Serving and Thriving in a Hard Place:
Black-led Organizations in a Racialized Nonprofit Industrial Complex

by

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To my late Grandmother, Annie Lee Weatherspoon; my late Father, Gregory D. Wilson, Sr.; and my Mother, Sharon D. Madison - for all your inspiration, love, and support.

Abstract

The nonprofit sector has become known as a public good where organizations are created to address various kinds of social problems. As organizations carry out diverse missions, they are expected to encounter a standard set of challenges - regardless of who leads them. Despite extensive work on the intersection of race and nonprofits, the sector, itself, remains understood as a race-neutral space. This dissertation develops a novel theoretical framework, the racialized nonprofit industrial complex (RNIC), and shows how racial stratification shapes the experiences of Black-led organizations (BLOs) in two medium-sized cities that differ in their racial demography and structure.

Using data from a four-year, two-city qualitative study, I ask three questions: (1) how and in what ways is the nonprofit sector, itself, racialized; (2) how does racialization influence the behavior, decision-making, and activities of BLOs in the nonprofit sector and does it vary by place; and (3) What strategies do Black-led organizations use in response to racialization?

Chapter 1 discusses extraordinarily unusual racial disparities across two unlikely cities and situates BLOs as playing a central role in addressing these issues on behalf of a predominately Black client base while also facing a unique set of challenges in carrying out their mission. Chapter 2 develops a novel theory of racialization in the sector that I call the racialized nonprofit industrial complex (RNIC). I define the RNIC as a racialized social system where Black-led and white-led organizations are placed into separate categories that differentially shape how they function and operate within the sector. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of middle cities where we might expect to find an RNIC and offers a justification for the two empirical cases: Madison, Wisconsin, and Montgomery, Alabama. Chapter 4 presents data describing how a small number of BLOs are impacted by racialization in the overwhelmingly white Madison sector and how they use strategies that reflect their unique relationship to clients to successfully navigate the city's RNIC. Chapter 5 presents data describing how a critical mass of BLOs are impacted by racialization within a white-dominated sector in a predominantly Black city and how they lean heavily on a civil rights movement ethic to challenge and navigate the city's RNIC. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion that contrasts the cases to show how the RNIC differs by place and how this impacts the capacity of BLOs to successfully navigate the system. This contrast serves as the basis for a discussion about how we might arrive at a more equitable sector where we radically redefine our expectations about what it means to be a successful organization – expectations often rooted in whiteness. This will allow us to move beyond merely proposing best practices aimed at situational equity to, instead, recognize BLOs as legitimate actors who have agency to best meet the needs of clients with whom they share a unique connection.

Introduction: Chapter 1

When I first arrived in the city back in Fall 2018 as a doctoral student, long before the pandemic upended the entire world, I was excited about being in a new environment, particularly one that countless publications had characterized as the best place to live for virtually any person on earth.[1] Aesthetically, driving alongside the lakefront with the bright sun shining on transparently clear water basically confirmed the superficial representations that I had read about. I was struck by the smoothly paved dark roads; the vast number of bikers with helmets and stroller extensions carrying small children while riding along paths adjacent to the lake; and boats, large and small, that dotted the lake. My initial reaction was: this is the life! As I came upon the traffic light to make a left turn, I noticed a flood of people making their way to and from the waterfront and imagined that I would one day join them once I was settled in the city. I also noticed how pedestrian-friendly this and other intersections were with their separate traffic signs for pedestrians, bikers, and cars. Once the light changed, I quickly made a sharp left turn to head towards the place where I would live for at least the next two years. From the lakefront, I was now driving down a street with what seemed like endless parks and green spaces with people throwing around frisbees and running around with dogs. Once I drove past the parks, I entered the city's downtown area which was similarly bustling with people interacting with one another, patronizing businesses, and just generally having a good time. Again, I thought about how this city really appeared to be something of an oasis; a place where everyone could find their niche. But, I was also struck by how few people of color I observed, particularly Black people; so few that I vividly remember only being able to count a handful. I had already

[1] Here I am referring to the political character of Madison as staunchly progressive that impacts the social and cultural environment of the city including the quality of life for racial minorities and members of the LGBTQ community.

anecdotally known the demographics of the city based on months of conversations with people who knew better than me. But, to actually be on the ground and see it in-person was an entirely different experience. I thought to myself: this place has such an amazing reputation surely this also had positive implications for people of color too? Nevertheless, I continued and finally arrived at the apartment office to complete the check-in process. Given that I had so few items, I was able to quickly unload and go exploring, primarily for food.

During my initial exploration of the city, I randomly met a local community leader in the Noodles and Company restaurant who provided me with a 2016 report that had been circulating. Initially I thought it would be a standard report that highlighted the achievement gap or some other data points documenting racial disparities that society has, regrettably, long come to accept as part of our social fabric. And, of course, all that I thought I knew about the city surely suggested it would be a place where everyone was doing *reasonably* well. Because of this thinking, I didn't even bother sifting through the report itself. Instead, I found a PowerPoint presentation online that summarized the findings. The presentation's initial slide contained a typical title referring to racial disparities and the next few slides mentioned the authors as being a part of an organization that one would expect is interested in addressing these kinds of issues. I thought to myself: "all of this sounds quite familiar."

After reading the 4th slide, I knew this was different from the run of the mill reports that I was used to reading. One way that it felt different was that it provided a stark, comprehensive picture of the condition of Black people in the city across economic, education, child welfare, and criminal justice metrics when I was used to reports summarizing perhaps a few of these disparities. But, the next several slides illustrated why this was a report that hit like a ton of

bricks. These slides outlined deep and wide-ranging racial disparities in economic status, childhood poverty, education, and the criminal justice system.

The economic portion of the report illustrated deep racial disparities. For instance, Black people had an unemployment rate 5 times higher than whites and significantly higher than the national average for Black people. Black families had a median household income of $20,664, which was just 1/3 of white families at $63,573. Nearly 54% of Black people in the city lived below the poverty line compared to just 8.7% for whites, making Blacks nearly six times more likely to be poor than whites. And this poverty rate was nearly one and a half times greater than the national poverty rate for Black people.

Childhood poverty highlighted a deeper racial crisis. Nearly 75% of Black children living in the city were in poverty making them 11 times more likely to grow up in poverty than whites. Still more, the poverty rate for Black children in the city was nearly one and a half times higher than the national rate.

Racial disparities were similarly alarming in K-12 education. Nearly half of all Black third graders did not meet proficiency standards in reading compared to just 11% of whites, making Black children four and a half times more likely to not be reading proficiently compared to white peers. Even under a new reading proficiency measure, 86% of Black third graders were not proficient, compared with 47% of whites. Within the education system, Black students were more than 15 times more likely to be suspended than a white student. And Black students were more than 9 times more likely to be chronically absent than whites. Making matters worse, according to the report, nearly half of the city's Black high school students failed to graduate.

In the criminal justice system, racial disparities were also significant. Black youth aged 10-17 were arrested at a rate 6 times higher than white youth. Despite being just 10% of the

population aged 12-17, Black youth made up 64% of the detention population. Similarly, Black adults were 15 times more likely to be admitted to a prison facility than white adults.

To suggest that I was shocked by this report would be putting it mildly. Indeed, this report was a damning portrait of the condition of Black people in the city. But, these disparities were not particularly new to those on the ground who lived this reality rooted in the consequences of racism. And to the outside world, these remarkable racial disparities were entirely consistent with what most people were used to seeing and reading about in our nation's traditional urban centers: Chicago, New York, Los Angeles - cities that scholars have long considered them to be the gold standard for any effort to understand social phenomena and how it effects historically marginalized people (Drake and Cayton 1934; Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Muhammad 2010; Hyra 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021).

But, what was absolutely new and *different* about these racial disparities is that they existed in Madison, Wisconsin; a place long regarded as a liberal bastion where progressive public policies were thought to be at the core of what made this such a great place to live – for all people.

Never in my wildest imagination would I have associated Madison with such deep racial disparities. This report was seared into my consciousness and prompted me to think about many things. I did not merely think about how a place known for its high quality of life could be home to such glaring racial disparities and what it meant for Black people who lived this reality, or how elected leaders could be presiding over such an extraordinary reality. Crucially, I also wondered who was standing up and providing support for individuals and families who have been historically excluded and contemporarily impacted by the consequences of racism?

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Nine hundred miles south of Madison another city was experiencing its own set of racial disparities within an entirely different context. Montgomery, Alabama is the birthplace of one of the greatest civil rights movements the world has ever known (Morris 1986). When I first moved to Montgomery, I got off I-65 south at the Clay Street exit which was on something of a hill overlooking the city's downtown area. I had been led in this direction by the GPS because I was renting an apartment in the downtown area. I had some trepidation about moving into the apartment because local residents told me that the building was once owned by a famous slaveholding family: The Bells. Ultimately, I was able to get over my trepidation because the building was centrally located, completely renovated, and now managed by what appeared to be a credible company – at least based on online reviews. As I drove along the winding road, I came upon a large and modern building that had giant gold words that read "Rosa Parks Museum." At that point I knew where I was; not just the Deep South, but a place best known for challenging the racial structures that impacted Black people long after the end of slavery. After parking my car, checking-in, and moving my few belongings to the apartment, I was eager to explore the city.

As soon as I stepped outside the Bell Building in the blazing summer heat, I realized it was not merely the museum that caught my eye on this day. Rather, as I walked west down Montgomery Street, I came across several historical markers; each with a 12x12 shape outlined with gold trim with the word "Alabama" inscribed above the state flag. Later I would realize government officials and civil rights groups made a significant commitment to strategically placing these around the city to help educate visitors about the past. One marker, in particular, was adjacent to this older, but majestic looking fountain, which I later realized was an important

symbol of the city. This marker documented the slave markets that were based at the fountain where enslaved people were auctioned. There was something about the markers and fountain that allowed me to feel the weight of Montgomery's history. In and around this fountain were countless other markers that detailed the excruciating historical past of this place; a past that shaped so much of how I thought about the work I would eventually undertake in this city.

Moving past the fountain, walking on a brick road, I finally came upon perhaps one of the most famous thoroughfares in civil rights lore: Dexter Avenue – home to the church of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I walked down Dexter Avenue on the southside of the street in the 100 block past many historical, colonial style buildings; some of which had been converted into offices and loft apartments with others actively under construction. And it was radio silent with few people; most likely working from home and tourism severely curtailed by the pandemic. When entering the 200 block of Dexter Avenue, after walking past the Alabama Power building which boasted long lines of Black people, socially distant because of the pandemic, waiting to enter the building to pay utility bills, I immediately observed the shift towards the state government campus area. There was the Alabama Educational Foundation, a noted and powerful white-led nonprofit organization whose name was plastered on the building's façade but based in a fresh concrete building with a similar neoclassical architecture style as government buildings in the city. As I discuss later, the physical structure of this particular nonprofit is an important signpost for the remarkably differential experiences of nonprofits in Madison and Montgomery. I quickly moved past additional buildings such as the state Supreme Court having noticed the famed Dexter Street Baptist Church. I saw pictures of it before, but it was much smaller in-person. It boasted a well-maintained rust-colored façade with slightly worn white steps on either side and included a plaque on the door referencing order of service and hours of operation as

well as a sign indicating they were closed for tours due to the pandemic. Just outside the church's door was a dark black light post referencing MLK that read "lighting the way" – another reference to the historical struggle that defined this place.

This was yet another profound reminder that I had arrived in a city that was the epicenter of the Civil Rights Movement and I presumed that surely *this* city would be a place where Black people were doing *reasonably* well – no doubt better than those living in Madison, Wisconsin? After all, the city had just elected its first Black Mayor, boasted a predominantly Black city council, and was a majority Black city. In my own mind, this basic reality portended that Black people at least had some access to levers of power that could make a tangible difference in the lives of people despite the potential forces of racism. After all, there was some research on larger cities such as Washington DC and Philadelphia suggesting this might be the case (Hunter 2013; Hunter-Asch and Musgrove 2017). Yet, I was not entirely surprised that for all the civil rights gains made during the 1960s, and the symbolic reminders throughout the city, the present-day reality for Black people living in Montgomery is the antithesis of the what the civil rights movement was about. Here, in Montgomery the day-to-day reality of Black people is rife with challenges resulting from racism.

This reality was made clear in stark economic terms based on 2019 Census Data. An individual Black person in the city had an average annual income of $22,137, which is less than half of a white person at $42,512. The average Black family had a median income of $45,085, which is 1/3 less than white families at $71,878. Nearly 19% of Black people were living below the poverty line compared to just 7.4% for whites making Blacks nearly 3 times more likely to be poor than whites. Notably, the poverty rates for both Blacks and whites is below the national average, which is of little consolation for Black people given the obvious disparity.

Education outcomes in the city indicated additional racial disparities. According to 2019 data from the Alabama Department of Education, just 27% of Black students were reading at grade level compared to 60% of white students. In math, just 24% of Black students were proficient compared to 55% of white students. In science, the disparity was even more pronounced with just 19% of Black students meeting proficiency standards compared to 55% of white students.

Comparatively, Black people across each city were doing worse in different ways. For instance, Black people in Montgomery had a median income twice as high as those living in Madison. Those living in Madison had a poverty rate three times as high as Montgomery. Again, a fundamental question is not merely why, but who can these individuals and families in Montgomery (just like Madison) count on to help them overcome the structural racism that has made their lives so difficult?

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Two cities, different both geographically, demographically, and structurally, but bound by the basic American reality that all too often means Black people are struggling as a direct result of racism (Du Bois 1903; West 1993; Kendi 2016). How could a city highly regarded for its seemingly liberal character and a city renowned as the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement also be home to such devastating racial disparities? How could two cities boasting major and consequential institutions of higher education also be a place where Black people are struggling so much educationally? What does it mean that both cities are the seat of state government and led by mayors who champion policies ostensibly designed to uplift historically excluded individuals and families are unable to achieve the desired results? None of these questions is meant to cast aspersions on anyone. But even if they do, the urgency of trying to

understand this issue is worth offending those who are either overtly complicit and/or those who believe they are championing efforts to improve the situation. That these two cities both represent places where Black people are denied basic opportunities to carve out lives of dignity highlights the power of structural racism and its capacity to dictate the life chances of people regardless of the existence of policies and other efforts. If structural racism constrained the impact of each city's historical character, institutions, and government, who is left to be a champion for those burdened by racism?

Both cities are also bound by the shared reality that it is Black-led organizations (BLOs) who are on the front lines of trying to address the entrenched effects of racism in the lives of Black residents. What binds these places together is that they both possess an organizational infrastructure of BLOs – organizations where the day-to-day leadership power is in the hands of Black people including the individual occupying the executive director role. These organizations occupy a unique status on the front lines in each of these places fighting against structural racism that is all too often overwhelming for their clients who deal with the disproportionate effects of poverty.

This dissertation is about how these organizations, themselves, are operating within a nonprofit sector that is structurally racialized in ways that have a profound impact on their ability to carry out a mission in service of clients. In making a solemn commitment and pact to serve their clients, overwhelmingly comprised of Black people, to help lift them out of poverty these organizations are impacted by the same kind of structural racism whose effects they work to limit in the lives of their clients; effects that until now have largely been attributed to their own perceived deficiency (e.g. Vaughan 1999). The belief that the success or failure of BLOs is uniquely linked to their own perceived deficiency fuels a larger, dominant narrative of the

nonprofit sector as a race-neutral space that has been reified by scholars and embraced by the general public. Consequently, we are left with an erroneous, but powerful belief, that working in the nonprofit sector is one of the few places where those seeking to make a difference are free to do so without many of the constraints that are often associated with other parts of society. Meanwhile, BLOs continue to experience a unique set of challenges induced by an invisible racial structure that also means their clients are not receiving critical support – a gap further exacerbated by the State's abdication of its duty under the traditional social safety net. Indeed, for all these reasons, this project joins, and extends, a larger intellectual conversation among an interdisciplinary group of scholars including sociologists, organization, and nonprofit scholars that helps us understand the nonprofit sector's racial character and how this impacts the work of BLOs.

