers*, who have the freedom and—responsibility—to practice choice in a marketplace of private providers (Cucchiara, 2013; Witten et al., 2003). Hankins (2005) argued that charter school legislation constitutes a "hyperlocalization" of the rights and responsibilities associated with educating children. She contended, however, that these rights are only available to a segment of the population whose socioeconomic position grants them the ability to perform them. That is, a decentralized system allows greater autonomy in place, but this freedom can only be realized by those in a position to do so. In some cases, this means that people or organizations are able to develop schools that serve the particular needs of local neighborhoods (see Buras, 2013; Hankins, 2007). However, in many other cases it means that marginalized people and communities continue to endure substandard educational options. This parallels trends across other sectors of the welfare state over the past 40 years, as state retrenchment has transferred responsibility for social service provision to local communities, magnifying the effects of their differential positionality (Herbert, 2005; Lake & Newman, 2002)

Calls for decentralized school governance and "local control" have a long history in the United States that predates the neoliberal era (Briffault, 1992; Shelley, 1994). This tradition, however, is distinct from contemporary market-led reforms in critical ways. Historically, fights for local control have sought to root accountability in local communities, rather than ceding control to forces of market competition, as recent

choice-based reforms have sought to do. To consider a paradigmatic case, during the 1960s, local control of public schools became an intensely contested issue in New York City as place-based community groups demanded greater influence in the governance of local schools. Faced with the impotence of desegregation initiatives following the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, leaders in African American and Puerto Rican communities in New York City concluded that they would be able to more successfully improve educational opportunities for their children only through greater control of local public schools that included having a voice in hiring decisions and the ability to institute bilingual and cultural education (De Jesus & Pérez, 2009).

Like the contemporary push to marketize education, the 1960s era local control movement in NYC called for the devolution of power from a centralized school district. It differed, however, in the structure of the local accountability it sought, aiming to make neighborhood schools accountable to local, place-identified constituencies. By advocating market discipline through individual consumer choice, marketizing education reforms in the neoliberal era fundamentally weaken ties between schools and local communities.

2.6 The other foot falls: Closing traditional public schools

Demographic shifts have always caused schools to close, along with the retrenchment of other public services for declining populations. However, the recent mass closures of schools in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York are not attributable solely to population changes, but represent the consequence of an intentional expansion of the charter school sector, drawing students and resources away from

traditional public schools. To date, research within planning and urban studies that situates the recent spate of school closures within neighborhood contexts and urban processes is small. Nevertheless, a growing and interdisciplinary literature is engaging school closures from multiple angles, including (1) work that has framed school closures as manifestations of the broader neoliberalization of urban space, (2) studies focused on the politics of school closure processes and their resistance by opponents, and (3) research probing the implications of school closures for local communities. I will briefly review each of these in turn.

2.6.1 Closures, neoliberalism, and urban inequality

The efforts to marketize education in the United States over the past two decades have emerged amidst a broader neoliberalization of urban policy that, as Weber (2002) wrote, has forwarded "a hypermarketized style of governance … [that] is also an ideological fetishization of pure, perfect markets as superior allocative mechanisms for the distribution of public resources" (p. 520). Critics of this policy regime argue that the reconstitution of urban space as an arena for investment opportunity and profit extraction drives increasing urban inequality, jeopardizing most acutely those who are most vulnerable (Harvey, 2007). Critical scholars watching the expansion of choice policies and charter schools see in their growth the application of neoliberal policies to education, propelling parallel trajectories of inequality and exploitation of the poor within the education sector.

Lipman (2011a, 2011b), for one, has made this case forcefully through her research on Chicago's Renaissance 2010 initiative (Ren2010). She characterized Ren2010—which was rolled out in 2004 and simultaneously aimed to close over 60

underperforming public schools and open 100 new market-oriented schools[1] by 2010—as

a reframing of education around market logics, consumer choice, privatization, public-

private partnerships, and urban entrepreneurialism (see also Lipman & Haines, 2007). In

doing so, Lipman argued that the Ren2010 reforms are part of broader neoliberal urban

restructuring that seeks profit through the disinvestment, displacement, and

redevelopment of poor communities:

> It is no accident that Chicago's charter schools are concentrated in very low-income African-American and Latino communities where public schools have been historically under-resourced and which bear the scars of years of public and private disinvestment and racism. Like the failure to maintain decent public housing and other urban infrastructure, this is a strategy of disinvestment in public goods that furthers privatization, and ... the spatial restructuring of the city. (2011a, p. 229)

That is, Lipman tied the closure of traditional public schools and the expansion of charter

schools in poor communities of color to the reconstitution of disinvested neighborhoods

as new sites for private investment through the neoliberalization of urban space (see also

Buras, 2013). This framing suggests that processes of school closure and charter school

growth cannot be understood apart from the political economy of urban space: the

intertwined histories of racial segregation and uneven development shape where school

closures happen and who they affect.[2]

Others have argued that the application of market competition to the education

sector constitutes the abdication of society's responsibility to mitigate the effects of

structural injustices. For example, drawing on a case study of the closure of an Austin,

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[1] The Ren2010 objectives stipulated that the new schools be one-third charter schools, one-third contract schools (privately operated schools that are similar to charter schools), and one-third CPS "performance" schools, all models that incorporate greater school autonomy and flexibility while dismantling or marginalizing the influence of labor unions and democratically elected local school councils.

[2] On the concentration of Chicago school closures in poor communities of color, see also Burdick-Will, Keels, & Schuble (2013); Fleming, Greenlee, Gutstein, Lipman, & Smith (2009); and Greenlee, Hudspeth, Lipman, Smith, & Smith (2008).

Texas high school, Johnson (2013) showed how school closures and "clean slate" turnaround strategies employ logics from the business world designed to jump start the competitiveness of a school. She argued that these strategies effected the devolution of responsibility from policymakers to students, invoking the benefits of market competition without acknowledging the realities of systemic race and class inequalities:

> The notion of "having to merit staying open" places the responsibility for the school's continued existence squarely on the shoulders of the students, absolving policy makers and private partners from responsibility for the consequences of defining and structuring failure…. The expectation that schools "beat the odds" and overcome entrenched inequities without real or substantial social transformation amounts to contextual, historical, and moral "reductionism" that works in concert with neoliberalism. (p. 243)

When performance deficiencies lead to school closures or turnarounds, policymakers are able to wash their hands of the decision, invoking the merits of market accountability—an accountability, however, that is blind to the legacies of racialized segregation, neighborhood disinvestment, and job loss.

2.6.2   The politics and protest of closures

School closure processes make evident an inherent tension between a school district's systemic need to cut costs, and a community's opposition to the loss of a school and what it represents for the neighborhood. Basu (2007) explored this tension through her study of a school closure process in Ontario, Canada. In the Ontario case, closure decisions were made at the provincial level, and Basu discussed the starkly contrasting scalar frames of reference out of which provincial-level decision makers and community actors operated:

> The case studies illustrate a fundamental tension between the two ideological approaches to school closures in an age of neoliberal reform—one based on bureaucratic decisions of accountability and the other based on neighborhood attachments and a 'loss of community'…. Policies formulated at the provincial

> level are interpreted differently at the local level whereby closure of a school facility (savings in education costs) entails the loss of other community ties (loss in social connections). (p. 123)

One outcome of this disconnect was a closure process that pitted communities against each other through the "zero-sum game" of local debates about *which* schools to close, rather than enabling the collective mobilization needed to engage the provincial-level decisions that identified school closures as a necessary course of action. Pappas (2012) described a similar dynamic in her study of parent engagement in a school closure process in New York City, arguing that the forums for community input effectively positioned different parent constituencies in competition with each other, undermining the possibilities of broader coalition building. (See also Irwin & Seasons, 2012; Kretchmar, 2014.)

2.6.3   The neighborhood implications of school closures

The protest of school closures by local communities brings to light the many roles schools play within neighborhoods, beyond their basic function of educating students. It highlights, also, the importance of schools in the production of place and place identities. Witten, Kearns, McCreanor, and colleagues published an array of research during the 2000s exploring the implications of urban and rural school closures in New Zealand for local communities across a breadth of dimensions (Kearns, Lewis, McCreanor, & Witten, 2009; Witten et al., 2003; Witten, McCreanor, & Kearns, 2007; Witten, McCreanor, Kearns, & Ramasubramanian, 2001). They argued that schools play important roles as neighborhood institutions, as pieces of the public social service infrastructure, and as spaces of community connection and relationship building. These roles become particularly important in communities that have suffered from prolonged disinvestment

and where there are few other community organizations—where the "institutional fabric of neighborhoods may be thin and fraying" (Kearns et al., 2009, p. 132). Witten et al. (2003) summed up the place-significance of schools in this way:

> Schools are … central community institutions. They represent a common experience of place for individuals and families in a community, hence their importance to the production and reproduction of communities. Schools have histories and special characteristics born of place that in turn offer particular experiences to that community and facilitate the development and assertion of local knowledges and identity. (p. 206)

That is, schools can be resources for the production and leveraging of place identities, across bounding, historicizing, and politicizing dimensions—resources that anchor communities in space and can also be employed in political debate.

In her study of a school closure process in Ontario, referenced above, Basu (2007, p. 116) reported that residents made similar arguments, highlighting their local school's long-term importance to their neighborhood as an institutional resource—a dimension of value not captured by enrollment-based rationales for school closure. Others studying school closures in both urban and rural settings have highlighted the roles schools play as hubs of community relational networks (Bondi, 1987; Oncescu & Giles, 2014), some tying neighborhood schools explicitly to the development of neighborhood social capital (Brinig & Garnett, 2010; Fischel, 2006; Witten et al., 2007). Along similar lines, Deeds and Pattillo (2015) described the varied types of disruption that school closures cause for differently positioned school stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers. While there is some danger in drawing parallels across too broad a spectrum of schools and communities, this body of research draws out a dimension of schools common to many contexts and reflective of the reality that for many communities, schools are not

only spaces of education, but also constitute critical resources for local communities, socially and institutionally.

2.7 Conclusion

Place *does* matter. Experience and opportunity vary across remarkably small geographies. In a city like Philadelphia, you can turn the corner or cross the street and find yourself to have traversed an unexpected border, to be amidst an entirely different social, economic, physical, and infrastructural reality. And that variation has substantial effects on the lives of those who live there.

People's life quality and opportunities are shaped to great degrees by the specific places where they live, and the focus of community development efforts, since the field's emergence in the 1960s, has been on addressing social need and disadvantage *in the particularity of place*. And yet, any diagnosis of the challenges facing a community that remains bounded in the particularity of place fails for its blindness to the larger systemic forces that differentially position people and places, mediating their access to economic opportunity, political power, quality services, and healthy environments. The enduring challenge for urban theorists is how to name the ways structural disadvantage manifests in space, without losing the capacity to see the particularity of place or the political agency of local actors.

In this chapter, I draw on theorists in political economy, feminist, and critical race studies who have conceptualized structural disadvantage—marginality—as a political resource (in particular: Dikec, Young, and hooks). Their work provides frameworks for leveraging spatial positionality—*place*—to contest the systems that reproduce spatialized inequality. In this way, we can begin to think of place and place identities as not only the

manifestation of situated dis/advantage, but as a production: a process of negotiating meaning and belonging in space that has real political relevance, in terms of *what* and *whose* place is, but also as a resource in broader political debate. The three dimensions of place production I delineate suggest the arenas through which this process is mediated and provide a basis for conceptualizing place as an ongoing and political production.

Historically, public schools have served the communities that surround them and have often reflected the privilege or disadvantage of the community's structural-spatial positionality. The marketizing school reforms of the past two decades constitute, on one level, a way to disrupt this link, to facilitate mobility on an unequal landscape by giving students access to more choices. However, what these policies and the discourse that surrounds them miss are the implications of these reforms for local communities, for place. The expansion of charter schools through regimes of choice and the attendant closure of traditional neighborhood schools play out in the particularity of place. The effects of these changes for local communities are neither all good, nor all bad. They are, however, real. And celebration of the market-disciplined efficiencies of private management has obscured both (1) the ways that communities are differentially positioned to take advantage of the choices of the market and (2) the unequal ramifications of these transformations for particular neighborhoods. Granting, for the sake of argument, the market's wisdom in driving charter school expansion and neighborhood school closure, those closures still happen in specific places and not others. And for planners and policymakers, the expansion of markets and choice must be guided by this awareness.

In this dissertation, I explore the ways neighborhood stakeholders inserted place into the school closure debate in Philadelphia. This set of questions and the lens it affords reveal the ways closures played out differentially across Philadelphia's landscape of spatialized inequality *and also* the ways the closure process manifested in the particularity of place. In this way, this research grounds in place a policy process whose framing in market logics obscured important questions of equity and spatial justice.

3   Methods

3.1   Introduction

In this dissertation, I use qualitative case study methods to study the ways neighborhood stakeholders inserted place into the school closure debate in Philadelphia in 2013. I draw on video and transcription records of public meetings held during the months of the closure debate and subsequent interviews I conducted with neighborhood stakeholders to understand (1) how stakeholders invoked place in protesting school closures, (2) how they understand the significance of their location (their spatial position) in the context of this debate, and (3) how they understand the significance of school closures for their neighborhoods. Neighborhood stakeholders are conceptualized broadly within this project as individuals who in some way identify with a neighborhood, either vocationally or as residents, including: parents, teachers, residents, pastors, community leaders, and representatives from local organizations. I supplement the qualitative data with a quantitative analysis, reported in Chapter 5, characterizing the neighborhoods where schools were slated for closure. I do this through univariate and multivariate census-tract-level analyses comparing those census tracts in Philadelphia that contained a school building or program slated for closure with those tracts that did not, across nine independent variables. In this chapter, I discuss the methods for each of these analyses, beginning with the quantitative methods and then addressing in more depth the qualitative methods that constitute the core of this project.

3.2   Quantitative methods

The District proposed closing in 2013 approximately one out of every six schools that it operated in Philadelphia. Using both univariate and multivariate analyses, I compare those census tracts that contained a school or program recommended for closure with census tracts that had at least one District-operated school, but none recommended for closure, across nine independent economic and demographic variables (Table 3.1).

For this analysis, I identified 45 buildings or programs as having been recommended for closure in 2013. This count is slightly higher than the numbers cited most often in the press. Determining how many schools were recommended for closure is definitionally complicated, as the District's proposal

Table 3.1: *Independent variables*

1. Percent population change, 2000-2012
2. Median household income (MHI), 2012
3. Change in MHI, 2000-2012
4. Median home value (MHV), 2012
5. Change in MHV, 2000-2012
6. Percent rental tenure, 2012
7. Percent Black, non-Hispanic, 2012
8. Percent White, non-Hispanic, 2012
9. Percent Hispanic, 2012

included significant restructuring of programs, moving programs from one building to another, and co-locating multiple programs in the same building. I included instances where a building was recommended to close, a program was recommended to close, and/or a program was recommended to move to a different location.

In the univariate analysis, for each independent variable, I compared the distribution of that variable's values across tracts that had a school or program recommended for closure with the variable's distribution across tracts that had at least one District-run school, but none recommended for closure. Comparing these two distributions reveals disproportionalities in the characteristics of tracts where schools were recommended for closure. I did this in three ways: (1) Mapping the school locations overlaid on each independent variable provides a visual representation of how the

location of schools recommended for closure coincided with the spatial distribution of the independent variable. (2) Box plots allow for visual comparison of the numeric distribution of each variable between tracts with and without schools slated for closure, highlighting differences in the median value of the variable for each group as well as the spread of the distribution. (3) The Wilcoxon rank-sum test generates a probability statistic that the distributions underlying two samples are different from each other. It represents a way to quantify the level of difference between the two distributions represented in the box plot for each variable.

In the multivariate analysis, I build a logistic model to assess the relationship between closure locations and individual independent variables, while holding the other independent variables constant. Logistic regression incorporates the relationships between multiple independent variables and a single binary dependent variable. In this case, the dependent variable captures whether or not a tract had a school or program recommended for closure and the model generates a coefficient characterizing how changes in a given independent variable affect the odds of a school being recommended for closure in a given tract. I follow Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000) to guide model construction, a process I describe in detail in Chapter 5.

3.3 Qualitative methods

The qualitative component of this dissertation is structured as an embedded case study of the school closure process in Philadelphia, with neighborhoods as the unit of analysis (Yin, 1994). That is, the research focuses on responses in three different areas of the city to a centralized process of institutional restructuring. Each neighborhood represents an individual case, embedded within the same larger context. The objective is

not to contrast neighborhood X with neighborhood Y, but rather to understand, in the particularity of each case, how local stakeholders view the significance of their location to the school closure debate and the ways they represented their location in the context of that debate.

The intent is to explore, specifically, how and to what ends people invoked their neighborhood—their location in space—in contesting school closures. Qualitative research methods are ideally suited for answering these questions, which require achieving a nuanced understanding of social dynamics (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In-depth narrative description of a specific context has the capacity to reveal more than a broad survey, particularly if the questions being pursued involve trying to grasp the intersecting influences of different social processes (Flyvbjerg, 2004). In this dissertation, I explore how people made sense of their neighborhood, the ways they represented their neighborhood in a political debate, and their motivations for doing so. These questions cannot be answered—beyond a superficial level—through survey research techniques. Instead, they require explanatory analysis of the ways people are engaging their surroundings and what those surroundings mean in the context of a larger political process. Qualitative case study methods are ideally suited for this task (Yin, 1994).

3.4   Case selection

I studied stakeholder responses in three neighborhoods: Germantown, Fairhill, and Mantua, each of which had at least one school on the closing list (Figure 3.1). I selected these neighborhoods with the goal of including varying histories of racialized and classed space. Germantown encompasses significant income diversity and has maintained a racially diverse middle-class through demographic shifts of the past half-

century. Fairhill has been the hub of the Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia, and includes some of the highest concentrations of Hispanic residents in the city. Mantua is an African American neighborhood that has experienced significant population loss in the past 30 years and is currently feeling development pressure from an expanding Drexel University. In what follows, I sketch brief descriptions of each case neighborhood.

Case Neighborhoods
Philadelphia, PA, 2013

Case Neighborhoods
- Germantown
- Fairhill
- Mantua

Schools
- Recommended for Closure (closed)
- Recommended for Closure (not closed)
- Other District Schools
- Charter Schools
- Waterways
- Center City
- City of Philadelphia

0   1   2   3   4 miles

Sources: School District of Philadelphia; U.S. Census Bureau, Tiger Files
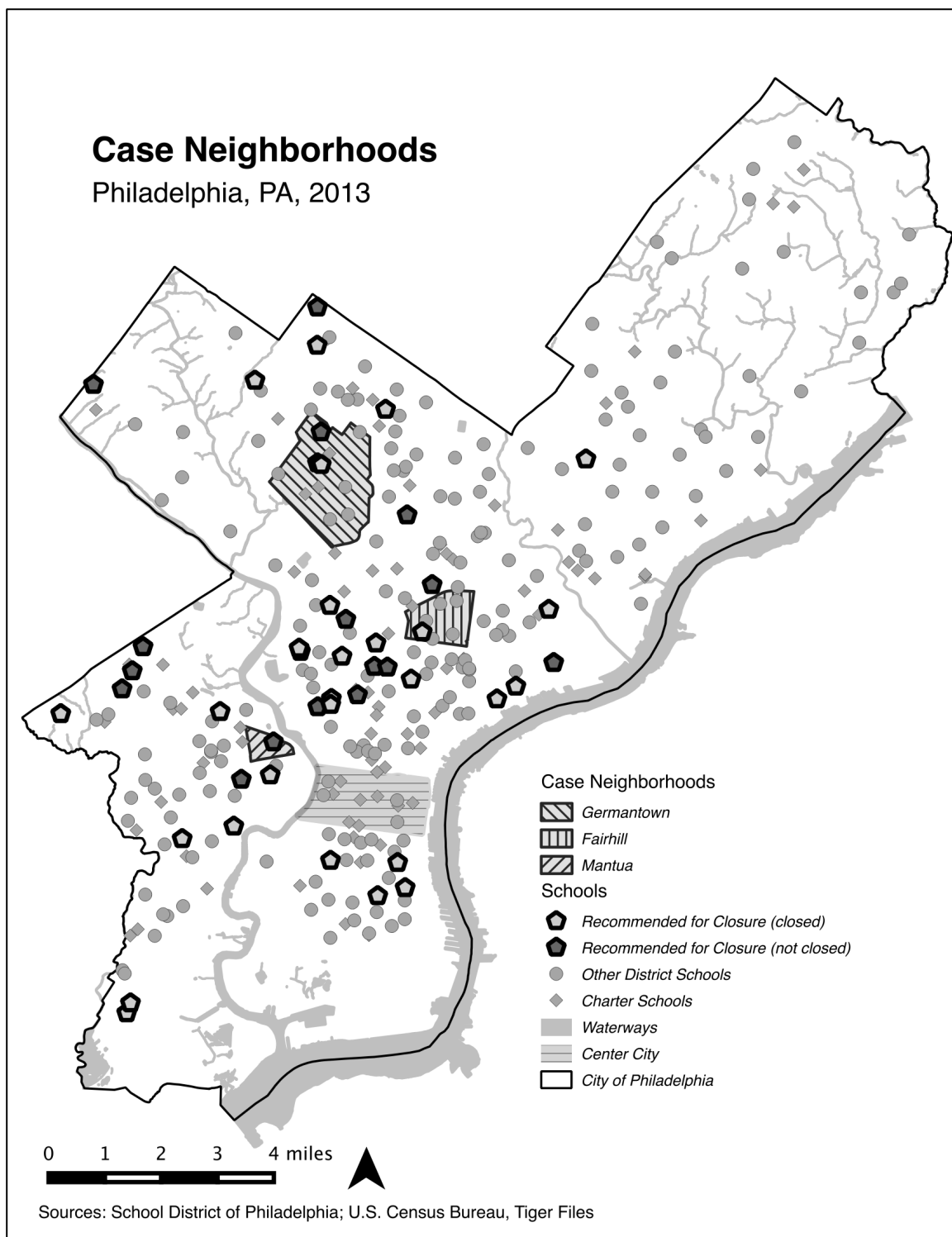
Figure 3.1: *Case neighborhoods map*
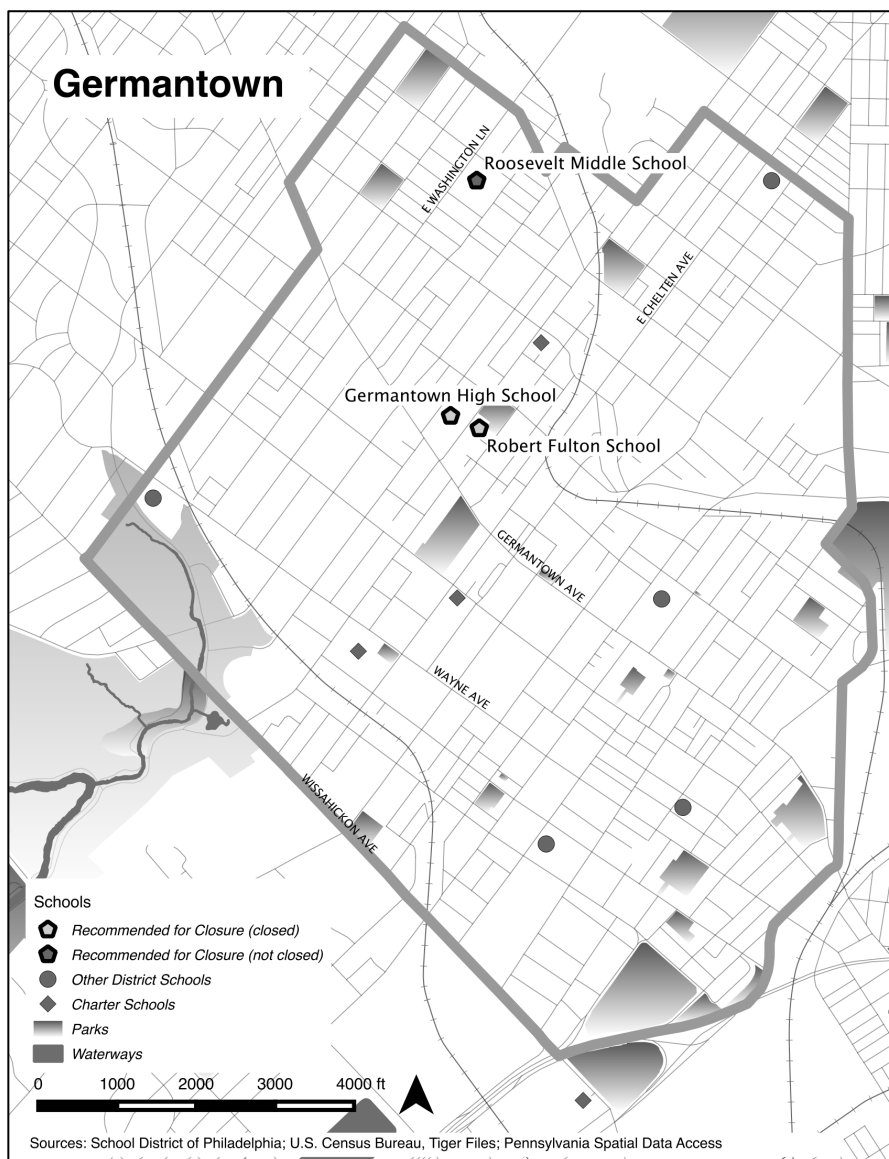
Figure 3.2: *Germantown map*

3.4.1 Germantown

Germantown is located in lower-Northwest Philadelphia and has a storied history dating back to the 17th century. This colonial-era legacy maintains a presence in the contemporary neighborhood through centrally located historic buildings and organizations working to preserve both the buildings and the history they represent. The

Borough of Germantown was incorporated into the City of Philadelphia in the mid-19th century.

Over the course of the 20th century, Germantown traced an arc familiar to neighborhoods in many northern industrial cities in the United States, as African American in-migration and the loss of industrial jobs dramatically transformed the racial and economic landscape. A long-time resident described to me schools whose racial makeup swung quickly from predominately White to predominately African American during the 1950s and the long, slow decline of the commercial corridors along Chelten and Germantown Avenues over the past 50 years. She outlined a familiar story of small independent stores giving way to larger department stores, which eventually moved out to suburban malls, leaving in their wake dime stores, discount clothing stores, and fast food chains.

In other ways, however, Germantown today does not conform to the homogeneity typical of many urban neighborhoods in the region. Although there is a sense of segregated space within Germantown, the neighborhood encompasses marked economic and racial diversity, including pockets of significant wealth and areas of much greater poverty. The fact that a racially diverse middle class has remained in Germantown means that among those now working to cultivate a nascent economic revitalization of the area are many with long and deep ties to the neighborhood. One resident explained to me that, even though she had lived in Germantown for almost 25 years, she could still feel like a newcomer:

> *Rsp: I'm still a stranger here in some ways. You know, I'm still an outsider in some respects. [...] I've lived here for a long time. I've been involved in the community. But there's another part of this community that's been here for*

*generations. And has gone to school here and has shopped here. And has seen
more changes than I've seen.*

RG: So, for some people there's a real, deep root here.

*Rsp: For some people there's a very, very, deep, deep, deep connection here. And,
I love Germantown. I'm very happy to be here. I'm very glad when I'm in other
parts of the city and I come home to Germantown. But I don't have that same kind
of thing. […] And I recognize it. […] I'm still a little bit of an outsider.*

Pride of place in Germantown has deep roots, drawing on multi-generational family ties

and the sense of historical significance arising from a colonial heritage.

Among the schools recommended for closure in December 2012 were three

schools in Germantown: Fulton Elementary School (K-6), Roosevelt Middle School (7-

8), and Germantown High School (GHS) (Figure 3.2). The Fulton school building sits

right across the street from the sprawling GHS building, both just off the main corridor of

Germantown Avenue. However, its fate was tied to GHS by more than just its proximity:

pipes from the GHS boiler cross under the street to heat Fulton. The buildings are joined

at the hip and closing one has direct physical plant consequences for the other. Roosevelt

Middle School sits further afield, at the top of a hill about one mile from the other two

and four blocks off Germantown Avenue. Ultimately, the School Reform Commission

(SRC) voted to close GHS and Fulton, sparing Roosevelt and expanding it to include K-

8.
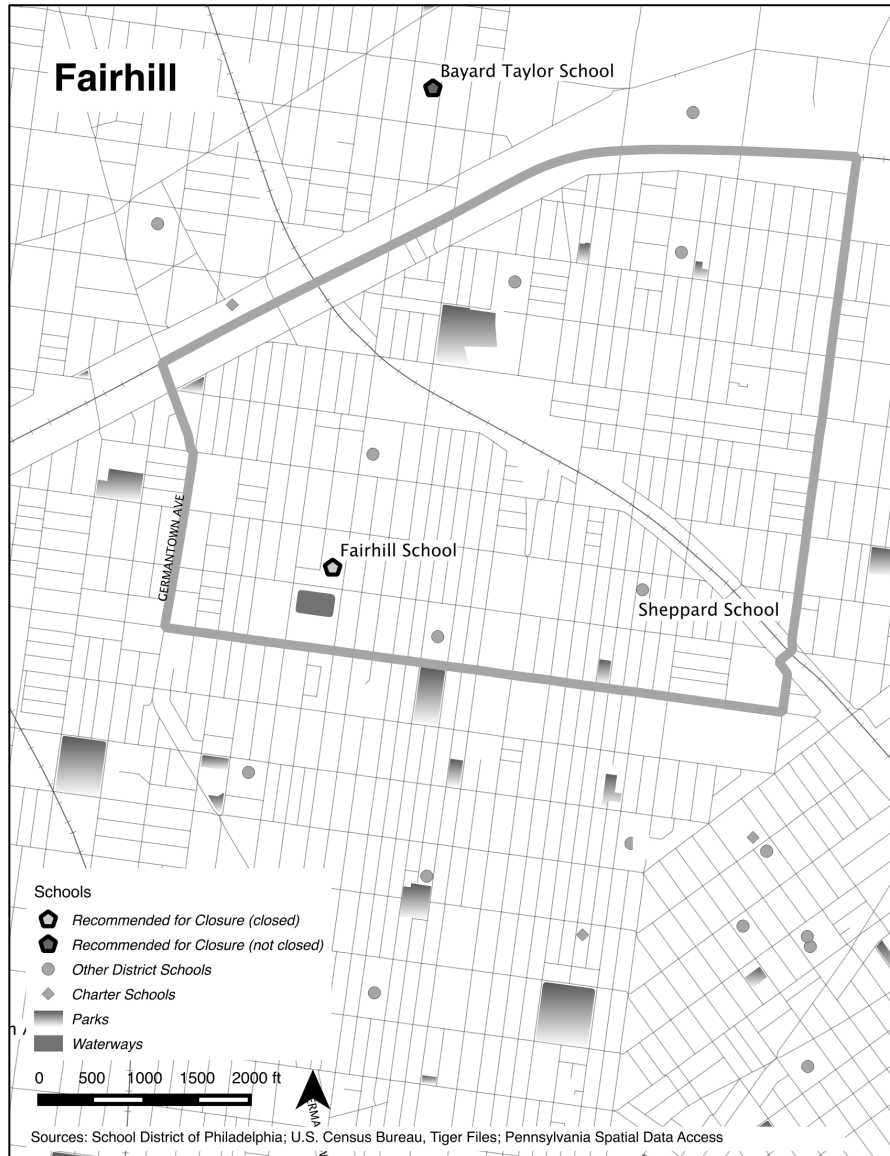
Figure 3.3: *Fairhill map*

3.4.2   Fairhill

The Fairhill neighborhood lies in the heart of North Philadelphia, just south of the angular gash cut by Amtrak's Northeast Corridor as it slices across the city toward Trenton. Today, Fairhill is the hub of the Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia. Historically, it was home to Quakers. Though there are no longer any Quaker meetings in Fairhill, the neighborhood carries a material reminder of its earlier importance for the

Philadelphia Quaker community: a 19th century cemetery holding, among others, the remains of famous abolitionist and women's rights crusader, Lucretia Mott.