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A prevailing view of the nonprofit sector as race-neutral can be traced to the influential work of scholars focusing on understanding the behavior and composition of organizations largely defined by two approaches. The first approach, institutional theory, is a theoretical paradigm that helps us understand the various ways in which organizations are shaped by the context or organizational field in which they operate (Hannan and Freeman 1974; Wamsley and Zald 1973; Edelman and Suchman 1997). According to this framework, because organizations are subject to contextual conditions beyond their control, they are compelled to operate in ways that conform to the norms within a particular organizational field. A significant contribution to this theory is the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) who emphasized the importance of organizational legitimacy and argued that it is gained largely by conforming to the norms of an organizational field. Organizational fields are important because they are shaped by political,

social, and economic forces that impact their composition and the extent to which they remain viable or legitimate (Scott 1961). We also know a key characteristic of the organizational field is defined by a basic competition for resources (Scott 2004). The need to be seen as legitimate, existence of external influences, and competition for resources creates a unique level of pressure for organizations to behave and look a certain way within a field. The work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) that focuses on institutional isomorphism is central to understanding how organizations behave within the field. In particular, they argue that organizational fields are defined by isomorphic pressures that compel organizations to essentially look like other organizations deemed successful by virtue of a particular institutional environment – the perceived successful organizations are usually defined by whiteness. The point is that institutional theory equips us with a theoretical body of knowledge to understand how organizations navigate a particular field – this includes nonprofits. The challenge with this approach is that it thinks about an organizational field as static and does not account for how other factors, such as race, might influence how organizations behave and/or interact within a particular field. It is also a helpful explanation for why we have been limited in our ability to broach the issue of racialization in the nonprofit sector because it is easier to point to a variety of other factors as having an impact on how organizations navigate the space. For some, it seems entirely reasonable that organizations will vie for resources in a competitive marketplace and strive towards legitimacy to be stamped as capable of doing work (Davis and Cobb 2010). The notion that there might be other factors, such as race, is not central to the institutionalist view.

Recognizing the need to build upon institutional theory's general focus on environmental factors, and less on issues of race, the second approach, neo-institutionalism, is defined by its theoretical attention to questions of agency and power as well as the extent to which

organizations change. Within this theoretical tradition, scholars have developed a set of ideas that critically appraise organizational fields and recognize the dynamic nature of these spaces and the organizations within them. For instance, in an influential paper Powell et al. (1996) contend that the complexity of an industry or organizational field is central to ensuring innovation within a broader network rather than an individual organization. Other scholars working in this theoretical tradition have been concerned with how organizations vie for and ultimately acquire resources. For instance, Hannan and Freeman (1984) argue that organizations compete for scarce resources, including material and nonmaterial, which is central to the creation and maintenance of an organization. The larger point of neo-institutionalism is that despite its attention to power dynamics, it offers a set of prescriptions that implies all organizations, regardless of how they look, should navigate an organizational field by conforming to prevailing norms. In this way, neo-institutionalism is not best positioned to engage in a racial analysis of the nonprofit sector.

Nonprofit analysts, too, have also done important work to understand the experiences of organizations without largely considering how the sector has been racialized. A significant amount of scholarly attention has been documented the distinct historical origins of the sector (Salamon and Anheier 1999); explaining how organizations are defined and categorized (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990); and analyzing organizations within the sector in regard to their relationship with the state, private sector, and other organizations (Anheier 2006). To be sure, the history of the sector, the nature of organizations, and the relationships among sector actors each provide an important piece of the complex nonprofit jigsaw puzzle. Beyond this work, there has been recent interest in the issue of race within the nonprofit sector including how nonprofits in general do work in predominantly Black neighborhoods or the lack of Black people occupying

leadership positions (Danley and Blessett 2022; Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld 2020). But, much like sociologists, there is a view that race is not an organizing force within the sector itself (Coule, Dodge, and Eikenberry 2022). Such a belief is also at odds with a scholarly consensus about the myriad ways in which race influences various parts of society (Winant 2000). It is also wholly inconsistent with the everyday *lived* experiences of racial minorities – many of whom have or are battling the broad effects of poverty as a symptom of a larger racialized society.

Considering significant contributions in the organizations and nonprofit literature reveals important insight into how best to understand how organizations emerge, gain legitimacy, behave, interact, pursue resources, and even survive. It also means an opportunity to bridge of each of these important subfields to take an even more critical look at the nonprofit sector. Despite these insights, we are left with a critically unresolved issue: to what extent is race a central organizing principle of an organizational field such as the nonprofit sector? Put more simply, it is imperative that we understand how the nonprofit sector, *itself*, is racialized in ways that profoundly impact the experiences of BLOs and how they are perceived by powerbrokers in the field. In trying to understand this process, I also want to stipulate that the nonprofit sector is not merely a freestanding structure. Rather, it is also place-based in ways that differ distinctly from for-profit sector. That is, a nonprofit sector is both a feature of and embedded within a particular place – usually a city – and has a unique relationship to people within a geographical place and is heavily influenced by the historical and contemporary reality of a particular location. To that end, this dissertation sets out to answer three primary questions:

1. How and to what extent is the nonprofit sector, itself, racialized?
2. How does racialization influence the behavior, decision-making, and activities of BLOs in the nonprofit sector and does this vary by place?

3. What strategies do Black-led organizations use in response to racialization?

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Given that this dissertation aims to understand not only the social reality of racialization in the nonprofit sector, but also how BLOs experience this process within the sector, I use qualitative data. These data reveal the nature of racialization, its underlying mechanisms, and how BLOs navigate and are impacted by this process within the sector. Later on in the dissertation I discuss my methodological choices in greater detail both in empirical chapters but also as part of a concluding methodological appendix. For now, I want to clearly articulate why this issue merits attention now both from an intellectual and practical perspective. While scholars across academic disciplines have been concerned with nonprofit organizations, they have yet to offer a theory of how the nonprofit sector, itself, is racialized. The absence of such a theory has created a significant gap in our ability to understand inequality within the nonprofit sector while reaffirming a problematic view of this space as race-neutral. To that end, this is among the first studies that advances such a theory and does so by leveraging an impressive, multidisciplinary literature, anchored in Sociology and Nonprofit Studies, to specifies not only how the sector is racialized and who maintains this system, but also the mechanisms that allow for its persistence. In particular, readers will see how I use these literatures in Chapter 2 to reorientate our view of the nonprofit sector as race-neutral to one that is akin to a racialized social system defined by a clear and dominant schema that standardizes expectations of what it means to be a legitimate organization within the sector.

Additionally, recognizing that the nonprofit sector is always placed-based, I use this dissertation as an opportunity to extend the scope of urbanists' preferred empirical cities. My decision to move beyond these prototypical cities stems from the basic fact that too often

scholars reflexively turn to these locations as the best place to understand social phenomena. As I detail more in Chapter 3, these cities have been critical to so much of what we know about the social world including significant processes such as urbanization, stratification, and even racialization – a topic central to this work. However, in carrying out such important work, we have neglected an entire category of cities that I call middle cities. I define middle cities as geographical spaces with population thresholds (e.g. 200,000-300,000) that place them between large urban cities and small cities and where social phenomena sometimes differs and mirrors what we have historically understood as unique to large cities. It is true that a significant part of my definition is population based, but lying between large and small cities makesmiddle cities particularly important. Indeed, turning our gaze to these kinds of cities is important because their size means much of established theoretical and empirical knowledge may not comport with what happens on the ground in these places. For instance, unlike in prototypical cities, medium-sized cities may not have access to an extensive network of social support services which might exacerbate inequality amongst people – and organizations. As a primary source of support, these organizations are significant resources for people who lack access to a robust social safety net in middle cities. This means it is even more imperative that we are able to understand how a racialized nonprofit sector might inhibit their work on behalf of clients.

Still more, and of particular relevance for the current study, I show the extent to which racialization might differ across place by offering a comparative look at two very different cities, one predominantly white and one predominantly Black. But, as I also discuss in Chapter 3, the demographics are not the only ways in which these cities differ. Indeed, beyond race I attempt to hold a variety of other factors constant as each city is a state capital, has a similar total population, boast similar Democratic-leaning local government, and feature an anchor higher

education institution. In this way, I am able to offer a more fulsome account of how each place might influence (or be influenced by) its own racialized nonprofit sector.

While the intellectual merits of this project are important, the practical existence and unique experience of BLO is critical to their clients. Black-led organizations, including those discussed in this study, represent critical pillars in their communities which gives their clients easy access to important services. BLOs are often led by people who grew up in the neighborhoods served by their organizations and have encountered many of the challenges that they now work to address on behalf of clients. And so, they have a first-person understanding of the issues their organizations are working to address, which means they are often best positioned to improve the life chances of clients. Later on in this dissertation readers will come to know this interconnectedness as constituting linked-fate between leaders of BLOs and their clients which inspires a dogged determination effect change in the lives of clients. But, their clients are even more important to consider in the context of this project. They are the ones living the day-to-day reality of structural barriers inhibiting even their best effort to improve their life chances. And because BLOs are more often than not their primary source of support, the effects of racialization on the organizations create a dual structural disadvantage in the lives of clients. Additionally, as I illustrate in this dissertation, BLOs provide a holistic set of supports to their clients that include basic needs such as healthcare, various kinds of social support including mental health counseling, advocacy when involved with the criminal justice system, and a host of other services. Now, more than ever before, it is imperative that we acquire a full accounting of how the sector is racialized, what it means for organizations, and how we can make the sector a more equitable place for all organizations. To do so holds the promise of not merely intellectual advances, but also improving the lives of those most vulnerable.

Research Plan

I began this research prior to the pandemic in August 2018 in Madison, Wisconsin and moved to Montgomery, Alabama in August 2020 during the pandemic. I focused on Black-led nonprofit organizations (BLOs), which I define as having an African American executive director and where a majority of individuals working full-time identify as African American. A logical question related to my definition of BLOs relates to Board composition and why it is not discussed here. While Board composition is important and certainly will be part of a future research agenda, I made a decision to focus on BLOs because they do the vast majority of the work and experience the nonprofit sector in ways the Board does not. This is not to suggest the experiences of nonprofit Boards is not racialized – I believe they are. But, for the purposes of this work, I am interested in BLOs navigate a racialized nonprofit sector and their robust engagement within the sector is the best chance to understand this issue.

It is also true that the nonprofit sector within a particular location is vast and includes many kinds of organizations. And so, I had to disaggregate organizations by both race and the services they provided. Despite both nonprofit sectors having roughly 4000 total registered 501(c)(3) organizations, very few of these were characterized as Black-led based on my basic inclusion criteria. Indeed, in Madison there were about 20 nonprofits and 60 in Montgomery.. All of these organizations were largely engaged in antipoverty work. Rather than exclusively refer to these as antipoverty, I opt to characterize them as human services organizations. The National Organization for Human Services define these kinds of organizations as "…uniquely approaching the objective of meeting human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as on remediation of problems, and maintain a commitment to improving overall quality of life of service populations.[4]" (p. 1). These organizations are

indispensable manifestations of a basic commitment to social welfare and exhibiting certain attributes such as helping improve people's lives, being guided by a moral compass amid emotional work, dependent upon external audiences and environments for success, and other factors that allow human services organizations to occupy unique status in the larger nonprofit ecology.[5] Finally, the BLOs here are human services organizations whose mission, stated or implied, is to improve the life chances of primarily, but not exclusively, Black people who comprise most of their clients.

In total, I identified 20 BLOs that met the criteria in Madison and studied 15. In Montgomery, I identified 75 that met the criteria and studied 40. Within each organization, I interviewed only the executive director. This decision reflects the reality that within BLOs executive directors occupy a uniquely powerful role that not only makes them the face of these organizations, but centrally situates them within an inverted organizational chart where arrows point towards them. Thus, as these data will show, it was not uncommon to encounter leaders who engaged in strategic planning, fundraising, and data collection while also performing administrative tasks including bookkeeping and even routinely answering general inquiries from the public.

While this dissertation primarily uses interviews, I also strategically use census data, observations within both cities, and publicly available information from organization websites to add context to the experiences of BLOs. Importantly, none of the information included here is attributed to any single organization. I make this choice because throughout research process I heard directly from leaders of BLOs express their concern that their organizations could be placed at risk within the sector for speaking so freely about their experiences. This concern was also a primary reason why I was not able to establish contact with each organization that met the

inclusion criteria. And so, I take care to protect their privacy by not attributing information to specific organizations.

A final point that I would like to make about organizations concerns who will not be included in this work. There are well known BLOs, particularly in Montgomery, who are major players within the nonprofit sector. Among them is the Equal Justice Initiative based in Montgomery. Led by Bryan Stevenson, this organization has dramatically improved the nation's access to and understanding of racial injustice. In doing so, this organization has gained a great deal of publicity which has led to a very stable financial position where they do not encounter the same issues as smaller, lesser-known BLOs. That is not to suggest that larger BLOs are immune to racism. Of course, this is not the case. Instead, the position of larger BLOs allows them to better mitigate the effects of racism. The BLOs included in study reflect small organizations with an average of 3 full-time employees, who do not have well-known reputations or financial resources that might otherwise shield them from the most deleterious effects of a racialized nonprofit sector. Despite this reality, they are engaged in very difficult work – serving and thriving on behalf of their clients.

It has become commonplace to conclude qualitative studies with a methodological appendix that outlines how a researcher carried out a project.[6] In addition to providing such an appendix, I have also decided to offer methodological insights throughout the dissertation as I believe they will be helpful for not only understanding how I embarked on this work, but also provide insights into how leaders go about their daily lives within the nonprofit sector. More specifically, in the forthcoming chapters, I engage in a more substantive discussion about my data collection process including how I used key informants in each city to gain access to BLOs within the sector; how I established and cultivated rapport with leaders; and how I gained

legitimacy by engaging with them socially, civically, and intellectually. The quotes that follow are directly from leaders but are never attributed to individual organizations. As noted, I made this decision because across both cities there is a consensus that given how BLOs are impacted by racism, attributing quotes to them could run the risk of further marginalizing them within the sector. Therefore, I use pseudonyms to conceal the identity of leaders and their organizations.

Outline of the Dissertation

In this opening chapter, I have discussed the structural barriers facing BLOs, how scholars' treatment of organizations has not included a robust examination of race, and why these issues merit significant attention. The rest of the dissertation is organized as follows: In chapter 2, I challenge a prevailing view of the nonprofit sector as race-neutral. To do so requires a fundamental reorientation of the sector as race-neutral to a view of it as a racialized social system featuring two competing schemas that converge around social and material resources that leads to racialized outcomes. From there, I use Chapter 3 to discuss the nonprofit sector as situated in middle-cities which moves beyond our preoccupation with large and small cities that has largely defined the urban canon. Part of this discussion introduces and distinguishes between the two cities, Madison, Wisconsin and Montgomery, Alabama whose nonprofit sectors is where the theory of racialization is tested. Chapters 4 and 5 takes up the empirical cases to understand the process of racialization across each city. I conclude in Chapter 6 with a discussion of how we might achieve a more equitable nonprofit sector.

Chapter 2: Towards a Racialized Nonprofit Sector

What are popular beliefs about the nonprofit sector? One belief holds that anyone can start a nonprofit organization for any cause that they deem important (e.g. Hopkins 2017). Another belief is that the nonprofit sector is a de facto tax shelter for the wealthy (e.g. Hammack 2002). However, perhaps the most dominant belief is that the nonprofit sector represents a public good where people seek to have an impact on the lives of disadvantaged groups – services historically provided by the State (e.g. Siliunas, Small, and Wallerstein 2018). This prevailing view of the sector offers a portrait that makes it difficult to even begin thinking about some of the downsides to or challenges associated with operating in the sector and having a maximum impact – even though we know these exist (Helmig, Jergers, and Lapsley 2004). Therefore, our focus tends to be on all the good things that organizations are doing (Salamon 1994; Alexander 2003; Mason and Fiocco 2017).

There are countless examples of well-known nonprofit organizations engaging in meaningful work in various aspects of society. For instance, philanthropic organizations such as the McArthur Foundation offer financial support to combat climate change and promote criminal justice reform. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and United Way are international in their scope and provide a range of social services that address issues as diverse as disaster relief to neighborhood services and virtually everything in between. But, at the community-level, despite receiving less attention and often far-less funding, smaller Black-led nonprofit organizations are also engaged in important work. For instance, neighborhood organizations such as Dion's Chicago Dream is offering a truly innovative approach to thinking about the intractable issue of food insecurity. Despite its small size, this organization delivers 5 days' worth of fresh produce directly to the doorsteps of residents free of charge – a model that fundamentally

challenges the dominant approach to food aid. While different, each of these organizations are providing a range of services that have been outsourced by government (e.g. local, state, and federal) and having an impact on communities.