In the 1980s, Quakers sold the cemetery, which had become overrun with weeds and trash, since there was no local Quaker community to maintain it. At the time, the Fairhill neighborhood was in the throes of the crack epidemic, and 9th Street and Indiana Avenue—at the northeast corner of the cemetery—was one of the busiest open-air drug markets in the city. A community leader who was *"born and raised"* in Fairhill described to me the neighborhood's late-20th century transition:

> *As my father tells the story, when he was alive, this was a big industrial community. Factories all over the place. You drop out of high school, get a job in the sewing factory. As those factories begin to close down and leave, a lot of the white flight happened and, uh, influx of people from North Carolina, South Carolina and at the same time—way down south—Puerto Ricans come into the community. And they were looking for those factory jobs. But simultaneously, as they were moving, they're closing down…. Then the drug trade moved in…. You know, it was a way to make money. And so, that's how this neighborhood really got desecrated.*

During the 1990s, local residents began organizing community members against the drugs and associated violence in their neighborhood. Along with police initiatives, they succeeded in uprooting and displacing the worst of the drug traffic and use. At the same time, a group of Quakers bought back the cemetery and began a years-long effort to clean it up, eventually establishing a park and garden maintained by a non-profit organization named Historic Fair Hill that offers programming for local school children. As a staff member told me, *"Our mission is to preserve the historic site, to carry on the work of the reformers who are buried here, and to help in the revitalization of the neighborhood."*

Across the Philadelphia cityscape, Fairhill stands out as containing the highest proportion of Hispanic residents: in the four census tracts comprising central Fairhill, the

Census Bureau estimates that between 80% and 90% of the population identifies as Hispanic. Fairhill is bordered on the west by the predominately African American communities of North Philadelphia "west of Broad" and on the south and east by the predominately white River Wards. Rumblings from the dramatic gentrification of the southern River Ward neighborhoods of Northern Liberties and Fishtown can be felt—if not yet seen—in Fairhill. As a local community leader told me:

> *You know, [we need] access to our own power, in terms of community structure. And, you know, what things are being developed and blah, blah, blah. Because, gentrification is actually moving further from Northern Liberties down this way then– then I ever thought would happen.*

Also to the south, lies Temple University, though Fairhill sits outside the radius most directly affected by the university's recent development and expansion. Socioeconomically, Fairhill is very poor, with annual median household income below $20,000. Additionally, a strikingly low proportion of Fairhill residents have completed high school; the Census Bureau estimates that in 2012, less than 60% had high school diplomas.

Fairhill contains a number of District-run elementary schools within a relatively small area, and the District has tried to close two of them in recent years (Figure 3.3). In 2012, Sheppard Elementary (K-4) was on a list of nine schools slated for closure. Local supporters fought the closure of the small 114-year-old building and the school it housed. In March 2012, the SRC voted to keep Sheppard open (Herold, 2011, 2012a). The following year, Fairhill (K-8) and Bayard Taylor (K-5)—which sits just north of the tracks and thus in the Hunting Park neighborhood—were both on the list of schools the District recommended closing. Taylor was spared by the SRC; Fairhill was not.

Figure 3.4: *Mantua map*

3.4.3 Mantua

Mantua sits on the eastern edge of West Philadelphia. To the south lies the Powelton Village neighborhood and the encroachment of an expanding Drexel University. To the north and east the neighborhood is bounded by the major rail arteries snaking north from 30th Street Station that, along with the Schuylkill Expressway, create a wide, impenetrable barrier separating Mantua from the river. In defiance of the sheer

vastness of the rail yards, Drexel aims to span this barrier as part of its massive effort to develop an "Innovation Neighborhood" between the university and the river (Hurdle, 2014).

Mantua, though only a few blocks north of Drexel, an easy walk from the zoo, and barely half a mile across the Spring Garden Street bridge from the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Schuylkill River Trail, appears to have been—until recently— largely untouched by the university development to the south or the residential gentrification that has changed neighborhoods west of University City and across the river in Fairmount. In marked contrast, Mantua has been emptying out over the past three decades. Vacant houses and empty lots pockmark many of Mantua's blocks, the population of the two census tracts comprising Mantua having dropped by 35% between 1980 and 2010. A long-time Mantua resident described to me a very different neighborhood that she had moved into 40 years ago, an economically diverse and politically active community. Today, she sees a neighborhood that is vulnerable. She told me that although Mantua has a higher homeownership rate than Powelton Village (where many Drexel students rent apartments), Mantua homeowners are aging, making more tenuous the community's hold on the neighborhood.

Tension over university expansion is not a new story in this area. In the 1960s, redevelopment efforts, spearheaded by a multi-institutional collaboration named the West Philadelphia Corporation that included Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania, leveraged federal urban renewal monies into the creation of a "comprehensive research and development park" to be called the University City Science Center—a vision whose realization necessitated the demolition of residential blocks in the predominately African

American neighborhood known as the Bottom (Harnwell, 1971). Local residents still refer to the area now called University City as the Bottom or the Black Bottom, a reference to the historically African American neighborhood's having been at "the bottom" of the hill leading down to the Schuylkill River. Mantua residents today, some of whom were displaced by the earlier development, remain suspicious of Drexel's motives and recent efforts to revitalize their neighborhood. At a fall 2014 civic association meeting, an older gentleman said that he came to Mantua from the Bottom when they were displaced. He noted that while it is good that Drexel says it is going to help the community, the community needs to find some way to pressure the university, because *"they've got all the power."* Another participant was more colorful, exclaiming: *"David slayed the giant. The giant is upon us. We got to slay that giant!"*

In 2010, John Fry became the new president of Drexel University and brought with him a commitment to civic engagement with the neighborhoods surrounding the university, beginning an era of more active involvement in Powelton Village and Mantua through the university's Office of University and Community Partnerships. The university developed neighborhood stabilization and revitalization strategies that focused on six community development areas, one of which is education. Through this effort, the university committed to supporting the two District-run public schools within their target geography: McMichael and Powel elementary schools. McMichael (K-8) sits in Mantua; Powel (K-4) is in Powelton Village (Figure 3.4). Drexel has poured significant resources into these schools through professional development, student assessment, and partnership building with outside organizations.

In December 2012, the SDP recommended closing McMichael, in addition to University City High School (UCHS), which opened in 1971 as part of the Science Center development and was located just outside of Mantua, on the south side. McMichael was dropped from a revised list of closure recommendations released in February 2013. UCHS closed its doors for the last time in June 2013. In June 2014, Drexel purchased the former UCHS property for $25.15 million and announced plans for a billion dollar redevelopment of the land, including housing, retail, labs, office space, parking, and a K-8 public school (DiStefano, 2014; Hurdle, 2014). The inclusion of a potential school in these plans—which was also confirmed for me in a June 2014 interview with a Drexel administrator—evokes a striking sense of historical circularity and calls to mind the West Philadelphia Corporation's efforts to establish a science magnet school on the same property in the late 1960s (Harnwell, 1971).

3.5   Data collection

I draw on two forms of qualitative data: (1) video and transcription records of public meetings and (2) semi-structured interviews I conducted subsequent to the closure process. I analyzed video and transcription records of seven public meetings[1] the SDP facilitated during the months of December 2012 through March 2013 and public comment at three SRC meetings held during the same window, as well as three days of formal hearings conducted by the SRC in February 2013 and a one-day hearing convened by the Philadelphia City Council Education Committee the same month.[2] In reviewing

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[1] The SDP held 13 such public meetings. I reviewed only those meetings held in parts of the city close to the three case neighborhoods framing this project.

[2] Community meetings video retrieved from: http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/f/facilities-master-plan/community-forums. Video records of SRC meetings retrieved from: http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/c/communications2/broadcast-operations/. Official transcript of City

this video and documentary record, I identified speakers whose testimony was explicitly place-based, that is, testimony that invoked place by situating the speaker, the school, or the speaker's neighborhood in space. Testimony of these speakers was transcribed in full.

Additionally, I draw on in-depth semi-structured interviews I conducted during 2014-2015 with parents, teachers, residents, community leaders, pastors, and community organizers, seeking to understand the relationships between schools and the neighborhoods where they are located—and how and why those communities responded the ways they did to the SDP's recommendation that local schools be closed. I talked with over 50 people through formal and informal interviews and a parent focus group. Most of the individuals I interviewed were affiliated with a school or community in one of the case neighborhoods. A few were affiliated with citywide organizations. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling, beginning with community organizations active in each neighborhood. After explaining that I was studying the neighborhood's response to the closure process—or after completing an interview—I would ask who else I should talk to about this. Interviews were confidential and each individual I interviewed received a $30 gift card as an appreciation for his or her time.

The goal of the interviews was to learn, from a variety of perspectives, how the neighborhood responded to the school closure recommendations. Each interview protocol was tailored for the specific individual being interviewed; see Appendix A for a representative example. All but four of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Notes from non-recorded interviews were typed immediately following the interview. I

Council hearing retrieved from: http://legislation.phila.gov/transcripts/Public%20Hearings/education/2013/ed021213.pdf. Official transcripts of SRC hearings retrieved from: http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/f/facilities-master-plan/src-hearing-materials.

was also an observer at eight community meetings and neighborhood events in the three neighborhoods during the same time period (i.e., during 2014-2015, in the wake of the school closure process) in order to better understand the local social and political contexts.

3.6   Data analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data followed an inductive approach. I began with a set of codes constructed around the dissertation's central research questions: (1) How have neighborhood stakeholders invoked place in protesting and making sense of school closures? (2) How do they understand the significance of their spatial location in the context of this debate? And (3) how do local stakeholders understand the significance of school closures for their neighborhoods? The initial coding framework was expanded and refined as related themes emerged from my engagement with the data. Through the coding process and concurrent writing exercises, I identified and clarified common themes that informed the guiding research questions. The iterative process of writing and returning to the transcripts ensured that findings remained faithful to the dataset itself.

I am a Philadelphia resident and drew on my familiarity with the city in structuring and conducting this research. I was not involved, however, in protesting the school closure process, nor do I have children in Philadelphia schools. I do not live in one of the three case neighborhoods and did not have former acquaintance with any of the individuals I interviewed.

4 Politics, school reform, and the historical geography of race in Philadelphia

4.1 Introduction

The state of Pennsylvania took over the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) in 2002, setting up a five-member School Reform Commission (SRC) charged with putting the struggling district's fiscal house in order. This move by Harrisburg outraged many in Philadelphia who saw it as an attempt by a Republican governor and state legislature to push a privatization agenda onto the city's public school system. The subsequent decade of SRC governance saw charter school enrollment in the city grow from approximately 16,000 to 50,000 students, while enrollment in District-managed schools dropped by one quarter to approximately 144,000 students. In 2012, the enrollment losses and continued fiscal insolvency drove an effort by the SDP to close one sixth of the schools the district operated. Neighborhood-based responses to this closure process are the subject of this dissertation. In this chapter, I provide background to contextualize the responses of neighborhood stakeholders that I draw on in the chapters that follow.

In the first section, I review how the state came to take over the SDP in 2002. I chronicle the ambitious reform efforts of Superintendent David Hornbeck during the late 1990s and his increasingly contentious relationship with Harrisburg as he alleged racial discrimination in Pennsylvania's inadequate funding of public education in Philadelphia. I describe the controversial role of Edison, Inc., the largest for-profit school operator in the country, in recommending in a report to the state that an SRC be established in

Philadelphia and that operation of the SDP be handed over to a private company. And I recount the SRC's implementation of a diverse provider strategy in contracting with multiple private entities to operate schools in Philadelphia.

In the following section, I detail the District's process of school closures in 2012-2013 and the broad-based opposition it evoked. I report on the cash-strapped SDP's use of private funding to hire the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) for $1.4 million to recommend a restructuring plan for the public school system in Philadelphia, recommendations which—when the report was finally made public—included the closure of up to 60 schools and the use of privately contracted labor to replace unionized support staff. I describe the coalition of labor and community organizers who mobilized in opposition to the District's transformation plan, which had drawn significantly on BCG's work. And I chronicle the window of animated public debate between the December 2012 announcement of specific schools recommended for closure by Superintendent William Hite and the March 2013 SRC votes that took action on the closure recommendations.

In the final section, I step back and briefly review the history of Philadelphia's racial geography, beginning with the city's industrialization in the mid-19th century. This section sketches the history of racial discrimination in Philadelphia in order to situate contemporary fights over school reform within a longer historical trajectory of race and space. I describe the ways that the African American community's segregation in space—and exclusion from economic opportunity—differed from that of European immigrants in the mid-19th and early 20th century. I recount how the massive influx of African American migrants from the American South and the exodus of jobs and white

residents during the 20th century transformed the Philadelphia landscape. And, finally, I

describe how the city's racial turnover was paralleled in the public school system, with

accompanying disinvestment.

4.2   Leading up to the state takeover, 1994-2002

During the 1990s, the historic rift grew deeper between Harrisburg and

Philadelphia over the funding of Philadelphia's troubled public school system. In 1994,

David Hornbeck was appointed superintendent of the SDP, and his tenure revealed both

grand ambition for systemic reform and an antagonistic and politically polarizing

approach. Hornbeck's reform agenda, Children Achieving, sought a comprehensive

overhaul of the structure and strategy of public education. The scope of these reforms

carried a steep price tag and, although Philadelphia succeeded in winning one of the

Annenberg Foundation's sixteen five-year $50 million Challenge grants in 1995,

including $100 million raised through local matching contributions, Hornbeck was

ultimately unable to convince either City Hall or Harrisburg that the SDP should merit

the ongoing and additional funding required to fully implement Children Achieving. As

Boyd and Christman (2003) reviewed, Hornbeck was stymied, in part, by a shifting

political landscape. A few months after Horbeck became superintendent in Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania voters elected a Republican governor and gave the Republican Party

majorities in both houses of the state legislature (see also K. E. Bulkley, 2007). Boyd and

Christman (2003) observed:

> Children Achieving can be viewed as a calculated risk. In this view,
> Superintendent Hornbeck was betting that the Annenberg Challenge grant and its
> matching funds could be used to improve performance, and that improved
> performance would generate the political will to obtain increased city and state
> funding…. It turned out that this was a bad bet. (p. 106)

Facing reticence in Harrisburg to pour more funds into Philadelphia's public schools, Hornbeck and local city and community leaders became increasingly antagonistic. In 1997 they filed a lawsuit that argued Pennsylvania did not provide a "thorough and efficient" education to all its residents, as mandated by state law, and in 1998 they filed a federal civil rights law suit, alleging that Pennsylvania's funding practices discriminated against school districts with large numbers of students of color (Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Travers, 2003). In spring of 1998, fed up with calls for greater cuts to services in the SDP, Hornbeck threatened to pass an unbalanced school budget if Harrisburg did not increase the state's support for Philadelphia schools.

Perhaps not surprisingly, lawsuits and demands for increased state funding were met with legislative action that paved the way for greater private and state-level control of public education in Philadelphia. In 1997, the state legislature passed a law authorizing the creation of charter schools in Pennsylvania and in spring 1998 state lawmakers passed Act 46, allowing for state takeover of financially troubled school districts (LaRoche, 2002; Travers, 2003). That summer, the SDP narrowly avoided state takeover, passing a balanced budget at the last minute by borrowing $250 million (Boyd & Christman, 2003).

In 1999, Philadelphians elected John Street as mayor and, through a referendum, gave him greater authority to influence public school governance by changing the city charter to allow the mayor to appoint school board members with terms concurrent to his own (Corcoran & Christman, 2002). (Prior to this change, school board terms were staggered so that any individual mayor had less ability to shape the entire board.) In June 2000, Street reached an agreement with Governor Tom Ridge that again succeeded in avoiding state takeover of the SDP (Johnston, 2000a). The following week, Hornbeck

resigned in protest over insufficient state funding of public schools in Philadelphia (Johnston, 2000b). Later that fall, the state passed the Education Empowerment Act (Act 16), creating a list of school districts marked for takeover if scores did not improve within three years (Travers, 2003).

Another year on found the SDP's situation little improved and the District again faced the threat of state takeover coming into the summer of 2001. In July, Mayor Street and Governor Ridge reached a compromise: the state would put up money to keep schools open on the condition that the District submit to an external review. This agreement included a commitment to resolve the crisis in one form or another by the end of October (Boyd & Christman, 2003).

In August, the state hired Edison, Inc. for $2.7 million to assess the SDP and to make recommendations as to setting up a state-run governing body for the District (Johnston, 2001a). In October 2001, Edison released their report, recommending a five-member school reform commission be set up in place of Philadelphia's existing school board, with four members appointed by the governor and one by the Philadelphia mayor. Furthermore—and controversially—Edison recommended that the operation of the District's central office and administration of its most troubled schools be contracted to a private company. This latter recommendation appeared to many observers to reflect an inherent and troubling conflict of interest, since Edison itself was at the time the largest for-profit school operator in the country (Cucchiara, 2003). The same month the Edison report was released, the state legislature strengthened the law allowing for state takeover of school districts, making it "easier for the governor to put a private for-profit or

nonprofit management team in charge and to nullify contracts with employees other than teachers" (Johnston, 2001b).

A contentious fight between Philadelphia and Harrisburg ensued in fall 2001 over the shape and terms of a state takeover of Philadelphia's schools, and—especially—the role Edison would play. Eventually, Mayor Street reached a compromise with the state. The five-member SRC would have two mayoral appointees (rather than the recommended one) and there would be no private company brought in to manage the SDP central office. Street's agreement also included the commitment of an influx of additional funding from the state (K. E. Bulkley, 2007). On December 21, 2001, the state formally took over Philadelphia's school system. At the time, it was the largest school district in the U.S. to have been taken over by the state (Useem, Christman, & Boyd, 2006).

In the early months of its governance, the newly established SRC opted against Edison's recommendation of using a single private management firm to run the city's lowest-performing schools, instead adopting a "diverse provider model." Under the diverse provider management strategy, the SRC brought in a variety of private entities to run 45 of the District's schools in 2002, contracting with seven for-profit and non-profit entities. This group included three for-profit companies (one of which was Edison), two nonprofit organizations, and two local universities. In addition to the 45 schools selected for private management, 21 schools were to be "restructured," and another 16 were designated for additional funds (Gill, Zimmer, Christman, & Blanc, 2007; Travers, 2003).

In implementing a diverse provider strategy, the SRC and the SDP under newly hired CEO Paul Vallas drew on a model developed by Paul Hill and colleagues at the

Center on Reinventing Public Education (see, e.g, Hill, Harvey, Campbell, & Reed, 2000). The model is rooted in the contention that urban school reform will only succeed if the underlying administrative structure is transformed to incorporate greater competition and marketization through the use of private management of schools. At the time, Philadelphia's experiment was the largest effort to implement a diverse provider school management strategy in the country (Useem et al., 2006). While Philadelphia's reforms included significant deviation from Hill et al.'s proposals—in particular, staff at privately managed schools remained District employees (K. E. Bulkley, Mundell, & Riffer, 2004)—it was unquestionably a dramatic step toward the privatization of public education in Philadelphia, a compromise between the city and conservative lawmakers in Harrisburg. As Bulkley et al. (2004) wrote:

> For a core of state policy makers, the diverse provider model was an opportunity to put into place a long-term commitment to a more market-based approach to the challenges facing Philadelphia public schools. For city officials, the diverse provider model was a practical compromise that facilitated the district's access to additional state funding while avoiding total privatization. Finally, local supporters, including some parents and community members, simply believed that "something else" needed to be done; though it is important to note that a significant body of parents, students, teachers, and community organizations resisted privatization. (p. 1)

(For further review of the early implementation of the diverse provider model in Philadelphia, see K. E. Bulkley et al., 2004; Christman, Gold, & Herold, 2005; Gill et al., 2007; Gold, Christman, & Herold, 2007.) Since 2002, the SDP has experimented with a variety of ways to incorporate a mixture of private management in running Philadelphia's schools. Today this type of approach is more commonly called a portfolio model—that is, rather than directly administrating schools, school districts manage portfolios of schools

operated by a diverse set of providers. In 2011, the SRC formally adopted a portfolio model as their theory of change.

Public School Enrollment, Philadelphia, PA
2000 – 2014

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education
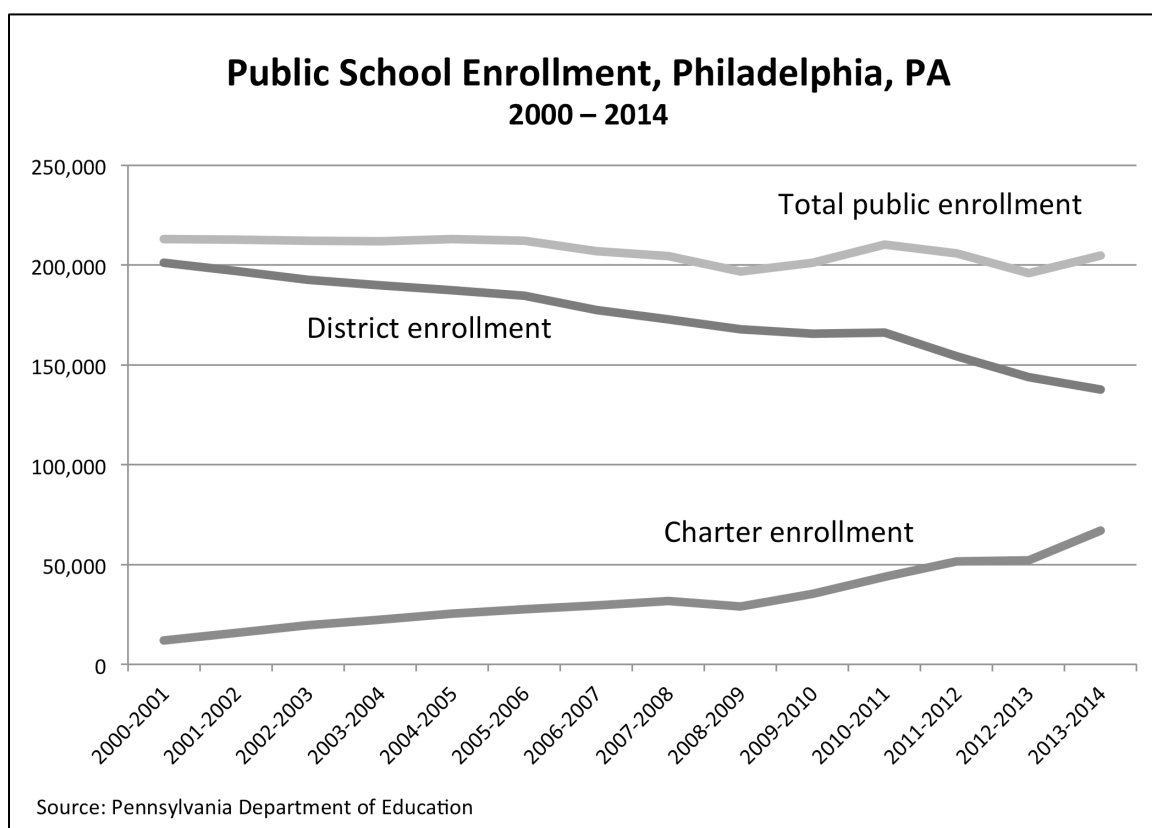
Figure 4.1: *Public school enrollment trends*

Alongside the use of private management contracts, Philadelphia's experiments in school privatization have involved continued and dramatic expansion of charter schools in the city. The first charter schools in Philadelphia opened in 1997. At the time of the 2002 state takeover, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, 15,759 Philadelphia students were enrolled in bricks-and-mortar or cyber charter schools, constituting 7% of publicly funded students in the city (Figure 4.1). By 2012-2013, that number had risen to 52,095 students (27% of all publicly funded students). In the decade preceding the 2013 school closures, District-run schools lost almost 49,000 students, a 25% drop in enrollment that reflected the growth of the charter sector as well as an

overall decline of approximately 16,000 students in the combined enrollment at District and charter schools (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2002-2013a, 2002-2013b). According to U.S. Census estimates, the population of children ages 5-19 dropped by approximately 37,000 between 2000 and 2012, even as the overall population of the city held steady at 1.5 million (although it dipped in the intervening years).

Charter school expansion is fiscal quicksand for public school districts in Pennsylvania. Every student that leaves a district-managed school for a charter school takes with him or her a pot of money from District coffers. That is, charter schools are paid a per-pupil rate by the school district. As charter enrollment expands, increasing amounts of a school district's budget must go to charter payments. This creates a problem for school districts, as it is impossible to shrink administrative, staffing, and physical infrastructure proportionally to match the rate of student attrition to charter schools. In Philadelphia, recent estimates put the net cost of each additional student who enrolls in a charter school at $7,000 (Dworetzky, 2013). In other words, if 100 additional students enroll in charters from one year to the next, the District budget incurs an ongoing net annual loss of $700,000. (The $7,000 estimate blends the net costs of students who transfer from District-operated schools and the higher costs incurred when students transfer to charters from private or parochial schools, as the District can achieve no cost savings in the latter case.)

4.3 School closures and the transformation plan, 2012-2013

Declining enrollments through the 2000s, without concomitant reductions in facility infrastructure, left the school district in a position in 2012 where, according to

District numbers, District schools were—on average—only being used at 67%[1] of their capacity, leaving approximately 53,000 "empty seats" (School District of Philadelphia, 2013). Additionally, according to testimony Superintendent Hite gave before the SRC at a formal hearing in February 2013, District facilities were estimated to be in need of $4 billion in renovations and repairs.

The District's perennial fiscal struggles were pushed to the brink by declines in both state and federal support. While there is a long history of contentious fights between Philadelphia and the state legislature in Harrisburg over funding the state's largest—and one of its poorest—school districts, dramatic cuts to state funding between 2011 and 2013, coupled with cuts in federal support, put a tremendous fiscal squeeze on the SDP and other school districts around Pennsylvania (Ward, 2014). In spring 2012, the SDP estimated a cumulative deficit of $1.1 billion dollars over the next five years (School District of Philadelphia, 2012a).

In this context, District officials argued that the resources tied up in heating and maintaining half-empty school buildings could be put to much better use if a subset of the under-enrolled schools were closed and the savings were plowed into improving the quality of education at the remaining schools. In March 2012, the SRC approved closure of eight traditional public schools. The very next month, the SDP announced a five-year plan that included dramatic restructuring of the school district, shrinking of the central

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[1] Building utilization numbers compiled from materials the SDP prepared for presentations at community meetings in January 2013. Retrieved from http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/f/facilities-master-plan/community-forums on January 4, 2014.

office, and the potential closure of one quarter of District-operated schools (Graham, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e; Mezzacappa, 2012a; Socolar, 2012).[2]

In formulating this proposal, the District drew on recommendations made by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) after an extensive—and highly controversial—review of the SDP that spring. In February 2012, the SRC approved a $1.4 million contract to hire BCG to perform an external review of the school district and to make recommendations for a transformation plan that would restore the District to fiscal solvency (Graham, 2012a). The $1.4 million price tag for a cash-strapped school district raised eyebrows—along with BCG's past alignment with privatization reform. The funding question became clearer a few days later when it was announced that the private philanthropic William Penn Foundation would cover the BCG contract.

To many observers, the decision to involve BCG appeared to be a clear signal by the SRC of their intention to continue to move the SDP in the direction of greater privatization. In her analysis of the BCG contract and the William Penn Foundation's involvement, *Philadelphia Inquirer* education reporter Kristen Graham (2012b) wrote:

> The SRC has been clear that it means to "decentralize" its operations, ripping up a bureaucracy that's been in place for decades and giving schools much more say over how they are run. And it has also said that it wants a new superintendent comfortable with managing a "portfolio" of schools—both traditional district schools and a network of charter schools.

Critics also railed against the role of private funding in paying an outside consultant to recommend dramatic changes to the structure of the public school system, a process that shielded public input, review, or accountability (e.g., Gym, 2012a).

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[2] In this section I draw significantly on reporting by three Philadelphia news agencies: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Newsworks (the local news arm of Philadelphia's NPR station, WHYY), and *The Public School Notebook* (an independent nonprofit news service devoted to covering public schools in Philadelphia).

The transformation plan announced in April 2012 included further shrinking an already bare-bones central office and restructuring the District's management into "achievement networks" of 20 to 30 schools, some of which would be operated by nonprofit organizations. The plan also called for labor concessions, the closure of 40 schools in 2013 and 64 schools over five years, and anticipated growth of the charter sector to include 40% of public school students in the city (Graham, 2012d; Mezzacappa, 2012a; School District of Philadelphia, 2012a). Facing a deficit of over $200 million for the coming year, District leadership framed the transformation plan as an effort to restore fiscal stability to the struggling school system (Graham, 2012c). Critics countered that the plan amounted to the privatization of public education in Philadelphia and was an attempt to offset inadequate state funding on the backs of students and staff in the SDP (Graham, 2012f; Mezzacappa, 2012b). At the end of May—in the face of "tumultuous objections"—the SRC approved a $2.5 billion budget for the coming year that involved borrowing $218 million, in addition to significant cuts to school personnel and services (Graham, 2012g). Ultimately, the District would borrow $300 million to cover basic operations through the 2012-2013 school year (Graham, 2012j).

The extent of BCG's role in influencing the District's transformation blueprint became more apparent over the summer. In July, Benjamin Herold (2012b) reported for *The Notebook* and WHYY/Newsworks: "The Boston Consulting Group has identified up to 60 Philadelphia school buildings as potential candidates for closure and helped line up private vendors willing to replace the School District's unionized blue-collar workforce at a $50 million discount." By August, the BCG analysis and recommendations were finally made public. At the same time, the District also announced that the achievement

network proposal—a recommendation of the BCG—would be put on hold for the time being as newly-appointed Superintendent William Hite needed time to orient himself and assume responsibility (Graham, 2012h).

In response to the District's transformation plan—and the process and actors involved in its creation—a coalition of activist and labor organizers announced their intention to facilitate the writing of an alternative transformation plan, rooted in a process that involved more direct input from the community. This group, calling itself the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS), represented a collaboration of the teachers union, Action United (which emerged in the wake of ACORN's demise), and two Philadelphia student organizations: the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) and Youth United for Change (YUC). As a PCAPS organizer explained to me in a July 2014 interview:

> *Historically, the union and community-based education folks, it's been a pretty rocky relationship. There have been earlier coalitions but they've been of a very narrow, ad-hoc, type. Whereas this one, I think there was sort of, to some extent explicit, to some extent implicit, understanding that this was a strategic coalition where we had to agree to– You know, it wasn't just let's agree on some narrow issues and go our separate ways. But, let's come together with a long term-term objective. Education. Justice.*

During fall 2012, PCAPS members facilitated a survey of over 1,500 parents, students, and community members, held a conference with over 300 participants, conducted listening sessions with approximately 750 students, and organized two town-hall meetings that together gathered approximately 250 community members (Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools, 2012). PCAPS released their report in mid-December, calling for improved instruction, increased state funding, returning the SDP to

local control, changing the conversation on school safety, halting school closures, and stopping charter school growth (Graham, 2012l; Hangley, Jr., 2012).

In September, the SDP announced a series of meetings intended to solicit community input into the priorities that should guide the selection of an anticipated 40 schools to be closed in 2013 in a process the District called the Facilities Master Plan (FMP). District estimates put the cost of paying for tens of thousands of "empty seats" at $30 million per year and officials argued that, given the dire fiscal straits facing the District, there was no choice but to close schools (Graham, 2012i). On December 13, 2012, Superintendent William Hite announced recommendations to close 37 schools and to relocate or restructure many others, kicking off a season of vigorous public protest and debate before the SRC would make final decisions on the closure recommendations in early March 2013. If approved, the recommended changes would affect approximately 17,000 students and 2,000 District staff; the closures and restructuring were estimated to reap $28 million in annual savings (Graham, 2012k; Herold, 2012c).

The week following Superintendent Hite's announcement, District officials held four citywide FMP meetings at high schools around the city to explain the recommendations to the public and to answer questions. In January, the District hosted nine FMP Planning Area community meetings to explain how the closure and restructuring recommendations would impact different areas of the city. All 13 of these community meetings had open microphones for officials to hear questions and concerns from the community, and long lines of students, parents, teachers, and community members waited their turn to speak to Superintendent Hite and other District officials, their comments often punctuated by cheers of support from the audience. During these

months, the District also accepted submissions of revisions or alternatives to their recommended closures. Officials expressed their desire to take into consideration the ideas and concerns raised by local communities. Thirty-eight alternative proposals were received and posted on the District's FMP website.

An SDP handout prepared to provide background information for this series of community meetings described a three-phase process through which the District had reached its recommendation of 37 schools to close (School District of Philadelphia, 2013). In the first phase, the District used four filtering criteria to generate an initial list of 180 schools: (1) academic performance, (2) utilization, (3) building quality, and (4) cost. During the second phase, the District "sought policy guidance from the public through a series of community meetings; assessed school safety, climate and academic performance; and visited schools to ensure specific and sufficient space for the recommended actions;" winnowing the initial list down to approximately 50 schools. The third phase involved a final review by District officials.