Taken together, these organizations, and countless others, constitute a view of the nonprofit sector as a quintessential panacea where any issue facing disadvantaged groups may be addressed. It also assumes that the sector is a level playing field where success or failure is tied to an individual organization's decision-making, capacity, or ability to embrace isomorphic tendencies thought to be associated with successful organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). That is, if any nonprofit organization is to be successful it must look and behave in a certain universally acceptable way consistent with what is expected in a nonprofit sector that largely resembles a white space (Anderson 2015). Part of the challenge with this view is that it effectively superimposes perspectives that might not be applicable to understanding the unique ways in which some organizations experience and navigate the nonprofit sector. And, it creates limited opportunities to contemplate the ways in which organizational outcomes might be impacted by factors beyond routine explanations. Indeed, what if there are other factors beyond decision-making, size, and conformity that are at play which impact the success or failure of organizations?

What I want to propose in this chapter is that the nonprofit sector, itself, is racialized in ways that have a profound impact on organizations led by people of color, particularly Black-led organizations (BLOs). At present, while scholars have certainly attended to the intersection of race and nonprofits (e.g. Bond, Kenny, and Wolfe 2015; Hum 2010; Besel et al. 2023) we still do not have a robust theory that helps us understand the extent to which the sector, itself, is racialized. Heeding and extending the call first made by DiMaggio and Powell (1990), I sketch

out a theory of racialization in the nonprofit sector that I will call the *racialized nonprofit industrial complex*.

To fully develop this theoretical idea, I must take a number of intermediate steps that might be thought of as building blocks. First, I consider an important lesser-known theoretical idea, the nonprofit industrial complex, to show how scholars have offered a critical analysis of the sector that stops short of a full-fledged analysis of racialization. Then, I briefly review the multidisciplinary and multimethodological literature on race and nonprofits to show that, while scholars have carefully examined the issue of race, they have not theorized its structural nature at the sector level thereby establishing a clear need for a new theoretical framework. To reframe a prevailing view of the sector as race neutral, I apply Bonilla-Silva's (1997) racialized social system concept to illustrate how to conceptually understand the sector as racialized. Recognizing racialization as a larger process, I turn to the concept of schema to describe the existence of a Sector Schema and a Black-led Organization Schema that take very different approaches to navigating the sector. By themselves, the schemas represent different views of what it means to be a viable organization within the sector. To illustrate how schemas produce racialization, I consider the literature on key areas that I refer to as *organizational success metrics* (OSMs) - those areas thought to be central to a nonprofit's overall success and where racialization has the most significant impact. From there, I show the impact of racialization by extending Ray's pathbreaking theoretical framework to the nonprofit sector by particularly focusing on his tenets. Finally, combining these contributions, I sketch out my understanding of the racialized nonprofit industrial complex as a theoretical framework to begin evaluating the experiences of Black-led organizations as an empirical case.

The Nonprofit Industrial Complex

This dissertation is hardly the first to take a critical look at the nonprofit sector (e.g. Mesch et al. 2006; Garrow 2012; Pettygrove and Ghose 2018; Hopper et al. 2021). Rather than initially focus on more well-known critical observations of the sector (e.g. Salamon, Hems, and Chinock 2000), I want to lift a theoretical perspective often outside the intellectual mainstream: the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) found in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (2017). In this anthology, various authors offer a critical appraisal of the nonprofit sector focusing on the experiences of a range of organizations within the sector. I specifically want to engage the NPIC concept because even as it takes a critical view of important parts of the sector it falls short in delivering an analysis that ties everything together in a manner that constitutes a racial structure – an omission that I discuss in greater detail below. Additionally, consideration of NPIC is useful insofar as it specifies key actors that I argue play a significant role in facilitating a racialization process within the sector.

The concept of NPIC has its origins with women of color who were devoted to fighting various forms of violence, primarily inflicted by the State (e.g. government actors). And their efforts were funded by foundations because they regarded the State as deliberately undermining efforts aimed at social change. However, they soon discovered that foundations, too, were similarly committed to stifling social change based on, among other things, placing restrictions on who and what would be funded. Seizing on the need to describe the ways in which the nonprofit sector is systematically used to limit progressive social change, scholars and activists developed the NPIC concept. The NPIC is defined by Rodriguez (2017) as "…the set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and

especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements (p. 21-22). There are at least three significant features of the NPIC: (1) the system appropriates what counts as social change by making a distinction between revolution and reform with a preference for the latter and (2) the system is upheld by virtue of an interconnected relationship between the State and foundations that express a purported interest in social change while taking strategic steps to undermine such efforts. (3) The NPIC is quite strategic in that it represents a government-nonprofit partnership that creates a management structure that represses progressive efforts and enhances neoliberal movements such as prison proliferation (Gilmore 2017). The critique of the NPIC also includes references to Congressional Reports such as one prepared by the Walsh Commission that raises important questions about how foundations use wealth and power to advance an ideologically driven agenda that is not committed to fostering change. According to INCITE, this criticism prompted foundations to take a different approach to advance capitalist agendas that included enlisting institutions of higher education that could promote perspectives that appeared as neutral. But, the most significant analytic critique offered by INCITE of foundations focuses on conservative Republican efforts to take legislative action that regulated the ability of foundations to support liberal causes while also facilitating the rise of right-wing foundations working against progressive social change.

Within the NPIC, contributors in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* meticulously explain the varied and sophisticated ways in which progressive social change efforts of nonprofits are undermined. One of the most important critiques of the NPIC focuses on the role of philanthropy. Allen (2017) discusses the ways in which foundations use their finances to take over social movements by exploiting organizations' need for capital and embracing ambiguous organizational efforts aimed at social change. This latter point is interesting because it potentially

creates an opportunity to sew divisions among social change organizations in ways that benefit foundations. Here, however, the emphasis is on the role of foundations and actors within the sector committed to undermining social change. Ultimately, what Allen argues is that the philanthropic sector's primary aim is to include moderate Black nonprofits into an existing capitalist structure that gives the illusion of social change but maintains the capitalist, neoliberal status quo. Ahn (2017) extends a critique of capitalism, by creating the tax system that allows for foundations to be created in an effort to subvert laws requiring taxing of estate funds. And those overseeing these foundations are often white, a part of the business class, and allocate very little to social change programs. The author concludes with case studies that take both liberals and conservatives to task for differentially undermining progressive social change. Taking a more aggressive approach, King and Osayande (2017) offer a searing critique of what they identify as progressive philanthropy and its impulse towards steering social justice movements in the wrong direction. They specifically argue that progressive philanthropy is predominantly white and this composition focuses more on the maintenance of white wealth and limits the work of what they call "oppressed communities of color."

What Allen, Ahn, and King & Oayande describe, along with other contributions (e.g. Guilloud and Cordery 2017), is the ways in which actors, principally those who control money in the sector, effectively use their power and influence to undermine social justice efforts. Their contribution is part of a larger effort within *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* to point out the ways in which social justice organizations are unable to fulfill their efforts at effecting structural change. A key aspect of their approach presents something of an entanglement between boards, philanthropy, and the state as the roots of a concerted effort to thwart social change. This is both an interesting and important point because it highlights how whites occupy roles in three key

spaces that play a significant role in determining the fate of social justice movements. Yet, we know the presence of whites, alone, no matter how complicit they are in oppressing minorities, does not constitute the kind of racial analysis that we need to fully account for all that ails people of color navigating the nonprofit sector. There are other areas within the sector where the power and influence of whiteness are also important. Still more, documenting the ways in which oppressed people of color are negatively impacted is consistent with a deficit oriented lens that does not fully account for how they might work within the NPIC to challenge its impact (Tuck 2009). Critically, left alone, the NPIC only delivers hints of racialization without fully advancing a theoretical framework within which to understand this process in a more fulsome manner within the sector.

There are some aspects of the NPIC that are helpful to building a theory of racialization in the nonprofit sector. The framework does specify the actors that I pay attention to when developing my own theory of racialization in the nonprofit sector. Indeed, in order for a system of this nature to exist and have an impact it must be maintained and facilitated by powerful, interconnected actors including the State, Philanthropy, and Nonprofit Organizations & Boards – all of which are dominated by whites. But, more than pay attention to these actors, I try to make clear not merely what they are doing to undermine organizations of color, but *how* – the actual mechanisms that underlie their power. Additionally, the NPIC specifies in compelling detail how philanthropy represents not only an inequitable distribution of resources, but also the role played by actors in contributing to this system. Following the money is always a helpful strategy in trying to understand the implicit goals of philanthropic actors (Reckhow 2013). While funding is a routine topic of importance for scholars and an obvious concern for nonprofits, it is hardly the only thing that matters within the nonprofit sector. And the challenge is that if we only focus on

money, we miss so many other ways that the nonprofit sector might be racialized. And so, the NPIC's overwhelming emphasis on funding creates an opportunity to offer an analysis on additional issues. The NPIC also shines an important light on lesser-known organizations led by people of color (Tang 2017) which are always going to be more susceptible to racism within a racialized nonprofit sector. The concern is specifically for social justice organizations, broadly conceived, who are fighting to achieve structural change on behalf of racial minority groups. But, in today's nonprofit sector there are many smaller, grassroots based organizations who are trying to support clients in meeting basic responsibilities (e.g. Boris and Mosher-Williams 1988; Walker 1993; Bulkley and Burch 2011; LeBlanc et al. 2014).

Ultimately, the overarching aim of those critiquing the NPIC is to fundamentally disrupt or even eliminate the nonprofit sector as it currently exists. While a fundamental dissolution and replacement of the sector would be the best-case scenario, for now the system is here to stay. That does not mean we should not call for reform. Indeed, there are many calls for such changes from elected leaders, scholars, and the lay public alike (e.g. Light 2000; Suykens, De Rynck, and Verschuere 2018). But, the pursuit of such dramatic change requires an additional set of efforts aimed at understanding the nonprofit sector in a manner that illuminates its racialized nature and uncovers its underlying mechanisms. The NPIC only provide a starting point for such an analysis.

Race and Nonprofits

While the NPIC does not provide a robust racial analysis of the sector, there is a significant literature focusing on the intersection of race and nonprofits. This literature is a rather impressive, multidisciplinary and multimethodological body of knowledge that attends to this intersection. But, this breadth and depth also makes it remarkably difficult to delve into for fear

of being too expansive or too narrow. In an effort to avoid either of these pitfalls, and following the prescription of Becker (1998), my own approach to briefly reviewing this literature is guided by a basic question: What does the literature say about the role of race in the nonprofit sector? And I was particularly interested in thinking about the experiences of BLOs as they are the basis for this work; though thinking about race in the sector also elicits work focused on other racial minority groups. To aid in answering this question I borrowed a useful tool from the Health Sciences, COVIDENCE, that helps succinctly organize literature. As I discuss below, the answer to this question is summarized in three categories: (1) discussion of diversity in the nonprofit sector with an emphasis on people of color; (2) consideration of the work done by nonprofits with minority populations including neighborhoods; and (3) focus on how minority populations interact with nonprofit organizations.

The literature has been quite clear about the lack of leaders of color in executive director roles and the need for increased diversity (Medina and Partner 2017). This leadership deficit exists despite ample evidence suggesting the benefit of racially diverse leadership in all kinds of nonprofit organizations (Fincher, Katsinas, and Bush 2010). In response to this void, scholars have examined various ways in which efforts have been made within the sector to cultivate more leaders of color. For instance, Hopkins et al. (2019) examined a partnership that sought to increase the skills of leaders of color. They found that, while leaders benefited from the training, they often did not hold the necessary leadership positions or possess the organizational authority to put the skills into practice. Efforts to "improve" the skills of leaders of color is a common strategic approach within the sector. One skill found to be important is networking (Johansen and LeRoux 2012). Aside from focusing on skills, scholars have also pointed to the importance of

having a diverse board as an important factor in increasing racial diversity (Lee 2022; LeRoux and Medina 2022; Mumford 2022).

One of the important parts of nonprofit work is how these organizations have become an attractive alternative to government services, particularly for people of color, as part of efforts aimed at achieving racial justice (Strauss 2017; Besel et al. 2023). Nonprofit organizations provide a range of services (e.g. Schwartz and Austin 2011; Meyer 2019; Chiriboga et al. 2019). Nonprofits led by African Americans are more likely to provide economic services focused on tangibly improving the life chances of clients (Littlefield 2010). Even as nonprofits provide these services, there is evidence of racial disparities including racialized perceptions of Black clients by white nonprofits (Cox 2009). Smith (2005) found that despite desegregation efforts to promote increased access to nonprofit healthcare in Jackson, Mississippi, federal guidelines governing reimbursement led to disparities in treatment received by racial minorities. These disparities are also evidenced in how nonprofit organizations focused on providing services to formerly incarcerated individuals exercise undue surveillance over racial minorities (Prior 2020). One way to address racialized delivery of services is for Black leaders working within white-led nonprofit organizations to offer insights that counter white-dominant perspectives, address racial inequality, and help organizations understand how to become more racially diverse (Fulton, Oyakawa, and Wood 2019).

Given that nonprofits are occupying such a critical role in society, their services are central to the life-chances of racial minorities. Hughes (2019) found that African American mothers preferred seeking assistance from nonprofit organizations because these interactions did not include the kind of surveillance that mothers experienced when seeking assistance from government services agencies. This kind of surveillance is consistent with what Enriquez, Vera,

and Ramakrishnan (2019) found in California when nonprofits advocated against racialized practices that precluded undocumented immigrants from obtaining driver's licenses. This kind of advocacy is critical particularly in predominantly Black cities such as New Orleans where Hopper et al. (2021) found that just one-fifth of Black women were receiving treatment at a substance use rehabilitation center.

Diversity is clearly an important consideration within the nonprofit sector, particularly when it comes to increasing the number of racial minorities in leadership positions. And nonprofits are carrying out important work on behalf of racial minorities in a number of ways. Racial minority clients' interactions with nonprofits, particularly those led by whites, has led to, at best, mixed results. Across the intersection of race and nonprofits what becomes clear is that, while scholars have certainly advanced our theoretical, empirical, and practical understanding, there remains no clear explanation for some of the challenges facing racial minorities in key dimensions of the nonprofit sector.

The Nonprofit as Racialized Social System

It is not enough to simply note that scholars have not addressed the extent to which the sector is racialized. Instead, there is a need for a robust theoretical framework to explain (and empirically examine) racialization within the sector. To construct such a framework, I begin with Bonilla-Silva's (1997) *racialized social system* and extend these ideas to the nonprofit sector. Bonilla-Silva's contribution began with a bold and somewhat controversial statement that "The area of race and ethnic studies lack a sound theoretical apparatus" (p. 465). I point to this quote because the same can be said of the nonprofit sector. At present, we lack any kind of theoretical framework with which to understand whether and how the nonprofit sector, itself, is racialized which has allowed for a narrative of race-neutrality to be engrained in the minds of both scholars

and the lay public. The consequences of this dominant perspective are not merely academic. Indeed, organizations led by people io color, embedded within communities of color, are tasked with carrying out their work in a purportedly race-neutral sector where their success or failure is seen as organization-specific rather than structural.

Before making this critical contribution, Bonilla-Silva offers a critique that those studying race and ethnicity often subscribed to a reductionist approach – what he called idealist – that reduced racism to a basic consideration of racist ideas. It is these ideas, according to his critique, that led to the development of prejudice towards people of color. According to Bonilla-Silva, even alternatives to the ideological view of racism including Marxist and Institutionalist perspectives do not offer an analysis that allows for the study "...of racially stratified societies" (p. 466). For Bonilla-Silva an idealist view, while a part of racism, precludes us from understanding how it shapes the life chances of a racial group and prevents us from readily identifying the dynamic nature of racism which might be less visible than more obvious ideological examples.