Public protest of the District's closure recommendations was passionate and vocal. An "angry rally" convened outside District headquarters a few hours after Superintendent Hite's December 13 announcement (Gammage, Matza, & Woodall, 2012). In the months that followed and leading up to the March 7 SRC vote, many people across Philadelphia mobilized to protest the closure of one sixth of the city's traditional public schools. As Helen Gym, an outspoken Philadelphia advocate for public education, wrote in late December: "[T]here's no question that the District has failed to explain its inconsistent approach of allowing charter expansion without regard to expense or

academic quality while insisting on draconian and widespread sacrifice among District schools" (2012b).

On December 20—one week after the District's closing list was made public and two days after the press conference announcing the report with their alternative recommendations—PCAPS organized a candlelight vigil and march from City Hall to the District administrative offices to protest the closures at the SRC's monthly meeting. Impassioned public testimony protesting the closure recommendations dominated the four-hour meeting (Graham & Moran, 2012; Herold, 2012d). Similarly strident and vocal testimony was given at each of the subsequent SRC meetings, leading up to the March vote. Describing the January 17 SRC meeting, Graham (2013b) wrote:

> Shouting, waving signs, and drowning out officials, hundreds of students, parents, and community members angry at plans to shut 37 Philadelphia schools lashed out Thursday night at the School Reform Commission…. The raucous crowd made the meeting a long, uncomfortable one for the SRC. At several points, the meeting came to a halt as audience members shouted: "Whose city? Our city! Whose schools? Our schools!"

On February 21-23, the SRC held a series of formal hearings to solicit public testimony on the record regarding the school closures.

Public protest continued through January and February, in local communities and through events organized by PCAPS or one of its affiliate members. In mid-January, the PSU organized a "zombie flash mob" of zombie-costumed student dancers on the steps of the school district administrative offices, symbolizing the impact of the recommended closures on students (Graham, 2013a; Pope, 2013). The PSU, along with the rest of the PCAPS coalition, called for a one-year moratorium on school closings, to give more time for community process and input.

City legislators also picked up the call for a moratorium. On January 24, Philadelphia City Council passed a non-binding resolution calling for a one-year moratorium on school closings in the city and directed its Education Committee to schedule a public hearing on the issue (MacDonald, 2013). At the Committee's hearing, which took place on February 12, lawmakers, scholars, activists, labor representatives, and community leaders challenged Superintendent Hite and other District officials on various elements of the school closing recommendations (Herold, 2013a).

On January 28, PCAPS held a press conference to reiterate their call for a moratorium on closures and to make public their analysis showing that poor students, students of color, and students with disabilities were going to be disproportionately affected by the District's recommended school closures. They also announced that the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education would be investigating the complaint they had filed alleging similarly discriminatory affects stemming from the District's 2012 closures (Graham, 2013c; Mezzacappa, 2013a). On January 10, *The Notebook* had reported a similar finding based on their analysis of District data: that closings and relocations would disproportionately affect African American students (Socolar, 2013a). In both cases, District officials acknowledged that under-enrolled and low-performing schools—those schools prioritized for closure consideration—were predominately attended by African American students, but maintained that the intent of the closures was to improve educational opportunities for those very students.

Responding to a feeling shared by many that the District had not adequately incorporated local communities into the process shaping the closure recommendations, the leadership at the massive Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Northwest Philadelphia

set out to facilitate community meetings at each of the 44 schools slated for closure or relocation in order to "give voice to the school communities that are directly affected by the proposed recommendations" ("Voices from the Inside, Volume II: Reports on the Schools Recommended for Closing/Restructuring/Relocating in the SDP's Facilities Master Plan," 2013, p. 5). Enon volunteers facilitated community meetings and the church commissioned Next Step Associates, a Philadelphia-based management consulting company, to draft a report—a herculean task to turn around in a matter of weeks. Though community meetings did not happen at all of the schools, on February 21, Enon delivered a report to the District with feedback from meetings at over 20 schools.

In the face of steady opposition and critical feedback, District officials maintained their position that the closures were a fiscal necessity, a critical piece in the larger puzzle of how to close a gaping budget deficit. As Superintendent Hite framed it in opening remarks at the community meeting at Sayre High School on December 17, the crisis was existential:

> *[W]e will have to close schools in this district. It is the way that we will survive moving forward. We have no other options. We must close schools. This past year alone […] the School Reform Commission and the School District actually had to borrow $300 million to meet this year's budget. We may have had options in the past. Those options no longer exist. And now, […] if we don't take these types of actions, we're not talking schools closing, we're talking the possibility of the whole district closing.*

The superintendent argued that if the District did not immediately execute a significant infrastructural contraction—along with a set of other draconian budget and personnel cuts—deficits could bring an end to the public school district itself. He advocated culling "empty seats" so as to be able to devote resources to increasing the number of "quality seats" in the city's schools. He described this strategy at another community meeting two

nights later at Martin Luther King High School: *"At the end of the day […] we have to shift our conversation about why this shouldn't happen to how do we come together to make sure that whatever the remaining seats are, are the best seats available for our students."*

While doggedly unwilling to entertain the idea of a moratorium or a delay in the closures, Hite and other officials repeated their intent to take into consideration the feedback they received at community meetings about specific schools and elements of the overall plan. On February 19, the District made good on this promise, releasing a revised set of closure and restructuring recommendations. The revised list dropped ten schools that had been slated to close in the original recommendations—though it also added two new schools to the closing list. The new plan would close 29 schools, affecting 14,000 students (down from 17,000) and leading to annual savings of $24.5 million (down from $28 million). In revising their recommendations, the SDP reported having taken into account the input of over 4,000 people who had attended community meetings and the 38 alternative proposals submitted by community groups and elected officials (Graham, 2013d; Mezzacappa, 2013b; Socolar, 2013b).

On March 7, the SRC met to vote on the District's closure and restructuring recommendations (with the exception of the two schools added to the list on February 19, which would be voted on the following month). Before the meeting an angry crowd estimated to include at least 700 people rallied in opposition to the closures. Nineteen people—including Randi Weingarten, the national president of the American Federation of Teachers—were arrested for trying to block SRC commissioners from being able to enter the building (Graham & Woodall, 2013; Herold, 2013b). During the time for public

comment at the beginning of the meeting, 31 parents, teachers, community leaders, and elected officials made last-minute pleas that their neighborhood schools not be shuttered. In all, the SRC approved closure of 23 of the 27 schools to be voted on that night, sparing only four and constituting a closure of approximately one out of every ten District-operated schools in the city. *Newsworks* video from the evening (see Herold, 2013b) captures images of distraught and sobbing students, as well as an infuriated minister who delivered a withering and full-throated condemnation of the SRC's actions as she left, shouting:

> *It's wrong! Every state representative needs to be here to say it's not right! You stop educating black kids for 400 years. You just let us in the schools, and now you're putting us out? Putting us out of schools? We don't even have opportunity! And it's wrong! And everybody who says they're about kids in this city needs to be here and needs to stand up and say it's wrong!*

4.4 Philadelphia's racial geography: A historical overview

School closures and their protest in Philadelphia is very much a story of race. And thus—as this pastor argued—it must be understood in light of the city's racial history. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the historical geography of race in Philadelphia since the city's industrialization in the mid-19th century. It is a history notable for the ways work and housing discrimination have persistently disadvantaged African Americans in Philadelphia (Hershberg, Burnstein, Erickson, Greenberg, & Yancey, 1979).

In the early 19th century, racial segregation in the city was limited by walking distances (Adams et al., 1991). Even with the job and population growth that accompanied the city's industrialization, people tended to live relatively close to their places of employment, as the only way to get there was to walk. One outcome of this

reality was that the city's population was substantially organized by employment in the mid-19th century. That is, because people had to be able to walk to their jobs, their work—more so than their ethnic identity—shaped where they lived (Hershberg et al., 1979). One group of people, however, represented a distinct exception to this dynamic: African Americans were more segregated than other groups, lived closer to industrial jobs, and yet were denied access to those jobs. This pattern continued to hold for African Americans in Philadelphia through the city's industrial decline in the mid-20th century (Hershberg et al., 1979).

Elaborating this point, Adams et al. (1991) contrasted the significance of the spatial concentration of white ethnic groups and African Americans within particular neighborhoods. For European immigrants of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, segregation supported workforce specialization and job opportunities; for African Americans, the experience of segregation was completely the opposite. They wrote:

> Manufacturing and wholesale centers provided employment for the newly arriving immigrants who established "ethnic villages" … close to their work places. These were "ghettoes of opportunity" that provided the social and institutional supports for the emergence of American ethnic groups. The growth of the black ghetto, however, cannot be explained by the proximity to work. In 1930, more than 80 percent of the black population lived in areas that were within one mile of five thousand or more industrial jobs, yet less than 13 percent of black workers were employed in manufacturing. Blacks were more likely to be employed as laborers, servants, and waiters. Unlike the ethnic communities whose neighborhoods were "ghettoes of opportunity," black communities tended to be "ghettoes of last resort"—residential areas that had been rejected or abandoned by other ethnic groups. (p. 11)

While, in some ways, the clustering of African American in-movers within particular Philadelphia neighborhoods during this period resembles the ethnic enclaves of European immigrants, as these authors argue, the experience and implications of that patterning are starkly different.

These analyses are helpful for the way they situate the spatial concentration of people—and the privilege or disadvantage that concentration brings—within larger social and economic processes. As Du Bois (1899) argued in describing African American neighborhoods in his landmark work, *The Philadelphia Negro*: "[A] slum is not a simple fact, it is a symptom, and ... to know the removable causes of the Negro slums of Philadelphia requires a study that takes one far beyond the slum districts" (p. 6). Du Bois was tasked with describing and diagnosing the social ills of the African American population in Philadelphia. He concluded (1) that the struggles of this community could only be understood as an outcome of racial discrimination in social exchange, hiring, and housing; and (2) that this situation should concern all Philadelphians, writing:

> [The] center and kernel of the Negro problem ... is the narrow opportunities afforded Negroes for earning a decent living. Such discrimination is morally wrong, politically dangerous, industrially wasteful, and socially silly. It is the duty of the whites to stop it, and to do so primarily for their own sakes. Industrial freedom of opportunity has by long experience been proven to be generally the best for all. (As cited in Franklin, 1979, p. 15.)

For Du Bois, the economic exclusion and subjugation of a significant portion of the Philadelphia population was ultimately a detrimental path for the city as a whole.

In the decades after Du Bois' study, the African American population in Philadelphia grew dramatically, as tens of thousands of people migrated to the city from the American South (Figure 4.2 and Table 4.1). Between 1910 and 1930, approximately 140,000 African Americans settled in Philadelphia (Wolfinger, 2007), driving a 260% increase in the city's African American population over that time. Between 1940 and 1960, the African American population again more-than-doubled, increasing by almost 280,000. This massive influx of people to Philadelphia was largely confined—by social and structural discrimination—to existing African American neighborhoods in North

Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, and a small pocket of South Philadelphia (Franklin, 1979). The resultant housing and employment pressures helped to forge a pan-ethnic white racial identity within the European immigrant communities in Philadelphia. Competition over space and jobs undergirded the distillation of a white-black racial dichotomy in Philadelphia and other U.S. cities at this time (see Sugrue, 2005). As Wolfinger (2007) wrote:

> Many European immigrants were still arriving in the early twentieth century and creating their own places in the housing and job markets. These were not established "white" communities that blacks "invaded" during the Great Migration; they were, instead, ethnically fluid arenas that African Americans tried to fit into…. But the arrival of tens of thousands of African Americans pushed race closer and closer to the fore, and in the ensuing years color, much more than ethnicity, became the dividing line in Philadelphia. (p. 20)
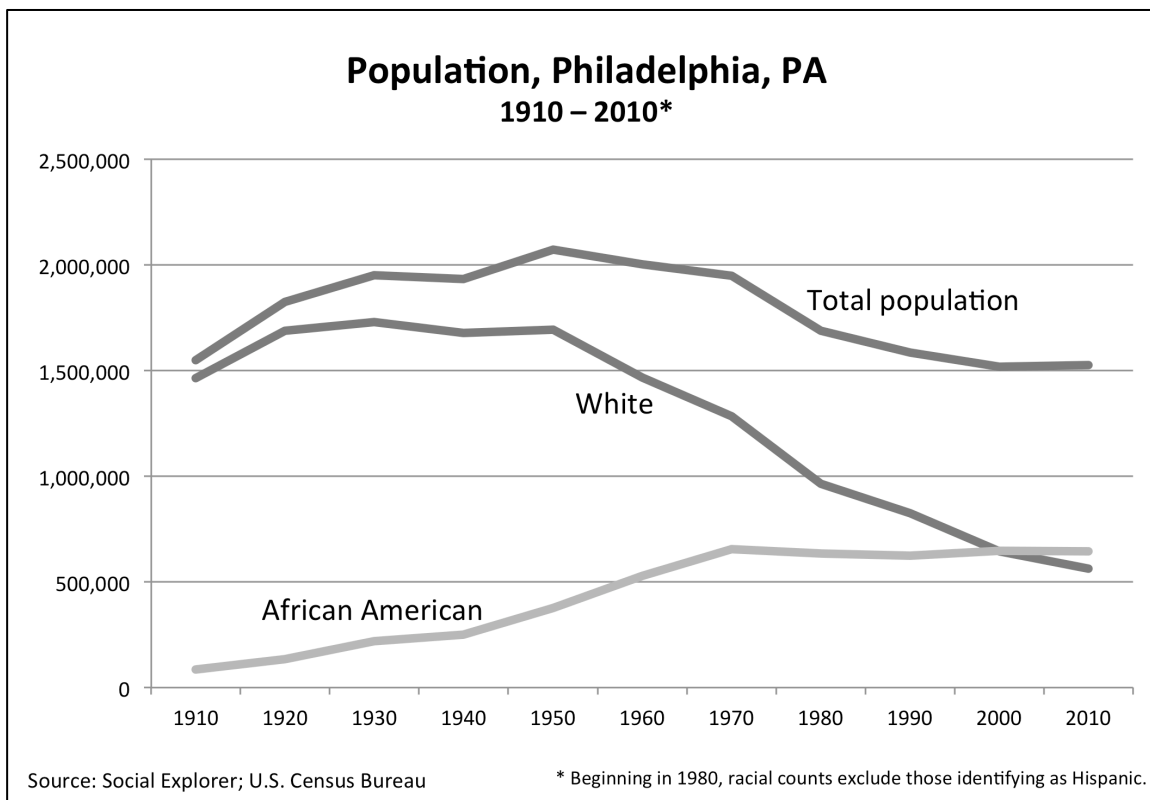
Figure 4.2: *Philadelphia population trends*

Table 4.1: *Philadelphia population, 1910-2010*

Year	White	% White	Black	% Black	Total
1910	1,463,371	94.5%	84,459	5.5%	1,549,008
1920	1,688,180	92.6%	134,229	7.4%	1,823,779
1930	1,728,806	88.6%	219,599	11.3%	1,950,961
1940	1,678,577	86.9%	250,880	13.0%	1,931,334
1950	1,692,637	81.7%	376,041	18.2%	2,071,605
1960	1,467,479	73.3%	529,240	26.4%	2,002,512
1970	1,282,215	65.8%	653,747	33.5%	1,948,609
1980[*]	963,469	57.1%	633,485	37.5%	1,688,210
1990	825,839	52.1%	623,510	39.3%	1,585,577
2000	644,395	42.5%	646,123	42.6%	1,517,550
2010	562,585	36.9%	644,287	42.2%	1,526,006

* Beginning in 1980, racial counts exclude those identifying as Hispanic.
Source: Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau

At the same time that the African American influx began, other changes in technology, policy, and infrastructure enabled the deconcentration of jobs and white residents in the city. For one thing, transportation improvements allowed people to live further from their work, facilitating greater levels of social differentiation in space (Hershberg et al., 1979). Also significant were New Deal housing policies that at once subsidized white suburban homeownership and made it harder for African Americans to secure mortgages, driving systemic disinvestment in African American communities (Hillier, 2005). Furthermore, the exodus of manufacturing jobs after World War II dramatically altered Philadelphia's economic landscape, driving a shift from moderate-wage manufacturing jobs to low-wage service-industry jobs. Between 1930 and 1970, Philadelphia lost 75,000 manufacturing jobs (Hershberg et al., 1979). As this transformation played out in space, it led to growing income inequality between whites and African Americans in Philadelphia, as whites were better able to follow jobs out of the city—and those white communities most connected to the city's remaining

manufacturing sector saw less flight to the suburbs and thus fewer African American in-movers (Adams et al., 1991).

One outcome of these trends—the Great Migration, solidified racial antagonism, discriminatory federal housing policy, suburbanization, and deindustrialization—has been a dramatically transformed racial geography in Philadelphia. As whites continued to leave the city through the latter half of the 20th century, African Americans expanded outward in space from the neighborhoods to which they had been confined in lower-North Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, and South Philadelphia (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). However, this expansion came not with increased economic opportunity, but rather with continued isolation from good jobs and services. As Hershberg et al. (1979) wrote:

> [U]nlike the earlier white ethnic villages, [late-20th century black and Puerto Rican ghettoes in Philadelphia] have not formed around abundant employment opportunities; they emerged instead in economically depressed residential areas which were abandoned by affluent whites who moved to more distant suburbs seeking greater socioeconomic homogeneity, better schools, and more spacious housing. (p. 79)

In the four decades since Hershberg et al. wrote, Philadelphia has experienced a modest economic renaissance, anchored in the medical and higher education industries, but also drawing a range of young professionals to the city. The city's population slide reached its nadir in 2006, and as of 2016 Philadelphia's population had grown for nine consecutive years, driven in part by dramatic growth among 20-34 year olds—the so-called and much-hyped "millenials" (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016). However, the benefits of this growth, and the revitalization and gentrification that have accompanied it in certain sectors of the city, have not been shared by everyone. Philadelphia has the highest poverty rate of the ten largest U.S. cities, and that poverty remains concentrated in poor communities of color.
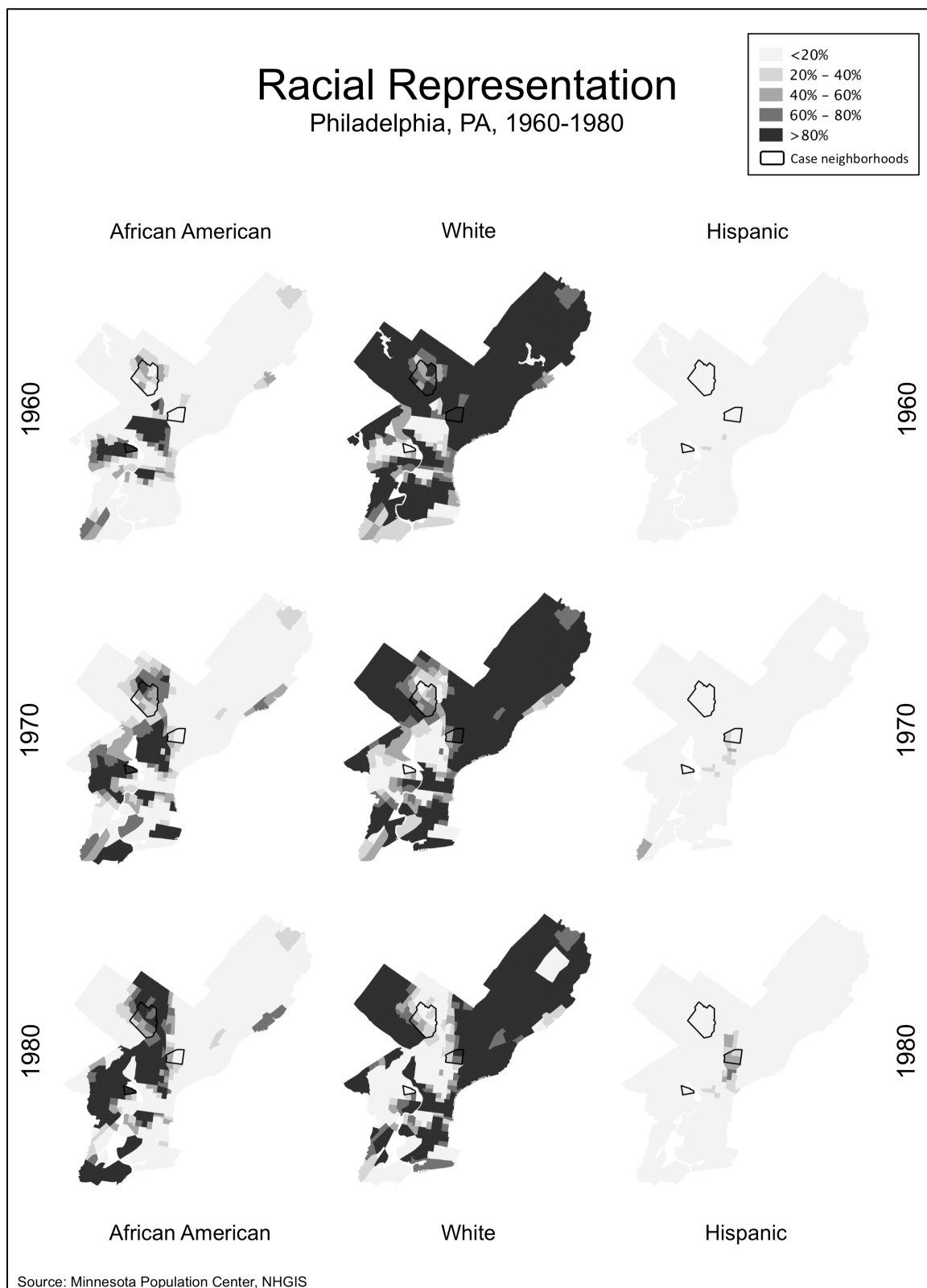
Figure 4.3: *Historical racial representation maps, 1960-1980*
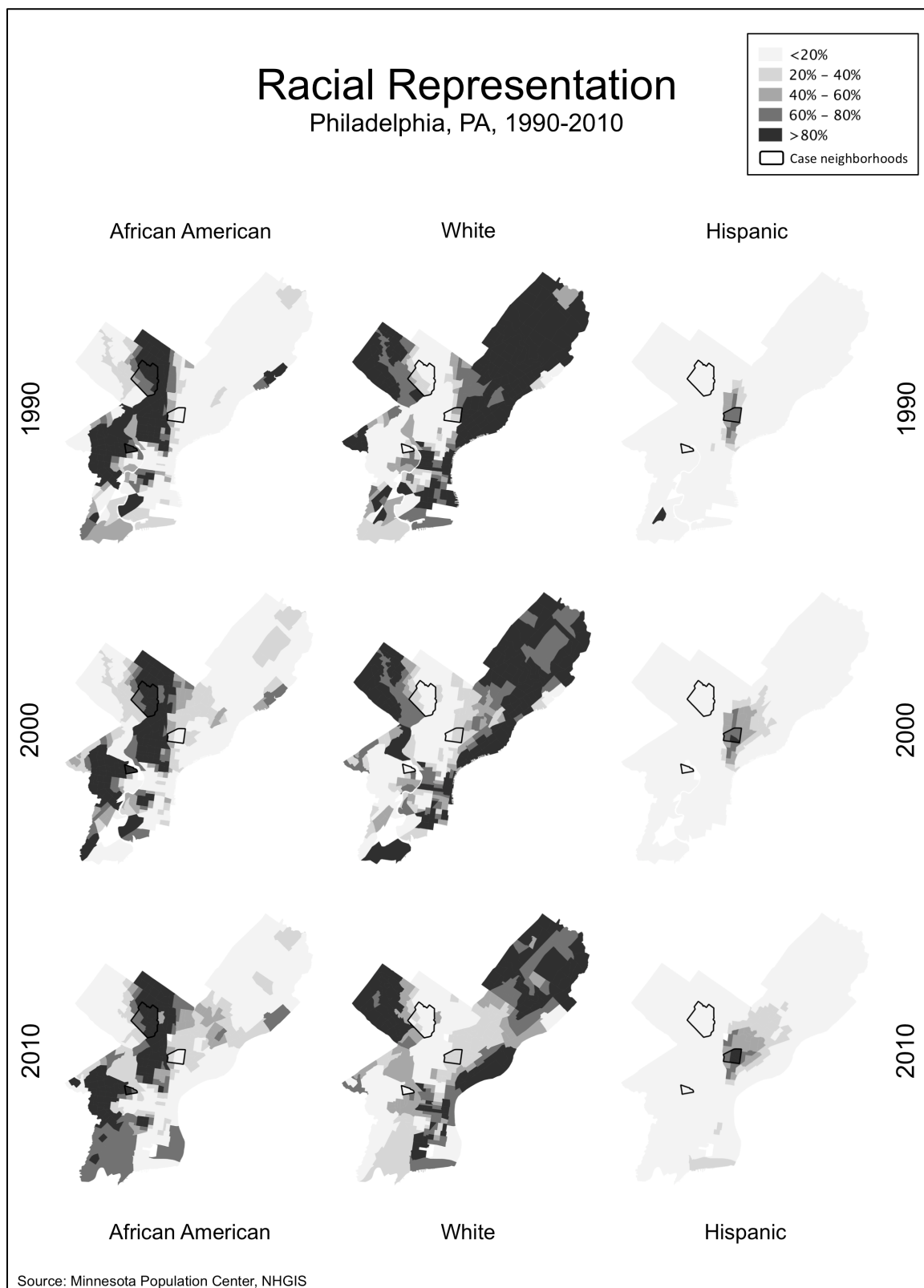
Figure 4.4: *Historical racial representation maps, 1990-2010*

As I will show in Chapter 5, schools recommended for closure were likewise not evenly distributed across the city, affecting some neighborhoods far more directly than others. Specifically, many of the closure recommendations were clustered in African American neighborhoods in lower-North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia, and, across the city, schools recommended for closure were disproportionately located in poor and African American neighborhoods. Some of these were the same neighborhoods to which African American residents were constrained in the early decades of the 20th century—communities that have struggled with inferior public services and underfunded schools for decades. As Franklin (1979) described, the influx of African Americans in Philadelphia during the 1910s and 1920s and subsequent efforts to reduce the high levels of segregation in Philadelphia's public schools led to the exodus of white children from the school system. Additionally, the departure of white students through the mid-20th century was accompanied by a loss of political will among the white political establishment—at the state and city levels—to adequately fund Philadelphia's public schools (Franklin, 1979). Coupled with the loss of industrial jobs, employment discrimination, and the unequal allocation of redevelopment funds, the history of under-resourced schools serving African American communities represents one piece of the larger systematic disinvestment in and marginalization of African American neighborhoods in Philadelphia. While the District framed its plan as an effort to direct more resources toward educating the poorest children in the city, the locations of many of the schools recommended for closure conspicuously aligned with long-standing patterns of racial segregation and neighborhood disinvestment.

5 Philadelphia school closures and geographies of race and class

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I show, through an analysis of census demographics, that school closures in Philadelphia in 2013 were recommended disproportionately in poor and African-American neighborhoods. While these neighborhoods had some of the greatest discrepancies between enrollment and school building capacity, this analysis highlights the disproportionate burden of closure and transition borne by low-income, African American communities in the city, reinscribing historical legacies of racial discrimination and neighborhood disinvestment.

On the one hand, the recommendation to close one-sixth of District-operated public schools in Philadelphia in 2013 can be understood as a "right-sizing" of the District's facilities footprint that was driven by declining enrollments and budget deficits. As Superintendent Hite testified before the Philadelphia City Council at a February 12, 2013 hearing on school closures, the average utilization rate of District school buildings at the time was 67%, and the District estimated its facilities needed $4 billion in renovations and repairs while facing an estimated $1.35 billion deficit over five years. On the other hand, however, declining enrollments can be understood not as the *cause* of closures, but as the *outcome* of decades of underinvestment in public schools. The District's assertion of the necessity of closures presumed underenrollment as a given, and failed to acknowledge the anterior disinvestment that precipitated the attractiveness for parents of charter schools and school districts outside the city.

The School District of Philadelphia's (SDP's) stated goals for the school closure process were two-fold: "to improve academic outcomes for all students and ensure financial stability" (School District of Philadelphia, 2012b, p. 1). Doing so was framed in terms of minimizing the number of "empty seats" in District schools so as to be able to devote more resources to increasing the number of "quality seats" that remained. The image of empty seats—desks in classrooms with no students sitting in the chairs—was used to help people understand the scale of the misalignment that had emerged between enrollment in District schools and the building infrastructure the District owned and maintained (e.g., School District of Philadelphia, 2013).

Framing school systems as markets for seats, and the SDP's facilities issue in terms of a citywide surplus of 53,000 seats, obscures the spatial reality of schools and schools' intersections with histories of race and class inequality (Buras, 2013; Huff, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Kretchmar, 2014; Lipman, 2011a). In practice, culling thousands of "seats" involves closing specific schools, located in specific places, differentially affecting parents, children, and communities across the city. Furthermore, communities vary in their capacity to mobilize the civic and political resources necessary to oppose the closure of a local school (Basu, 2004, 2007). The District originally proposed closing approximately one out of every six schools that it operated in Philadelphia (Figure 5.1). In terms of the fairness of this process, a critical question becomes, *whose* neighborhoods stood to be affected by the recommended closures?

In Philadelphia, as I will show, schools recommended for closure were disproportionately located in neighborhoods that were home to poor and African American residents. These are the same neighborhoods that have for decades endured the

consequences of racial segregation, job loss, private disinvestment, and underfunded public facilities and infrastructure. By framing school closures as a necessary response to low enrollment, the SDP failed to interrogate the ways disinvestment in neighborhood schools over time drove enrollment declines.
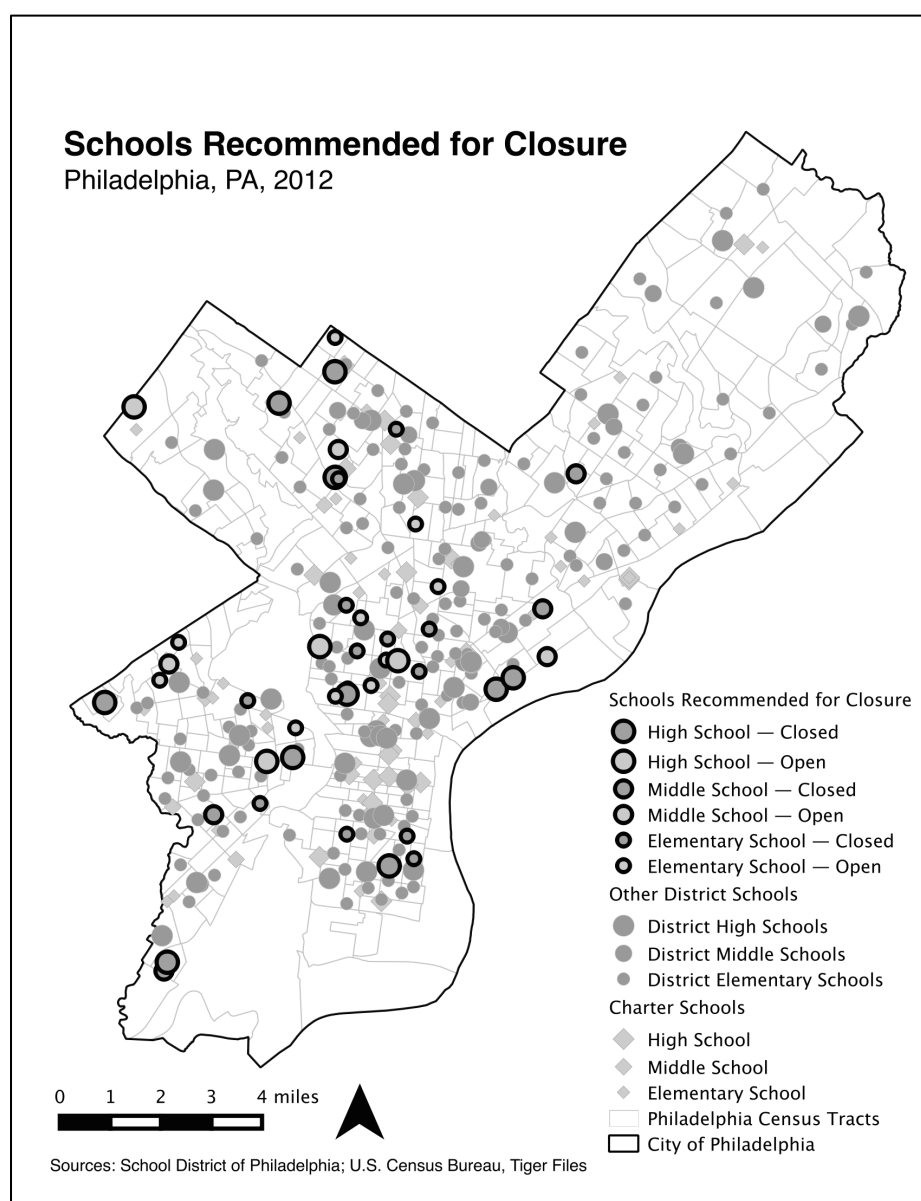
Figure 5.1: *Map of schools recommended for closure*

5.2   Analysis

The District proposed closing in 2013 approximately one out of every six schools that it operated in Philadelphia (Figure 5.1). Using both univariate and multivariate analyses, I compare those census tracts that contained a school or program recommended for closure with census tracts that had at least one District-operated school, but none recommended for closure, across nine independent variables (Table 5.1; see Table 5.2 for group counts).