To address what he observes as significant limitations, Bonilla-Silva offers an alternative framework: the racialized social system (RSS), defined as "...societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by placement of actors into racial categories" (p. 469). The identification of racial actors is not only about color, but also about certain race-specific characteristics that are socially constructed. This manufactured view and understanding of racial actors is critical because it serves as the justification for differential treatment including access to various social rewards based on the perceived worthiness of a group. Within a social system, the effect of racism portends a structural foundation – one where racism is embedded. Within the RSS, racial categorization is hierarchical in nature, which

dictates social relationships among groups. In practice, this means races in a superior position have an advantage in various aspects of society (e.g. economically, politically, employment, and social estimation such as superficial designations of beauty and intelligence). Taken together, the racialized social relations undergird a society's racial structure.

The operative question is: how does the RSS apply to the nonprofit sector? In short, I argue the nonprofit sector itself constitutes a racialized social system that features a hierarchy in which white-led organizations are in a superior position and organizations led by people of color (e.g. Black-led organizations) are in an inferior position. This dichotomous relationship means white-led organizations occupy a position of power and influence within the sector and set the standard by which all organizations – regardless of how they look – are judged. An additional implication of this hierarchical relationship means that organizations led by people of color are disadvantaged in a variety of ways within the nonprofit sector, particularly when they dare to deviate from an established set of standards. This reality constitutes the racial structure of the sector. Critically, as a racialized social system the nonprofit sector is rooted in and has a preference for whiteness.

The Nonprofit Schema

Thinking about the nonprofit sector as a racialized social system is the starting point and theoretical context for understanding its racialized character. An important question that follows this designation is concerned with *how* racialization is produced within the sector. That is, what is the underlying mechanism that facilitates racialization as a process? To answer this question, I draw upon a popular concept in the discipline: schemas. The concept of schema has been around for decades and has been most prominently associated with the work of Sewell (1992) who posited schemas as constituting rules of social life. Following Giddens (1984), Sewell contends

that these schemas are generalizable rules that reproduce aspects of social life. But it is DiMaggio's (1997) work that has shaped sociological utility of schemas. DiMaggio's definition of schema is "...knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information" (p. 269). Building on these early contributions, I want to anchor my discussion of schema in the important work of Boutyline and Soter (2021) because they set out to help sociologists refine an approach to using cultural schemas as an analytical tool. While they acknowledge the carefulness of DiMaggio's usage of schemas, they cite two limitations: (a) there exists no clear boundary for what constitutes a schema and (b) the operation of schemas are limited to pattern creation which does not include other sociologically relevant functions. Their basic argument is that the popularity and utility of schemas have led to an ambiguous conceptualization that does not permit sociologists to arrive at correct conclusions and offer proper explanations. For them, scholars have too often aimed to overextend the usage of schemas which led to a ubiquitous designation – a catch all approach that allows anything to be labeled as a schema even when it does not meet the standard.

To address the limitations of existing schemas the authors suggest that we need to employ a functional-level understanding; one that has clear utility and boundaries within sociology. They define a cultural schema as "...socially shared representations deployable in automatic cognition" (p. 735). Essentially, they argue cultural schemas have three particular features: social sharedness, automacity or automatic cognition, and representational character. Social sharedness refers to how different schemas constituted agreed upon ways of understanding some aspect of the world. But, according to Boutyline and Soter (2021), the cultural dimension lies in the ability of the schemas to be replicated amongst individuals. Automatic cognition is about having a

conscious awareness of norms that are reflexively deployed in a given situation. The power of automatic cognition is tied to: (1) an ability to influence behavior by providing default assumptions that basically provides information about ambiguous situations. That is, an individual might reflexively know to grab an umbrella if someone tells them that it is raining outside. (2) Automatic cognition also allows for a narrow understanding of relevant and familiar information which makes a reflexive understanding of some issue easier. (3) Automatic cognition has an underlying and familiar cultural script that an induces some behaviors and actions within an individual. Representational character refers to the ways in which schemas facilitate information about the world – real or otherwise. Such a character allows questions to be raised about any given subject. Through this framework, the authors establish a lens through which we can deploy the cultural schema concept to important sociological questions.

What are the implications for the nonprofit sector? I extend the authors' conception of cultural schema and argue that such a schema is also present in the nonprofit sector, which I call a *sector schema*. I define the sector schema as a socially shared set of standards that are reflexively and automatically reproduced amongst organizations. This sector schema sets the standard and expectations for what it means to be perceived as a successful organization within the nonprofit sector. This standard is established by virtue of the IRS, acting on behalf of the State, that sanctions who can participate in the sector and under what terms and conditions. As a result of these provisions, all actors within the nonprofit sector develop a view of *nonprofitness* that comes to define participation within the sector. A unique dimension of the sector schema is all that we know about how it functions on a day-to-day level is rooted in whiteness. That is, given that whites dominate the sector, everything that we understand about its structure is rooted in the experiences of white-led organizations. This obviously may not be consistent with the

experiences of organizations led by people of color, particularly Black-led organizations (BLOs).

While the sector schema is dominant and standardizes participation, it begs an important question: how do BLOs respond to the sector schema? Equally important is how this racialized system is implemented?

Implementation of Racialization

To understand how racialization is implemented in the nonprofit sector. I turn to the pathbreaking work of Victor Ray (2019). He recently offered an influential theoretical framework that has dramatically shifted how people think about the question of race and organizations. His entry point into this discussion stems from a belief that race and organization scholars have diverged in a manner that precludes either from informing the other's work – a disjuncture that he believes prevents us from arriving at a complete understanding of how organizations are racialized. He defines racialized organizations as "...meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinated racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant group" (p. 36).

Here I extend Ray's theory to understand how racialization is implemented in the nonprofit sector. For Ray, within racialized organizations are certain tenets that enhance or limit agency; legitimating the unequal distribution of resources; establishing whiteness as a credential; and embracing racialized decoupling - each of which I briefly discuss and subsequently use as sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954) for examining how Black-led organizations experience racialization in the nonprofit sector.

In the first tenet, Ray discusses how racialized organizations shape agency. First, he suggests racialized organizations dictate how time is spent for non-whites based on their location

within the organization, which dictates the amount of control they have over their time. Second, he suggests time is stolen within racialized organizations because of how it is differentially divided between whites and non-whites. The concept of time is similarly important in the nonprofit sector given that organizations provide services (e.g. Fyall 2016), are required to report data (e.g. Thomson 2010), adhere to regulatory requirements (e.g. Kerlin and Reid 2010), rely on volunteering (e.g. Ngah, Abdullah, and Suki 2022) and, of course, pursue funding (e.g. Smith and Phillips 2016). Second, Ray suggests that racialized organizations shape agency by limiting how people of color express themselves emotionally. Within the nonprofit sector, positive emotions have been linked to increased donations and volunteers (e.g. Paxton, Velasco, and Ressler 2020).

In the second tenet, Ray argues that racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources. According to Ray, this occurs because white organizations are seen as ideal types while non-white organizations are seen as problematic deviations. In similar ways, the nonprofit sector features an overrepresentation of whites that dominates the landscape and situates their interests as the ideal type (Danley and Blessett 2022) Additionally, Ray points to segregation as limiting access to resources which leads to majority-minority organizations being under-resourced compared to white organizations (Marable 2000; Wooten 2015). In the nonprofit sector, funding is a perennial issue facing all organizations, but is especially challenging for minority serving nonprofits as they consistently operate on a smaller budget and have fewer resources (e.g. Lee and De Vita 2008; Roth et. al. 2015).

In the third tenet, Ray argues that whiteness is a credential that provides "...access to organizational resources, legitimizing work hierarchies, and expanding white agency" (p. 41). Effectively, one's identity as white is accompanied by a number of advantages, particularly in

employment contexts. Scholars and practitioners, alike, have documented minority leadership deficits in the nonprofits sector by frequently pointing to the lack of leaders of color (De Vita, Roeger, and Niedzwiecki 2009; BattaliaWinston 2017); though few substantive explanations have emerged to explain this deficit. And, we also know that nonprofit organizations rely heavily on volunteers who tend to be overwhelmingly white (e.g. Guttentag 2009). Moreover, as resources have become increasingly competitive, the nonprofit sector has encouraged partnerships and collaborations as an optimal way to meet the needs of clients.

Ray's final tenet, racialized decoupling, points to a disconnect between an organization's commitment to equity, access, and inclusion and requisite policies that ensure these outcomes are achieved. In the nonprofit sector, there have been calls for and a recognition of the value of diversity (Weisinger, Borges-Mendez, and Milofsky 2016; Weisinger 2017). Yet, the sector remains a place where people of color occupy disproportionately fewer leadership roles with analysts often citing a need for innovative leadership (Hopkins, Meyer, Shera, and Peters 2014)

The need to extend and modify Ray's argument stems from the fact that he is dealing with individual organizations rather than an organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The nonprofit sector, as an organizational field, contains a sector schema. Ray's tenets provide a lens through which to understand how racialization is implemented through the sector schema. Relatedly, it is important to note that the sector schema is not merely an expression of preferences for how organizations should navigate the sector and carry out day to day work. The power of the schema is enhanced by being connected to what Sewell (1992) called social and material resources. Within the nonprofit sector, social and material resources are analogous to organizational success metrics (OSMs) - those key dimensions within the nonprofit sector thought to be central to an organization's success. In the next section, consistent with an Urban

Institute (2012) report, I identify and discuss five OSMs: leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteering.

Organizational Success Metrics

Above I have argued that we should now be thinking about the nonprofit sector, itself, as racialized and having a racial structure. This designation is the starting point for the larger process of understanding the impact of racialization on BLOs. To fully capture such an impact requires consideration of how racialization is facilitated through key material and social resources that I referred to as OSMs. In my forthcoming discussion of the primary OSMs of leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteering I have three aims: (1) highlighting the importance of each for any organization operating within the nonprofit sector; (2) discussing how OSMs have largely been understood through a race-neutral lens; and (3) arguing that this race-neutrality has prevented us from fully accounting for how and to what extent BLOs might deviate from and be impacted by standardized views of OSMs.

Leadership. There is a consensus that Executive and Board leadership matter a great deal for the success of nonprofit organizations (e.g. Herman and Hemovics 1990). There has been growing concern about increased turnover in nonprofit leadership (e.g. Executive Directors/CEOs) and difficulty in recruiting replacements (Hopkins, Meyer, Shera and Peters, 2014). Some see this challenge as a result of nonprofit leaders lacking the holistic training needed in a competitive sector environment where policy issues and management acumen seem to matter as much as constituency issues (Ebrahim and Rangan 2010). Beyond executive leadership, nonprofit boards, who often take on greater importance in organizational management than in the for-profit sector, are difficult to recruit and lack the training and capacity needed to effectively manage the organization (Ostrower 2007). And there is a call for

non-hierarchical and collective leadership structures (Hopkins, Meyer, Shera and Peters 2014). This prevailing view understands leadership as either individuals or not having skills without regard for any other factor that might influence leadership style.

The question of race and leadership has often been confined to analysts pointing to a general lack of leaders of color in the nonprofit sector (BattaliaWinston 207; Thomas-Breitfeld and Kunreuther 2017), but that is not due to a lack of experience and capacity of prospective leaders of color (Gelles et. al 2009). Instead, analysts cite institutionalized racism, from mission statements to white domination of boards (Bell, Moyers, and Wolfred 2006; Board Source 2017) as the culprit. Their focus of concern, however, is individuals of color, not organizations led by people of color. Thus, we are left with an incomplete understanding of how organizations led by people of color are understood within the sector.

Funding. Funding is the perennial issue facing nonprofits as these access to revenue is central to organizations' capacity to fulfill their mission (e.g. Smith and Phillips 2016). In light of the challenge of identifying and maintaining secure funding sources, there is an increasing focus on nonprofits diversifying their funding, including engaging in fee for service activities (Brooks 2003), and on foundations attending more carefully to nonprofits' actual financial needs (Buteau, Chaffin, and Gopal 2014). Adding to the pressure facing nonprofits is the fact that foundations express preferences for business-oriented evaluation criteria and quantitative outcomes measurement standards for awarding funding (Incite!, 2017). With respect to the question of funding, organizations are judged as viable if they demonstrate the capacity to appropriately manage funds based on who works for them and their existing organizational infrastructure.

While there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that race might matter in nonprofit funding, scholars have sometimes addressed this question by focusing on issues such as how neighborhood composition effects funding allocation (e.g. Garrow 2011; Garrow 2014). Beyond these contexts, King and Osayande (2017) engage in an important analysis of how progressive philanthropy undermines movements led by people of color. An important point made in this analysis is the ways in which funding allocations are routed to white-led organizations who are committed to minimum change that essentially maintains the status quo. This and other contributions move towards understanding race, but stop short in offering an analysis about how the pursuit of funding might be racialized within the sector in ways that disadvantage organizations led by people of color.

Data Collection and Management. As funding competition grows, so do the demands for justifying funding requests and demonstrating an organization's impact (Fine, Thayer and Coghlan 2003; Umar and Hassan 2019). Nonprofits are expected to "measure" and prioritize specific outcomes that take precedence over delivering services to clients in need. Despite these expectations, many nonprofits lack the overall capacity to collect the data required of them and don't use much of the data they do collect (Benjamin, Voida, and Bopp 2017; Stoecker 2007). Moreover, many nonprofits also have a technology deficit that inhibits collecting data (Hou and Lampe 2015; Schneider 2003). Thus, data is seen as a natural component of demonstrating organizational capacity and worthiness and when organizations are unable to fulfill these requests they are seen as noncompliant.

Despite the data reporting expectations and challenges meeting these, there is little evidence that has sought to understand what this might differentially mean for organizations led by people of color. One exception is Schneider (2003) whose ethnographic research has shown

that data expectations are particularly burdensome for nonprofits working in communities of color as a result of low funding and staff lacking sufficient knowledge of new technologies. Though promising, this study is but one step towards understanding how the nonprofit, itself, creates a data structure that uniquely impacts organizations led by people of color. A key reason why there might be such a large gap in understanding the role of race in data within the sector is because neoliberal forces have made it a requirement to produce such measurable outcomes and this standard applies regardless of race (e.g. Bloodgood, Stroup, and Wong 2021; Farmer et al. 2023). An important question is how racialization within the sector might regard organizations who opt to treat data in ways that are inconsistent with the established expectations.

Collaboration. Funders emphasize collaboration between nonprofits, and among nonprofits, government, and business, assuming that collaboration will produce bigger outcomes (Austin 2010; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006). Nonprofits typically provide the justification for collaboration, as they lack resources to accomplish objectives by themselves. Collaboration is seen as good for everyone, but the best resourced and most established organizations are in the best position to benefit from them (Guo and Acar 2005). Given that collaboration is seen as a normative dimension of the sector, organizations are expected to be willing to collaborate and an unwillingness to do so creates a narrative that an organization might be prioritizing having an impact.

Research on nonprofit collaboration and race has focused on environmental factors that make collaborations challenging. For instance, Snavely and Tracy (2022) compare collaboration experiences between two rural communities from southern Illinois (predominately white) and Mississippi Delta (predominately Black). They reported nonprofit leaders in each location identifying trust as central to successful collaborations. While this analysis is promising, the

authors contend that the challenge of establishing trust equally affects both Black and white nonprofits in the same way across each region which does not provide the kind of racial analysis that helps understand differential experiences in collaboration. Others have found a general disconnect within communities between nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders, including community-based boards, which prevents collaborative partnerships leading to improved race relations (Hum 2010). There is still a need to understand how a racialized collaboration system might impact the efforts for organizations led by people of color to engage in equitable collaborations and the extent to which this engagement is exploitative.

Volunteer management. Volunteers are also crucial to NPOs, and there has been a historical shift in volunteering from long-term volunteers to episodic volunteers who only commit to time-limited engagements (Cnaan and Handy 2005; Hager 2013). The challenge of getting and keeping volunteers has led to professionalized volunteer management, generating a large literature on best practices and conditions for volunteer recruitment and retention (e.g. Macduff, Netting , and O'Connor 2009; Hager and Brudney 2011; Studer and von Schmurbein 2013). As long as organizations are expected to maintain a robust volunteer base – within a presumed large pool of willing volunteers – any desire not to tap into this base will be seen as organizations self-sabotaging themselves and their work.