Table 5.1: *Independent variables*

1. Percent population change, 2000-2012
2. Median household income (MHI), 2012
3. Change in MHI, 2000-2012
4. Median home value (MHV), 2012
5. Change in MHV, 2000-2012
6. Percent rental tenure, 2012
7. Percent Black, non-Hispanic, 2012
8. Percent White, non-Hispanic, 2012
9. Percent Hispanic, 2012

Table 5.2: *Counts of tracts and schools*

Total census tracts:	384
Census tracts w/ District school in 2012:	185
Tracts w/ District school and no recommended closures in 2013:	146
Census tracts w/ school recommended for closure/relocation in 2013:	39
Schools recommended for closure in 2013:	45
Schools closed in 2013:	28

I use census tracts as the unit of analysis in order to get a sense of the *neighborhoods* where schools were recommended for closure—the places where schools are located and the people who live there.[1] Notably, this differs from two studies released by local organizations in January 2013 about the intersection of race and the SDP's closure recommendations (see Graham, 2013c; Socolar, 2013a). Both of these analyses sought to assess the disproportionate effect of the closure recommendations on students

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[1] This constitutes a dichotomous and highly localized conception of proximity, based on a school's position within a census tract. A census tract either contains a school, or it does not. In other words, the analysis constructs a starkly defined boundary of spatial association. Most of the schools slated for closure had traditional neighborhood catchment areas, but others—particularly a few of the high schools with specialized programming—drew students from across the city. I contend that the effects of a building or program closure are most concentrated in the area immediately surrounding the school, whether or not the school enrolled students from broader geographic areas. As such, it is important to understand who is living in the neighborhoods where these schools were located and I have used census tracts as a unit of analysis in doing so.

of color. For example, the study conducted by *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook*[2] found that 79% of the approximately 15,000 students slated to be affected by closings and relocations were African American, while African Americans constituted only 56% of the students District-wide (Socolar, 2013a). While the impact on students should be, perhaps, *the* central concern in this debate, I build this analysis around a spatial unit, in keeping with the central questions shaping this dissertation.

5.3   Data

In this chapter, I use univariate and multivariate methods to compare those census tracts that contained one of the 45 schools or programs recommended for closure with census tracts that had at least one District-operated school, but none recommended for closure, across nine independent variables (Table 5.1). The universe of tracts included in this analysis comprises the 185 census tracts in Philadelphia with at least one District-operated school during the 2012-2013 school year, 39 of which contained a school building or program recommended for closure (Table 5.2). I drew demographic data from the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), supplemented by data from the US2010 Project, Longitudinal Tract Data Base to describe changes from 2000-2012 (US2010, 2000). A few tracts were omitted from the analysis because the coefficient of variation of the ACS estimates was higher than 35% and/or because population in the tract was less than 200.[3]

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[2] *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook* is an independent nonprofit news service devoted to covering public schools in Philadelphia.

[3] The 35% coefficient of variation threshold was ignored for the three racial categories, as tracts with minimal representation had extremely high coefficients of variation. Given the high levels of racial segregation in Philadelphia, excluding these tracts would have made comparison between tracts across racial lines impossible.

5.4   Univariate analysis

In the univariate analysis, I compared the distributions of each of the nine independent variables between the 39 tracts that had a school building or program slated for closure and the 146 tracts that had at least one District school but no school buildings or programs recommended for closure (Table 5.3, Figure 5.2, Figure 5.3, and Figure 5.4). As described in Chapter 3, I did this in three ways: (1) maps represent the spatial alignment of school closures with each variable, (2) box plots compare the two distributions and their medians, and (3) the Wilcoxon rank-sum test quantifies how different the two distributions are from each other. Median values for each variable and Wilcoxon rank-sum significance are reported in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: *Group medians and Wilcoxon rank-sum test*

	Median, tracts w/ SDP school and no proposed closures	Median, tracts w/ closure recommendation	Wilcoxon rank-sum test significance (p-value)	Tract-level median, citywide
Percent population change, 2000-2012	0.6%	-8.2%	0.016	-0.9%
Median household income (MHI), 2012	$34,432	$26,591	0.004	$35,610
Change in MHI, 2000-2012	$5,793	$2,394	0.024	$5,860
Median home value (MHV), 2012	$124,150	$109,150	0.173	$133,550
Change in MHV, 2000-2012	$66,400	$63,673	0.558	$72,200
Percent rental tenure, 2012	45.3%	50.1%	0.196	46.6%
Percent Black, non-Hispanic, 2012	28.2%	77.4%	0.005	30.7%
Percent White, non-Hispanic, 2012	23.4%	8.5%	0.061	27.6%
Percent Hispanic, 2012	4.8%	2.7%	0.030	4.3%
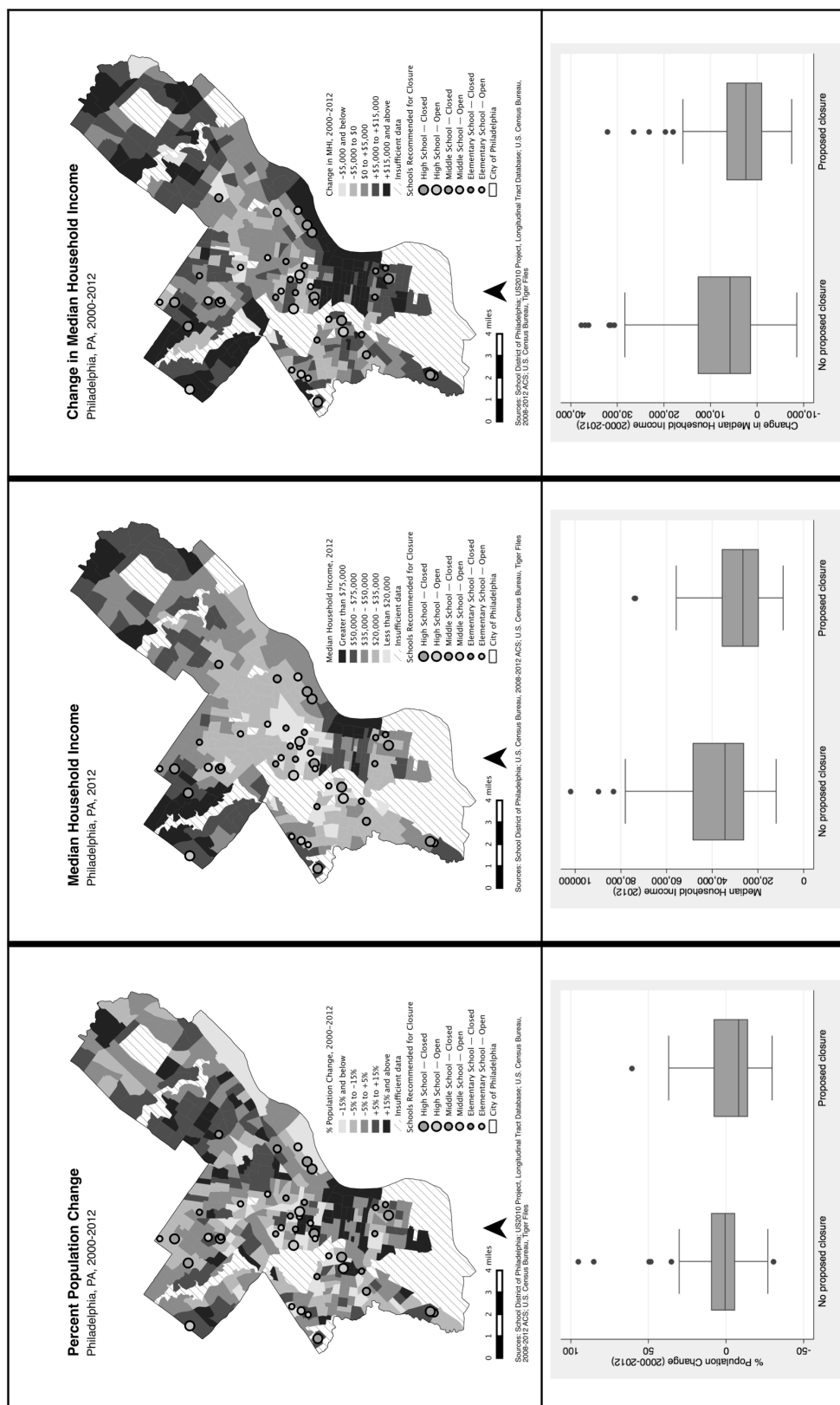
Figure 5.2: *Univariate analysis: Population and income*
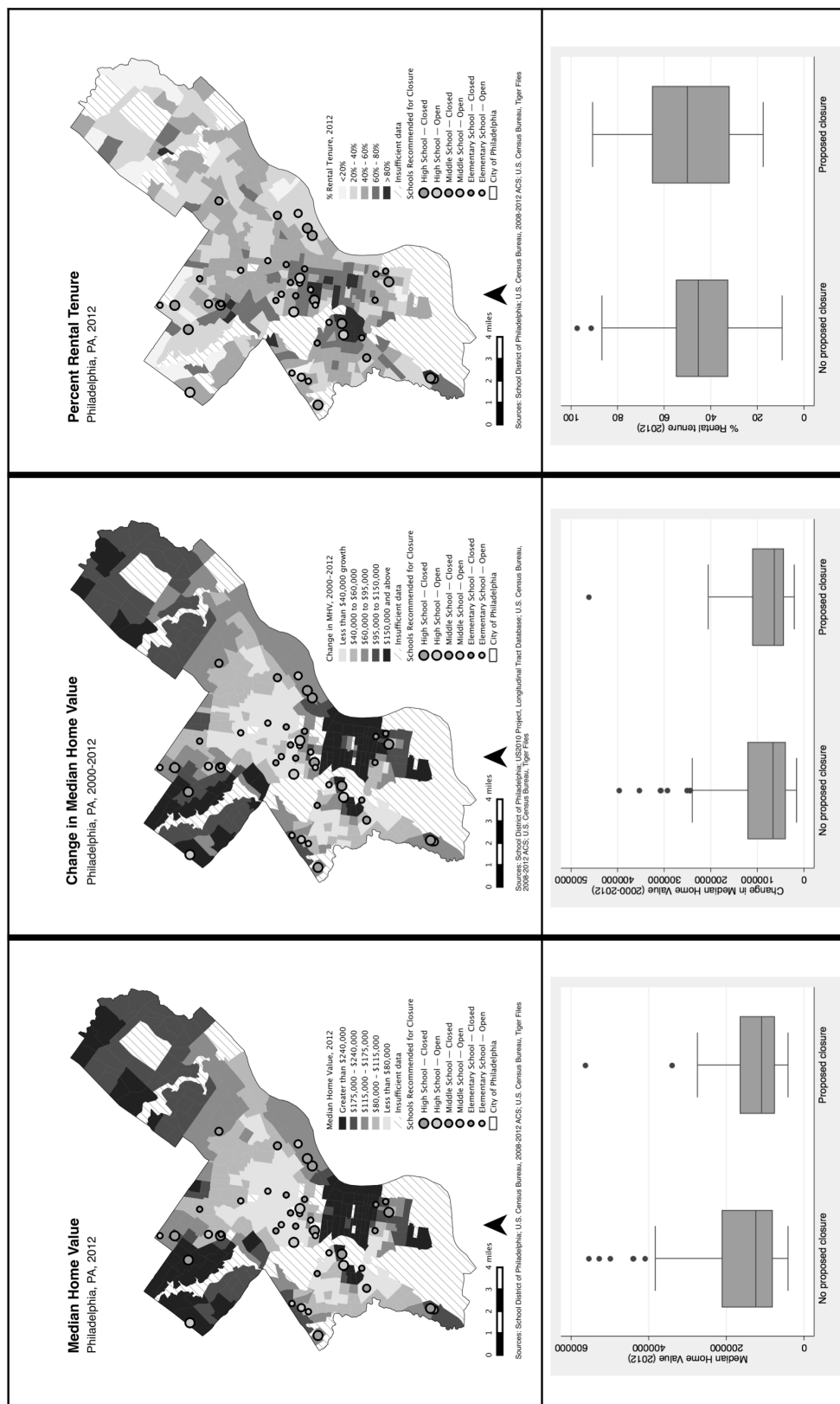
Figure 5.3: *Univariate analysis: Housing*
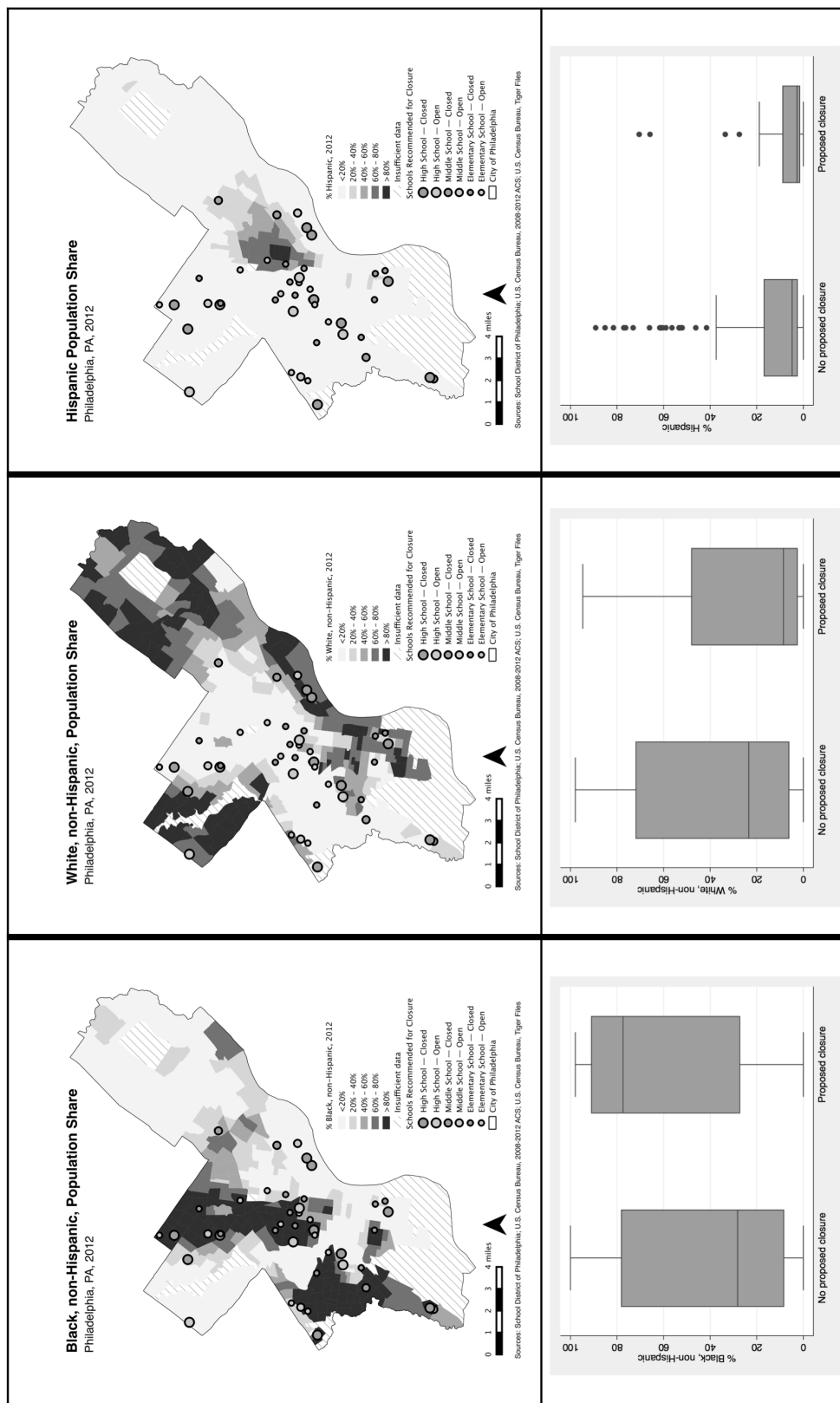
Figure 5.4: *Univariate analysis: Race*

5.5   Multivariate analysis

I supplemented the univariate analysis with a multivariate logistic regression to better understand patterns in the types of neighborhoods where schools were recommended for closure. [4] I began model construction with seven of the nine independent variables, selecting to use only percent African American, of the three race variables. I converted each variable to a three-step categorical variable, based on citywide quantiles, and used dummy variables to represent low, medium, and high values[5] (Table 5.4). This conversion (1) limits the effect of outliers on the model and (2) does not assume linearity in the relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

In constructing the model, I followed Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000), beginning with a univariate assessment of the strength of the relationships between the dependent variable and each independent variable individually. I removed variables with a univariate likelihood ratio χ^2 significance greater than 0.25, which eliminated two variables: median home value ($P > \chi^2 = 0.5575$) and percent rental tenure ($P > \chi^2 = 0.4056$). Next, I fit the remaining five variables in a single model (Table 5.5, Model 1). From Model 1, I removed change in MHI due to (1) the statistical insignificance of the coefficients, (2) the minimal effect of its removal on coefficients for the other variables, and (3) the increased likelihood ratio χ^2 significance of the model (Table 5.5, Model 2)[6].

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[4] Professor Radha Jagannathan provided helpful feedback during the model construction process.

[5] While categories were constructed based on citywide quantiles, the model included only those tracts that contained a District-run school in 2012-2013. Thus the number of cases in each category of a given variable is not even (see Table 5.4 for frequencies).

[6] At this point, I added both of the earlier removed variables individually into Model 2 to check for suppressor or moderator effects. The coefficients of percent rental tenure remained insignificant and their addition to the model did not markedly change coefficients on the other covariates. Adding MHV to Model 2 had little effect on either population change or percent African American. However, it suppressed the coefficients on MHI and amplified the coefficients on change in MHV, decreasing the significance for

This revised model has a likelihood ratio χ^2 significance of 0.0006 and incorporates (1) population change (2000-2012), (2) median household income (2012), (3) change in median home value (2000-2012), and (4) percent African American (2012).

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both—markedly so for MHI. I decided to leave MHV out of the model because its coefficients remained insignificant and because of the considerable correlation between MHV and change in MHV.

Table 5.4: *Categorical variables*

Population change, 2000-2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	-30.8%	-5.4%	61	20	41	32.8%
Medium	-5.2%	4.6%	61	8	53	13.1%
High	4.9%	94.9%*	62	11	51	17.7%

Median household income (MHI), 2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	$8,980	$29,698	69	21	48	30.4%
Medium	$30,000	$44,707	62	11	51	17.7%
High	$44,885	$101,964	48	6	42	12.5%

Change in MHI, 2000-2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	-$8,522	$2,441	63	20	43	31.7%
Medium	$2,582	$9,860	66	11	55	16.7%
High	$10,046	$37,667	50	7	43	14.0%

Median home value (MHV), 2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	$41,100	$100,500	68	17	51	25.0%
Medium	$103,400	$202,500	66	13	53	19.7%
High	$205,700	$562,000	47	8	39	17.0%

Change MHV, 2000-2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	$15,803	$51,500	65	12	53	18.5%
Medium	$53,000	$111,606	64	18	46	28.1%
High	$111,900	$461,300	52	8	44	15.4%

Percent rental tenure, 2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	9.4%	38.6%	67	14	53	20.9%
Medium	39.1%	53.9%	59	10	49	16.9%
High	54.1%	97.2%	55	15	40	27.3%

Percent Black, non-Hispanic, 2012

	Min	Max	n	w/ proposed closure	w/ no proposed closure	% w/ proposed closure
Low	0.0%	11.6%	55	4	51	7.3%
Medium	12.9%	64.6%	62	15	47	24.2%
High	66.1%	100.0%	67	20	47	29.9%

* A single outlier at 761.5% was excluded from this maximum value.

Table 5.5: *Logistic regression*

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	P > |z|	Odds Ratio	P > |z|
Population change				
Low (reference)	ref	ref	ref	ref
Medium	0.2803 (0.1520)	0.019	0.2752 (0.1488)	0.017
High	0.2963 (0.1631)	0.027	0.2697 (0.1458)	0.015
MHI				
Low (reference)	ref	ref	ref	ref
Medium	0.4203 (0.2135)	0.088	0.4014 (0.1977)	0.064
High	0.3674 (0.2988)	0.218	0.3678 (0.2362)	0.119
Change in MHI				
Low (reference)	ref	ref	ref	ref
Medium	0.5725 (0.2783)	0.251		
High	0.7548 (0.6101)	0.728		
Change in MHV				
Low (reference)	ref	ref	ref	ref
Medium	4.2253 (2.2089)	0.006	4.3522 (2.2584)	0.005
High	3.1351 (2.1084)	0.089	2.8476 (1.8297)	0.103
% Black, non-Hispanic				
Low (reference)	ref	ref	ref	ref
Medium	4.5588 (3.1829)	0.030	5.3566 (3.6729)	0.014
High	4.0649 (2.6925)	0.034	4.1572 (2.7560)	0.032
# of observations	176		176	
d.f.	10		8	
LR χ^2	28.67		27.34	
P > χ^2	0.0014		0.0006	

Note: Standard errors reported in parentheses.

5.6 Results

The univariate analysis reveals that, among census tracts with at least one District-run school in 2012, those with a school or program recommended for closure had (1) disproportionately higher population losses over the preceding decade, (2) lower and stagnant median household income, and (3) higher representation of African-American

residents than those tracts without closure recommendations (Table 5.3, Figure 5.2, Figure 5.3, and Figure 5.4).

While high standard errors in the logit model limit the specificity of the magnitude of the effect of each covariate, the model describes a sizeable and statistically significant increase in the odds of having a school recommended for closure in tracts with medium and high representations of African American residents, controlling for population change, income, and home value appreciation (Table 5.5). The odds of tracts with medium levels of African American representation (13% – 65%) having had a school recommended for closure are 5.36 times higher than for tracts with low African American representation (90% confidence interval: 1.73 – 16.55 times higher). The odds of tracts with high levels of African American representation (> 65%) having had a school recommended for closure are 4.16 times higher than for tracts with low African American representation (90% confidence interval: 1.40 – 12.37 times higher).

The model also supports the observation that schools were more likely to have been recommended for closure in neighborhoods that had experienced population losses and neighborhoods with low median income. Interestingly, the analysis additionally indicates that—accounting for race, income, and population change—schools were more likely to have been recommended for closure in neighborhoods that experienced increasing home values. This finding suggests a possible relationship between the school closure process and patterns of gentrification, though further research is needed to investigate this.

In summary, the multivariate logit model revealed that, controlling for population losses, income, and home value appreciation, schools were more likely to have been

recommended for closure in neighborhoods with medium and high concentrations of African American residents. That is, a disproportionate burden of the impacts of school closures in Philadelphia in 2013 was borne by poor and especially African-American neighborhoods that have sustained population losses over recent decades.

5.7 Discussion

In finding that neighborhoods where schools were recommended for closure were disproportionately poorer and with higher representation of African American residents, this analysis emphasizes the impact of the closure process on neighborhoods that have borne the brunt of legacies of racial segregation, job loss, and disinvestment. However, it does not follow that this disproportionality resulted from nefarious or explicitly racist strategies. Within the policy logic employed by the District, the closure recommendations were presented as eminently reasonable for a cash-strapped school district: building utilization, academic performance, building condition, and cost savings. And yet, the application of these metrics resulted in a process that imposed the greatest transition costs on poor and African American communities.

District officials argued that the apparent race- and class-patterning of the closure recommendations was a consequence of neighborhood population losses and the choices of parents who had opted not to send their children to the District-run school in their neighborhood. Furthermore, the District emphasized that the restructuring was intended to improve the education of students at the under-enrolled schools slated for closure by freeing up resources District-wide and moving students into better-resourced schools. In response to allegations that the process was racially discriminatory, the District released a statement in January 2013, acknowledging that "a higher proportion of students in under-

enrolled, low-performing schools are African American, and these are the schools that are most affected by the recommended facility closures," but noting that these students stood to benefit from the restructuring by being moved to better facilities and academic programs (Mezzacappa, 2013a).

Superintendent Hite, testifying at a hearing held by the Education Committee of the Philadelphia City Council in February 2013, likewise argued that the closures were needed in order to redirect more resources toward educating poor and minority students:

> *[W]e have too many of our young children, particularly poor minority students, who are not being taught to read, who are not being taught to do math, and we don't have the ability to address that issue. […] I'm not in support of prolonging any longer our ability to address the educational needs of students, particularly at poor and minority students in their schools. We have to do that right now.*

In his testimony, Hite framed the problem in terms of resources. He argued that children of color were not being educated, and he pointed to resource shortages as compounding the issue. By closing under-enrolled schools, he contended, those students would ultimately receive a better education.

In contrast, many opponents of the closures highlighted the disruption closures would cause for students, parents, and their communities, consequences that were unevenly distributed across the city and disproportionately concentrated in poor and African American neighborhoods. As I will describe in Chapter 6, by invoking the spatial race- and class-patterning of school closures, stakeholders reframed the debate in terms of who was being most affected by closed schools—whose neighborhoods were bearing the brunt of the transition costs.

There is a sense in which the closure process played out along the contours of spatialized inequities that have shaped the experiences of neighborhoods over decades, in

that the process shifted the burden of school closures onto the communities that have long carried the consequences of systematic underfunding and disinvestment. The critical omission in the District's framing lies in the failure to acknowledge the role that chronic underfunding of the infrastructure of public schools played in creating its current crisis. This history, coupled with a set of decisions that enabled the dramatic expansion of the charter sector in Philadelphia during the 2000s, precipitated the low-enrollments and maintenance backlogs that the District cited in justifying the need to close schools. That is, the erosion of traditional public school infrastructure, exacerbated by the diversion of students and money to an expanding charter sector, must be seen as the backdrop to the District's contention that the fiscally prudent and necessary course of action to address the educational needs of the poorest students involved closing schools in their neighborhoods.

6 Race, inequality, and urban space

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the ways stakeholders protested and made sense of the 2013 school closure process in terms of its intersection with structural inequalities arrayed in urban space. Against a backdrop of the historical context and statistical findings of the preceding two chapters, I explore how stakeholders from neighborhoods with schools slated for closure situated themselves, their schools, and their neighborhoods within the racial, economic, institutional, and political unevenness that characterizes Philadelphia's urban space.

I situate this analysis in a conceptualization of the production of urban space as an ongoing process—social, economic, and political—that reflects both underlying structural inequalities *and* the ways residents every day participate in its reproduction (Lefebvre, 1991). In particular, I draw on Dikec's (2001) framing of a dialectic between the *spatiality of injustice* and the *injustice of spatiality.* The spatiality of injustice captures the ways that social injustices are distributed and inscribed in space. The injustice of spatiality refers to the ways that urban space acts to stabilize and reproduce the injustices that have shaped it.

How then do actors—situated in space—destabilize urban space and disrupt the reproduction of spatialized inequalities? Dikec (2001) draws on Lefebvre's right to difference, which he argues may be more appropriately translated as a "right to resist/struggle" (p. 1790), suggesting that difference be understood not as particularity,

but rather as a right to differentiate oneself from one's structural positionality. As Lefebvre wrote in *The Survival of Capitalism*, the right to be different was "the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers" (as cited in Dikec, 2001, p. 1790).

Echoes of Lefebvre's right to difference can be heard in the work of feminist and critical race scholars who have long argued that the ways women and people of color are differentially positioned in social and physical space constitute the manifestation of racist and patriarchal injustices *and also* the basis from which to challenge those systems and effect change (Bondi, 1993; hooks, 1990; Young, 1990). That which differentiates and disadvantages people and communities can serve as a lever through which the system itself is critiqued.

In the context of school closures in Philadelphia, then, I ask how stakeholders named their positionality on landscapes of spatialized inequality across racial, economic, institutional, and political domains. Given the disproportional location of schools recommended for closure in poor and African American neighborhoods that I described in the previous chapter, how did stakeholders invoke that landscape and the multiple dimensions of marginality it entails? In what follows, I begin by considering the District's framing of the race and class disproportionalities revealed in the closure recommendations. I then draw out three dimensions of spatialized inequality that stakeholders brought to bear in protesting and making sense of school closures: (1) racial and economic, (2) institutional, and (3) political. These dimensions clearly intersect and the intent is not clean segmentation, but rather describing different ways stakeholders invoked place and considering the implications of that positioning.

6.2   Racial and economic marginalization

In this section, I consider and discuss the ways neighborhood stakeholders situated the closure process on landscapes of spatialized race and class inequality. Analysis of testimony at public meetings during the closure debate and subsequent interviews I conducted with neighborhood stakeholders reveal three ways stakeholders invoked this landscape in contesting and making sense of the school closure process: (1) they described school closure as a burden unequally borne by poor and African-American communities; (2) they framed school closure as confirmation and perpetuation of past place-based inequities and marginalization; and (3) they portrayed school closures as manifestations of uneven development, gentrification, and displacement.

6.2.1   A burden unequally borne by poor and African-American communities

One of the ways that stakeholders situated themselves vis-à-vis the race and class inequalities manifest in Philadelphia's urban space was to frame the recommended closures as a restructuring whose costs would be disproportionately shouldered by poor and African-American communities. As a July 2014 focus group participant in Germantown told me:

> [I]t only happened in minority neighborhoods. They didn't shut those schools
> down in those white neighborhoods! [...] They don't have books in the schools.
> They not teaching them anyway and then you shut the schools down. Then you tell
> the kids to leave their neighborhood and go to other schools where kids are angry
> there, 'cause they territorial.

Pointing to the racial patterning of neighborhoods where schools were closed, she argued that students of color in Philadelphia, having struggled with chronically under-resourced schools, were then asked to bear the transition costs of the District's downsizing in very personal ways.

At the January 2013 School Reform Commission (SRC) meeting, a community activist and public school parent lifted out the disproportional impact that the recommended closures would have on African American neighborhoods, contending that economic dynamics were not adequate to explain the racial patterning:

> *[I]n my opinion, I think that these are downright racial. Now. I'm not one who would use race as a crutch or a means to try to get over or even to try to get my point across. But you tell me, if 27 of 37 schools that are proposed to close are located in African American communities. What is that? To me, I consider that to be an issue of race and not an issue of economics.*

Expressing a reluctance to claim racial oppression where it is not warranted, this parent sees the location of a majority of closure recommendations in African American neighborhoods as irrefutably an issue of racial injustice. By forwarding the location of the schools, he spatializes the debate, emphasizing the differential effect for specific communities within Philadelphia.

At the School District of Philadelphia's (SDP's) January 2013 community meeting at Martin Luther King High School, a Germantown stakeholder raised the same issue and asked Superintendent Hite to address the racial inequities that seemed apparent in the school closure recommendations.

> *I have one final point that no one seems to be addressing. And it's very quiet. And that is, no one speaks about the racial connotations driving these school closings. And the fact– the damage that it is doing to minority communities, specifically, communities that are permeated by Americans of African descent. […] I'd like you to address that and take it out from the closet.*

In his response, Superintendent Hite acknowledged the racial disparities in the schools being closed and the neighborhoods where they are located. However, he contended that this happened, not because schools with students of color were being targeted, but

because many parents in those neighborhoods had opted for other options, leaving schools under-enrolled:

> *You're right sir, […] in terms of the racial composition of schools. And if we look across the city, and we look at how the populations have shifted from certain parts of the city to other parts of the city. I think, though, when we overlay a map on the other educational options that are available, in some of these communities that you just described, many of the parents who live in those communities now have also selected out of the District schools. Which means that it leaves the District schools with a lot of vacant seats. And that's why it is– it appears that it is a disproportionate impact on communities with certain racial compositions, because many parents in those communities have already made decisions to select other options to educate their children.*

Superintendent Hite's response highlights the agency parents have exerted in seeking out alternative options for their children's schooling. However, it doesn't address why parents in poor and African-American neighborhoods were in the position of needing to make that choice, nor does it acknowledge potential consequences for those students required to transfer and the neighborhoods where they live.

At a January 2013 SRC meeting, a community member sounded a similar chord. She argued that the recommended school closures would disproportionately affect poor communities, framing the issue in terms of place-based income disparities:

> *The decision to close 11 elementary schools in North Central Philadelphia, while leaving schools in Northeast Philadelphia virtually untouched, is a blatant testimony that providing an equal opportunity for a quality education to Philadelphia's lowest income students is not a priority for the current administration, and/or its staff.*

This argument raises an interesting tension, as District administrators consistently contended that the restructuring was, explicitly, an effort to make available more resources to improve the quality of education for struggling students. At a February 2013 hearing before the Philadelphia City Council's Committee on Education, Superintendent Hite testified:

The recommendation to close schools is an acknowledgment of how dire our situation has become. I do believe, however, that it is the right decision, although a very drastic step, to change the District's trajectory. If we do nothing, if only for one year, that would mean an unknown budget forecast, near certain job cuts, and another year of struggling to make our limited ends meet. It also means that students will remain in crumbling schools with limited academic opportunities. District-wide less than half of our students can read or do math at grade level. Some of the buildings recommended for closures have proficiency rates of less than 25 percent. We must do better by these and all students.

The two statements highlight the structural/spatial tension inherent in this debate. Many schools in Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods were dramatically under-enrolled, with students struggling to make state benchmarks and buildings crumbling. Facing a staggering budget deficit, the school district argued that maintaining the existing infrastructure of schools was exacerbating their financial obstacles and ultimately impeding their ability to improve the quality of education for the city's poorest children. However, for those speaking from the perspective of poor neighborhoods, losing what for some was the last remaining public institution in their neighborhood represented a clear and targeted disinvestment in their community on the part of the school district. For example, a Germantown pastor I interviewed in September 2014 framed the deflection of funding from traditional public schools to charter schools as an "educational genocide" that siphoned resources away from a school system that had become the educational option of last resort for poor African American students. In sum, the District framed closings as a solution to the immediate problem of under-enrolled schools amid a fiscal crisis, failing to acknowledge the legacy of disinvestment that precipitated this situation; in contrast, stakeholders framed closures as a burden disproportionately borne by poor and African American communities.

6.2.2   Confirmation and perpetuation of past place-based inequities and marginalization

A second, though related, way that neighborhood stakeholders framed and made sense of school closures was as the continuation of a long-term marginalization of their communities and their political voices. Rather than seeing the District's restructuring as an effort to address the failure of neighborhood schools to adequately educate their children—a central justification for District administrators—some framed the closure of a local school as the latest chapter in a long history of injustices tied to their neighborhoods. They saw it as a confirmation that they, their schools, and their communities do not matter in the same way as others.

A Germantown pastor I interviewed in September 2014 described the feeling among students after their school's closure was approved that the school district did not care about them. He situated this round of school closures within an ongoing pattern of political marginalization:

> Rsp: *Every Tuesday morning I was in front of Germantown High, greeting students as they're coming in. […] And mentoring Tuesday afternoons in the high school for tenth to twelfth grade young men. And to hear the conversation of that last three months, when they got the word that they were going to be closing. It was like, […] "They don't care about us. You know, we're just a number. They're going to do something else that doesn't involve us." […] The discouraging part for me, more so, for this congregation, is that now, where do we minister to and how do we effectively minister to this community? When they're hurt, over and over and over again.*
>
> RG: *So, it sounds like it felt […] to people like part of a longer pattern of decisions being made–*
>
> Rsp: *Without them.*
>
> RG: *–at their expense and without their input.*
>
> Rsp: *Right.*

This pastor, whose church had a significant and long-term relationship with Germantown High School (GHS) before it closed, represented the school's closure to me as one in a long string of hurts ("over and over and over again") the community had suffered.

Parents participating in a focus group I facilitated in Germantown in July 2014 echoed this view, arguing that the closure decisions had been made before the community was consulted and that the District's community engagement was largely window dressing. As one participant said:

> [Y]ou couldn't stop it—the damage was already done. They had already made the decision and it was what it was. They were just– It seemed like they were just listening to people to hear the voice and to pacify people for what they had done. And nothing was going to change.

In another exchange, the same parent noted that the school closures were clearly a part of a larger plan, though one that undoubtedly did not prioritize the interests of their children and their community:

> Rsp: *What did I think [when I learned they were going to close Fulton and GHS]? I wondered why.*
>
> RG: *You wondered why?*
>
> Rsp: *Because we've never gave up on our kids. Never gave up on their education, so wonder why now? What plan– what plan are they putting in effect? Why are they* not *concerned about the kids? So you had to wonder what wave of thinking that is. Because of course if somebody's puttin' in a plan, they're doing it ahead of our vision. And, it's nothing new. Plans have been put into effect since the beginning of man. […] And right now it seems like our kids aren't in their plans.*
>
> RG: *It feels like they're planning for somebody else.*
>
> Rsp: *That could be true. I don't know what they're planning. But I just know my son and kids like him aren't in those plans.*

Participants also voiced a strong feeling that the local community—and particularly poor parents and students of color—were not included in the process. One participant

lamented: *"And it's sad. And nobody came down to the neighborhood and really said, let me see how the young people feel about this."*

In testimony at a community meeting in January 2013 at University City High School (UCHS) in West Philadelphia, a community member challenged Superintendent Hite's assertion that the closures were needed in order to stop families from leaving the District for schools they perceived as having more resources.

> *For your consideration, sir. I attended many of these elementary, junior high, high schools, and have taught in many of the buildings which are on this list. They never were given fair and equitable resources. It was always less than the rest of the city. And all of the impact is still here. So, when you say that there may not be a district [if schools are not closed]– Maybe we should divert things elsewhere and then give a moratorium to the ones who have always been denied.*

The speaker challenges the District's logic of saving money by closing schools with low enrollments, poor performance, and deteriorating buildings, pointing to a history of inequitable resource distribution that played a role in rendering those schools vulnerable to closure, a history he knows through his own experience as a student and teacher in the neighborhood. Instead, the speaker proposes a different strategy of course correction: diverting resources from those schools that are doing well so as not to close the schools that have endured a history of disinvestment.

A District principal testifying in a formal hearing before the SRC in February 2013 invoked a similar history, highlighting the ways that a school closure would remove a resource from a neighborhood that has suffered long-term disinvestment and struggled with resource-deprived schools:

> *As a mother and educator who grew up in North Philadelphia I understand the importance of stability in the lives of the youngest citizens and their education. The community of North Philadelphia has been neglected for decades, none of which is the fault of the young children [at] L.P. Hill, but they said we had to bear the brunt of the consequences. North Philadelphia is desperately in need of*

stability, institutions that its residents can count on and produce educationally healthy children. The students of L.P. Hill are already in need of a great deal of support, but have been steadily deprived of the necessary resources that are crucial in the early years of their educational career.

By reframing school closures as the perpetuation of a history of inequality, rather than as a corrective or as restitution, stakeholders like this principal demanded that the District look at its criteria for closure through the lens of historical inequalities that have played out across Philadelphia's neighborhoods. They positioned themselves and their neighborhoods as having "borne the brunt" of that history, calling into question the justice of the current round of school closures.

6.2.3   Manifestations of uneven development, gentrification, and displacement

Stakeholders also interpreted the District's closure process in terms of the political economy of development in the city, framing school closures as part of larger redevelopment efforts and policies that they perceived as (1) intended to benefit others and (2) resulting in harm to their communities. At a December 2012, District-facilitated community meeting, a GHS student linked the under-funding and closure of neighborhood schools to new high-profile developments in other parts of the city:

> *Y'all can make million-dollar skating rinks in Center City and different things for Temple students in North Philadelphia, but y'all cut down elementary schools in North Philadelphia. Y'all not giving money towards Germantown or different schools like that. Y'all want to close down those schools. But you give money to miscellaneous things that we do not need. If we don't have education, how can we afford those skating rinks and different things like that?*

At a July 2014 focus group, a parent from Germantown echoed this student's critique of the channeling of public funds in Philadelphia toward Center City amenities and away from neighborhood schools: *"And that's where all this money is going into Center City. Not these neighborhoods where people– crime rate is high, kids don't go to school. 'We*

don't care about y'all! We'll kick y'all to the curb'." At the same focus group, another

parent noted: *"They spent like a million dollars on bike lanes. But they closing schools?*

It don't make sense." By connecting school closures to development in other parts of the

city, these stakeholders framed the closures as a consequence of investment decisions that

prioritized other people and other communities, highlighting processes of uneven

development in the city.

Stakeholders also framed the closures explicitly in terms of gentrification. In

February 2013 testimony to the City Council Education Committee, a representative from

the neighborhood group Concerned Citizens of Point Breeze framed school closures in

terms of their potential redevelopment as condominiums, raising concerns about resulting

gentrification and displacement pressures:

> *I've sat here all day and listened to a lot of testimony, but no one has posed the question, what will happen to all of these schools? Are they going to just sit in our community and be blighted? Well, we feel as though these schools will be turned into condominiums. It's already been put on record that the old School Board has turned into condominiums. The state building has turned into condominiums. Several schools have already been sold to developers to turn into condominiums. And it's already known based on gentrification research that if you turn– if you put a condominium in a middle of a low-income community, then that is ground zero to begin to spread out to all the other areas of low income, and will definitely gentrify the community. We're asking, is the real goal here real estate development for the school closings? To sell the schools to developers to build condominiums that will run 300,000 to 3 million, and this will begin a devastating process of gentrification. Many of these schools have been strategically selected in predominantly African American, Latino, and minority communities. According to the Philadelphia Business Journal article December 2012, commercial real estate in Philadelphia is supposed to boom, and New York developers are lining up to invest in Philadelphia. If these schools are turning to condominiums, this will have a ripple effect of gentrification in many other low-income and working-class communities.*

This community activist, representing a South Philadelphia neighborhood experiencing

significant development pressures, reframed the closure process in terms of real estate

development, positioning schools as sites of potential capital investment attractive to investors outside the city ("New York developers are lining up to invest in Philadelphia"). She suggested that closed schools represent potential catalysts for gentrification—buildings whose redevelopment has the capacity to spark broader conflagrations ("ground zero to begin to spread out to all the other areas of low income").

At a July 2014 focus group with parents from the Germantown community, a participant similarly interpreted the closure of GHS and Fulton Elementary as part of gentrification processes that threatened the community's claim to the neighborhood:

> Rsp: *I think it's more of a gentrification of this neighborhood. […] And I feel that the city really has sold these kids out. […] A lot of people see Germantown as very historic. And I see a lot of people from the suburbs moving back into the city. […] And a lot of suburban [people], you know, pay those high school taxes in the suburbs so they want to come back into the city, closer to their jobs. It's easy to get into Center City and all the […] attractions so that's what they want here and the little guy is getting squeezed out or getting pushed out.*
>
> RG: *And you see that as part of what happened in the school closing.*
>
> Rsp: *Exactly. They're selling them out, privatizing. I believe in about another 7 to 10 years everything going to be you have to sign your children up or go to school online or have to home school. And if you can't afford it then these children are really going to be sold out.*

For this community member, the closure of schools facilitated the class transition of the neighborhood, pushing out "the little guy" through the retrenchment of the public education infrastructure on which they depend. She described the privatization of education as an attraction for gentrifiers moving into Germantown, who want to more easily access their jobs and the city's amenities but do not want to pay for the education of the neighborhood's lower income children.

In the West Philadelphia neighborhood of Mantua, displacement pressures from the universities that lie to the south are real and long-term residents saw the

recommended closure of local schools as a continuation of Drexel University's and the University of Pennsylvania's decades-long encroachment into the African-American neighborhoods surrounding their campuses. A longtime Mantua resident and community leader told me in a May 2014 interview that many members of the Mantua community are suspicious that the attempts to close McMichael and UCHS are part of a larger effort to take over the neighborhood by universities and cultural institutions. Because of its location, the market value of Mantua houses has increased significantly and she reported that people feel their neighborhood is ripe for the picking—that the threat of gentrification is high.

At a formal SRC hearing on the closures in February 2013, a longtime community leader and UCHS alumnus similarly tied the recommended closure to real estate interests and development potential. However, he went a step further, seeing in the high school's enrollment decline a strategic effort to weaken the school:

> *"When I attended University City from '76 to '79 we had enrollment about 3,000, 3,000 strong, now it's 500 [or] less, done by design of course, because it's a prominent real estate area and they want to take over. Why can't we be the pioneers in between two universities that bring the school from the inner city and bring out students? […] Let's get these students that need help and then you can say wow I've really done something."*

In this framing, the development potential of the property on which the school building sits grew to supersede its role as a school, resulting in a targeted withdrawal of support and a loss for the children and families in the local community.

At a January 2013 SRC meeting, a local pastor protesting the closure of UCHS argued that without explicit agreements in place, should one of the universities take over the school it would represent a tragic loss to the local community:

If you take that high school and do this to what you're doing to our communities and sell it off to the University of Pennsylvania without them making a contract or agreement to educate the kids that those institutions represent, that will be a travesty to every African American in the City of Philadelphia.

The local community had fought to gain admission to the school when it was first built in the early 1970s as part of an urban renewal project that bulldozed a residential neighborhood called The Bottom. Those who, like this pastor, remembered this fight were concerned that closing the school would open the door for further university expansion. As it turned out, such concerns were not unfounded: Drexel bought the now-closed UCHS property in June 2014 for $25.15 million and announced plans for a one billion dollar redevelopment of the land (DiStefano, 2014).

In protesting school closures, neighborhood stakeholders also framed the issue in terms of claims to neighborhood space. Who belongs in a neighborhood is intertwined with the question of who belongs at the local schools. When a school closes, even if a newly constituted school opens in the same building, that piece of a community's tie to the neighborhood is changed. In an August 2014 interview, a teacher who formerly ran afterschool programming at Fairhill School described to me the perception of local residents that the building was being repurposed as a charter school, a prospect that meant to them that it would no longer be serving their community:

The year before they closed Fairhill they put in this huge new air conditioning unit. And people talked about it all the time. Like, feeling like it was like part of a conspiracy. They're like, "They put in this big, expensive air conditioning unit, but then they closed the school. It's because they're trying to sell the school and turn it into a charter school."

Although gentrification is not currently a significant threat in Fairhill, the community's history with a local institution represents a critical claim to neighborhood space and the closure of Fairhill may have been perceived as a portent of future trends.

6.3   **Systemic disinvestment, staff churn, and external partnerships: Closures on a**
landscape of institutional inequality

Another dimension of place that stakeholders invoked in protesting and making sense of school closures was variation in the institutional positionality and capacity of neighborhood schools. Schools are located not only within the racial and political economic space of the city, but also within the institutional space of the public school system. Unevenness on this institutional landscape—exacerbated by funding cuts and the diversion of resources to the charter sector—differentially positioned schools in ways not fully acknowledged by the closure metrics guiding the District's process. In this section, I lift out three ways stakeholders brought institutional unevenness and marginalization to bear in the closure debate: (1) by framing closure as an outcome of the disinvestment that preceded it, (2) by naming serial principal turnover as a source of school-instability, and (3) by highlighting the supplemental networks supporting individual schools through partnerships with private organizations.

6.3.1   District disinvestment

Some stakeholders framed school closure as a decision whose inevitability was ensured by the systemic disinvestment that preceded it. Former teachers described to me the ways diminishing resources caused a cascading series of detrimental effects that paved the way for closure. The loss of resources at an individual school compromised a school's ability to function effectively. This contributed to a situation where both parents and teachers were more likely to opt to move to other schools if they could. Together, staff turnover and enrollment losses hurt morale and disrupted relationships built within

the school and between the school and the community, helping to foster a sense of inevitability around the school's eventual closure.

A former Fairhill teacher described the school's decline to me in an October 2014 interview and attributed some of that trajectory to the SDP's lack of support.

> Rsp: *No. No, it didn't [surprise me that the District was recommending closing Fairhill]. [...] The last three years at Fairhill. Maybe four. Unfortunately we had a large turnaround in staff members. The students were not as successful academically. They were not making AYP. The administration was not strong and supportive enough. I would say, for, both the students and faculty members. [...] We had several principals. But their duration was short and I don't think that the school district was really aware of what was happening in the school. And I don't think that they were concerned enough to intervene [...] so that action could have been taken to prevent the students not meeting AYP.*
>
> RG: *So, [...] it sounds like there were changes going on in the school and maybe there could have been more intervention or support from outside. Or, even within the school administration. But that by the point– the point that you got to, at that point, it didn't surprise you.*
>
> Rsp: *No. 'Cause I could see the building deteriorating physically. I could see the students academically not performing. I could see staff members not as enthusiastic and dedicated to their profession. And very little action was being taken in a way– in a positive manner to correct that. It was– everything– any action that was taken was mostly negative.*

From the perspective of this veteran Fairhill teacher, instability at the school, coupled with an absence of District support, preceded—and made unsurprising—the closure of a school that had served the neighborhood for over a century (and from its current building since 1969). This teacher characterized the SDP central office as unaware of the school's decline and "not concerned enough to intervene." In a context of diminished staff morale and poor academic performance, the school's closure began to take on a sense of inevitability. Another former Fairhill teacher echoed this feeling of inevitability, telling me in a separate October 2014 interview:

> *We saw changes in resources. Programs, not as readily available. And that, you know comes from various levels, with funding and things like that. And that has to*

affect you. And then, you know, you have openings of different schools and parents making different choices to send their children to different programs or schools that may offer different programs. And that kind of affects the whole picture. And also, we had some staff that decided to move. As things changed. So that, also, affected things overall.

And later:

Having gone from a time when Fairhill was a very, very highly viewed place for education and it offered so much, to seeing what I call a very, very slow decline and change for a variety of reasons, […] it wasn't surprising to a certain extent [that the District recommended closing Fairhill]. But at the same time, it was– it hurt. So, you can kind of see something happening. You know. […] Either something drastic is going to happen, or [laughs] *we'll continue on that same road until something drastic happens.*

From this teacher's perspective, also, the school had reached a point where closure seemed the sensible conclusion to a decline that had its origins in resource retrenchment, which contributed to families and teachers leaving Fairhill for other schools. By situating the closure in the context of structural changes that contributed to the school's decline, these teachers underlined the ways that the loss of people and resources to charters and other schools of choice eroded the Fairhill's ability to function, creating the conditions on which its closure was based.

6.3.2   Principal turnover

In reflecting on the closures, former staff and neighborhood stakeholders also highlighted the destabilizing effects of frequent administrator changes. For example, in a May 2015 interview, a former principal expressed frustration that the destabilization of administrator turnover had not been acknowledged in evaluating the school's performance for potential closure: *"They didn't talk about the five changes in leadership that we had in the ten years. All the District's doing. They didn't say anything about that."* For this administrator, principal turnover constituted a significant challenge for the

school—one that should have been taken into account when schools were evaluated for closure. A longtime Germantown resident and retired SDP school administrator expressed similar frustration in a July 2014 interview, describing the District's role in facilitating a revolving door of administrative leadership at GHS:

> *The last ten years of the school [...] every other year you would have a new principal. And there was no stability, whatsoever, in the school. I mean, the school district just did a– they really effed over the school and the community. [...] Nobody was there. I mean there were a couple of people who were there, but they got promoted right away. 'Cause they were doing such a good job. After two years.* [gasps] *Everybody loved them and then, boom! Up to the district superintendent's– [...] And some of the people that got in there were– I mean, there were– They put in some elementary principals who really had no idea how to run a high school.*

This former administrator holds the SDP responsible for rapid principal turnover at the high school and the instability it engendered, accusing the District both of serial promotion of successful principals and the hiring of unqualified administrators.

Stakeholders also described the ways principal turnover affects a school's relationships with parents and with the community, a network of relationships that—when cultivated over time—represent a source of institutional and political strength. In a July 2014 interview, a former Fulton Elementary School teacher described the disruption that resulted from a new principal during what turned out to be Fulton's last year, contending that if the closings had been announced while the previous principal was still there, the school community would have mounted a much more significant protest. Community mobilization is made easier the stronger the existing network of relationships (Sampson, 1999). When principals turn over, the relationships those principals have built with the community are lost as well, making it more difficult to mobilize the school community in response to a proposed closure.

In Mantua, a community leader noted to me in an October 2014 interview the obstacle that principal turnover at McMichael created for neighborhood churches that wanted to support and build relationships with the school. *"The challenge with McMichael was that they went through principals. […] So, some of them were really engaging with the church. And some of 'em was hands off. […] So, it was really challenging to, like, work in the school."* Here, this respondent highlights the principal's role in cultivating the external relationships so essential to a school's health, particularly in a time of extreme resource scarcity via District channels. As she described, when there is frequent principal turnover, it is much more difficult for those external relationships to be built, even with mission-oriented organizations that are seeking out the opportunity to support the school.

At public meetings during the closure debate, stakeholders pointed to the destabilizing effects of principal turnover. At the hearing on school closures held by the City Council Education Committee in February 2013, a parent organizer with Action United tied principal and teacher turnover to Philadelphia's political economic space:

> *I also want to talk about teacher and principal stability and equity. Last year Action United put out a report, and it showed that schools in high poverty areas experience higher turnover […] as far as teachers and principals as opposed to other schools. […] We have another parent organizer […] who has seen five principals in five years at her children's school.*

By linking staff turnover, closure recommendations, and spatialized economic inequality, this parent called on city decision-makers to recognize the spatial patterning of institutional instability within District schools and the coexistence of social challenges (i.e. poverty) and staff turnover in schools that were showing up on the District's closure list.

At the January 2013 SRC meeting, a representative from the GHS alumni association identified principal turnover, alongside declines in District funding, as the source of the struggles that led to the closure recommendations—and not a failure of student performance:

> *Between 1998 and 2008, Germantown High School experienced consistent administration instability. The school was a revolving door for ten principals. Changing of programs. Lapse of school district funding. And poor maintenance of the facility. It wasn't the students that were failing the school, it's the School District failing the students.*

This GHS stakeholder characterized the school's instability as radiating out from the District's central office. The metrics the District was using to identify schools for closure, she argued, reflected outcomes of funding cuts and destabilization perpetrated on the school by the District itself.

6.3.3   External partnerships and private resources

In a context of diminishing resources, another source of variation in schools' institutional and political positionality derived from the number and types of partnerships schools had developed with private organizations. As direct support from the school district central office contracted, schools have increasingly needed to pursue private partnerships to meet their needs. Schools with institutional partnerships have greater capacity to raise money and access resources. Additionally, such relationships constitute a network of organizations and businesses that in some cases mobilized to defend the schools they supported when they were threatened with closure.

A staff member at a small non-profit that had partnered with Fairhill School before it closed described to me the critical role that such partnerships play in a June 2014 interview:

A good principal will get all kinds of services. She'll talk to Temple Medical School and have them come over and bring their interns. She'll […] get the truck to come and do dental care out of a van. And, talk to the city youth track club. And come and bring uniforms and shoes and entry fees to get a track club going. So, a good principal can– There are a lot of resources. I mean, Philadelphia has got so many resources. The trouble is that they're so bare bones now that they don't have the staff to coordinate volunteers.

This same individual noted that in the context of the closure debate, she felt that those schools with stronger partnerships were in a better position to contest their closure:

I think they were trying to close 40 of us or something like that. And one of them is a charter with the Franklin Institute. And one of them is a partner with the Tinicum Wildlife Preserve. And, if you have a connection like that, you had a better chance.

External partners render visible a broader network of support surrounding a school. Whether through political influence or the sheer practicality of resource-maximization, as this stakeholder contended, partnerships could sway the District's calculus on closure.

During the debate over the recommended 2013 closures, representatives from some organizations that had partnered with schools slated for closure spoke at community meetings and SRC meetings in opposition to the closure plans. For example, at a January 2013 District-led community meeting, a staff member from a West Philadelphia non-profit organization that had worked with McMichael and other local schools highlighted the years of work that had gone into getting a library opened again in the school:

We're the West Philadelphia Alliance for Children. […] I would like to speak on behalf of a few of the elementary schools where we work. This year, we have opened the library at Morton McMichael Elementary School in Mantua. [cheering] *Thank you. And this is due to the very hard work that has come years before our organization partnered with McMichael. And, the school was without a library for over twenty-five years! Twenty-five. That's more than a generation. […] I would like to say that I am very concerned as a community member. As somebody who works here, who lives here, who is trying hard to engage our communities.*

This speaker highlights the resource represented by a community organization's partnership with District schools, in this case made visible in the re-opening of McMichael's library after twenty-five years. In describing this effort, she also forwards the tremendous resource scarcity under which the school has struggled for decades.

At the March 2013 SRC meeting, a staff member from the Wyck Historic House, Garden, and Farm argued that closing GHS and Fulton would limit students' access to the neighborhood-based resources available through Wyck programming:

> *I am a youth program manager at the Wyck Historic House Garden and Farm in Germantown. The children from Fulton and Germantown Head Starts, Fulton Elementary, and Germantown High School are part of our neighborhood schools program. They walk to Wyck biweekly or monthly for free. Hands on lessons in environmental science, agriculture, and history. And an overall safe place to play outside. Our program not only connects these children with the natural world in their neighborhood, it also connects them to their food. Promoting healthy eating, exercise, play away from technology. Which is crucial to their physical, academic, and psychological well-being and development. […] Germantown needs its children. They need their neighborhood. And they need resources like the Wyck house which is unique to Germantown.*

This Wyck staff member describes the benefits for students who participate in their programming and points to the importance of the schools' proximity to Wyck for students' ability to access the resources Wyck has to offer.

The role of private partners in getting schools off the recommended closing list was nowhere more significantly demonstrated than in Mantua, where McMichael School had an extremely powerful benefactor in the form of Drexel University. By fall 2012, the university had invested significant resources in McMichael as part of a larger effort at civic engagement and revitalization in the neighborhood. Drexel was the key institutional actor leading an ambitious community organizing and planning process in 2012 that was part of implementing a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. The planning process,

called *We Are Mantua!* (*WAM!*), was broadly focused on building civic capacity and organizing groups of community stakeholders to understand and strategize around addressing neighborhood concerns. Education was a central component of this effort and, specifically, finding ways to engage and improve McMichael.

When, in December 2012, McMichael showed up on the District's closing list, those leading the *WAM!* initiative were caught off guard, reacting with disbelief that the District would close a school that had such strong support from a university partner. As a Drexel administrator involved with the project told me in June 2014:

> Rsp: *When McMichael went on the closing list, we kind of looked around and said, "What the heck? We're right here! We're working with this school. Why are you guys doing this?" We thought that maybe it would be turned into a Renaissance School. It was a failing school. We thought somebody might have talked to us. Nobody told us.*
>
> RG: *Really? So it was just out of the blue?*
>
> Rsp: *Out of the blue we heard they were closing the school.*

Those working for Mantua's revitalization saw preserving the school as critical to the neighborhood's future, and they made a case to the school district for keeping McMichael open in a February 2013 report. The proposal highlighted Drexel's commitment to the school and the substantial resources that the university had already plowed into the school through direct investment, leveraging external grant funds, and in-kind professional development and support. The report's authors argued, essentially, that the university has the capacity to leverage enough resources to single-handedly (i.e., without District support) turn the school around.

> *While we understand the District's concerns about McMichael's viability and the challenges the School District of Philadelphia faces in maintaining underutilized school buildings, we believe we have the partnerships and the resources needed to create a strong and successful school at McMichael. We have also begun conversations with potential tenants for the underutilized first floor of the school.*

Later in the report, the authors itemize Drexel's investments in McMichael since 2011, totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars in direct and grant-secured investments, along with active partnership-building on behalf of the school. Apparently unable to resist a dig at the District for the destabilizing effects of principal turnover at McMichael, the authors express Drexel's ongoing commitment to bringing change to the school:

> *Since 2011, the University has invested significant time and funds to working with McMichael staff and families. Although Drexel's efforts have been hampered by the frequent turnover of school leadership, the University stands ready to be a consistent and responsive partner to McMichael.*

The month following their submission of this alternative proposal, the District released a revised closure plan that dropped McMichael from the closing list.

The role of private partnerships in supporting neighborhood schools reveals another dimension to the ways schools are differentially positioned with regard to spatialized class and development inequality across the city. Neighborhoods vary in the strength and capacity of local non-profit organizations and businesses—those entities perhaps most likely to partner with a neighborhood school. For schools in or near wealthier communities or powerful institutions, the resources locally available that might be tapped through partnerships are more significant, creating an unevenness in the educational landscape that mirrors other dimensions of community capacity (see Lake & Newman, 2002).

6.4   Politics, powerlessness, and place

Across the city, the responses of communities faced with the closure of a local school revealed variation in the capacity of different constituencies to mobilize in protest. Striking among my case neighborhoods was the absence of organized pushback from parents of current students. In this section, I seek to understand this absence, to make

sense of the closure process in terms of its intersection with the feeling of powerlessness within local communities.

A community's response to the recommended closure of a local school speaks to the role that the school plays in the neighborhood and the value it represents to the community. However, the type of response a closure recommendation elicits also evidences the extent and ways in which the stakeholders are already organized. Recalling the response to the District's closure recommendations, a longtime observer of the SDP noted to me in an October 2014 interview:

> *It appeared to be a, you know, pretty broad and diverse outpouring of opposition in […] the first few months. And, as time went on—and this was also true with the earlier round of a smaller number of schools—it became clear that some schools had strong community support and others virtually none.*

He went on to hypothesize, however, that the community pushback defending schools revealed the level of organization within different constituencies, noting that in some cases protest came from an organized faculty and administration, while in other cases it reflected organizational capacity within the community. In other words, it may be too simple a story to conclude that a lack of vocal protest means that a school was not valued by the community.

Within my case neighborhoods, in Germantown, opposition was spearheaded by alumni, clergy, and local politicians. In Fairhill, school staff took the lead to organize a response. And in Mantua, Drexel University was the primary force organizing around McMichael, while current students, teachers, and longtime residents mobilized in defense of UCHS. Although some parents spoke passionately at community meetings, by and large, within these neighborhoods parents did not take the lead.

The question then becomes, *why?* How should we interpret the apparent lack of response in some communities among parent constituencies? Is it a manifestation of an underlying structural inequality, a lack of organization, or should it be understood as an acquiescence that represents the perception or recognition of one's powerlessness in a process?

Making sense of the lack of action is inherently difficult. And the data collected here are not well positioned to speak to this question, in large part because I framed the study around an effort to understand how stakeholders invoked place in *protesting* school closures. Nevertheless, some stakeholders I spoke with shared descriptions and interpretations of the lack of parent action that can serve as the basis for a preliminary exploration of these questions. Here I draw out four sets of explanations given for parent inaction in response to the school closure recommendations: (1) apathy and inadequate engagement, (2) a lack of community organization, (3) the demands of poverty, and (4) the awareness of systemic powerlessness.

6.4.1   Apathy and inadequate engagement

For some, the lack of response from parents revealed that parents did not care enough to do something. For example, in a September 2014 interview, a local politician expressed to me frustration that parents were not more involved in mobilizing to protest the closure of a school in his district:

> *Unfortunately, in my opinion, though, I think that the troops weren't truly there, you know? We had students. I recall going to numerous meetings in the auditorium. And I would […] say, "Well, where the parents at?" "Ah, they work" They this and that. I know– We all do. I mean, well, most of us do. But I think, for me, it's like, in my opinion, if we were going to really take a stand, that was an issue that we should have taken a stand for. And that we should have made some sacrifices. Yeah. Bring your child if you have to. Leave work early if you have to.*

You know, you do those types of things to really address this issue. I mean, it was an emergency!

In this interpretation, "sacrifices" needed to be made to defend the neighborhood school and the absence of parents indicated an unwillingness to make the necessary sacrifices.

A longtime Mantua resident and community leader told me in a May 2014 interview that she was surprised that there was no huge outcry from McMichael parents when it was announced that the school would close. While older residents were more active in protesting the closure, current parents, she said, seemed not to care or even be aware.

At a parent focus group in Germantown in July 2014, participants debated why there hadn't been a stronger response from Fulton parents. One parent (quoted above in section 3.2) felt strongly that the lack of parent protest was a consequence of a process that did not include them—one in which the decisions were already made before the community was consulted. However, another participant argued that parents did not come to the community meetings because they did not take the process seriously enough:

I went to a lot of meetings, I went to the majority of meetings—Fulton parents thought it was a joke. It was like– they thought it was a joke, they thought it was a joke. Aw, I ain't going– they thought it was a he-said, she-said […] They just thought it was a joke! And then when it happened, it was a reality, they was like, oh, it did happen. Now you wanna say something. No. You had a opportunity. […] So use your voice then!