There is limited and inconsistent literature on race and volunteering in NPOs. Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) found that Blacks are less likely than whites to be recruited for volunteering and are less likely to respond to recruitment efforts, except for church-related activities. Mesch and colleagues (2006) review literature suggesting Blacks and whites may volunteer in relatively equal amounts when controlling for human capital variables, but that overall the literature is inconclusive on racial differences in volunteering. They also cite

Morrow-Howell, Lott, and Ozawa (1990), who found that Black volunteers committed more time to Black constituency members when volunteering, and were rated higher by them than white volunteers. And Boyle and Sawyer (2010) suggest that, to the extent Blacks volunteer less frequently, it may be due to how volunteer recruitment campaigns are run, leaving Blacks with less information about volunteer opportunities. Yet, we still know very little about how a racialized volunteer system within the nonprofit sector might lead to a volunteer base that undermines the efforts of organizations led by people of color and their clients.

The preceding OSMs are important to any organization seeking to work and have an impact within the nonprofit sector. They represent critical resources that all organizations – regardless of their racial composition – are expected to pursue for the purposes of being seen as legitimate. What I argue is that within a racialized nonprofit sector the dominant schema, rooted in whiteness, is powered when connected to an OSM because it gets to standardize expectation around each of these key dimensions. The result is that organizations led by people of color, particularly BLOs, are disadvantaged in ways that undermine their capacity to successfully carry out their mission on behalf of clients.

The Racialized Nonprofit Industrial Complex

At this point it is important to summarize my theoretical view of the nonprofit sector as racialized. I began by considering the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) as providing a limited analysis of race, but specifying the actors who might be charged with maintaining the sector. In an effort to understand the extent to which racialization of the nonprofit sector has been addressed, I considered a multidisciplinary and multimethodological literature at the intersection of race and nonprofits. Following consideration of this body of knowledge, I concluded two points: (1) scholars have been talking about the issue of race in the nonprofit

sector and (2) we lack a theoretical framework within which to understand the nonprofit sector as racialized. To begin building this theoretical framework I argue that the sector be regarded as a racialized social system that places organizations into categories on the basis of race. And within this racial structure is a sector schema that standardizes how organizations should look and behave within the sector to be seen as legitimate. This schema is implemented by the State and nonprofit organizations consistent with Ray's tenets of racialization that I extend to the sector. And the consequences of this racialized process occurs when the schema is connected to material and social resources that I characterize as OSMs.

Moving forward, the theoretical idea that I want to advance is that the racialized nonprofit industrial complex (RNIC), is a racialized social system that places organizations into racial categories where Black-led nonprofit organizations (BLOs) are regarded as inferior (or illegitimate) compared with white organizations under the guise of race neutrality. The system is supervised by the State (e.g. local, state, and federal levels), thought to be a neutral arbiter, and by funders who control the primary means of survival for organizations. Aligned with these key actors, white-led organizations function as an ideal type in contrast to BLOs. Together, these key actors use their power to fuel a complex schema that dictates how social and material resources are allocated based on taken for granted assumptions about Black-led organizations.

Now that I have presented my own theoretical framework that will be used to analyze racialization in the nonprofit sector, the next question is: where is this nonprofit sector? This is a particularly important question because so often any reference to the nonprofit sector tends to be shrouded in mystery which may be why some have asked: what is the nonprofit sector? (Salamon, Hems, and Chinnock 2000). Drawing upon my own theoretical framework, I argue that it is possible to isolate the nonprofit sector to a particular context. Because the racialization

processes involves nonprofit organizations (including the people who lead them), funders, and government, I argue the nonprofit sector is situated in a geographical place – a city. In the next chapter, I discuss not only how I understand the sector as situated in a city, but I point to particular kind of place which I will call middle cities.

Chapter 3: Towards Middle Cities

In the previous chapter I defined a racialized nonprofit industrial complex as a racialized social system where organizations led by people of color are marginalized. It is a system that exists within a city because of both the sheer volume of nonprofit organizations and the varied roles they play in this geographical space in the lives of people (Feiock and Jang 2009; Joassart-Marcelli, Wolch, and Salim 2013). As one might imagine, there are many different cities where one could study nonprofit organizations. That so many possibilities exist creates a challenge in deciding *where* to study. Of course, there is always pressure for urbanists to venture into traditional empirical sites such as large cities. However, I have made the bold decision to do my work in places where scholars have not always paid attention: middle cities. In this chapter, I offer a justification for studying a racialized nonprofit sector in middle cities by critically examining how and why scholars have focused their attention on certain types of cities, mostly large and to some extent small cities. This chapter is organized around three parts. First, I consider key aspects of the urban canon and related debates in an effort to highlight how urban sociology has been largely defined by a primary focus on large cities I refer to as prototypical and, to a lesser degree, smaller cities to the detriment of an entire other category of cities, which I refer to as middle cities. From there, I define what a middle city is and discuss why it represents a good geographical context in which to investigate racialization in the nonprofit sector. Finally, I identify and discuss two middle cities that are the basis for the empirical test of my theoretical idea. This discussion of middle cities sets the stage for the forthcoming empirical chapters.

The Urban Cannon & Prototypical Cities

Literally every aspect of urban sociological inquiry derives from what happens in a city (Park 1915; Jacobs 1961; Zukin 1987). If we want to understand patterns of segregation, we look

towards the work of Massey and Denton (1993) which examines racial segregation in American cities. To understand urban crime and deviance we reflexively cite Shaw and McKay's (1942) book that laid the foundation for an understanding of social disorganization in the city. William Julius Wilson (1987) set the research agenda on poverty and inequality by documenting how changes in neighborhoods including loss of jobs negatively impacted the experiences of African Americans in Chicago. Though problematic for his characterization of poor African Americans as part of an underclass, Wilson's work spurred many important debates amongst urbanists (e.g. Wacquant 2008). Questions about how residents successfully navigate urban poverty have been examined in the work of Mario Small (2004; 2009) and Newman (2000). To understand what happens in urban neighborhoods in large cities, we often refer to Sampson's (2012) extensive work analyzing a range of factors why and for whom neighborhoods matter with a particular a focus on Chicago. It is true that the aforementioned contributions have largely emerged as a result of scholars studying Chicago. But, I argue that Chicago is not an outlier and is, instead, part of a larger uncritical impulse by scholars to study issues in certain kinds of cities.

I also want to make clear that a focus on cities like Chicago is not by accident. Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and other places constitute what I call prototypical cities – large geographical spaces with populations above a half million in habitants that represent what Krause (2021) has called model cases that are preferred by scholars based on a variety of factors including historical precedents. I contend that an overwhelming preference for these prototypical cities in the discipline can be traced to various schools of sociology – historically significant intellectual contexts based on their generation of ideas central to the discipline. These schools are defined by shared theoretical, empirical, and methodological traditions/preferences that pertain to a set of research interests.

There are three schools of sociology that have established the prototypical city: Chicago, Atlanta, and Los Angeles. I want to clarify that while I discuss prototypicality in the context of these schools, I am defining prototypicality in terms of a common location, set of issues (both theoretical and empirical), and the establishment of standards set by each school.

The Chicago School

In the aforementioned studies, and others within the urban canon (e.g. Gans 1962; Anderson 1990), we take for granted a serious definition of what constitutes a city. For both scholars and the lay public, a common understanding of the city is this big place with clearly defined boundaries, tall buildings, and lots of people which is enough to contribute to a basic universal view of this space. If you were to stop and ask the average person what constitutes a city they would point to most of the aforementioned criteria without hesitation. This taken for granted view of the city is not by chance. Instead, I argue that our preoccupation with these large, prototypical cities (e.g. Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles), is the result of a number of factors including the role played by various schools of sociology. Chief among them is the Chicago School of Sociology – long thought to be the nation's originator of the discipline (Barley 1989). From Chicago, the definition of the city began taking shape as what Park (1925) viewed as "...a state of mind, body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in the customs and are transmitted within this tradition" (p. 1). For Park, there was just something inherent about the city that could almost be summed up as "we know it when we see it…" Additionally, and more definitively, the sociological definition of the city reflets Wirth's (1938) characterization as "...a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (p. 8). For both Park and Wirth, the city represented an ecologically specific entity; a social laboratory for which sociologists might carry out

investigations that improve our understanding of social interaction and human behavior within society.

A defining feature of this School is its signature city as laboratory ethic that identified Chicago as a geographical space within which to understand various aspects of the social world. This ethic meant that members of this school saw proximity to the city as an opportunity to do their work. A signature way they carried out this work was by utilizing and championing qualitative inquiry, particularly by becoming immersed in various communities within the city (Becker 1996). This focus on qualitative inquiry led to some of the discipline's most significant theoretical and empirical contributions that constituted an important foundation for what we understand as urban sociology (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Zorbaugh 1929; Park 1936; Blumer 1969; Shaw and McKay 1942; Goffman 1961). It is no wonder that Andrew Abbott (1991), a de facto resident historian of the Chicago School, summed the centrality of Chicago as an epicenter for sociological inquiry. Indeed, Chicago has come to represent the quintessential prototypical city.

The reason why Chicago matters so much is that it set the standard for where urbanists should carry out their work (Burgess 1925). More concretely, studying Chicago granted scholars what might be thought of as *sociological credibility* – a view that an individual is engaged in work that provided a reliable, trusted, and perhaps generalizable view of the urban world. I do not mean reliability and generalizability that is central to methodological discourse (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Instead, I only mean that historically there was fundamental expectation that scholars interested in urban work would be expected to examine these issues in Chicago. And any deviation would call into question their ability to credibility weigh on these issues.

While featured prominently, the Chicago School is not alone in establishing interest in prototypical cities. The Atlanta School of Sociology is also an important intellectual context within which to understand scholars' interest in prototypical cities.

The Atlanta School

A second School that has helped establish urbanists' views of what constitutes a city is the Atlanta School of Sociology. While less heralded, the Atlanta School is central to our understanding of the prototypical city because of its historical concern for and interest in the city of Atlanta (and deep south more generally). Ensuring an accurate view of the Atlanta School's position in the urban canon has been part of a larger intellectual crusade by Earl Wright to make the discipline of sociology understand the School's contributions. He has been careful to point out the ways in which the Chicago School's contributions were predated by work in the Atlanta School (Wright 2017). The School's seminal contributions have been made by W.E.B. Du Bois. It was Du Bois, according to Wright (2000), who is credited with being the first to establish and advance a systematic sociological research program (Du Bois 1899). Within this path breaking research program, Du Bois and others were principally concerned with the overall condition of Black people, not merely for basic inquiry, but to improve their lives – a significant departure from Chicago's emphasis on documenting the deviant behaviors of Black people.

But, how might Atlanta contribute to the theoretical prototypical city? Wright (2002) pointed out that the Atlanta school was interested in urban conditions, particularly during the post-emancipation period wherein scores of Black people gained "freedom". Acquiring an understanding of and ways to improve their condition was primarily pursued in cities (Du Bois 1968). An important piece of evidence that suggested the Atlanta School's concern with the prototypical city is Wright's (2000) assertion that the Atlanta School's conference would be

"focused on the concerns of African Americans in cities while Tuskegee focused on agriculture and vocation…" (p. 169). The implication, which expressed a clear preference for the prototypical city, is that the Atlanta School had a very specific view about what constituted a city even if not as clearly defined as what we see in Chicago.

It is important to note that the Atlanta School differed in key ways from the Chicago School. First, The Atlanta School emphasized trying to understand the nature of racial inequality in the cause of social justice, particularly in the South. Second, scholars working in the Atlanta School were not merely focused on collecting qualitative data in the form of participant observation and interviews. Instead, this school also utilized other methods including surveys that were used to provide a more substantive understanding of issues facing African Americans. Third, and critically, the school embraced what we now more clearly identify as public sociology as it sought to use knowledge to address the conditions facing Black people in the South as a result of white supremacy. Last, Atlanta was anchored in the city but also focused on the South more broadly in an ongoing effort to both understand and address racial inequality. In this way, the Atlanta School's prototypicality extended beyond a central city, to an entire region. Despite these points of distinction, Atlanta should still be considered as central to establishing the prototypical city. The school's work was largely focused on the experiences of Black people in Atlanta and the Deep South more broadly. The work of scholars was guided by a shared methodological preference aimed at both understanding and interrupting racial inequality. In these ways, the Atlanta School's prototypicality extended beyond a central city, to an entire region.

The Los Angeles School

A third, and more recent School, is Los Angeles. In trying to situate the school among Chicago and Atlanta, Dear (2003) laments the lack of understanding of the "prototypicality of the LA experience" (p. 493) which also offers an initial stipulation of its eventual status as a prototypical city. Despite efforts to establish Los Angeles as unique, particularly in contrast to Chicago, much of its development aligns with and reifies Chicago's (and Atlanta's) emphasis on what constitutes a city. Take for instance, McWilliams' (1973) contribution that characterizes Los Angeles as heterogenous in ways that gave rise to the same sorts of social problems scholars examined generations before in Chicago. Banham (1971) aimed to distinguish Los Angeles from other places, implying that Los Angeles was still worthy of the same sort of study as other prototypical cities. And, as Dear concedes, the school emerged "...based on theoretical assumptions, and on the view that LA was emblematic of a more general urban dynamic…" (p. 497) and that those working in the school would make intellectual contributions that "...would quickly overtake that of Chicago, the dominant model of the American industrial metropolis" (p. 497). Ultimately, Dear (2003) concludes that Los Angeles represents a post-modern alternative to Chicago. Yet, as Abbott (2002) has pointed out, the preoccupation with Chicago is analogous to a phoenix rising given that it constitutes the perpetual prototypical city on which Los Angeles seeks to be compared thereby establishing itself as a prototypical city.

The Chicago, Atlanta, and Los Angeles Schools represent three essential and consequential sites that have helped advance our understanding of cities in signature ways. Their contributions have revealed foundational theoretical explanations about the ecology and social disorganization present in cities; how scholarship can be used in service of racial justice; and recognizing how western cities (e.g. Los Angeles) experience similar social problems thought to be exclusive to Chicago and Atlanta.

Yet, in different ways, each school is important in establishing preferences for a prototypical city. In particular, they help make the point that a prototypical city is more than a geographical space that urbanists have constantly studied. Instead, the idea of prototypicality as it relates to cities implies a fundamental belief that the best way to make credible theoretical and empirical contributions takes place by venturing into one of these places. It began with the Chicago School which offered a foundational view of how cities are spatially structured in ways that facilitate social interaction as well as understanding how historically marginalized groups deviate from social norms. Concurrently, in Atlanta, while the school's emphasis largely focused on documenting and understanding the lived experiences of Black people, it did so consistent with Chicago - by focusing on "cities" in direct contrast to rural areas - even if it predates Chicago. And, the Los Angeles School is born out of a deep desire to be both seen and shift our understanding of cities in a post-modern way, but ultimately ends up conceptualizing Los Angeles in much the same way as Chicago thereby establishing it, too, as a prototypical city. Equally important is: what happens to cities that do not fit neatly within either of these schools? I argue that we should be thinking about the urban canon in a more expansive manner that includes lesser-known cities for what they might potentially reveal about the social world.

Reification of Prototypical Cities

The theoretical view of establishing large cities as prototypical has not been limited to Sociology and some of its most prominent Schools. Indeed, across disciplinary boundaries, particularly in urban geography, the prototypical city has been debated in ways that ultimately serve to reify its preferential treatment by scholars.

The debate can be summed up in two camps: those with a strong conception of the city and those who oppose this view. Those scholars subscribing to the former are part of what has

become known as the *Urban Age* (Brenner and Schmid 2014); the belief that the majority of people are living in cities (Davis 2006). While these beliefs have been persistent, Davis (1955) is largely credited with the first empirical investigation that confirmed a reality that more people are actually living in cities. The powerful precedent set by Davis led to a proliferation of scholars that sought to predict an urban influx of people. Weissman (1965) was among this group and even cautioned that such an explosion in urban population would lead to, among other things, certain kinds of "dangers" - presumably social problems that have been synonymous with what scholars have studied within urban sociology. Moreover, the United Nations, too, from a policy perspective, soon embraced the view that the urban age was becoming a reality.