Here the absence of Fulton parents at community meetings was framed as an unwillingness to take seriously the closure process or what it meant for them. The speaker was frustrated by this stance, seeing Fulton parents as having missed their window of opportunity to make a difference.

6.4.2   Lack of community organization

Others framed the absence of parent protest in some communities as a reflection of the lack of organization within the community. Communities with pre-existing organizations and networks in place can more quickly mobilize in response to a threat (Sampson, 1999). When parent constituencies are not plugged into the school or connected to each other through organizational channels, mobilizing collective action is more difficult.

For example, in Mantua the local community had largely become disengaged from McMichael School and was not well organized. As a local pastor told me in an October 2014 interview:

> *My sense is that there was not much involvement between the community and the school. It was like there was, you know– Here's the school. Here's the community. There's sort of an antagonism. You know, we send our kids there, but it's– that's that school over there. It's sort of like, two different worlds.*

This assessment was shared by an organizer who helped to lead the *WAM!* Choice Neighborhoods planning process in 2012, who responded *"What relationship?"* when I asked about the nature of the relationship between Mantua and McMichael in a July 2014 interview. This organizer told me that the connection between the school and the neighborhood had been extremely weak prior to the *WAM!* process.

To a great extent, Drexel's larger effort to improve McMichael has been guided by this diagnosis. That is, Drexel saw organizing parents as critical to their work with the school and the neighborhood more broadly. As a Drexel administrator explained to me in a June 2014 interview:

> *Mantua had no civic [association]. It didn't have a Home and School Association. It didn't have a SAC [School Advisory Council]. It had weak rec centers. It had very few youth serving programs. They tended to be quite old and*

they tended to be run by a single leader, rather than having any structure. So there wasn't this kind of civic capacity. And one of the things we were trying to do through the Choice Neighborhoods grant was to build civic capacity.

Civic capacity describes the ability of a group of people to collectively debate issues, articulate an agenda, and mobilize the resources to take steps toward pursuing that agenda—particularly with regard to the capacity to influence external decision makers (Saegert, 2006). As part of an effort to cultivate civic capacity within Mantua, Drexel and its partners have worked to build a parent organization at McMichael, to cultivate buy-in and leadership development for parents within this structure, and to enlist the help of local churches in supporting the school. At the time of the closure recommendations, however, there was no such organized parent group or engaged coalition from local faith communities, and there was minimal protest of the recommended closure by parents or community members. A different Drexel administrator told me in a separate June 2014 interview:

> Rsp: *So, the school being on the closing list created an opportunity for parents and the community to get involved in sort of saving the school, campaigning for the school. The parents had never been– had never been a high level of engagement. So, the school was actually, if you want to say, 'saved' from closing by the efforts of the community. So community support, political support, behind the scenes—*
>
> RG: *As opposed to parents.*
>
> Rsp: *As opposed to parents. So our relationship with the community was to help create structures for Mantua's civic association. To organize parents around the efforts to support the school.*

McMichael, in this university administrator's assessment, was defended by "behind the scenes" community and political support; parents did not protest the school's closure because parents were not engaged. In communities such as Mantua without effective neighborhood organizations, the lack of social or organizational networks—and the civic

capacity such networks enable—inhibited efforts to mobilize opposition to the closure recommendations. Further hampering the civic capacity of school constituencies in some neighborhoods was the attrition of the most politically engaged parents, who have often already opted out of the neighborhood school. In many cases, the most active parent advocates have already self-selected out of struggling neighborhood schools that were slated for closure.

6.4.3 The demands of poverty

A veteran Philadelphia organizer, reflecting on local protests of the closure recommendations in a June 2014 interview, observed that some of the poorer neighborhoods and more transient communities had a harder time mobilizing a response—this was significant, he noted, as poorer neighborhoods were also some of the hardest hit with the closure recommendations. An organizer who worked in the Mantua community echoed this observation, explaining to me that generating parent engagement in a school and mobilizing parents to oppose a school's closure is more difficult among parents struggling with the realities of poverty. She also noted that parents whose own educational experience has been limited sometimes feel they are not prepared or qualified to be involved at the school.[1]

An active community-member in the Fairhill neighborhood similarly made the case to me in a July 2014 interview that people in poverty have less time, energy, and resources to invest in protesting the closure of a school:

> Rsp: *Look at where we are. Like, there's enough issues. This is considered a 'high risk' community, so I mean, as far as a school closing? So what? Especially when you know that somehow that problem will fix itself.*

---

[1] This interview was conducted over the phone (was not recorded) and thus I do not have direct quotes.

> RG: *Yeah. There's other things occupying your mind.*
>
> Rsp: <u>So</u> *many other things. So many other things. […] And let's also take into consideration that this is a neighborhood of English second language residents. So, in a lot of ways, there are different priorities. Like, things come differently. You know. In different cultures, that's just how it is.*

This Fairhill resident interpreted the lack of protest from parents as reflecting a prioritization necessitated by the demands of life in a poor, "high risk," immigrant neighborhood. Given the stressors that poor families deal with, she reasoned, it is not surprising that making time to protest the closure of the school was not a priority.

6.4.4   The awareness of systemic powerlessness

A number of stakeholders I spoke with framed the lack of parental response in terms of resignation—a feeling that they would not be able to affect the District's decisions and so protesting would be a fruitless effort. In this sense, inaction might be thought of as rooted in a recognition of the realities of one's structural positionality, rather than evidence of a lack of caring or commitment. A staff-member at a Germantown non-profit social service agency told me in July 2014:

> *What I was surprised at– The parents that I know well, […] there was almost like– almost what I would say, a flat affect. Like, they are so used to being kicked in the teeth. […] I mean that, you know. "Oh. Okay." They're– I did not see the riled up response that I would like to have seen.*

This community worker conveys surprise and disappointment that parents did not respond to the closure recommendations with more anger and active resistance. She interprets their inaction—their "flat affect"—as being borne of the experience of repeated injustices.

Offering a slightly different interpretation, a former principal described to me in a May 2015 interview what she saw as a sense of powerlessness among parents:

I believe that many of our parents feel helpless and hopeless. Or, at least felt helpless and hopeless in this process. They weren't listened to. They weren't able to articulate to the District in a manner that they could understand what these, so called, failing neighborhood schools meant to them.

Here she clarified that the helplessness she describes is a consequence of the closure process, a response to not being able to communicate to decision-makers the significance of their neighborhood school. That is, this is a resignation borne of community engagement that was not sufficiently responsive to their voices and concerns, a reproduction of histories of political marginalization through the closure process itself.

In an August 2014 interview, a former staff member at Fairhill School echoed this perception, describing a sense of inevitability and powerlessness within the community about the closing of Fairhill School. He saw among students and their families the resignation that Fairhill, as a poor neighborhood, had little recourse to change the minds of District decision-makers: *"And I also think people just have this feeling that because they're in an impoverished neighborhood [the District] can just do what they want."* Here the suggestion is that residents perceive the District as having more leeway to enact policy without community accountability in poor neighborhoods, in other words, the voices of residents in poor neighborhoods are understood to be less effective in influencing District decisions.

A Germantown parent put the question of political efficacy to me directly in a July 2014 focus group: *"What do you think we can do to turn the system around? Is there anything we can do?"* In response, I suggested the importance of getting a group together to let their representatives know that they are upset and also situated part of the issue as a debate between Philadelphia and the state legislature in Harrisburg. His follow-up— *"What would our voice do for Harrisburg?"*—conveyed a clear perception that, as a

lower-income, African American resident of Germantown, he was positioned at a political disadvantage. His tone conveyed the laughable impracticality of what I had suggested.

6.5 Discussion

Schools in Philadelphia are arrayed in space, and for schools in poor communities of color, this means shouldering the effects of the classed and racialized processes that likewise stunted the trajectories of the neighborhoods where they are located: racial segregation, job loss, and disinvestment by both public and private entities. Under-resourced schools are an *outcome* of underlying structural injustices and also constitute a means through which those injustices are *reproduced*, as communities struggle with the implications of nonfunctional schools. In this way, they reveal Dikec's dialectic: their spatiality reflects broader social inequalities and also functions to reproduce those inequalities in space.

By holding the District accountable for the community consequences of school closures and the disproportional impact on African American neighborhoods, stakeholders exposed an underlying paradox within marketized educational reforms: when educational reforms aim to benefit individual students by creating access to better schools, the result is the further siphoning off of economic and political capacity from communities that have suffered disinvestment for decades. That is, the celebration of choice rings false: the best options are not available to all, and the diversion of resources from neighborhood schools further erodes their capacity to serve those who remain. Purporting to erase legacies of neighborhood segregation and discrimination through

school choice only serves to obscure the ways they become manifest in choice systems themselves (Hankins, 2005; Huff, 2013).

Furthermore, by tying the disinvestment and closure of schools in one part of the city to redevelopment in other parts of the city, stakeholders situated closures within broader processes of uneven development, the consequences of which lie not only in the inequities and social costs of disinvestment, but also in differential access to the benefits that accrue when the development seesaw swings the other way (Smith, 2008). Schools are educational institutions, but they are also large properties with the potential for significant exchange value in the right real estate market (Logan & Molotch, 1987). Finding a way to realize some of this potential was clearly part of the cash-strapped school district's strategy. Less clear, however, were the ways that a school building's potential market value may have played into recommendations about which schools to close.

Schools are situated, also, within an uneven landscape of *institutional* resources that intersects with and reflects the political economy. Schools that had been institutionally peripheralized by resource cuts, had been undermined by administrator and staff turnover, and were not well positioned with private partnerships, were understood by stakeholders to be at greater risk of closure. The marketized politics of choice that have driven charter school expansion in Philadelphia select against the survival of neighborhood schools by exacerbating these types of institutional inequalities. By inserting such dynamics into the closure debate, stakeholders highlighted the ways their functioning serves to further disadvantage those students and families who rely on neighborhood schools as options of last resort.

This dissertation sits within a tradition of urban scholarship that has focused on the capacity of marginally situated urban populations to transform the city (e.g., Castells, 1983; Cox, 1998; Holston, 2009; Lefebvre, 2003; Secor, 2004). But what if resistance appears absent? What if an institutional reform such as the closure of a neighborhood school incites no visible response? Stakeholders I spoke with suggested a variety of explanations for a lack of protest from parents in their neighborhoods. The first three of these included (1) a personal lack of commitment (individual), (2) a lack of local organization (social), and (3) a resource-limitation rooted in poverty (structural). These suggest corresponding interventions of education, community organizing, and resource supplementation, respectively. The fourth explanation—a pragmatic acceptance or defeated recognition of one's structural disadvantage—is posited to arise from people's experience of spatialized injustice over time, a realization of the limitations of one's position (*"what would our voice do?"*). Inaction rooted in an understanding of systemic powerlessness is harder to "see" and is arguably harder to address (Gaventa, 1982; Lukes, 2005).

The lack of protest among some school constituencies is significant because it reveals how schools and neighborhoods without the political and economic capacity to mobilize effective protest were the places where schools were most easily closed. In a school closure process that disproportionately recommended schools be closed in poor and African American neighborhoods, those communities that had borne the brunt of under-resourced schools for many years were also the communities that needed to mobilize to keep their schools open. Stated conversely, wealthier neighborhoods had the *privilege* of not needing to justify to the District the continued value of their schools.

While it is true that many parents did not mobilize to protest the closure of schools their children attended, it is *also* true that parents whose children's schools were not facing closure did not need to protest in order for their schools to remain open.

Is political marginality something we should conceptualize as arising from a lack of civic capacity within a local community—the result of a community's inability to mobilize or act collectively? Or, conversely, is political marginality better understood as an outcome of processes of institutional marginalization and economic disinvestment in place? The answers, I submit, are yes, and also yes. The lack of civic capacity in many neighborhoods limited stakeholders' ability to sway the District's plans or the SRC's decisions. *And also*, this marginality cannot be understood outside of neighborhood histories of segregation, job loss, property abandonment, and real estate disinvestment.

For public education, this cycle has troubling implications, confirmed in both the pattern of closure locations and the ways that stakeholders situated those closures in space. Schools with well-resourced and/or well-organized constituencies were better prepared to mount an effective opposition. Communities without such resources were at a disadvantage in this way. However, both civic capacity and the condition of local schools reflect historical patterns of structural disadvantage. Schools were more likely to be closed and communities less likely to mount an effective protest in places with histories of disinvestment—in schools and neighborhoods. If public education is to represent a socialized space of opportunity for all, efforts to reform public education through market mechanisms of choice must acknowledge and proactively counter this cycle in which histories of spatialized inequality are reproduced in space.

Did the invoking of place by stakeholders in the closure debate constitute a disruption of spatialized inequalities—did it destabilize the *injustice of spatiality* in some way? On the one hand, it did not. Twenty-eight of the 45 buildings or programs identified in this study as recommended for closure were closed or moved in summer 2013, disrupting the lives of approximately 9,000 students and their families and leaving newly vacant buildings in their wake (Graham & Gammage, 2013). On the other hand, however, the invoking of place in this debate pushed the conversation beyond the District's framing of resource consolidation and culling empty seats. By situating themselves and their schools in space, along with the history of accrued disadvantage that placement entailed (Young, 2000), stakeholders challenged the metrics of the District's closure process. In doing so, they demanded that decision-makers acknowledge the reproduction of historical inequalities enacted through a process that sought to disproportionately close schools in poor and African American neighborhoods.

This points to a critical question—one often under-acknowledged in school reform policy debates: how can a woefully underfunded school district such as the SDP correct for historical injustices writ large? While school districts cannot be held accountable to remedy all wrongs manifest in urban space, they do have the obligation—to the greatest extent possible—not to reproduce historical injustices through their decisions and policies. The rhetoric driving marketized school reforms, targeted school closings, and the expansion of the charter sector can be dangerously aspatial, masking the ways that governance regimes prioritizing choice and market accountability reproduce and exacerbate historical inequalities. If schools are to be managed through a market of

choice, that market must account for the ways place-based disparities shape and reproduce the ability of schools to educate children.

7   The production of place

7.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the school closure debate through the lens of the production of place framework developed in Chapter 2, conceptualizing place as an ongoing process including bounding, historicizing, and politicizing dimensions. That is, I explore how neighborhood stakeholders protesting and making sense of school closures engaged in the bounding, historicizing, and politicizing of place. This analysis reveals the intersection of the school closure debate with the politics of place: with questions of what this place is, what this place means, and to whom it belongs. I argue that the invoking of place in these ways in the context of the school closure debate carries assertions not only about the value of a school slated for closure, but also about the identity of a neighborhood and those to whom that neighborhood belongs.

I situate this argument within a processual understanding of place as an ongoing, contested, and deeply political production (D. Massey, 2005). Understandings of place are rooted in the delineation of place boundaries in social and physical space (bounding), the telling of what this place was and to whom it belonged (historicizing), and the invoking of place in the pursuit of political objectives (politicizing). These dimensions do not operate independently of each other, but are intertwined in processes of place production. This chapter is organized around this framework in order to illuminate how these three dimensions function as arenas in which the identity and meaning of place are negotiated. Because they are fundamentally interconnected, however, the voices reported

in each section often do not reflect a clean analytical separation but are rather examples that emphasize one dimension even while also reflecting elements of the other two.

Bounding, historicizing, and politicizing constitute avenues through which people, communities, and organizations exert claims to space. As such, the production of place is intertwined with the construction of belonging: *whose place is this?* By weaving schools into place history and placed social networks, community members laid claims on both the institutions and their neighborhoods, tethering themselves and their schools to the places they call home. Furthermore, in doing so, they expanded the framing of schools' significance beyond the metrics the school district had put on the table in evaluating schools for closure. The story of a community's relationship with a local school over generations has the capacity to root that community in space and to legitimize their claims to that neighborhood. The school closures that frequently accompany the expansion of charter- and magnet-school sectors should be understood as part of an erosion of those claims. By situating the protest of school closures within a discussion of the politics of the production of place, I illuminate in this chapter the ways stakeholders' defense of local schools was embedded in constructions of place identity, with implications for contested claims to space.

7.2   Bounding place

Bounding processes of place production involve drawing lines around place in both physical and social space. What are the edges of this place on a map—what lies inside and what lies outside? And also: who belongs inside and who does not? What are the edges of place within the social realm? In the closure debate, stakeholders engaged in bounding place by tying schools to understandings of neighborhood belonging, by

framing schools as place-based "families," and by associating a school's value with its location in space.

For many in Germantown, particularly for those who grew up in the neighborhood, Germantown High School (GHS) came to be closely associated with what it meant to be from Germantown. In reflecting on the shuttered school's significance in a September 2014 interview, a community leader described to me the role the high school played in the community when he was a student in the 1970s and the deep pride he has felt as a Germantown student and alumnus:

> *Germantown High School was sort of like central to everything taking place in Germantown. […] And you had this proudness to be a part of Germantown High School. […] You were proud to be a Bear. […] In fact, if you lived in Germantown, you were going to Germantown High School. And those that went to Central and other places were like, traitors, so to speak. Because– Just because of the pride and the connectedness of the high school.*

For this alumnus, going to GHS in the 1970s was an important part of being a loyal resident and member of the community. Though delivered as a tongue-in-cheek comment, his assertion that residents who went elsewhere to school were "traitors" suggests that, for him, being connected to the school was an important part of belonging in the neighborhood. Later in the same interview, he returned to the idea of the school's identification with the community and his own identification with the school as a member of the community:

> *This is the community that I grew up in. This is my community. This is where my home is at. […] And, you know, I even took it personally and said, you know, this is an assault on public education. And, really, it's an assault on public education for the black kids in Germantown. […] So it became personalized.*

Here he expressed a direct claim to the neighborhood ("this is my community"), legitimating that claim by calling to mind his childhood in the community and

referencing his ongoing dwelling in that place. He also identified himself ("I took it personally") with a racially-bounded and place-based description of the GHS students who stood to be affected by the school's closure.

During and in the wake of the 2013 closure debates, stakeholders protesting Fairhill School's recommended closure were notable for their framing of the school as a family, interweaving the school with the neighborhood social fabric and bounding a space of social belonging. In doing so, they identified the school with a locally situated community and suggested the idea (i.e. a sociospatial imaginary) of the school as a neighborhood-based family—a close-knit network of relationships that included students, staff, and multiple generations of local families. For example, in an October 2014 interview, a former Fairhill teacher described to me the relationships that held the school together and knit the school into the community.

> *The reason I chose to stay at Fairhill is because for me it was always a family environment. The neighborhood itself was a family environment. I had grown to know a lot of the students. By the time I was in my 15th or 16th year there, I was teaching some children of former students. […] A lot of the people that were in the neighborhood had also, some of them worked within the school. So you had families that were actually working. So that kind of bridge, the connection between the parents and the students and it kind of flourished from that. So, you know, that translated and carried over into the school and you kind of felt that– you felt that connection to the community, to the school and the students.*

This teacher described an intergenerational interweaving of the school and the neighborhood, recounting how parents who had themselves attended Fairhill would send their children to Fairhill. Additionally, this teacher framed the neighborhood as a place where many people had worked within the school in one capacity or another ("a lot of people that were in the neighborhood had … worked at the school"). Later in the same

interview, this teacher again used familial language, in this case to describe the strength

of the relationships among the staff at Fairhill:

> *Because of the type of environment and the love that was shared for me […] at Fairhill, through our students, through staff members, which we still maintain a very strong friendship and relationship with. Even with administrators. That, when I use the word family, is what we felt. […] It was family. As in every family, you know, you have your moments, but you know, it was: I know that I can trust this person. And that was trickled down to our students.*

Using "family" language to describe the connections among staff at the school and

between the school and the neighborhood over generations constitutes a bounding of

place, a delineation of a neighborhood social sphere rooted in its affiliation with the

school.

Another former Fairhill teacher echoed this characterization in a November 2014

interview, likewise describing the school as a family and highlighting the strength of

relationships built among staff and with the neighborhood over time:

> *When I went there in 2001, it was very welcoming. The staff was very welcoming. And, I quickly learned that it was a family. It wasn't just a school. It was a family. And, everyone looked out for each other. […] And there were a lot of personal relationships that have been built over the years with the teachers. […] And then with the people from the community. 'Cause there were teachers at Fairhill who taught there for thirty-something years. So, they, like, you'll meet a family, and the teacher can tell you, well I taught their grandmother. Or, I taught, you know, I taught their brothers and sisters. So, the community itself– The school itself was very close– close-knit school. And they had a good relationship with the community.*

By emphasizing the good and long-standing relationships between staff and

neighborhood families, this teacher situated the school within the social space of the

neighborhood, tying the school to the community that has made the Fairhill neighborhood

their home.

Invoking the familial image of "home," this same teacher described to me the way students would return to Fairhill School after they graduated, framing the school as a place to which they could return for support and encouragement:

A lot of our former students, when they left, they came back. That was still their home. And you know, they'll come back. They knew they can come back there. They can talk to any of the teachers there if they're having an issue, if they needed advice. If they needed someone to give them a pep talk, you know. Just encourage them. They knew that they could come there. That was home. And, you know, that's something that a lot of them, when I speak to them now, that's something that they miss.

In these two comments, this teacher used familial language and imagery to represent a place of intergenerational belonging: a "welcoming" place where people "looked out for each other" and to which "they knew they [could] come back." By interweaving the school with the neighborhood community over generations and invoking the idea of "home," she engaged in a bounding of neighborhood social space that centered on the school.

During the school closure debate, a group of University City High School (UCHS) students had mobilized to push the District to modify its recommendations so as to allow the UCHS community—students and teachers—to stay together, whether in their current building or in a new location. However, as a former-UCHS teacher explained to me in a May 2015 interview, alumni and longtime community activists pushed the students to see the significance of staying in a school building they had fought to gain access to a generation before. He described a strategy meeting in January 2013[1] that included both students and alumni:

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[1] This meeting was organized as part of the citywide community engagement process facilitated by Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church and described in Chapter 4.

So that meeting became this crossfire—and in what ended up being a positive way—but this crossfire of, what students had worked for and what they were thinking, which is: we get that this is too big, that this is a 3,000 kid school and we have 500, and we're looking for a plan to stay– to keep the group together. To the old guard and alumni of like: we're here, ready to fight. And we've experienced being pushed out of this school and this neighborhood so we– we don't think you know how important it is to fight and stay here.

For current students, the motivation to protest closure was rooted in defending the relationships and community they were part of at the school. They did not want to see their classmates and teachers scattered to multiple other high schools, but instead wanted to keep that group together. As a UCHS student put it at the December 2012 School Reform Commission (SRC) meeting:

[W]e're not fighting to keep our school building open. We're fighting to preserve the culture within it. We understand the circumstances of our building. And we also understand the budget crisis of the school district. But what we want is to have options for our students to stay together rather than be split apart.

This clear act of social bounding was not tied to neighborhood space and was not made contingent on place-identification. In contrast, those who remembered the community's efforts to add local admission seats to the new school when it opened saw the school's *location* as a marker of their fight against displacement and as a testament to their claim to the neighborhood. As recorded in the published notes from the January 2013 strategy meeting described above, a UCHS alumnus put it this way: *"I want to put up a fight for this school…. This community is being taken over. But I'm not going to sit back and help"* ("Voices from the Inside, Volume II: Reports on the Schools Recommended for Closing/Restructuring/Relocating in the SDP's Facilities Master Plan," 2013, p. 314). Here, the closure of the school was tied to changes in the neighborhood, a framing that bounded the community in physical and social space through identification of an external adversary that threatened to displace the community that lived there.

7.3   Historicizing place

The historicizing dimension of place production centers on the telling of place history. What was this place? *Whose* was this place? The representation of a place's history constitutes a set of assertions about the "true" nature of a place and the people to whom it belongs. In the school closure debate, stakeholders participated in historicizing dimensions of the production of place by connecting a school's significance to the length of its history in the neighborhood, the legacy of the community's relationship with the school, and the multiple generations of local families with connections to the school.

For longtime Germantown residents, GHS had been a touchstone, a reminder and connection to their history and what it means to be from Germantown, even as the high school fell further and further toward dysfunction, a shadow of its former self. GHS opened in 1914 and served the community from the same building on the corner of High Street and Germantown Avenue for nearly a century, expanding into new wings built in the 1950s and the 1970s. If the school were to close, the physical and institutional repository of the memories and legacy valued by so many alumni would be gone. For GHS alumni with deep roots in the community, the school's value extended beyond its function—or dysfunction—as an educational institution. As a life-long resident told me in July 2014: *"That building is the heart of the community—geographically [...] and emotionally."*

The tension between the school's value as a historical touchstone of neighborhood identity and its struggle in recent years to effectively educate students can appear paradoxical, as some residents who did not consider sending their own children to GHS adamantly decried its closure. A former GHS teacher remarked that she thought the more

stable families in Germantown had been opting not to send their kids to GHS for many years and the development of charter schools and magnet high schools in the city had accelerated the hemorrhaging of students from GHS over the past decade. While the District rated the GHS building as having the capacity to accommodate over 2,200 students, the District's official enrollment numbers report 655 students enrolled at GHS in 2012-2013, with average daily attendance of about 500.

And yet, for some stakeholders—particularly alumni—GHS evoked memories of the neighborhood's former glory. A former GHS teacher explained to me in July 2014 that Germantown residents have a nostalgia associated with the high school that is tied to their identity as being from Germantown. In a July 2014 interview, two longtime Germantown residents described the positive memories that older alumni carried of their time at the high school and the anger it motivated in response to the school's closure:

> Rsp 1: *I spoke to lots and lots of people. And people who'd been graduates of Germantown in the 50s and the 60s and the 70s. […] And they were really, really, really disappointed to see the school close.*
>
> Rsp 2: *And angry, too.*
>
> Rsp 1: *And angry. Yeah. […] Their memories of their school years were good. They were good! And it was not like the last, what, ten years of the school where every other year you would have a new principal. And there was no stability, whatsoever, in the school. I mean, the school district just did a– they really effed over the school and the community.*

For the alumni described here, the high school was a piece of their own personal history, associated with positive memories of growing up in Germantown. In spite of the school's recent struggles, its continued existence tied them to that history, a tie that was threatened by the school's closure. Additionally, this resident fingered the school district as responsible for the high school's decline, an evolution she perceived as harm committed also against the community.

It is striking that the prospect of the school's closure caused an outcry within the community in ways that its decline had not. For alumni and older residents, the high school—in its materiality and existence, rather than its current performance as a school—represented a time when Germantown was thriving and embodied an important part of their own personal connection to that story. As a Germantown pastor told me in September 2014:

> *I was born in Germantown. I didn't go to Germantown High, but I understand why it's important to Germantown community. It's a landmark. But as a parent, based on the way the school district is run now, I would not have sent my child to Germantown High. Or Fulton. Or Roosevelt. Because it was– to me it's less than standard. And if I had the means—which this community usually don't have the means to be able to send their child to a charter school or to a private school—but it's still the history of where they came from. [...] So, take away this building, if you will, you know, that's a big deal for them. Even if it wasn't good to them.*

Here, the assertion is made that the school represents a tie to place that is bound up with a historical sense of belonging: *"It's the history of where they came from."* Even if it did not serve the community as well as it might have, the school's closure was a significant loss for the community ("a big deal for them"). GHS—a massive building with a century-long history in the center of Germantown and bearing the community's name—represented something more than a site of education to many from the neighborhood. The longevity of the school's relationship with the community is represented as helping to tie individuals and families to place, symbolizing and legitimating their belonging in Germantown.

In West Philadelphia, the urban renewal that razed the Bottom during the 1960s was invoked in the school closure debate by stakeholders protesting the recommended closure of UCHS, which was built in conjunction with the urban renewal development and opened its doors in 1971. In protesting its closure, stakeholders recalled the local

community's efforts to gain access to the school, which had originally been developed to be a magnet science program but was opened to neighborhood students following local protest. They tied the closure recommendation to past and ongoing revitalization efforts on the part of Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), explicitly constructing a parallel between the razing of the Bottom for the purposes of attracting middle class residents in the 1960s and the proposed ending of the high school that they had fought to access. In this way, they invoked historicized constructions of place that carried both the marks of accumulated injustices and the memories of the community's resistance.

As described in the alternative proposal for UCHS submitted to the District in January 2013 by a group of school stakeholders:

> *[I]n the 1960s and 1970s, members of the West Philadelphia community had to fight to access the high quality educational opportunities at the then-new UCHS, a project of Penn, Drexel, and the University City Science Center, that caused historical mistrust of these institutions by the community.*

This statement constitutes a historicizing (and also a bounding) of place, situating the "West Philadelphia community" as needing to fight to access a resource developed by the universities and identifying an ongoing "mistrust" with its roots in that experience. Doing so connected the closure debate to a history of displacement and contested visions of place—and to whom it should belong.

This history was reiterated by a UCHS teacher at one of the SRC's formal hearings on the school closure recommendations in February 2013:

> *From inception, University City High School was not meant to inhabit the African American community also known as the Black Bottom. Through resilience and [...] dedication community leaders were able to reverse the original purpose of the construction of the building. University City High School was founded under the premise that it would be a math and science magnet school so that professors at the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University could have their children attend the institution. Now, 41 years later we are facing the same issues.*

This teacher invoked historicized productions of place to tie the recommended closure of UCHS to historical conflicts between the community and the universities, explicitly drawing a parallel to the present and connecting the present dispute to a past injustice. However, he described the school as representing a victory the community had won, in which they transformed the building's original purpose and gained access for students from the community. In this statement, he also suggests racial and class undertones to the conflict, using a historical place name and explicitly associating that place name with a racially defined community. He suggested a class differentiation by characterizing the school's original intent as a resource for professors and their families. The speaker argued that the school was opened as part of an effort to make the neighborhood more attractive to middle class families and suggested that it was now being closed as part of a process with similar objectives ("41 years later we are facing the same issues").

In Fairhill, the representation by stakeholders of the Fairhill School as a hub with ties to multiple generations of neighborhood families constituted a historicization of place, linking family histories in the neighborhood to their relationships with the school. In an October 2014 interview, a former Fairhill teacher recalled conversations with residents in January 2013 about the recommended school closure: *"Many of them had stated, you know, "I attended that school. My children attended. My grandchildren are now attending." So it goes back to that family. That kind of legacy idea."* Here this teacher framed the school's value as arising from its historical connection to families in the neighborhood over generations ("I attended … my children attended … my grandchildren are now attending"). In this sense, the school was depicted, quite literally, as an inheritance received by younger generations of Fairhill families (a "legacy").

A Fairhill School parent speaking at a community meeting at Edison High School in January 2013 likewise emphasized the school's trans-generational connections to the community, opening her remarks by identifying herself as a former student of Fairhill School:

> *I'm a single parent. I'm representing Fairhill School. I went to Fairhill over 40 years ago. And, my son is an A-B student. I'm there for him. I'm there for the school. And you look and you see the other school that is already torn down and here it is you want to close down another school? We live in North Philly. […] [My son] needs to be in this school and I'm praying that you keep this school open.*

This parent positions herself not only as a resident and a parent, but also as somebody who attended Fairhill as a child more than 40 years prior. By invoking her own life experience in North Philadelphia and with Fairhill School, she connects the school to a historicized production of place, one that, through the arc of her life, transcends the present and legitimates the importance of the school for the community.

The familial sense of loss Fairhill stakeholders felt was given physical expression by a group of students working with a local artist and educator in August 2013, after Fairhill School closed its doors for the last time. Outside the front door of the school they built a memorial to the school, the way they might have for somebody who had been killed by gun violence. The artist described the memorial to me in an August 2014 interview:

> *The school closed and then I was running a summer camp. And a lot of my kids from Fairhill were in the summer camp. […] And, it came up in conversation all the time. Like, "Can you believe they closed the school?" "I miss the school." "It's not right." "It seems like it just happened so quickly." And I could tell there was like some unresolved feelings. So, one of the students threw out the idea, like, "Oh, we should build a memorial." You know, like when somebody gets shot, they build a memorial. So, we decided to do it. And we put out a call to parents and neighbors to bring flowers and stuffed animals and candles and we all just met up at the school and built this memorial. It was a really kind of solemn occasion.*

After we built the thing we just kind of stood there and looked at it, [laughs] *you know. Some people were moved to like say some words about Fairhill School. And the thing– I was afraid I would like come back the next day and it would have been pushed over. [...] But people kept lighting the candles and bringing more stuff. It kept growing and growing for weeks after that.*

The community's participation in this memorialization of the school—literally, an act of remembering—testified to the relationships and intergenerational sense of family that Fairhill parents, teachers and students experienced through their engagement with the school. It also constituted a production of place, an enactment that made visible a longstanding claim to the now-closed institution and reinforced the sense of placed identity held by the community that it had served.

7.4   Politicizing place

Politicizing place means bringing identifications of place to bear in the service of a political interest. It means leveraging the relationships, ideas, and meanings associated with place toward accomplishing a political objective. While, in a fundamental sense, all assertions about place are political, here I identify the explicit use of place and its production to forward political arguments. References to place in this section in many cases reflect the bounding or historicizing of place; what is significant is that local identifications of place were leveraged in a broader political forum on behalf of a place-rooted group of people. That is, in the school closure debate, neighborhood stakeholders used understandings of place history and identity—sociospatial imaginaries (Martin, 2003a)—to situate the closure debate within the context of local neighborhoods and their ongoing struggles.

In spite of maintenance backlogs, under-enrollment, and poor academic performance at UCHS, stakeholders understood it to be—and leveraged it as—a physical

and institutional representation of the Mantua community's fight to resist displacement. In protesting the District's recommendation, they tied the school to place history, framing its closure as an assault on their community that was directly connected to (1) the razing of the Bottom in the 1960s and (2) the gains achieved in accessing the high school when it opened in the early 1970s. For example, at a January 2013 community meeting held at UCHS, a local pastor framed for Superintendent Hite the history of the community's relationship to the school, arguing that the school's potential closure must be understood in the context of the history of the neighborhood's decades-long efforts to resist displacement and to access quality education:

> *The reason why this building is here, Dr. Hite. Because my mother, […] in 1971, said that we must have a building to educate the students that reside in this neighborhood, which they call Mantua and the Bottom. This school, right here, was built in cooperation with the University of Pennsylvania. It was first established so that the University of Pennsylvania employees, professors, and other individuals would have a place to send their children. That's why this school was built! […] When you hear University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University wanting to take over this building, they've been wanting to do it since 1971. And we can't let it happen!*

This speaker centered her remarks around the school building, using the sense of permanence its physicality conveyed—an awareness strengthened by the meeting's location—to situate the school within a generation-spanning political struggle between the neighborhood and the universities. She identified the school building as a place of contestation between us and them (*they* want to take it over; *we* can't let it happen). Furthermore, by identifying "this neighborhood" in the present tense as "the Bottom," she inserted into the debate a place-identification that preceded the urban renewal development and that has been replaced by the name "University City" in most

representations of the area, drawing on the longer history of "the Bottom" to legitimize the community's claim to the school in the present.

In protesting the recommended closure of UCHS, stakeholders invoked a sociospatial imaginary rooted in the idea of a community engaged in ongoing political struggle with Drexel and Penn. Furthermore, they tied the closure debate to the urban renewal project through which the school was created and the memories of the neighborhood that was razed through that process. In recalling the loss of the Bottom and the community's victory in gaining access to UCHS when it opened, stakeholders wove together two aspects of the community's larger political struggle: the fight against displacement and their demands for adequate educational opportunities.

During the school closure debate, some supporters of Fairhill School invoked the lengthy history of the school's relationships with local families as grounds for keeping the school open. In so doing, they leveraged relationally bounded and historicized productions of place to make their case. Some pointed to the multigenerational relationships that tied the school to the neighborhood. For example, speaking at the City Council Education Committee's February 2013 hearing on the recommended school closures, a Fairhill teacher said:

> *Since 1887, residents of the Fairhill section of the City have had the opportunity to attend our school. Our students' parents and grandparents have the proud honor of saying that they went to Fairhill, and in some cases, even great-grandparents. Now the school and students I've grown to know and love, as well as 126 years of history, are being threatened with the possibility of closing and coming to an end.*

These comments draw on the school's 126-year-long history in the neighborhood to emphasize its historical value to the community. Notably, this teacher rooted that history in the experiences of neighborhood families with Fairhill School across two, three, and in

some cases, four, generations, leveraging a multigenerational history of dwelling in the neighborhood in defense of an argument against the proposed closure.

In public testimony during the closure debate, others invoked familial language in protesting the school's closure, emphasizing the strong relationships that held the school together and rooting opposition to the closing in the ideal of family. In this way, they characterized the school as a critical node for children in the neighborhood that would be lost were the school to close, bringing a familial bounding of place into the political arena. At the community meeting held in their region of the city in January 2013, two of the three Fairhill students who spoke situated themselves explicitly as members of a "family" threatened by the school's closure. In a particularly heartbreaking plea, one Fairhill student implored the District to recognize how hard they were working to bring up their test scores:

> *Well, I would like for all the students in Fairhill—otherwise my family—to please rise. […] Basically, what I'm trying to say is here, y'all closing the school because our PSSA scores is not right, all that stuff, but we is trying to fix it. Right now, we're reading during lunch. This is our free time. We're reading during lunch. We have books on the end of our table. Take it out and we read it! To save our school. We doing everything that's possible to save this school and for y'all to close it down, it ain't right.* [Starts crying.] *It ain't right at all. We try our best. We really do. As hard as we can. […] Just to show y'all, that we want to bring our PSSA scores up. To show you that we want to keep that school. That is family. Nothing can break family apart. Family over everything.*

This student positioned herself explicitly as a member of the Fairhill "family," in so doing bounding the school and the neighborhood in social space in order to support her argument that Fairhill School should not be closed. She described her Fairhill family as working together in the face of an external threat ("y'all closing the school … we is trying to fix it") and emphasized the strength of the relationships that would hold the school together ("nothing can break family apart").

When GHS was slated for closure, alumni and older residents protesting the recommendation framed the school in terms of its history in the neighborhood. In this way, they tied the school to place for the purpose of convincing the SDP to keep it open, constructing the high school as an essential piece of the sociospatial imaginary that is Germantown. That is, they leveraged bounded and historicized productions of place in opposition to the high school's closure. For example, at a community meeting in December 2012, a representative from the Germantown Alumni Association pointed to the school's history in the neighborhood in arguing that it should not be closed, highlighting the community's long-standing support of the school:

> *I hear you—the school district—say that you're concerned about education and academic programs. Well, I'm a little confused, because Germantown High School seems to be the target of everyone's list every time the school district wants to make a move. Now, Germantown High School will be celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2014. Germantown High School is a landmark of the community. [...] Germantown has had its problems in the past, but we've come a long way. We've come to the school district and fought for Germantown for years.*

In this statement, the speaker suggests the bounding of Germantown as a place through the use of "we" language and the framing of a sense of opposition and external threat ("the target of everyone's list"). The speaker also asserts a claim to the institution whose legitimacy rests on the longevity of the school's presence in the community, its status as a landmark. At a January 2013 community meeting at Martin Luther King High School, a Germantown stakeholder echoed this sentiment:

> *Germantown High School has been a community pillar for 98 years. And as such, community reigns supreme. And I would hope that those that make the final decisions should use common sense and save Germantown High School. Let common sense prevail!*

Here the school is framed as a critical support ("a pillar") for the local community, and again its value is tied to the length of time the school has played this role for the

neighborhood. In protesting the high school's closure, both of these stakeholders situated the school as an essential and valued component of place. By tying GHS to the neighborhood's history in order to protest the school's closure, Germantown stakeholders leveraged in political debate a production of place that constituted Germantown as a singular community with a long history, framed the school as an important part of that community over many years, and asserted their claims to the school based on the legitimacy that the length of that history entailed.

7.5   Discussion

The production of place is deeply political and entails constructions of meaning and belonging, delineating the significance of place and giving shape to the community to whom it belongs. In Germantown, Fairhill, and Mantua, stakeholders engaged in the bounding, historicizing, and politicizing of place through their protest of school closures. In all three neighborhoods, stakeholders invoked place in ways that posited coherent and longstanding communities that had mobilized in response to the external threat posed by the District's actions. In doing so, they sought to bolster the political clout of their contention that their schools should not close. Clearly, none of these three neighborhoods—nor any place—are unified, unchanging entities. Rather, they are ongoing, evolving, and negotiated productions. Leveraging productions of place that are rooted in unified, bounded, and historicized sociospatial imaginaries at once creates and legitimates a placed rhetorical space around which to mobilize a neighborhood (Martin, 2003a, 2003b).

In the school closure debate in Philadelphia, communities' leveraging of place rooted debates about the closure of individual schools in the local political contexts in

which the schools operated and in which their closures would reverberate. For communities that identify with local schools, and for whom local schools carry place-significance, the closure of a school constitutes the erosion of a social and institutional tether tying the community to place and legitimating their claim to the neighborhood (Witten et al., 2003, 2007). An erosion of this sort is especially significant for communities whose political and economic position within the city has been marginalized by systems of race and class exclusion, manifested in neighborhood disinvestment, job loss, and redevelopment efforts that portend displacement (Johnson, 2013; Lipman & Haines, 2007). For poor and African American communities in Philadelphia, the closure of public schools extends a long history of discriminatory investment and disinvestment decisions. Stakeholders leveraged this place history to contest the closures and their implications for local communities.

Invoking place by interweaving schools with local communities and their histories constituted an expansion of the framework represented in the metrics guiding the District's closure process—academic performance, building utilization, building quality, and operation costs—a set of metrics notably lacking in considerations of either place or history. In explaining the recommendations to close GHS and UCHS at community meetings in January 2013, the District pointed to low academic performance (both high schools were in Corrective Action II, Pennsylvania's lowest tier of performance under federally mandated guidelines), low building utilization (30% at GHS and 19% at UCHS), and declining enrollments (a loss of approximately 55% at GHS and approximately 70% at UCHS over the preceding seven years). Fairhill was also in Corrective Action II, although utilization and enrollment trends were less stark (60%

utilization; enrollment decline of approximately 20% over seven years). By situating

schools in narratives of place history, stakeholders highlighted the ways that historical

disinvestment in both the neighborhood and the school have driven inequities in these

metrics. That is, because they do not adequately take into account historical and structural

factors *shaping* school performance, enrollment, and building condition, the District's

metrics were positioned to reproduce existing structural inequalities. Additionally, by

invoking place, stakeholders highlighted aspects of the schools' significance that were

not considered in the District's metrics.

This chapter shows the protest of school closures to be a process through which

communities articulate, perform, and reproduce understandings of who they are, where

they belong, and how they are situated vis-à-vis those entities threatening the community.

In doing so, this analysis embeds community protests of school closures within local

social, political, and economic contexts, with implications for place identity and

belonging. This analysis also illuminates the ways local protests of school closures

constitute productions of place, and as such, represent claims not only to the school but to

the neighborhood as well.

These findings make clear how stakeholders leveraged place to unmask histories

of marginalization, disinvestment, and displacement. By rooting school closure processes

within the particular histories of the neighborhoods where schools were slated for

closure, stakeholders revealed the consequences of closures to be continuations of

historic place-based inequities. Additionally, this research brings to light the roles schools

can play in rooting and legitimating communities' claims to the places where they have

lived. As institutions intimately intertwined with the lives of local communities over

generations, schools can come to signify communities' own histories in place and their ongoing claims to their neighborhoods. These claims, however, can be undermined by transitions to choice-based public education. Decontextualizing schools by administering public education as a market of seats constitutes the severing of ties between communities, local schools, and the neighborhoods they have shared.

While no school should be considered "uncloseable," the policy frameworks guiding the mass school closings that have accompanied marketized school reform in many cities should incorporate a greater acknowledgement of the roles neighborhood schools play in place-making and the constitution of urban communities. School closures can erode or undermine community struggles in place—particularly for those communities that have borne the costs of underfunded schools for decades. School closure decisions have broad implications for communities that extend beyond narrow considerations of school administration, implications that should be taken into account by school boards and school district administrations as they navigate the closure of public schools.

While there is a tension in this discussion between, on the one hand, the inability of underfunded schools to educate children and, on the other hand, their significance for local communities across social, political, and economic dimensions, when we fail to recognize the consequences of closure across these dimensions—and when closures disproportionately occur in poor communities of color—we mask one of the ways that choice-based school reforms reproduce historical injustices and can weaken communities' ties to the places they call home.

8 Potential and constraint: Schools and community development

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the ways that neighborhood stakeholders, protesting the closure of local schools, situated the closure debate within arenas of community development theory and practice. I argue that school closures and the larger marketization of public education that they often reflect should be engaged by planning scholars and practitioners as a community development issue. Empirically, I explore the ways that neighborhood stakeholders situated schools slated for closure within the social, institutional, economic, and environmental domains of their neighborhoods in protesting and making sense of school closures in Philadelphia in 2013. This analysis points to the multidimensional ways that schools intersect with local communities and reveals a clear association by stakeholders of schools with issues that frame and motivate community development practice.

Community development in the United States encompasses a wide array of efforts to improve places and communities at a local scale. Though in recent decades often associated with efforts to build affordable housing, community development planners and practitioners work across many domains, spanning the social, institutional, economic, and environmental dimensions of place.

1. Community development efforts within the social domain focus on the strength and character of the relationships that connect people to each other within a neighborhood (Sampson, 2012b).

2. Community development within the institutional domain can be both inward- and outward-focused. Local organizations can serve as a resource for building community connections and mediating between diverse groups (Ferman & Kaylor, 2001; Hum, 2010). They can also play key roles in amplifying political voice and facilitating access to resources outside the community (Marwell, 2007; Small, 2006).

3. Community developers working within the economic domain conceptualize the neighborhood in terms of economic processes and work to cultivate local economic growth and to leverage resources and investment into the neighborhood (Boothroyd & Davis, 1993; Wiewel, Teitz, & Giloth, 2012).

4. Community development initiatives focused on the environmental domain are concerned with how the local built and natural environments affect life for local residents (Anguelovski, 2013b; Harwood, 2003).

I delineate these four domains of place-based action, not to be a comprehensive typology that covers all community development work, but rather to serve as a lens through which to consider the ways neighborhood stakeholders protesting school closures positioned the school closure debate within the sphere of community development practice.

Given the breadth of community development practice and the recognition within the field of the ways diverse processes intersect to shape the lives of local residents for better or for worse, it is surprising that scholarly research on community development has largely ignored the significance of public schools and marketized school reform for local communities. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Baum, 2003; Silverman, 2014; Vincent, 2014), planning scholars have not engaged the roles schools play in

neighborhoods or the implications of policy changes that have dramatically altered the structure and governance of public education in the United States over the past two decades.

Neighborhood public schools constitute key pieces of the public infrastructure of a city, infrastructure whose place-rootedness has significant implications for local communities (Chung, 2002; Vincent, 2006; Warren, 2005). Neighborhood schools are pieces of a larger system tasked with providing educational opportunities to children in their home communities: physical and institutional infrastructure that, in places like Philadelphia, has suffered from underfunding and a diversion of resources toward charter school expansion. Such schools, however, are also neighborhood institutions, integrated within the fabric of local communities, and their closure has multidimensional implications for the places where they are located. The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) framed the closure debate in 2013 primarily in terms of fiscal savings and educational effectiveness. That stakeholders highlighted the broader implications of closures for their neighborhoods attests to the many ways schools are integrated into local neighborhoods.

In this chapter, I explore how stakeholders situated schools slated for closure within the four arenas of community development outlined above. I find that:

1. Within the social domain, stakeholders framed schools as social hubs, sources of social support for the community, and places that reinforce—or transcend—neighborhood turf boundaries.

2. Within the institutional domain, stakeholders protested the loss of a neighborhood organization in places where there are few.

3. Within the economic domain, stakeholders decried the spillover effects of a closure on local businesses and real estate values, as well as tying schools to neighborhood development trajectories.

4. Within the environmental domain, stakeholders denounced the creation of another large, vacant building in their neighborhood and the potential of such buildings to be redeveloped for purposes not in the community's interest.

The chief implications of this analysis are two-fold. First, these findings suggest that school closure processes should more adequately take into account the consequences of closures for neighborhoods, incorporating into closure decisions an awareness of the neighborhoods that will be most affected and potentially suggesting ways to mitigate disproportionate impacts of closures on struggling communities. Second, the connections between schools and community development concerns that these findings outline suggest the importance of considering the potential for community development objectives inherent within an infrastructure of publicly owned neighborhood schools. In an era when this infrastructure is being dismantled in many large U.S. cities, a research agenda probing these possibilities is sorely needed within planning and community development scholarship.

8.2 Social domain: Social hubs and sources of support

Stakeholders wove schools into neighborhood social landscapes by celebrating a school's role as a hub of local relational networks, a space in which relationships are built, supported, and maintained over multiple generations. In protesting the proposed closure of Cooke School at a January 2013 community meeting, a parent and former student attested:

There is a great staff [at Cooke] that not only taught me, my father, and my son, as well as other family members that we have, because this school was a staple of our community for as long as I can remember.

In protesting the school's closure, this parent framed its value in terms of what it means to the neighborhood ("a staple of our community"). She further suggested that the school's history in the neighborhood deepens its value as a node of community relationships, as new generations of students reinforce the family ties first laid down when their parents or grandparents attended the school.

Others recounted the moves teachers or families made into neighborhoods in order to be closer to school-based social networks. For example, a former Germantown High School (GHS) teacher told me in a July 2014 interview that many GHS staff—including herself—moved to the Germantown neighborhood after they got jobs at the school. She said that once people started teaching at GHS, they tended not to leave, suggesting the stability fostered by local school networks.[1] Speaking at a community meeting in January 2013, a GHS alumna struck a similar chord in describing the ways families move into neighborhoods to connect with the networks tied to local schools:

People have sold and moved their businesses and jobs to move around the schools, because they can't afford to get a car. […] They move close to these schools to be close to parents, teachers they know, and their relatives go to these feeder schools. You are breaking up families; you're breaking up the neighborhood. And this expense needs to be shared amongst the people and we need a moratorium.

This speaker's comment is notable for her framing of the social consequence of breaking up neighborhood relational networks in terms of an expense. Cost saving was the District's primary rationale for closing schools. The expressed goal was to redirect facility operations and maintenance savings into improving the quality of education at the

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[1] This interview was not recorded and thus I do not have direct quotes.

remaining schools. Not included in these calculations, this speaker suggests, is the cost of fractured social networks borne by communities in which schools are closed.

Stakeholders also framed the loss of neighborhood schools as the loss of a source of support for families struggling to meet their own social needs. As a former school administrator expressed to me in a May 2015 interview:

> *They took away from that community—with the closing of that school—an informal social service agency—an informal social service place where parents could go and talk to people who understood them. Who, through their children, wanted to help them. [...] It's gone! And it's replaced by what? A vacant building.*

For this administrator, the now-closed school had been a source of assistance for local families in ways that extended beyond the day-to-day education of children. She described the school as a place where parents could be heard and understood.

The capacity of schools to provide personal support was driven home by a Kinsey School parent at a December 2012 community meeting, who recounted how the school had sustained her and her family in the wake of personal tragedy:

> *I am a parent of John L. Kinsey. And I'm also a volunteer. I graduated from Kinsey. Three of my children have already graduated from Kinsey. I have two more boys. In 2005, my husband was murdered. These teachers took care of me and my kids. We are a family. Y'all tearing up families. You know, we love these kids. I volunteer there because I want to give back because they did so much for me.*

This parent described the multiple points of connection she has, and has had, with the school: alumna, volunteer, and parent of five current or former Kinsey students. She reported how Kinsey teachers were a source of support, not only for her children, but also for herself. ("these teachers took care of me and my kids"). Drawing on the metaphor of the school as family, she conveyed the sense of a place of loyalty and mutual support.

The breadth of support schools can provide for parents was echoed by a former Fairhill teacher in an October 2014 interview:

> *I believe that Fairhill played a large role for those families whose students were attending. It wasn't just a neighborhood school; it was also like a family school. We had some staff members that also went beyond the call of duty. Tried to help the families more in their personal settings. Not just educating their students. It was also a vehicle for parents to find assistance in areas where they felt they had no resources—nowhere to go—to get assistance for their child. Their child was having medical or mental ill necessities, they could come to the school and the school can– was able to steer them where to get that help.*

Also using the metaphor of family, this teacher described how staff members worked to help families who were wrestling with a broader scope of issues that extended beyond— though undoubtedly spilled into—the student's performance in the classroom. Notably, she also represented the school as a source of referrals to other resources. In neighborhoods like Fairhill, with many non-native English speakers, the possibility of being pointed toward help by a trusted neighborhood organization can be particularly important.

In an October 2014 interview, another former Fairhill teacher reflected on the significance of the school's closure, emphasizing the broader dimensions of support that neighborhood families received from the school:

> RG: *As you think about the Fairhill neighborhood, what is the impact of losing Fairhill School? […] Does it matter, that the school's closed? […]*
>
> Rsp: *I think it does matter. I think it does matter that the school is closed. I think that it was a place that people trusted. I think it was a place that people would go to for support beyond "you're teaching my child." It was a place that fostered, you know, just, kind of a family—as I use that word—a family type environment.*

This teacher pointed to the school's value as a place of social connection where people felt safe ("a place that people trusted"). He described the school, also, as a source of support for parents and families. In a longer reflection that followed this comment, he

noted that the school's role as a social hub had diminished in recent years. Some of this he attributed to the loss of resources and programs at the school, and some of it he attributed to generational changes in the neighborhood, changes in the values and priorities of local families.

On the flip side of the benefits of the integration of neighborhood schools with local communities—and reflecting the inclusion/exclusion tension inherent in local social networks—are the ways territorial identifications of place can become associated with school location and attendance. During the closure debate, some stakeholders expressed concern about the turf lines that would need to be crossed by students relocated to schools in different neighborhoods. For example, in public testimony at a January 2013 community meeting at Martin Luther King High School, a GHS staff member warned:

> *If those students coming from Germantown have to cross territories here to King, we all know. There's teen gangs. There's teen violence. There's gun violence. So, we're talking about teens coming across territories that they don't normally come across. And that is a threat. So, not only as a parent am I going to be concerned about other children crossing territories that I'm going to be worried about their safety.*

In this testimony, the speaker situated the impact of closures within the neighborhood social domain. However, the emphasis is not on the benefits of a school for the neighborhood, but rather on how youth turf boundaries can be shaped by, or associated with, the geographies of school attendance. Neighborhood place identifications may often be rooted in processes of exclusion (England, 2008)—processes reflected in the bounding dimension of the production of place—and thus it may not be surprising that reorganizing school communities and constituencies might create friction within neighborhood social domains. However, as a former Fairhill staff member noted in an

August 2014 interview, schools can also be resources for local communities as neutral spaces that span the social cleavages within the neighborhood:

> Rsp: *That little neighborhood, that Fairhill neighborhood is an interesting mix, you know? Like, over where Julia de Burgos is, it's really a Puerto Rican neighborhood. It's like, what, three blocks away. But the make up of [Julia de Burgos School] is maybe 75% Latino, or something like that. And then Hartranft [School] is right here, and that's like, 80% African American, maybe, and 20% Latino. But Fairhill [School] was like really a mix, you know. And it was– It was kind of a comfortable mix, I felt. But I've talked with students and teachers, like [one] who works at Hartranft says that the Latino students are made to feel like this isn't their place, you know? Like, they feel like outsiders. Even though it's, like, so close. And then African American students at Julia de Burgos sometimes feel like this is like a Spanish school, you know? So that's another unforeseen outcome.*

> RG: *[…] The space of Fairhill Elementary [was] sort of a neutral– In terms of the sense of turf that these two communities have, this was sort of a shared space.*

> Rsp: *Right.*

Here the loss of the Fairhill School was framed as the loss of a shared space. As this teacher described, while racial and cultural turf identifications can map onto even the microgeographies within neighborhoods, schools have the potential to cultivate spaces of shared belonging.

By lifting out the role schools play as (1) hubs of local relational networks, (2) sources of personal and social support for local families, and (3) embodiments of—or bridges across—the turf boundaries that exist between and within neighborhoods, stakeholders emphasized the implications of school closures for the broader social domain of their neighborhoods. In doing so, they reframed the closure debate around issues that have been the focus of planning and community development research and practice—in particular, the fostering of social capital, the cultivation of local relational networks, and the implications of relational ties for social welfare (e.g., Briggs, 1998; Ganapati, 2008; Putnam et al., 2004; Saegert et al., 2001).

8.3   Institutional domain: Community organizations in places where there are few

In responding to the proposed or completed closure of a neighborhood school, some stakeholders highlighted the role schools played as neighborhood organizations in places with few such resources. Neighborhood organizations are here conceptualized broadly as organizations with a physical presence in a neighborhood and that primarily serve local residents. These are organizations where community members intersect to receive public services (e.g., libraries, schools, health clinics), purchase goods or services (e.g., grocery stores, barber shops, childcare centers), or come together for recreation, worship, or the pursuit of a social or political objective (e.g., recreation centers, churches, synagogues, civic associations, community development corporations) (Small, 2006). By identifying the value of a school *as* a neighborhood organization, stakeholders pointed to the implications of a school closure within the local institutional domain. For example, as a staff member at a small nonprofit that provided community programming in the Fairhill neighborhood told me in a June 2014 interview:

> *The schools are really the strongest institutions. We don't have a CDC in our neighborhood. It was so beaten down. It's really like a former war zone. You know, if you could get out, you did get out. So, the schools are the strongest institutions. So, that's who we work with mostly.*

A similar argument was made by an elder from a church partner of Cooke Elementary School at a community meeting in January 2013. This stakeholder exhorted Superintendent Hite to recognize the historic role the school has played as an institution in the community:

> *In our communities, there are three positive and solid institutions. The church, the school, and the library. Mr. Hite, Cooke has been a vital force in the community. We have no idea, if Cooke is closed, the kind of devastation it will have on the lives– the quality of life in the community and in the life of our children.*

Both of these stakeholders, each of them rooted in a local organization, described the importance of schools for the neighborhood's institutional landscape, characterizing the school as a resource for the community more broadly.

At a formal hearing the School Reform Commission (SRC) held on the proposed closures in February 2013, a stakeholder representing a Germantown church situated the recommended closure of three Germantown schools in the context of a neighborhood that had experienced the closure of multiple large institutions:

> *Our neighborhood has experienced a series of shut downs of major institutions and buildings recently, including the YWCA on Germantown Avenue. If all three of these schools are shut down, the neighborhood would be deprived of anchor institutions that have stabilized this neighborhood over the years.*

In her statement, this stakeholder pointed to the capacity of larger institutions to play a stabilizing role for neighborhoods. By situating the schools alongside other recently closed institutions in the neighborhood, she emphasized the compounding effect closures could have for the community.

For these stakeholders, local schools represented sources of stability and organizational capacity in neighborhoods that have witnessed decades of disinvestment. Furthermore, as a Germantown pastor asserted to me in a September 2014 interview, institutional exodus from a neighborhood can have consequences for a community's psyche and identity: *"I think the most influential [effect on this community of having the school closed] is identity. It's almost as though the community is being stripped of who they are, because institutions are leaving."* A founder and board chairman of two charter schools articulated a similar sentiment at the February 2013 hearing on school closures held by the City Council Education Committee:

And I believe people have to understand that in Philadelphia, many, many neighborhoods are really defined by their school. […] The school is the central point of the neighborhood, and I feel that to close the schools, which is the center of the neighborhood, […] it almost goes to the death of the neighborhood. It changes the identity. People live in their neighborhood. I just think it's heart wrenching.

In both of these comments, the speakers pointed to the central role schools play in anchoring a sense of local identity and the blow that the closure of an organization such as a school can have on the community's self-understanding.

The stakeholders whose words I have reported here called on the District to recognize the value that schools represent as organizations situated in and serving local neighborhoods, emphasizing in particular the stabilizing role they have played. In this way, they aligned their protest of a school's closure with a literature that has theorized the importance of neighborhood organizations for local communities and community development efforts, including the roles organizations can play as "a vehicle through which communities act" (Baum, 1999, p. 188), as advocates on behalf of neighborhood interests (Elwood, 2006; Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990), and as brokers capable of accessing resources outside the neighborhood (Marwell, 2007; Small, 2006).

8.4   Economic domain: Local businesses and development trajectories

Some stakeholders framed school closures in terms of their intersection with the neighborhood economic landscape, specifically highlighting the implications of closures for local businesses, for real estate values, and for neighborhood redevelopment trajectories.

A former Fulton School teacher told me in a July 2014 interview that businesses along Germantown Avenue were concerned about losing foot traffic if Fulton and GHS closed. She reported that some businesses had put signs in their windows supporting the

schools. This concern was relayed to me also by a local politician in September 2014, who described the concerns expressed by local business owners:

> *It was an economic downturn [to have the schools close]. You know, I was having a series of meetings and talking to businesses. And, I mean, a few businesses told me outright, "If Germantown [High School] closed, I'm going to have to close my business." And actually, we did. There were some businesses that closed […] along Germantown Avenue.*

A Germantown pastor I interviewed in September 2014 echoed this account. Reflecting on the effect of two closed schools, he emphasized the impact on local businesses:

> *[The closures caused] economic distress for the small mom and pop type shops […] that were patronized by the schools, the students, the community. I mean, there was a Jamaican restaurant right on Germantown [Avenue]. […] That place is not there anymore. […] There's a barbershop down here. They're relocating because they don't have the foot traffic.*

For all three of these stakeholders, GHS and Fulton's closure needed to be understood as having had negative consequences for neighborhood businesses. They emphasized the ways school closures change daytime patterns of foot traffic and retail consumption as students and teachers end up in schools in other neighborhoods, supporting businesses nearby those schools instead.

Others expressed concern that shuttered buildings would sit vacant for years to come, contributing to neighborhood blight and depressing local development trajectories. For example, a parent and retired teacher speaking at a community meeting in January 2013 said:

> *Every neighborhood I go to says the same thing: "This is going to be a blight on our city. We're going to have abandoned buildings, like Ada Lewis." You can't just say, "Don't worry, somebody's going to buy 'em and make 'em into condos." Ada Lewis has been sitting there for years.*

Here, this stakeholder argued that closing a school and putting the building on the market (1) may not bring the revenue the District hoped it would and (2) may remain a problem for the local community for some time to come ("this is going to be a blight on our city").

At the City Council Education Committee's February 2013 hearing on the recommended closures, a representative from the union representing District blue-collar employees noted the many former school buildings around the city that had yet to be sold and raised concerns that the new closures would only exacerbate that oversupply, depressing home values for homeowners living close to shuttered school buildings:

> *We have 16 shuttered buildings right now, and they've been on the market for a while and they don't seem to be able to sell them. I understand six of those buildings are under contract right now, but the price that they're getting for these buildings are well under market value. If we're going to close 37 schools and we have trouble selling 16, what is going to happen in these communities down the road? It's going to shutter communities. People will not be able to live in them. They will not be able to sell their houses, and it's just unacceptable that we're allowing our children to be moved to different areas when we could find viable solutions to schools here in the City.*

This position was echoed at the same hearing by the Philadelphia City controller, who noted that the school buildings would be hard to sell and that the District did not have the money to tear them down. He further argued that property values would be hurt, citing a study conducted by the City that found a $2,000 property value penalty for homes near closed school buildings:

> *We have had experience in Philadelphia with vandalism and destruction of vacant school buildings. We had a notorious situation with the fire at the former Edison School. Prior to that, there were estimates that it would take $5 million to demolish the school. The school should have been demolished. Demolition is probably going to in fact be the remedy indicated in most of these schools. The School District doesn't have the money to do it, so the properties are going to become eyesores and become problems for the most part for the neighborhood. Finally, [City of Philadelphia Policy Director] Dr. Hornstein and our office developed a schedule that has not been referred to earlier, and that is the blight effect of the closure of a school on neighborhoods. Essentially he has determined*

that people who live in neighborhoods where the school has been shuttered are on average going to lose about $2,000 each on the value of their property. It basically redlines the neighborhood and identifies it as a dying neighborhood.

Both of these speakers endeavored to situate school closures within the realities of neighborhood real estate markets, framing the buildings as economic liabilities for local homeowners—liabilities that would remain in neighborhoods and that the District did not have the money to remove. They asserted a direct economic impact on neighborhood home values, an explicitly local consequence of closures in the economic domain. Notably, the City controller also likened school closures to redlining in the mortgage lending industry, targeted disinvestment that would mark the community as a neighborhood in decline.

Invoking a similar line of place-rooted economic arguments, Drexel University weighed in on the closure debate in support of McMichael, a school in the Mantua neighborhood that it had, in effect, adopted. The story of Drexel's involvement with McMichael highlights the contrasting positionality and interests of two very different sets of neighborhood stakeholders: the university and its partners, on the one hand, and the Mantua community, on the other. Drexel's efforts to support neighborhood economic revitalization through partnership with local schools (among other strategies) reflect the connections between schools and economic landscapes raised above. In this case, however, support for keeping the school open has complex implications for neighborhood residents.