In the last 20 years or so, the urban age thesis has been embraced by more mainstream thinkers and those generally interested in studying the city. For instance, Castells (2002) declared that "our blue planet is fast becoming a predominantly urban world" (p. ix). Ash et. al. (2008) similarly predicted "...by 2030, nearly 5 billion people will live in cities" (p. 739). When scholars, policymakers, and lay public reach consensus, as has been the case with the prototypical city, it creates a powerful theoretical and practical view that is difficult to overcome. It is no wonder, then, that Brenner and Schmid (2014) pointed out, "...the urban age appears, in short, to have become a de rigueur framing device or reference point for nearly anyone concerned to justify the importance of cities as sites of research, policy intervention, planning/design practice, investment or community activism" (p. 734).

Even those who support the urban age thesis have raised questions about the extent to which it is sustainable. For instance, Brenner and Schmid (2014), themselves, argue "...the urban age thesis is a flawed basis on which to conceptualize contemporary world urbanization patterns: it is empirically untenable and theoretically incoherent" (p. 734). For these analysts, the urban

age is rooted in arbitrary theoretical and methodological thinking with little justification – a stark contrast to even the rigidity of the Chicago School. Importantly, Brenner and Schmid (2015) eventually conclude that the city as conceptualized in the urban age is no longer recognizable because the urban has expanded beyond prototypical conceptions of the city. Thus, theoretical, methodological, and empirical investigations must adapt to this changing urbanism. The implication of pursuing a flawed view of urbanism, based primarily on urban age thinking, could potentially lead to a belief that all cities are alike and experience problems in the same ways. This is the reasoning that has undergirded my own thinking in identifying middle cities as important deviations from prototypical cities and capable of offering a unique portrait of urbanism, particularly as it relates to questions of racialization in the nonprofit sector.

We should take critics of the urban age as a starting point for a more fulsome discussion of how focusing on the prototypical city is limited. Their assertions imply that analysts have presumed that these prototypical sites represent the holy grail of doing empirical work; essentially suggesting theories and findings offer the definitive word on all issues within the field. But, even as this belief has generated important theoretical and empirical insights, it must not negate the need to pursue inquiry in other places.

Limitations of Prototypical City

Urban scholars have continually pursued their research agendas in these prototypical cities, with few questions about the utility of these spaces (e.g. Krause 2021). Still, as I seek to deviate from these sites towards middle cities, an important question is how and in what ways is the prototypical city limited? I argue they are limited in at least three key ways: (1) scholarly work done in these places often offer a homogenous view of marginalized groups; (2) these

places are prone to confirmation bias; (3) they present logistical complications that impact our ability to study them.

One limitation of studying prototypical cities is that scholars often provide a homogenous view of marginalized groups as powerless and at the mercy of social structures. Take, for instance, how urban scholars have thought about the ghetto – a place thought to be where problematic Black people reside. Wilson's (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged* was an agenda setting work for its consideration of how Black neighborhoods became socially disorganized. While he was right to document the ways in which structural changes led to decline of Black communities, Wilson's characterization of Black people as an underclass was a significant catalyst for conservatives and others to offer a homogenizing and deficit-oriented view that attributed the shortcomings of Black people to a purportedly indigent culture (Lewis 1966; Banfield 1974). Beyond the obvious issues with Wilson's perspective, the reason why this approach, and others, is problematic is they assume marginalized groups are solely at the mercy of the structures shaping their lives. It is true that some scholars have attempted to interrupt this narrative by pointing out how notions of the ghetto are theoretically unsound (e.g. Small 2008), how marginalized groups are actually thriving amid structural constraints (e.g. Newman 2000), or how living in these spaces are actually defined by a logical code of the street (e.g. Anderson 1999). Notwithstanding these contributions, a dominant view of Black people as of and from the ghetto has persisted (Anderson 2012). Such a dominant perspective precludes us from understanding, for instance, how BLOs might challenge the existence of and successfully navigate an RNIC, which I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. Left unchallenged, researchers would be prone to only focusing on the ways in which BLOs are stripped of agency within an RNIC.

Another reason why studying prototypical cities is limited is because their selection is prone to bias. I do not mean to engage in debates about researcher bias that have often been associated with carrying out qualitative research projects (e.g. Guba and Lincoln 1994). Of course as others have pointed out, such views are misguided and fail to appreciate the unique ontological dimension of qualitative methods that make them so well-suited to answer particular kinds of questions (e.g. Small 2009). Instead, I contend urban scholars exhibit a form of confirmation bias in frequently turning to prototypical cities to study social problems (Watson 1960). Confirmation bias has been described as strategically identifying and using evidence that is consistent with preconceived notions about the world (Nickerson 1998). In urban scholarship, confirmation bias can be extended to the ways in which scholars reflexively make decisions about the kinds of cities that merit study. As established by the Chicago School, among others, prototypical cities have been the place where important theories have been developed to explain social phenomena. And because these breakthroughs have been achieved by studying these kinds of cities, scholars make an unconscious decision to study them. Indeed, as I embarked on this work I, too, thought that I *had* to study Chicago because that's just what urban scholars do if they want to be taken seriously. I thought no matter what I would study it made sense to at least use Chicago as part of a series of cases because I was prone to the same confirmation bias that has guided the case selection of scholars doing urban work. But, as George and Bennett (2005) note, this approach is uncritical and could lead to undeveloped or even incorrect theoretical presumptions about a place that could be taken as generalizable.

A final reason why prototypical cities are limited is because their composition forces researchers to make difficult decisions about what parts to actually study. That is, prototypical cities tend to be very large and vast places that can be thought of as sometimes studying many

cities within one depending on the neighborhood that a researcher decides to study. Thus, the size of the city carries the risk of offering a homogenous portrait even though they are diverse. Still more, even if strategically identifying a neighborhood within a city one is only able to understand a tiny facet of its diversity. And on the question of neighborhoods, we know very clearly that these matters in remarkably different ways within prototypical cites (Sharkey and Faber 2014). Overcoming this challenge is not entirely difficult for those using quantitative methods because when studying a place like Chicago, researchers can readily access datasets that provide a representative sample of the city (see, for example, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). However, when carrying out a qualitative study, researchers must make many more decisions about how best to do their work. Rather than become consumed with qualitative and quantitative debates, I instead seek to make the point that carrying out a qualitative study in a prototypical city involves a number of factors and will inherently require researchers to make decisions that lead to a homogenous view of the city.

Addressing these limitations is not meant to imply that we should *never* study prototypical cities. Indeed, the theoretical and empirical record makes clear their value and I suspect that my own future work around racialization will inevitably return to one of these places because there is value in trying to understand how their complexity might impact something like a racialized nonprofit sector. Instead, what I am arguing is that there are more places that scholars should consider when trying to understand various aspects of the social world. That is, as I will argue, middle cities are unique in that they represent the complexity seen in large cities but, crucially, their smaller size makes it easier to understand the whole without neglecting the diversity along with seeing the uniqueness of the city as a whole and avoiding confirmation bias.

Despite this promise, calls to venture beyond the prototypical city has led to increased interest in small cities.

Shifting to Small Cities

Interest in small cities is not new as scholars have long been interested in these places. (e.g. Bryce 1977). However, recently there has been an increased call by scholars to deviate from the dominant conception of the city and focus on small cities (Bell and Jayne 2006; Ofori-Amoah 2007). For instance, Ocejo, Kosta, and Mann (2020) led a symposium aimed at setting a research agenda for scholars to refocus their theoretical and empirical gaze on small cities. Here I take a moment to briefly summarize their argument because I think it provides a succinct critique of the omission of small cities from the discourse and an argument for why they remain viable. One of their most important arguments characterizes scholars as uncritical for the longstanding belief that larger cities are indeed the only places where urban issues can be understood. Instead, the authors argue that our focus should be on urban processes and the extent to which they differ in places such as small cities. For the authors, shifting the focus is central to understanding core urban topics in other, smaller cities that allow scholars to refine important theoretical explanations.

For all the focus on small cities and the localized nature of processes, I argue that there is still a lack of reflexivity in defining these places regardless of the issues that scholars study. For instance, Nevarez and Simons (2020) examined how a metropolis impacts population change in small cities which they define as having a population between 6,000-30,000 people. Reese and Ohren (1990) conducted a study on the distribution of municipal services and described small cities as suburbs. Kashem and Gallo (2023) found that less minority participation in community planning within small cities which they defined as those places with a population of 50,000-

100,000. These and other studies are consistent with Bell and Jayne (2009) 100,000-person population threshold as constituting a small city.

The point that I am trying to make is that even as scholars have shifted their focus from prototypical large cities to small cities, they run into the same problem: an uncritical view of what constitutes a small city. The shift comes off as merely an interest in trying to deviate from prototypical cities with the only justification being that small cities are understudied. Part of the problem with such an uncritical approach is that it leads to perspectives that are of limited value. Urbanists would be wise to heed the advice of Desmond (2014) in both understanding and making a decision about the kind of city as the basis for study. While it is true that Desmond is advocating for a relational ethnography that eschews places, his emphasis on the importance associated with selecting an object for study has important implications for refining how scholars understand and decide to study cities. Following his prescription, urbanists would do well to emphasize the nuances of cities that contribute to a more refined conceptual understanding that extends beyond simply characterizing cities based on size alone – a stark, but necessary deviation from the Chicago School emphasis championed by Wirth. As a result of this reluctance to take care in offering a conceptual view of what constitutes a city we have been left with generic views that Desmond describes as un-relational and part of a larger un-constructivist view. More to the point and relevant to this current work, it omits an entire category of other cities that merit consideration; places that I refer to as middle cities. In the next section, I define what is meant by a middle city to establish this as a place to examine racialization in the nonprofit sector.

Defining a Middle City

I have argued that our understanding of what defines a prototypical city and small city is the result of a taken for granted impulse towards going to these places. The prototypical city has dominated urban sociology and those frustrated by this reality went to the opposite end of the spectrum to shine a light on smaller cities. Either approach is guided in different ways by size consistent with early theoretical explanations defining a city based on size, density, and heterogeneity (Wirth 1938). This makes a lot of sense and has led to some really important contributions. In the process, it has also led to the creation and reification of rigid categories of what constitutes a city whose theoretical utility is limited. And, as Mario Small has pointed out in critiques of the ghetto, once a theoretical idea becomes ingrained it shapes our entire view – even if it is not a completely accurate rendering of some issue. More problematic is that even this basic conception of cities has left out an entire category of cities that I refer to as middle cities. Rather than follow the same uncritical pattern of only defining middle cities by virtue of size, density, and heterogeneity I take a different approach. It is certainly true that we need a population threshold to differentiate between different kinds of cities, but there's an additional set of components that make for a more theoretically precise conception (Desmond 2014).

To get closer to such a conception, I propose we think about these geographical spaces as *middle cities*. Here, I briefly turn to the systems of cities literature to properly situate and define middle cities and to avoid the limitation of only describing cities based primarily on population thresholds. The basic idea behind the theory is that it aims to explain differences between cities with a particular emphasis on large and small cities within a hierarchical system. Larger cities are at the top of the hierarchy because of their big populations and capacity to provide a broader range of services to meet the needs of people. Among the most common features is a central employment center for different industries; global connections including hosting multilateral

corporations; and a robust knowledge infrastructure beyond educational institutions to include think tanks and other sites of innovation. In contrast, smaller cities provide more localized needs of smaller populations including basic services (e.g. grocery stores, healthcare, educational institutions); cultural and social centers (e.g. theaters, community centers); and niche amenities (Abdel-Rahman and Anas 2004).

Within the system of cities theory, middle cities are not explicitly discussed. I extend this theory to include middle cities and define them as cities with a population of roughly between 200,000-300,000, usually a state capital (Carroll and Meyer 1982), and includes many of the same aspects of the hierarchy as it pertains to both large and small cities. That is, middle cities are often central within a metropolitan area and represent a hub for surrounding municipalities; include a diverse population; contain major research institutions; and are home to a significant cultural scene. The point is that middle cities are in the center of the systems hierarchy and therefore exhibit many of the characteristics of those above and below – smaller and larger cities. And, of course, my decision to theorize a middle city is consistent with sociologists who have always affirmed the basic point that place matters (e.g. Gieryn 2000; Kim, LaGrange, and Willis 2013). Simply stated, we know that place matters in a variety of ways including how people interact with one another and access resources. I contend in this work that place has a significant impact on the nature of and responses to racialization within the nonprofit sector.

Studying Racialization in Middle Cities

An important question is why a middle city would be a good place to study racialization in the nonprofit sector. This is especially important because, as I noted earlier, urban scholars often primarily venture into large cities and sometimes small cities to carry out research. And, as noted earlier, before I even embarked on this work I thought a prototypical city such as Chicago

made the most sense for understanding this issue given its size and long history of community engaged work by nonprofits. Notwithstanding this reality, I argue a middle city is a good place to study racialization in the nonprofit sector for a variety of reasons. Chief among them is that they exhibit a relatively large and accessible organizational infrastructure of nonprofits. Middle cities, because they are smaller than large cities, tend to be more intimate and tight-knit across the city that can lead to a more manageable research setting. That is, it can be easier to get to know key informants who possess unique, localized knowledge of a particular space based on their privileged status as members of a community (Bernard 2011) who are critical to understanding local dynamics. Since I wanted to study racialization in the nonprofit sector, particularly in a place with a limited number of BLOs, it was imperative to be able to gain the trust of those individuals. Still more, as I will discuss later, middle cities are actually home to the kind of racial disparities that make for an interesting case to understanding the existence of structural barriers.

Now that I have offered my definition of what constitutes a middle city and explained why they are good places to study racialization, I want to move towards a more robust discussion of two empirical middle cities that I studied as part of this work: Madison, Wisconsin and Montgomery, Alabama. In particular, I want to offer a contextual portrait of each city in a manner that helps understand each in the context of this work. In the next section I discuss each city in four ways: (1) an explanation of what led to the initial selection including demographics; (2) consideration of each city's state capitol and what it means for the nonprofit sector; (3) the economy of each city; and (4) a brief consideration of each city's history and what this means for studying BLOs in a racialized nonprofit sector. Each of these key areas offer important context for understanding Madison and Montgomery as empirical sites.

Madison, Wisconsin as a Middle City

In this work, I identified two middle cities as good places to study racialization in the nonprofit sector: Madison Wisconsin and Montgomery, Alabama. Before discussing each, I want to make clear that the decision to study these cities is not by accident. Madison and Montgomery are two cases that allow me to hold a number of variables constant (e.g. population, state capitol, presence of major university; local democratic control) to really understand how BLOs navigate and respond to a racialized nonprofit sector in places with completely different racial compositions and the extent to which the nature of an RNIC varies by region/place.

Admittedly, my decision to study Madison began in the same way many researchers select a site: convenience (Bryman 2016). After all, I had just moved to Madison and already knew I wanted to study nonprofits following work I carried out in Chicago as part of a health disparities program that brought me into contact with Black-led nonprofits. And, upon arriving in Madison I discovered that nonprofit organizations in the city were engaged in a range of social service-related activities as well as pursuing racial justice which suggested that there was an active nonprofit sector. And it was a good thing that organizations were so engaged because even though I was studying the sector in 2018-2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were other national issues that necessitated increased efforts by nonprofits. The Trump Administration was advocating immigration policies widely regarded as racist, unarmed Black men, such as Stephon Clark and Bothan Jean, were killed by the police which prompted national protests including by Black Lives Matter. Madison was already a liberal place featuring a number of white-led nonprofits and activists committed to racial justice. But, in the context of these events, the city was an important site of protest in pursuit of racial justice.

Against this backdrop, in preparing to embark on this work, I soon discovered that Madison was more than a sample of convenience that represented an ideal place to study

nonprofit organizations because within the larger nonprofit organizational infrastructure, numbering some 4000, was a small group of Black-led nonprofits. On the surface, and because of previous research I had undertaken, I thought that BLOs in Madison would be experiencing a unique set of challenges. After all, there were only about 20 organizations in the city that met my inclusion criteria. This fact alone at least suggested that they were marginalized in the city. But, these suspicions were confirmed after I had a chance to talk to a fair amount of people on the ground prior to beginning this work in 2018. They told me stories about how Black nonprofits were shut out of funding streams within the city and had difficulty working with white-led nonprofits in this predominantly white city. Those conversations yielded important anecdotal evidence that Black nonprofit organizations were experiencing a unique set of challenges that did not comport with a prevailing view that all nonprofits experience the same challenges and in the same ways. Nor with the view that the nonprofit sector was a race-neutral space upholding the public good. Moreover, these initial insights piqued my interest and were consistent with what I experienced working in Black nonprofits in Chicago. But, Madison was different because for BLOs there were so few of them operating in a city with some of the greatest racial disparities in the nation as outlined in the *Race to Equity* report I discussed in Chapter 1. This contemporary reality meant an increased role of BLOs in the lives of marginalized people and was enough to merit consideration of how BLOs in Madison navigated a potentially racialized nonprofit sector in the course of doing their work.

Madison is a city of 250,000 people and is very clearly predominantly white. The white population in the city is 176,000 or 80% while African Americans make up 21,000 or only 5%. These numbers indicate that African American occupy a marginalized status in the city. Black-led organizations are also a decided minority numbering about 20 based on my inclusion criteria.

Madison is also a state capitol in a state where Republicans dominate the legislature even though the governor is a Democrat. Their dominance has led to a number of public policies that have an impact on racial minorities including the recent $36 million-dollar proposed budget cut to the UW System in an effort to halt funding of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Additionally, they have enacted legislation that makes it harder for citizens to vote and have attempted to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Still more, Republicans have limited union rights and collective bargaining. The reason why these issues matter is because they create an even more difficult environment for marginalized groups in addition to the glaring disparities documented in the *Race to Equity* report. Given that marginalized groups are unable to count on the state as a source of support, BLOs occupy an even greater role in Madison and it is important to understand how these organizations are hindered in their efforts to support their marginalized clients.

Given its status as a state capital, there is an attendant government workforce present in the city. By being home to a world-class research university, much of the economic activity of the city takes place within the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The city also has a significant healthcare sector with a variety of hospitals and medical research facilities. The city's population constitutes a highly educated workforce. On the surface, this suggests an environment where racial disparities are limited and that nonprofit organizations, regardless of leadership, should be able to draw upon the considerable expertise of the city to push their work forward. Yet, as the next chapter makes clear, the opposite is true for BLOs as they navigate the racialized nonprofit sector.

But, Madison also has an interesting history of race relations that makes it an important place to examine racialization in the nonprofit sector. Like large cities, Madison has a history of

housing segregation that prevented African Americans from living in certain parts of the city. These policies were challenged as part of robust civil rights movement activism. The city has a major, well-resourced, predominantly white university that on the surface could be a significant benefactor to BLOs but, instead, has a largely adversarial relationship with these organizations. The tensions between the university and BLOs stems from years of mistrust and exploitation that also coincided with these organizations being routinely shut out of competitive funding opportunities.

Thus, as a middle city, Madison is a good place to examine how BLOs navigate a racialized nonprofit sector. Though, it given all that I outlined above it might seem like an obvious choice that necessitates consideration of a comparison case.

Montgomery, Alabama as a Middle City

By itself, Madison is a fascinating case for all the reasons I discussed above. However, it was also a unique case: a middle city that is a center of state government with a predominantly white population, small number of BLOs, heavily influenced by a predominately white education institution, a politically liberal place, home to extraordinary racial disparities, and in the northern United States. Given these dynamics Madison was an obvious place to study racialization in the nonprofit sector. But, I knew I wanted to also study a case that was less obvious than Madison. I wanted a comparison case where it was possible to hold as many variables constant as possible consistent with established research norms (e.g. Babble 2020). And I didn't just want any comparison case; I wanted another middle city. And I was fortunate to be aware of cities that met my criteria. And following a conversation with my advisor I identified Montgomery as a prospective site. I took advantage of a small research grant that allowed me to travel to Montgomery in February 2020 – shortly before the world would change as any of us knew it. I

had a simple task when venturing to Montgomery: to acquire a general sense of its nonprofit sector and some initial insights into the experiences of BLOs. And I knew this trip would be especially important because I had no ties to the south at all. In fact, this would be my first trip ever to the state of Alabama.

When I arrived in the city I was able to meet with a librarian at Alabama State University, who had relocated from New York City 20 years earlier, who had a deep sense of the nonprofit sector. He provided me with some initial insights, and contacts, about Montgomery and its nonprofit sector which suggested that it would be a good candidate for a comparison case. The most significant thing that he revealed is that Black nonprofits in the city were still working to address many of the issues I thought were largely resolved during the Civil Rights Movement which was anchored in Montgomery.

Following our meeting, I had a pretty good sense that I would decide on Montgomery as my second case. But, what sealed the deal was a visit to an old missionary Baptist church in the city. My own pastor in Chicago had recommended this place and so I planned to visit while in Montgomery. I entered the extremely large church with rows and rows or red pews that seemed to extend into the rafters. I ended up taking a seat behind a woman, Miss Janice, who made small talk after recognizing I was new. She was very interested in where I was from and when I told her she invited me to meet the pastor of the church who was in his office. We exited the sanctuary and walked down a series of corridors and finally reached his office. When we entered there were three other guests and an associate minister in the office. I introduced myself and told him that I was completing a PhD in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Following this brief meeting, I returned to the sanctuary and reclaimed my seat behind Miss Janice just before the start of the service. When the announcements portion of the service began,

the Pastor came to the podium and acknowledged visitors generally and specifically mentioned the elected official who had been in his office during my earlier visit. After acknowledging him, to my shock the pastor called my name and requested that I stand up. Nervously, I complied. He introduced me and told the large assembled congregation that I had been visiting Montgomery from Chicago (by way of Madison) and was completing a PhD and that I was there to do research on nonprofits. I waved and the crowd applauded. I knew then that Montgomery would be the place I'd live. After the service there were so many people who approached me and provided their contact information and expressed such a strong willingness to assist in my work – quite different from the Madison experience. I later learned that as an outsider, credibility in Montgomery was deeply tied to relationships with people.

I arrived in Montgomery during the COVID-19 pandemic. This historic, predominantly Black city of 200,000 people – 60% of whom were African American – was in the midst of yet another turning point in its history. The city had just elected its first Black mayor and his presence had inspired a great deal of hope that change would come to the city. And BLOs, who numbered about 60 n the city, had long established a close relationship with the mayor which was another feature of the middle city; the capacity to engage political leaders in intimate ways.

Montgomery is a state capitol in a deeply conservative state led by both a Republican legislature and governor. As such, the state has followed a national trend of conservative-leaning states in enacting public policies that have been harmful to minorities. For instance, the state has enacted an incredibly restrictive abortion law; suppressed voting rights; and curtailed welfare programs designed to help the poor. These and other public policies have contributed to an erosion of a localized social safety-net that has placed even more pressure on BLOs to intervene in the lives of their marginalized clients.

Given its status as a state capital, the government sector plays a significant role in the city's economy. The presence of state and federal government agencies, as well as military installations like Maxwell Air Force Base, contributes to job opportunities and economic stability. In recent years, Montgomery has seen growth in the manufacturing sector, particularly in automotive manufacturing. The city is also home to assembly plants for Hyundai and Kia, which have brought investment and employment opportunities. The automotive industry has had a positive impact on the local economy, attracting suppliers and related businesses to the region; though there is some question about the extent to which they are paying residents a living wage. Other notable sectors in Montgomery's economy include healthcare and education. The city is home to several hospitals and medical centers, providing healthcare services and employment opportunities.

It goes without saying that Montgomery has a rich and complex history, particularly in relation to the civil rights movement in the United States. The city was once the capital of the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. However, it gained significant prominence during the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. Montgomery was the birthplace of several pivotal events, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which began after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. This boycott, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was a significant catalyst in the civil rights movement. The city also saw important events like the Selma to Montgomery marches, which played a crucial role in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It is notable that many of the Civil Rights Movement’s most iconic BLOs are actually no longer active in the city.

Montgomery's culture is deeply influenced by its civil rights history and its predominantly Black population. The city is home to numerous landmarks and museums

dedicated to the civil rights movement, such as the Rosa Parks Museum, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (also known as the Lynching Memorial), and the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. These sites attract visitors who want to understand and pay tribute to the struggle for civil rights.

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It is these two cities, Madison Wisconsin and Montgomery, Alabama, where I carried out this critically important work to understand the experiences of BLOs in a racialized nonprofit sector. And, in the next two chapters readers will be able to understand not just how BLOs in each city navigate the sector, but also how they do so differently based on these very different places.

Chapter 4: The RNIC of Madison, Wisconsin

In the two previous chapters I spent considerable time laying out key aspects of this dissertation in preparation for a robust analysis. I acknowledge it has taken some time, but for good reason. As I noted, because we literally lack a theoretical framework within which to even identify, let alone understand, how and in what ways the nonprofit sector is racialized, there was a clear need to develop such a framework. To make this central contribution, I drew upon and combined literatures and developed a novel theoretical framework that I called the racialized nonprofit industrial complex (RNIC). I defined the RNIC as a racialized social system within the nonprofit sector that places white-led organizations and BLOs into categories based on their composition. I contend within the RNIC, the nonprofit sector is structured by an unwritten set of rules, which I call a Sector Schema, that sets the terms of legitimacy within the nonprofit sector. The Schema, which is incorrectly presumed to be race-neutral, is based on the experiences of white-led organizations which further marginalizes BLOs who are unable and, often by necessity, unwilling to adhere to its terms. But, as I show in this chapter, rather than remain idle in the face of this structurally schematic marginalization, BLOs develop a counter-schema – a conscious or sometimes unconscious response that draws upon their unique *insider-status* and connections to their clients. This counter-schema constitutes their effort to engage key aspects of the nonprofit sector on their own terms as the most logical way to meet the complex, multidimensional needs of their clients which often extends beyond the constraints on what a mission should be according to the sector schema. I argue that when the Sector Schema and BLO Counter-Schema converge around material and social resources that I called organizational success metrics (OSMs), a racialized outcome is produced. Furthermore, I argue this process is place based and this chapter begins with the case of Madison, Wisconsin. In particular, I organize this chapter by

(1) explaining the sector schema as it pertains to five OSMs: leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteering; (2) illustrating how the schema impacts the work of BLOs; and (3) describing how BLOs respond to the sector schema with their own counter-schema.

Racialized Leadership

Leadership is one of the most important social resources that an organization possesses while operating in the nonprofit sector because it offers a signal of its legitimacy within the sector (Parsons 1960). The leadership schema in the sector is characterized by a number of key features. One such feature is the expectation that organizations will exhibit a bureaucratic model of leadership (e.g. Selznick 1943). Within this model organizations are expected to operate under a pyramid organizational structure/chart (Saiti and Stefou 2020), formal board of directors (e.g. Brown and Guo 2010), an executive director, and a narrowly-tailored mission.

A deeper part of the leadership schema stipulates that the relationships between leaders and clients should be one dimensional whereby organizations provide services allowed for within the narrow scope of their mission while organizational staff maintain professional distance (Corey, Corey, and Callanan 1988). This schema is enhanced by the overwhelming whiteness of nonprofit leadership (Fredette and Bernstein 2019). Because such leaders do not share the racialized identity of Black clients, they are by necessity socially distanced from them. This reinforces an expectation of professional distancing as a standard that establishes legitimacy within the sector. White-led organizations in the sector can adopt this model without asking deep critical questions and enjoy its benefits.

Many of the BLOs in this study adopted a counter-schema of leadership. The counter-schema begins materializing by virtue of the unique lived experiences of leaders. That is, the BLOs in this study have certain experiences that inspire them to begin a nonprofit in the first

place, which some scholars have called *biographical leadership* (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, Adler 2005). The essence of biographical leadership is how leaders use their biographical or lived experience to develop traits, values, beliefs, and skills that define an approach to leading an organization. In Madison, biographical leadership often developed by virtue of difficult life experiences including dealing with violence and a disrupted family:

> I am from one of the murder capitals of the world and I just feel like not having a father in my life drove me to do the work that I do. I know I was missing that in my life and I wished I had a father to guide me and tell me the things that I needed to know earlier on in life. I find myself being called Dad by a lot of kids; they yearn for it because a lot of kids that I work with don't have a father figure in their lives.

In the above instance, this leader obviously grew up in a difficult set of circumstances and suffered the traumatic consequences related to violence and disrupted families that researchers have documented (e.g. Golombok, Tasker, Murray 2006; Singer et al. 1995). Rather than be defined by this reality, this leader used it as an opportunity to start a nonprofit organization where he could provide opportunities for young people who grew up in similar circumstances. For him, the challenge of growing up fatherless and surrounded by violence equipped him with a unique perspective that allowed him to successfully intervene in the lives of young people. But, crucially, it afforded him an insider-status that solidified an intimate relationship with clients who might otherwise be skeptical. Other leaders were similarly guided by biological leadership:

> A lot of it stems from the fact that I was a teen mother; had my kid before my 15th birthday and have been working since I was 14. I watched my mom and aunts be on government programs and ended up being left behind; they were conditioned not to see themselves outside of that dependency. I was never a fan of having to stand in line to ask

> people for something or tell my personal business for food stamps. I remember shoveling snow to get Pampers for my kid and I didn't have any support.

In the above quote, this leader recalls how being a teen mother was a catalyst for developing agency and a sheer desire to do whatever it takes to improve her circumstances. Her reference to relatives being relegated to government programs and ultimately left behind is important because it suggests something about the inability of these resources to fully meet the needs of clients (Elliott et al. 2021). And, according to this leader, it was a central reason why she started a nonprofit for Black women who were not just dealing with teen pregnancy, but also issues of domestic violence and challenges with finding stable employment. This leader's interest in starting an organization to offer holistic support for Black women also reveals another important dimension of the counter-schema: *mission drift* – a dynamic organizational mission in response to on-the-ground realities facing clients. Research has suggested that adhering to a strict, narrow mission can be helpful for organization in accomplishing their goals (e.g. Bryson and Alston 2010). But, BLOs cannot afford to adhere to a strict mission because, as noted, part of their decision to start nonprofits in the first place stems from a deep understanding of the issues facing their clients. Take, for instance, one leader who started a nonprofit to help Black families navigate the complex contours of the criminal justice system. Again, based on his own experience being incarcerated – "caught up in the system" as he put it – he wanted to serve as a source of support and broker between Black families in the city and local law enforcement. He recognized that young Black people, especially males, were having uniquely difficult experiences with law enforcement (e.g. Hall, Hall, and Perry 2016). He specifically recalls one instance in which he was trying to support an individual, but soon encountered many more family members who needed assistance:

> We have one boy in a [Black] family who has issues and is living in a house with 15 people. His older sister is a high school dropout. He has a brother who is a father of 2. They are facing homelessness and eviction. So, we are helping all 15 of them. We are helping his sister get a GED. We are helping the brother get prenatal care. They weren't talking to anybody and tried to do it on their own; they were shocked by the help we were giving them. They didn't have to make 50 phone calls [to different organizations and government services] to get the help they needed.

The reason why this quote matters so much is not only that it reveals how BLOs are predisposed to mission drift in service of clients. But, it further reveals the extraordinarily difficult circumstances facing clients that are further exacerbated by the erosion of services formerly provided by virtue of a government safety-net (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). Still more, the point that this organization intervened to provide support rather than requiring this family to engage multiple organizations reveals a final part of the counter-schema. BLOs assume an identity that Mary Pattillo (2013) has called a *middleman* – a role defined by its capacity to forge connections between low-income Black people and broader market resources. In the nonprofit sector, BLOs are similarly regarded as brokers on behalf of clients, but they are often inclined towards defending their clients against racialized perceptions. As one leader recalls:

> I gave a presentation to a potential funder on the characteristics of leadership. And one gentleman [representing a white-led organization] got up and asked: 'why are these Black women having all these babies in Allied Drive [prominent local Black community] and their fathers are nowhere to be found and why don't they want to get married.' I told him this is a stereotype and was not true and I know a lot of Black men and women who are

> together in this same area. I offered to take him to the community and get educated. He declined.

Here it is fairly easy to see some of the challenges facing BLOs as they seek to work on behalf of clients who are encountering structural barriers. They are not only providing a range of services, but they are also standing up against racist perceptions of clients.