By fall 2012, when McMichael appeared on the closure list, Drexel had already invested significant resources in the school as part of a larger effort at neighborhood revitalization and the school had been identified as a cornerstone of the *We Are Mantua!*

(*WAM!)* Choice Neighborhoods planning process (see Chapter 6). Drexel and its partners saw preserving the school as critical to the neighborhood's future, and according to one *WAM!* organizer, had McMichael closed, it would have affected their ability to leverage development resources into the neighborhood. In a July 2014 interview, this organizer told me explicitly that to be able to move forward with the Choice Neighborhoods process, they needed a school. This position was clearly laid out for the District in an alternative proposal submitted by Drexel and its partners in February 2013:

> *[T]he potential closing of McMichael School threatens the plan […] to move forward with a HUD Choice Neighborhoods Implementation submission, the follow up to 18 months of community-based planning that is just now concluding. A HUD Choice Implementation Grant offers up to $30M to address education, employment and housing deficiencies in Mantua. Plans for a 2013 Department of Education's Promise Neighborhood grant submission would be thwarted as well. The grant has the possibility of bringing close to $50M to support McMichael School.*

In this case, Drexel and its partners framed the school's closure in terms of lost development potential, jeopardizing tens of millions of dollars of potential federal investment through the Choice Neighborhoods and Promise Neighborhoods programs.

Despite the benefits of Drexel's activity and advocacy in the neighborhood economic domain, the university's actions created a double bind for the Mantua community. On the one hand, through direct investment, grant writing, and partnership development, Drexel has brought to the neighborhood tremendous resources for community organizing, building civic capacity, and leadership development. The Mantua Civic Association that resulted from the *WAM!* planning process created a central space for community action that had been lacking in the neighborhood for many years, and Drexel's work on behalf of McMichael saved the school from closure and has turned the school around in substantial ways. And yet, on the other hand, Drexel's presence and

involvement is coupled with trajectories of investment and development that threaten to bypass the community itself. A life-long Mantua resident, who has worked for Drexel's office of University and Community Partnerships in recent years as a neighborhood organizer, explained this tension to me in an October 2014 interview, taking a pragmatic stance:

> Rsp: *The fact that Drexel's here– Because this is what I say to the community, for real: at the end of the day, this [Center for Neighborhood Partnerships] didn't have to be here. And stuff [i.e. gentrification] would still be going on. The community changes. It still would be going on. So, the fact that this is here, helps me be hopeful that we will be able to have some impact in the lives of people. Whereas if this was not here, it wouldn't happen at the magnitude that it's happening. That's hopeful. The other hopeful part is, the neighborhood, as a result of We Are Mantua! transformation plan was able to get organized. It doesn't mean that there's [not] some division and some differences. But it brought us together. And we're meeting. And issues are being discussed. And even with the dissenting voices, they get to be heard.*
>
> RG: *[…] And that wasn't happening before.*
>
> Rsp: *No. There was no place to take it.*

This reflection conveys a pragmatic assessment of Drexel's investment in the school and the neighborhood: gentrification would likely be coming to Mantua whether or not Drexel's support for the school and for civic capacity in the neighborhood is there and as a result the neighborhood is better off for having access to these resources.

A longtime Mantua resident and community leader told me in a May 2014 interview that the community appreciates Drexel's efforts and all the resources the university is putting into the school and the neighborhood. Even so, she said that residents are not sure they can trust Drexel and are not sure that the university has their best interests in mind in the longer term. Regarding the University City High School (UCHS) closure, she told me residents fear that once a university gets control of the

UCHS building, they can make it the kind of school that will be attractive for higher-income people moving into the neighborhood.

In a September 2014 interview, the pastor of a local church was explicit in making this connection, framing Drexel's interest in the neighborhood and its schools as part of a redevelopment effort with the ultimate intent of gentrifying the neighborhood. He contended that the university was not being transparent about its objectives for the schools and that the local community was only ever consulted as a formality at the end.

> Rsp: *What's happening to this neighborhood is regentrification. So you have all these people who are coming back into the neighborhood. Well, if I do come back, and I should come back with small kids, where they going to go to school? […] And so, the District, the city, everybody knows what the plans are, you know. The people in the community, they're always the last ones to know what's really happening. And so, when you have the colleges giving their professors, you know, enormous breaks on purchasing of homes if they come back into an urban setting, and so, if those– again, if those people are coming back with young kids, they got to go to school somewhere.*

> RG: *So, […] the understanding is that, the plans that maybe the universities and/or the school district have for some of these schools was to make them more accessible for people moving in from somewhere else, or–*

> Rsp: *Absolutely. And not for the kids that were already here. […] It'll be either a Drexel school or a University of Penn school. More often than not, it's going to be a Drexel school because Drexel is doing a– Oh my God, they are– They are working– Listen. They're working their tails off to implement a plan that University of Pennsylvania […] has already worked for years. So, what you have is, you have the new president at Drexel, less than five years. […] Came from the University of Penn. He knows what Penn did in the neighborhood. He knows how it works. So he brought that plan to Drexel. And they are systematically working that plan. That's why they're so heavily involved in McMichael's. […] So anyway, we fought them tooth and nail and what they did was– they finally decided, we got to close [UCHS]. And we were all saying, that's fine. If you're going to close it, it's closed. Okay. There's no reopening and all old crazy stuff. So that's […] what we were fighting. So, it did close. Okay. Got it. Understand that. So now, as you well know, […] Drexel has bought that property for 25 million dollars. Okay. And they're going to build a school over there. Another 40-something million dollars. […] So, from University City to Drew—all that property over there is going to be housing, retail space, a school. It's supposed to be the new Powel School.*

From this pastor's perspective, Drexel's interest in the schools in and around Mantua was part of a larger strategic effort to revitalize the neighborhood and its schools for the benefit of a gentrifying class of residents. He understood the community to have been marginalized from any decision-making shaping this strategy and the development processes it purportedly seeks to catalyze. The UCHS closure, in this view, was not ever about the UCHS students, but was a veiled strategy of land acquisition to allow the creation of a new school for new residents.

Powel School is an elementary school in Powelton Village, which is located between Drexel and Mantua and has for decades had a higher income profile than Mantua. Along with McMichael, Powel has been the recipient of substantial investment from Drexel. In June 2014, a Drexel administrator confirmed for me the pastor's assertion of a plan to move and expand Powel to a new facility as part of the massive redevelopment of the former-UCHS property. This administrator shed light, also, on the politics that surround the university's investment in both McMichael and Powel:

> RG: *Why McMichael? I mean, why is Drexel working with McMichael?*
>
> Rsp: *I mean, Drexel has a place-based strategy. So, it's in close proximity. That's why. But, Drexel has a priority for a school that's a little closer: Powel School. […] And the political reality is there's no way we would be allowed to just work with Powel. […] And abandon a school that's in greater need. And so if you're really committed to education—public education—than why won't you help both?*

Drexel's primary objective to transform and expand Powel, made explicit in this administrator's comments, has played a part in fueling residents' suspicions that Drexel's long-term vision for the area does not include them and that the university's investments in neighborhood schools are aimed at attracting and benefiting a different class of residents. Both Drexel's support of local schools and the concerns about their objectives

raised by local residents point to the implications of schools and school closure within the local economic domain.

Within neighborhood economic domains, stakeholders framed school closures in terms of their negative impact on local businesses, the depression of neighborhood real estate values, and as catalysts for economic development potential. The health of local businesses, economic consequences and potential redevelopment of vacant properties, and efforts to leverage development monies into a neighborhood—particularly through institutional partnerships—all sit squarely within arenas of community development research and practice (e.g., Baum, 2000; Bendick & Egan, 1993; Glickman & Servon, 2003; Immergluck, 2012).

8.5   Environmental domain: Place impact and the politics of reuse possibilities

School buildings are large structures that are given positions of prominence in many neighborhoods, and some stakeholders pointed to the consequences of their vacancy in protesting a school's closure. For example, at a December 2012 community meeting, a resident from the Fairhill area spelled this out for the District, framing the 2013 closures as the continuation of a pattern of school building abandonment:

> *Okay. I'm here as community. We have Edison– The old Edison High School has been on fire twice that I know of. The building's still sitting there. I understand it was just bought by Save-A-Lot Corporation. We got Roberto Clemente up the street that's been abandoned for years. We also have another one at Tacony and Bridge Street that's been abandoned for years. Squatters are living in both buildings. You're going to close 37 more schools. We're going to have squatters in them buildings too. This is a quality of life issue. How long's it going to take for yous to get rid of these buildings and do something where our neighborhoods aren't going down? They already are!*

Explicitly framing the closures as a "quality of life" issue, this resident emphasized the implications of huge vacant buildings for life in the neighborhood. Likewise pointing to

the informal reuse of vacant buildings for illegal activity, a former GHS teacher speaking at the March 2013 SRC meeting argued:

> *This isn't about the children. It's about real estate and money. Let's be honest. No building will be sold. They will be instead become a hub for drug activity, crime, violence. And an empty reminder of how the District and the City abandoned the children of Germantown.*

This stakeholder saw the District's plan to sell the empty school buildings as unrealistic, predicting, instead, that they would remain vacant and would attract criminal behavior.

Making the converse argument, a Germantown resident and former school administrator made the case in a July 2014 interview that having schools in a neighborhood lowers the crime rate:

> *People came out of the woodwork to argue for the school. […] It was amazing. Even people who didn't belong to organizations. They were there and […] there was a lot of anger about closing it. Because […] across the street is the old town hall which is also empty, although we're trying to bring it back. […] That emptiness really does affect the whole community. And, when they're full and they're working it lowers the crime rate. It really does. People are there on the streets. They see things. They know what's going on.*

From this resident's perspective, part of the reason so many people were upset about the school's closure was because an empty building stood to affect the whole community through the loss of a crime deterrent.

In a July 2014 interview, a Fairhill resident discussed reuse of closed school buildings as an opportunity to bring something positive into a neighborhood, noting however that the District's goal of selling properties on the private market exposes neighborhoods to new uses that may not serve the community's interests or needs:

> Rsp: *[Y]ou know that [vacant] school [building] that burned and burned and burned for like that whole day? […] They tore it down and they're putting up a shopping mall. […] So, now let's think about what they could possibly do with [the empty Fairhill School building], because we see it's for sale. Yeah. So that means that it could privately be bought, which is the goal. But for what? What?*

What are they going to put in our community next? Besides another church or bar or liquor dispenser.

RG: *What would you like to see there?*

Rsp: *I would actually like to see something that's going to be beneficial at the root level. There's a lot of things in our community that are beneficial, but it's only like surface level. Like, even behavioral health institutions? That's really surface level. Because when you get down to the bottom of poverty and drug use and other things, it's always something else.*

For this Fairhill resident, the prospect of the shuttered school building's sale brought little comfort, noting how often the private market did not bring into the neighborhood those services most needed by the community, instead replicating a history of enterprises with negative consequences for the community ("another church or bar or liquor dispenser").

This concern was shared by a longtime Germantown resident in a July 2014 interview, who also raised the issue of shuttered school buildings being reused in ways that do not prioritize the community's interests:

We have a number of very large, prominent, buildings on the Avenue here that are vacant and have been for very long, and now we just added Germantown High School to it and Fulton Elementary School to it, and that doesn't feel really good. […] And, those are all significant buildings that, if we're […] not really careful about, could be developed by someone who does not have the neighborhood in its best interest.

Framing the impact of the closures as compounding an existing vacancy issue, this stakeholder also identified the risk of development being done by an outsider without an inherent interest in the community's wellbeing. This particular individual had been involved in an effort, organized by Germantown residents, to shape what happens to the former GHS building, including the goal of bringing a school of some type back into part of the building.

The community-based effort to guide the redevelopment and reuse of the GHS building emerged in the wake of an ultimately aborted plan of the District's to move

alternative educational programming into the building that would serve students with unique educational and behavioral needs. Following substantial outcry by local residents, the plan was cancelled. That debate, however, motivated the convening of a local effort to shape what happens to the building. Another participant in this group put it this way in a July 2014 interview:

> Rsp: *Right after [GHS] closed, I guess—in June or July—Camelot [Education] had approached the District about putting a site there. Camelot's an alternative school, and then what they were going to do is consolidate three of their programs into one.*
>
> RG: *Programs that are currently operating elsewhere in the city?*
>
> Rsp: *Right. And they have different kinds of programs. Some are ex-offender kinds of programs. One is– one is a "oh shoot I didn't realize that when I dropped out of school I wasn't going to make any money" kind of programs. And, so there was some rumbling about that. And I feel very strongly about that kinds of issue. That if you're going to take our school away, don't put something worse in it. And I live two blocks away from the school–*
>
> RG: *Worse in terms of, sort of, the spillover effects for the neighborhood?*
>
> Rsp: *Exactly. And for the kids. I mean, these aren't going to be our neighborhood kids. They're going to be kids from other people's neighborhoods, coming into our community.*

As reflected in the quotes from these two Germantown residents, the mobilization to influence the redevelopment of the now-vacant GHS and Fulton buildings was motivated by concerns that the buildings would be put to uses that did not benefit or serve the local community. The goal was to become partners in the building's repurposing, or to find ways to influence the developers who would make those decisions. On the flip side of their concerns about building uses that would not serve the community, this group saw great potential in the school building to be repurposed for the community's use. Later in the interview just quoted, the speaker made this point:

The potential [in the GHS building] is amazing, too, to go beyond just a school. Because there's a beautiful gym in there, there's a beautiful auditorium. That it could really become, sort of a nexus of the community. And, we don't really have that now, here.

At the City Council Education Committee's February 2012 hearing, a representative from Concerned Citizens of Point Breeze raised a similar concern to that motivating the Germantown group. She called for legislation requiring that shuttered school buildings only be redeveloped in ways that served the local community:

Let's talk about solutions, because we do not want to gentrify our areas. Many of the people who vote for our elected officials are local residents in the area. And if you allow these buildings to be sold to developers, then you're going to be definitely wiping out communities. We're saying that right now, a bill needs to be passed to designate school buildings for community usage. That means maybe for veteran housing or for -- like right now we have senior citizens wait for independent living. There needs to be some type of designation.

While City Council does not have jurisdiction over what happens to vacant school buildings, the concerns these stakeholders raised point to a set of longer-term implications of school closures for local communities. Given their size and prominence, the repurposing—or vacancy—of a school building has the capacity to change the local landscape in significant ways, bringing new people or activities into neighborhoods and potentially displacing or affecting the quality of life of local residents.

By framing school closures in terms of vacant buildings, the types of people and activity they attract, and concerns about community control of their reuse, stakeholders linked the closure debate with issues that have long been a central focus for neighborhood planning and community development (e.g., Raleigh & Galster, 2015; Schilling & Logan, 2008).

8.6   Discussion

The preceding analysis illuminates some of the concerns school closures raise for the neighborhoods where they take place. Neighborhood stakeholders pointed to a breadth of intersections between schools and the health of their local communities across social, institutional, economic, and environmental domains in protesting and making sense of school closures in Philadelphia in 2013. By doing so, they highlighted the intersection of schools and school closures with issues that have been at the heart of community development theory and practice, framing schools as social and institutional resources for their neighborhoods and emphasizing the place-based economic and environmental consequences of school closures.

As is true across the field of community development, the ability of local communities to capitalize on the potential within schools and school buildings varies significantly. And *within* neighborhoods, larger struggles for community control of development play out in efforts to shape the future of a school or a shuttered school building. In Mantua, this pair of dynamics was evident, on the one hand, in the way that the infusion of resources from Drexel could transform a local school and, on the other hand, in the difficulty the Mantua community has had maintaining an effective voice at the table. Massive direct investment from a private institution was able to take steps toward addressing long-standing structural inequalities within the school system in a way that neither the community nor the school district had been able to achieve. However, Drexel's larger project of neighborhood revitalization, of which the support for McMichael was a piece, left the community feeling marginalized and at risk. As a Mantua community leader told me in a September 2014 interview:

> *So, we on the defense. Or, the train is running. Nobody didn't tell us that the train is going leave; we're running behind the train. You know, so, with all this development—all this planning and things being implemented—I just want to see Mantua back at the table. Having an influence. Making shared decisions with whoever they sit at the table. Not somebody come in and say, "This is the menu. You eat it."*

Drexel's substantial investments in McMichael and civic capacity-building within the Mantua community notwithstanding, for this resident—who has played an active role in engaging with Drexel and mobilizing the Mantua community—the processes reshaping the Mantua neighborhood and its schools remain a step ahead of their ability to have an influence ("we're running behind the train").

In Germantown, the class contrasts made evident through the school closure process and its aftermath look different but are not wholly dissimilar from the dynamics in Mantua. In Germantown, a middle-class group of politically connected neighborhood stakeholders rallied to repurpose a school building that had been largely abandoned (as a school) by middle-class residents in recent decades. Amidst growing optimism about a nascent economic revitalization, the school closure presented an opportunity to reclaim a historic landmark as a neighborhood amenity. The middle-class stakeholders I spoke with talked about the importance of neighborhood schools for building a community, though within some of these comments was evident also a vision for the preservation of something that would contribute to the neighborhood's historic value. For example, as a resident who was part of the local effort to bring a school back into the building told me in July 2014:

> Rsp: *Nobody wants to see– Well, I don't want to say nobody. Most people do not want to see that [GHS building] razed. They want to see certain parts—the modern parts of the high school—taken away.*
>
> RG: *But the historic building.*

Rsp: *But the historic building, they want to see it there. And they want to see the green space remain.*

While this group's objective was to bring a school back into the GHS building that would help provide job skills training for low-income Germantown youth—as opposed to an effort to attract new residents—part of the motivation was also related to the building's effect on the neighborhood's development trajectory. The political and professional connections and capacities that this group had enabled it to be proactive in attempting to shape the property's future, although their campaign has been thus far unsuccessful and as of 2016 the GHS building remains unsold and undeveloped.

The identification of neighborhood schools as resources for local places and community development efforts must sit in tension with the inability of many of the schools slated for closure to adequately educate the children they served—and the inability of most communities to change that reality. Underperforming, under-resourced, and under-maintained schools have for decades constituted persistent limitations for poor communities of color in the United States. Social privilege and disadvantage are exacerbated through the inability of marginalized families to access quality public schools (Squires & Kubrin, 2005). And some stakeholders interviewed in this research acknowledged this dynamic. For example, in an August 2014 interview, a teacher who had worked at Fairhill School reflected:

I have been thinking a lot about the effect– like what the fallout of this closure is. And I have really mixed feelings. Because, to be honest, Fairhill wasn't a great school, you know. It was like, home for these kids. And we loved it just because it was our home. It was really struggling. So, some of the kids. Half of them went to Potter-Thomas. Half of them went to Julia de Burgos. And some were spread to other schools, too. But I feel like both those schools are better learning environments. Honestly. I worked at both those schools too. So, like in a way, I'm kind of glad that that the students have had an opportunity to go to these other

schools. Have better facilities. And a good administration. But, also, it just broke up this network, you know. It broke up a support network of these kids.

Others I spoke with described chaotic educational environments and parent constituencies that were disorganized, disconnected, and not invested in either the school or their children's education. And yet, some—like this teacher—wrestled with how to balance the poor performance of the school with what was lost to the neighborhood in its closure.

The "mixed feelings" this teacher confessed exemplify the quandary at the heart of policy debates between people-based mobility strategies and place-based community development initiatives discussed in Chapter 2. On the one hand, neighborhood public schools have long failed to meet the educational needs of children in poor communities, and the enduring legacy of struggling schools in poor neighborhoods has been used to justify choice-based reforms aimed at giving parents access to options outside their neighborhoods. On the other hand, the closure of these same schools constitutes a targeted disinvestment in poor neighborhoods, with implications across local social, institutional, economic, and environmental domains.

What, then, are the policy implications of this mobility/place catch-22 that neighborhoods face in cities like Philadelphia with rapidly expanding charter sectors and a struggling system of traditional public schools? One clear takeaway concerns expanding the metrics used to guide closure processes to include consideration of the implications of school closures for *neighborhoods*. The metrics guiding the District's closure process in 2013 were notably silent on the place-based questions of which neighborhoods would be affected, how they would be affected, or who lives in those neighborhoods. While these issues were inserted into the debate by neighborhood stakeholders, a process that incorporated them from the beginning would be better

positioned to take into account—and potentially minimize—the spatial alignment of school closures with historic patterns of neighborhood disinvestment and racial segregation.

A second policy takeaway of this analysis regards the importance of engaging the network of traditional public school buildings for what it represents more broadly as an infrastructure of publicly owned properties that are located within neighborhoods across the city. As such, this network of properties constitutes significant potential for publicly coordinated place-based community development. When a school is limping along with only 40% of its enrollment capacity and facing crippling maintenance backlogs, this potential is of course not fully realized. The issue, however, that deserves greater attention within planning and community development scholarship concerns the implications of dismantling and liquidating this public asset. The potential these public properties represent is cut short when public schools are closed and the properties are sold.

Underfunded and underperforming schools represent an enduring limitation for many poor neighborhoods, perpetuating legacies of racialized segregation, disinvestment, and lack of opportunity. Neighborhood schools, however, are also pieces of an infrastructure of public buildings, institutions, and services that are located in and serve local communities. In neighborhoods that have suffered extended periods of disinvestment, schools can be among the few remaining neighborhood organizations and represent for local communities both a resource and a source of possibility—the remnants of an infrastructure whose footprint still carries the potential to anchor a community's growth and development.

To recognize that schools play multidimensional roles in local neighborhoods and are thus valued by local communities as more than solely sites of education is not to argue that under-enrolled schools cannot or should not be closed by cash-strapped school districts. Instead, I contend that planners and policymakers need to acknowledge the ways that the loss of traditional neighborhood schools through transitions to choice-based public education can affect local communities across social, institutional, economic, and environmental domains. Delivering public education through choice-enabled markets of schools has given many students options other than their neighborhood schools. And for some this has created access to better educational opportunities. What must be better acknowledged, however, are the ways that the diversion of resources—social, political, and economic—away from neighborhood schools weakens their capacity to serve as neighborhood organizations, with broad and complex implications for local community development efforts.

9   Conclusion

9.1   Invoking place in the closure debate

This dissertation focuses on place and the ways local stakeholders invoked place in a broader political debate. I have drawn on theorists in political economy, critical race, and feminist studies who have described the structural dynamics of capital, racism, and patriarchy in ways that reveal their power, but that also preserve an arena for contestation centered on leveraging the particularity of difference, of identity, of position, of *place*. Empirically, I explored the voices and experiences of stakeholders allied with neighborhoods that had schools recommended for closure in 2013. I sought to understand how they invoked place in protesting and then in making sense of the closure of neighborhood schools. I found that stakeholders invoked place in three primary ways.

First, stakeholders framed school closures as part of larger patterns of disinvestment in their neighborhoods and marginalization of the people living there. That is, they tied closures to the structural processes of uneven development and institutionalized inequality that contour urban space in Philadelphia. Their schools were in bad shape, but closing them did not address the underlying structural problems. Rather, the closure process—in this view—evidenced and confirmed the unfairness of a system that created the struggling schools in the first place. Closure was not restitution but a reproduction of injustice.

Second, stakeholders drew on place identities as resources in protesting school closures. Neighborhood identity provided a basis for collective action: "This is us. You

are doing this to us, *here*. And the us that is (and has been) here is not happy about it." Claiming an "us that is here" supported collective identities that countered the individualizing rhetoric of marketization. That is, by framing a closure as happening to a group of people who were tied together by their common association with a neighborhood, stakeholders used place identity to strengthen and legitimize their defense of the school and their claims to the neighborhood.

Third, stakeholders talked about closures in terms of their implications for the neighborhood. The District focused on school-level student performance, student enrolment, building condition, and potential cost savings. In protesting closures, stakeholders widened this lens by pointing to what they saw as the implications of closing a school for their neighborhood and community. They framed schools as part of the local neighborhood fabric and they asserted that closing schools would have ripple effects across social, institutional, economic, and environmental dimensions of place.

9.2 Neighborhoods, local action, and the politics of place

Neighborhoods are shaped by many things, both local and distant. The neighborhood scale is one in which small groups of people can get together and make a difference. Neighborhood associations can organize trash cleanup days, community barbeques, and neighborhood watch campaigns. They can petition their city government to repair broken streetlights or plant more trees in the park. They can incorporate nonprofit organizations to develop derelict properties or run youth programming. They can build coalitions of local businesses and churches to marshal the economic resources of local stakeholders for neighborhood improvements.

At the same time, neighborhoods are also shaped by sets of actors whose spheres of reference lie far outside the neighborhood and political economic processes at regional, national, and global scales. Corporations restructure their operations, moving jobs into and out of local places. Banks approve or deny mortgages with great consequence for neighborhood real estate markets. State governments make decisions about how to distribute funding for schools and community development projects. And investors around the world make decisions about where and how to put their capital to work, helping to write the fates of enterprises large and small, with implications for local places everywhere those companies touch ground or market their wares.

In this way, any neighborhood—any place—represents the outcome of myriad processes operating across many scales. Place, in this sense, *is* a process. It is an ongoing production through which divergent visions of what place is, means, and should be are negotiated. Massey (2005) situated such an understanding of place within a broader theory of terrestrial space itself as process: "[T]o escape from an imagination of space as a surface is to abandon also that view of place. If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space" (p. 130). For Massey, it is more appropriate to think of place as an event, a spatio-temporal moment in an emergent production.

Alongside the always-becoming "throwntogetherness" Massey describes is the reality that place carries special significance for the people who call that place home (Tomaney, 2015). It is the space and scale in which lives are lived and families are raised. Place is where people come home to sleep. In a phenomenological sense, through the acts of living, people imbue the places they live with meaning and—to the extent possible—a

sense of coherence. In a material sense, people have vested interests in the conditions of the places they live. The challenge for those who align themselves with a particular place is that of realizing positive local change when places are substantially shaped and positioned by larger forces. This is particularly difficult for communities that have been and are systematically disadvantaged by those forces.

For such communities, the predicament becomes whether and how to organize for change at the local scale—given the realities of structural disadvantage—or whether to emphasize, instead, the importance of broader coalitions that link the disadvantages experienced by many local places into a broader critique of systemic injustice. Efforts at local improvement—whether pursued through the mobilization of local assets, building local political power, or leveraging external resources into the community (Sites et al., 2007)—have been faulted by critics for a parochialism that misdiagnoses local conditions and obscures the effects of broader structural processes on individual places. And yet, the significance that place carries for people's lives means that it is for many communities an important sphere of action and, as I have argued, a political resource.

9.3   The paradox of placedness

This dissertation raises a paradoxical tension between the entrenched limitations of spatial disadvantage and the resources that place identity and community-in-place represent. On the one hand, the consequences of growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods have been well documented and drive policy strategies that "free" people from the places where they are stuck. By helping people move—helping people access opportunities outside their communities—we can help them improve their lives. On the other hand, however, such mobility strategies fail to acknowledge either the political

resource that place identifications represent or the implications of such policies for the fabrics of place: social, institutional, economic, and environmental.

We live our lives in place. And that spatial reality means that the spatial arrangement of the city has differential effects on communities depending on where they are located, how they are *placed*. And it is through this spatiality—this placedness—that many of the inequities carved in urban space are reproduced (Dikec, 2001). The collective experience of spatial disadvantage presents a tremendous challenge for poor communities and communities of color. But that collective experience in space—the "us that is here"—also represents a basis for mobilization and contestation.

The capacity and promise of local action, however, should not be romanticized. Some argue that organizing around place is inherently fragmenting and counter-productive. Purcell (2006), for one, described the risk for progressive voices of falling into a "local trap" by prioritizing local scales of action and inadvertently playing into a neoliberal hand that valorizes individual freedom, autonomy, and choice. In a July 2014 interview, a Philadelphia organizer argued that localized efforts to save individual schools represented a distraction from the underlying structural injustices and a breach in the united front they were trying to build. He described to me a tension between neighborhood-based *"don't close my school"* actions and citywide efforts to disrupt the closure process and demand a moratorium.

Nevertheless, this dissertation's findings suggest that political protest rooted in and leveraging place is particularly significant in the context of neoliberal policy regimes that prioritize mobility through the market mechanism of individual choice. In the school arena, the rhetoric of choice is rooted in the capacity of market demand to hold schools

accountable and to efficiently shape a flexible marketplace of schooling options. That is, schools that do not perform are forced to close, while new schools emerge to meet demand, maintaining a quality and efficiently scaled system of schools. When market discipline acts against a school, school districts should—in the now infamous words of a Philadelphia-based funder of charter expansion—"*dump the losers.*"[1]

As this dissertation has clearly shown, however, schools are interwoven with local communities in complex ways, and closing schools has implications for the communities they have served and the neighborhoods where they are located. The failure of Philadelphia's school closure process to adequately incorporate place reflects a shortcoming of the use of markets in neoliberal public policy more broadly. Enhancing mobility through market choice as a way to "free" people from the constraints of the places where they live (1) absolves society of its responsibility to address histories of racial segregation and economic disinvestment in place and, in so doing, (2) obscures the inequalities inherent in market function.

The marketization of public institutions and services must be examined—and contested—*through the lens of place* precisely because the individualized metrics and logics through which market decisions are weighed obscure the placedness of people and institutions, as well as the historical legacies of spatialized injustice that their placedness reflects. The ostensibly aspatial lens of market-driven policy cannot erase spatial inequality. Rather, the failure to acknowledge the spatial implications of these policies—

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[1] Mark Gleason, Executive Director of the Philadelphia School Partnership, was speaking on a panel I attended at the 2014 meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Philadelphia. The comment angered public education advocates who saw it as evidence of a deep insensitivity toward the social costs of portfolio models among choice-proponents (see, e.g. Gym, 2014).

the implications for places—enables the reproduction of the spatialized inequality they aim to mitigate.

9.4 Schools in place

Neighborhood public schools are multiscalar institutions that span from the local to the structural. That is, neighborhood schools are pieces of large institutional webs that are connected through administration, regulation, and funding to nodes of governance at the district, city, state, and federal levels. As such, they are differentially positioned by the long-standing inequalities that ripple through the workings of these institutions. In this way, existing racial and economic injustices are reproduced in space through the inequalities of public education. In truth, a system of neighborhood schools is remarkably well positioned to target uneven delivery of education services to specific communities in specific places. There is perhaps no more efficient way to ensure that our education systems reproduce the spatial inequalities of race and class that segregate our cities.

But schools are also public assets—buildings, institutions, and services—that are located within neighborhoods and that develop relationships with communities over time. The infrastructure of public education that has served to deliver unequal education directly into the heart of neighborhoods, could in the same way be used to target additional resources to those who need them the most. That is, the spatiality of public education has efficiently and effectively caused harm to poor communities of color for generations. However, dismantling that public infrastructure in favor of a choice-based system where privately managed schools arise to meet "demand" severs the connection between schools and place in ways that (1) have not achieved equity outcomes (Lubienski, 2013) and (2) lose the ability to target services to the places where they are

needed. And it is for this reason—the significance of the placedness of public schools—that I have in this dissertation told the story of resistance to a systemic process of school closure from the perspective of local communities.

The inequalities that differentiate opportunity and quality of life in society are manifest in urban space across multiple dimensions, including racial segregation, environmental pollution, uneven development, and job opportunities. That race and class inequalities are revealed in space enhances their durability, as lives lived amidst landscapes of spatialized inequality carry, for good or ill, the privileges or burdens of their positioning. In this work I have explored how those who are disadvantaged by the spatiality of their positioning call upon that positionality—invoke place—to contest the reproduction of spatialized inequality.

Appendix A: Interview protocol example

1) How long had you taught at Fairhill School?

   a) Why did you stay so long?

2) How did the school and the neighborhood change over that time?

   a) What was the school like before it closed?

3) How would you describe the Fairhill neighborhood to me, if I had never been there?

   a) Who lives there? What's it like? What makes it special? Challenges?

4) What role did the Fairhill School play in the neighborhood?

5) I'm particularly interested in understanding how the community responded to the announcement that Fairhill was recommended for closure.

   a) How did you find out that the District was recommending closing the school?

   b) How did the school community respond?

      i) Who gave leadership? Who participated? (And who didn't?)

      ii) What did they do?

   c) What would you say motivated the response?

6) Were you surprised when you learned Fairhill was slated for closure?

   a) Why do you think Fairhill was on the list?

   b) Did you participate in protesting the closure?

      i) What did you do?

      ii) Why?

7) If I were to ask people in the community today why Fairhill closed, what do you think people would tell me?

8) What difference does it make for the neighborhood whether a school like Fairhill Elementary is closed or not?

9) Do you have any recommendations of other former Fairhill teachers or parents that I should talk to?

10) Who else should I be talking to about this?

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