Despite developing a leadership counter-schema, BLOs are never fully able to be seen as fully legitimate within the sector. When they tried to challenge the Sector Schema in these ways, their legitimacy was called into question in often subtle ways. BLOs often reported being seen as "community organizers" within the sector. And while many of these leaders have a history in community organizing and see it as an entirely viable mechanism through which to affect change, they recognize how this designation is used to delegitimize them within the sector. Moreover, as they enacted a counter-schema – deviating from the leadership schema – it often led to their professionalism being called into question.

Racialized Funding

Funding is the perennial issue facing all nonprofit organizations (Akins 2015; Scott 2003; Anheier and Salamon 1998; Anheier 2006). The core of the funding issue boils down to organizations needing money to do their work (Kim 2017). All aspects of funding in the nonprofit sector are dictated by the most powerful and complex of all the RNIC's schemas. Given its power, the data suggests BLOs frequently deploy counter-schemas in response to this particular schema and achieve less success in mitigating its impact. An initial dimension of the funding schema is a prevailing narrative of limited funding within the nonprofit sector. This sentiment is despite a recent 2019 report from the National Center for Charitable Statistics indicating $2.04 trillion dollars of revenues reported by organizations. The belief that funds are

limited sets a tone that all organizations will have difficulty getting funding for their work which also serves to preempt any thoughts of bias against Black-led organizations.

There are several additional aspects of the funding schema that involve how organizations pursue opportunities, spend and manage grant money, and appease funders. Pursuing funding opportunities in the sector involves identifying or being made aware of opportunities through various networks or requests for proposals that are theoretically open to all organizations (Bryson 2018). Most organizations pursue funding primarily through private foundations and government funding (Anheier 2005). These opportunities are most often available to organizations who demonstrate the "capacity" to achieve an optimum outcome in service of clients (Prentice and Brudney 2018); outcomes usually rooted in neoliberal preferences (Hasenfeld and Garrow 2012). Capacity is understood as having a requisite number of full-time employees possessing specialized skills within a traditional organizational chart. BLOs in Madison had an average of 3 full-time employees which necessitated an *inverted* organizational chart where arrows point towards the Executive Director – rather than away as in a traditional organizational chart. Relatedly, organizations are expected to have a staff member who specializes in grant writing. A majority of BLOs in Madison did not have a designated staff member who specialized or even focused on writing grants. The question of capacity is further understood as being able to demonstrate an organization's ability to fulfill a funder's desired outcome (Carman 2009). That most BLOs do not have a designated grant writer does not mean they are incapable of demonstrating in writing their capacity to meet a desired outcome. Indeed, their insider-status and unique vantage point often equipped them to speak directly to a number of funding opportunities. For instance, some BLOs in Madison focused on issues related to education and intimately understood the issues facing their predominantly Black school-aged

client. Such knowledge made clear that they would be capable of using relevant grant funding to find solutions that would genuinely make a difference.

Another aspect of the funding schema concerns when organizations are selected for funding. Funding opportunities tend to be quite specific and require organizations to engage in work consistent with the priorities of the funder – often quite narrow in scope and part of a larger undemocratic philanthropic process (Saunders-Hastings 2017). And because white-led organizations are judged to have the capacity to meet these mandates, in addition to maintaining professional distance with clients, they are in a stronger position to receive funding. But, as I have argued, BLOs serve clients who deal with the multidimensional effects of poverty. This unfortunate reality often precluded them from ignoring these needs, but it also carried a risk of losing funding as one leader pointed out:

> When they [white funders] donate, they want to advise and consent. They try to tell you what to do, which may not be consistent with what you are doing. When I began doing something beyond my mission, a donor took my funding away because they wanted me to have a singular focus and I could not convince them that this person you want me to reach has many other issues.

This quote highlights an inherent tension between the funding schema and the work of BLOs. On the one hand funders, perhaps well-intentioned if we give them the benefit of doubt, aim to fund organizations who are going to follow a particular script and pursue narrowly tailored outcomes. On the other hand, BLOs in Madison primarily served clients who are symbolic representations of the need for structural change and racial justice that is often undermined by funders under the guise of "we know best" attitude or, worse, a blatant desire to stifle social change.

Even when funders are not overtly undermining the efforts of BLOs, they do so through other means such as imposing visible and invisible reporting requirements. Researchers have long documented the reporting challenges facing nonprofits and the implications for future fundraising efforts (e.g. Petrovits, Shakespeare, and Shih 2011). But, these challenges are exacerbated for BLOs in Madison who are already encountering capacity issues while trying to support their clients. Indeed, as one leader notes, meeting funder requirements was often a difficult process and required trying to strike a balance with serving clients:

> There were all these little traps and things that we didn't know. I remember being surprised by the general requirements in terms of reporting; we had to change billing patterns and the kinds of people who could work with us. Some funders required monthly check-ins and other things that distracted us from doing our work on behalf of clients who needed us.

For a high capacity white-led organization these sorts of requirements are not difficult to meet. It might also be more manageable for a small white-led nonprofit who is not serving the same population as BLOs. But, for BLOs, all of whom recognized the importance of meeting financial reporting requirements, the level of engagement, such as check-ins, seemed uniquely burdensome. More than burdensome, I argue the existence of another part of the schema that I call *racialized control* – funders' use of potential or actual funding to cultivate relationships with BLOs, claiming credit for supporting a marginalized organization while preventing them from challenging structural racism. As this BLO representative describes:

> I met with a foundation and submitted a letter and got selected. But, when I went to meet with them in person, I felt like somebody was going to treat me like a pickaninny. The way the conversation was going, he was talking about all the Black people he was

> hanging with. I thought about it as him saying let me tell you about all these Black people I control. When I was sitting there, I thought I was just one more Black person in a basket that he gets to manipulate with funding.

On its face, the racialized control exerted over BLOs in Madison is problematic. But, the control is extended to preventing BLOs from speaking out on issues of racial justice. While I was conducting the research there was a great deal of unrest in the nation and locally, including the *Race to Equity* report that highlighted racial disparities. At the time, BLOs saw it as their duty to speak out against these disparities. But, as one leader recalls, funders were more interested in censoring their comments than helping to resolve the situation:

> When a report came out that highlighted the racial disparities present in the Black community, I expressed my opinion to several different people and talked about how bad the condition was for Black people in Madison. After speaking out, a major organization made clear that it was not my responsibility to discuss these issues. They wanted to censor me. The same organization called a meeting with a significant number of other organizations in the community, not to address the substance of the report, but to discuss how to respond to the resulting criticism. The real issue was that me speaking out was taken as calling white people racist. And I learned from my white friends that there was nothing worse in life [than] being called racist. One white friend told me that next to the death of her child, being pegged a racist is the worst thing in life. And so, the damning report, and me speaking out offended them and threatened my organization.

This leader, and others, fully recognized how this report crystalized the experience facing Black people in Madison. From their vantage point, this was an opportunity for the philanthropic community to come together and think about ways that funding could be provided to address

such glaring racial disparities. However, as noted above, this was used by funders as an opportunity to prevent white powerbrokers in the city from appearing racist (Sue 2013). This point is particularly salient when understanding Madison's reputation as being a very liberal city filled with purportedly well-intentioned white people. The desire to suppress BLOs is further seen in how funders pull what I call *racialized strings* – using the influence of funding to prevent BLOs from using their work to challenge structural racism. One leader whose organization was being funded recalls how a funder pulled on racialized strings:

> I had issues with a [white] funder that began treating me like an enemy. The leader of that organization was very powerful and controlled a lot of businesses. It's like being on a plantation. She told me that when you step out of line people will use a whisper campaign and take their money away from you. She said 'that's what we do here.' She was basically letting me know what she would do if I stepped off the plantation. And it happened, one of the funders came to me and pushed a piece of paper across the table indicating how much they were funding my organization. And then the funder said I was the 2nd largest recipient of their funds and that I was not doing what they asked me to do and basically told me if I kept it up my funding would be at risk.

As this quote illustrates, in various ways BLOs are at the mercy of different aspects of the funding schema. Even when they are funded, they face the looming threat of losing funding if they refuse to comply with funder requests against speaking truth to power. It is also worth pointing out that a majority of BLOs in Madison are shut out of funding all together. This reality is consistent with research documenting funding disparities between organizations, particularly BLOs (Garrow 2014). In an effort to challenge the funding schema one leader subscribed to what I call *racialized finesse* – a sensationalized account of already existing hardships experienced by

people of color. As this leader notes, BLOs often perceive they would achieve more funding success by shaping proposals with "what is often seen on TV in impoverished African countries," something white-led organizations typically do, because it will make funders feel like they're having a more significant impact:

> I was frustrated with being denied funds, so I requested successful applications to review from a number of funders to see what people were doing to get funding. I thought it could be helpful for my organization. After reading, I immediately saw these proposals as a finesse and remember thinking: funders need to change the process because it encourages a finesse. I thought back to when I was in school writing for a scholarship and sitting down with the advisor and she wanted me to finesse my story. I didn't need to add anything else to the story; my reality was already really hard to overcome, but she wanted me to finesse the story even more. That is what I saw in those proposals; in too many instances, funders encourage finessed stories, which increased the likelihood of getting funding.

In addition to being a strategy to understand what successful white-led organizations were doing to increase the chances of funding, it illustrates an important contrast in how these organizations and BLOs see the experiences of their clients. Still more, it underscores a tension that potentially requires BLOs to make a choice to sensationalize the hardships facing their clients in ways that are consistent with what scholars observed about how social attitudes further contribute to the exploitation of marginalized groups (Gans 1995). Because the schema structures how organization, pursue funds, spend and manage money, and are forced to engage funders, some BLOs in Madison devote a final counter-schema that involves simply returning money or ultimately withdrawing from the philanthropic system all together:

> We have had to return a check to a funder because we couldn't do what they wanted us to do – things that we could not do. It would have cost us a lot of money including ongoing operating costs. You have to have funding to pay people, pay utilities, and other things. It was not that we did not want to do it, but it was just not time to do so; we were not in position.

Or, as one leader was forced to do: find alternative ways to pursue funding:

> I just tried to do my own thing with fundraising and using innovative approaches that open up opportunities where we don't have to continue our mission. That is why we use things such as card tournaments, day parties or things adults want to do that is fun and ultimately produces revenue for our program. I have also used GoFundMe for our programs.

The above counter-schema represented a difficult step for each of these leaders. However, that is one of the most powerful residual effects of the funding schema; its unequal distribution of resources caused BLOs to become frustrated and ultimately lose hope in the existing philanthropic system. Yet, as BLOs in Madison also discovered, operating outside the standard rules does not exempt BLOs from the pressures of data.

Racialized Data

The collection of data is understood in the nonprofit sector as central to demonstrating an organization's impact and improving its future fundraising prospects (e.g. Beer 2015; Carman 2009). It is typical for any organization that receives funding primarily from a foundation or government agency to produce data from programs supported by the funding. BLOs are no different in understanding this requirement as one leader noted: "You have to use it [data]

because it's the only way to grow" signaling their recognition of the basic requirement to use data. This fundamental expectation of data reporting sets the stage for the data schema.

Within the nonprofit sector, the data schema dictates organizational impact as consistent with neoliberal standards (Peck 2010). I have previously mentioned neoliberalism and want to briefly discuss what I mean by this concept as it relates to data reporting in the sector. A central aspect of neoliberalism is its emphasis on quantitative efficiency which translates to expectations of types of data deemed acceptable in the nonprofit sector. To achieve efficiency in reporting, the data schema establishes the kind of data that organizations are expected to collect. This translates into an expectation that organizations will produce primarily quantitative data that neatly summarizes an organization's work and demonstrates to the sector and its powerbrokers that the organization is having an impact and, importantly, serving as many people as possible. It effectively means the more people an organization can document as being supported by its work, the more legitimate it is seen within the sector. It creates an incentive to "count" as many people (or things) as possible. In Madison, this standard is especially important because while the Black population is smaller than the white population, a significant percentage of Black people are facing a number of challenges in education, housing, and employment among other aspects of life. And, organizations are expected to show that they are reaching as many people as possible to address these issues.

For BLOs in Madison the underlining neoliberal emphasis on quantitative data presents a very difficult mandate for them to fulfill because of the nature of their clients and work. As I have indicated, BLOs are working with people who present issues often beyond the scope of their mission. Because they share linked-fate with clients they are less inclined to turn them

away. But, in their sheer desire to help clients, BLOs run up against challenges with accurately measuring the impact of the work as one leader recalls:

> Our work is not measurable in the way that most funders are looking for measurable results. We have accomplished some really important things, but we have been unsuccessful in quantifying some of the work that we do. How do you measure work with a student who is coming from a family with so many needs that we support? I like to tell my story about how my organization is supporting people and am always told this is a nice idea, but it is rejected because of the measurability thing.

This quote references the meaningful work done by BLOs that is not always measurable in the ways that might be expected under the terms of the data schema. But, importantly, it also raises the preference of BLOs to tell the stories of their clients which underscored another part of the data schema that I call a *data mismatch* – a basic tension between expectations of the data schema and BLOs's insistence on treating their clients as more than a number. This mismatch is perhaps best summed up by one leader who lamented, "I'm like dang, they don't want no stories?". This reference to stories was a significant revelation and counter-schema deployed by BLOs. For BLOs, it is critical fully tell the stories of their clients as the best evidence that they are making a difference. Take, for instance, one leader who started a nonprofit to provide direct supports to students who were struggling with behavioral and maturity issues because of childhood abuse as well as reading and math.

> There is a young Black boy in the 7th grade and he was reading at a 2nd or 3rd grade level and dealing with so many other issues at home. I was trying to figure out what was keeping him from reading effectively. Sitting with him and supporting him. Through this engagement, I saw his dramatic improvement and increases in his reading score. I saw the

> confidence in everything else he did just grow from there. He was no longer the one who was sitting in the back of the class getting in trouble. Now he is the one sitting in front of class and participating and turning in his homework. I even saw it in how he approached girls because he was no longer shy or afraid that his reputation would be perceived negatively.

We know from research that Black boys have to overcome particularly challenging circumstances in and out of the education system (e.g. James 2012; Magnuson and Waldfoel 2008). Rather than only focus on strategies that could be measurable based on data schema standards, this leader's opted to engage with the student, and it obviously made a difference – not just in test scores – but all aspects of his life underscoring how BLOs in Madison are concerned about the whole person rather than reducing them to an anonymous data point. In addition to underscoring a need for the whole client, BLOs also endeavored as part of a counter-schema to ensure that their intimate understanding of clients' experience led to the kinds of qualitative stories that could inform practices that actually address their needs as one leader affirmed:

> We want to capture what they [clients] are experiencing and the impact of the work. We have created a qualitative theory of community transformation based on data from community meetings, interviews, and observations and put some strength behind what we do. We are capturing data that allows us to tell the story we want to talk about; what Black people want, what they are facing; what their outcomes are – funders might not want this, but we want it.

This leader defiantly captures the spirit of BLOs' understanding of data but, crucially, their desire to challenge the data schema by embracing data practices consistent with the lived

experiences of their clients. In doing so, they hear directly from clients which provides a more accurate understanding of their day-to-day reality.

A final reason why BLOs in Madison are so deeply committed to seeing the whole person is because of what I refer to as *data trauma* – the experience of Black clients having to constantly explain their circumstances to strangers, usually government social and welfare services, while simultaneously being forced to cope with the reality of their circumstances with little prospect of getting the assistance they desperately need. One leader is mindful of the damage done when they are required to present their traumatic selves for simply for data reporting requirements:

> So many of my clients must tell complex stories about the issues they are facing. And, to have a chance at getting support, they are required to subsequently fill out paperwork and all these things. Meanwhile, the same issues persist, and you still don't have assistance.

While BLOs are challenging the data schema in all the ways I described above, their lack of willingness to conform to the schema feeds into perceptions that they are not, by themselves, competent enough to meet sector standards. This feeds into pressures for them to "collaborate" with white-led nonprofits.

Racialized Collaboration

Within the nonprofit sector, there is an expectation that organizations will collaborate with one another to support clients (Page 2003; Sowa 2008 Selden, Sowa, Sandford 2006). Leveraging organizations' experiences and resources has become particularly important in light of the increased role of nonprofits in providing services formally provided by government agencies (Skocpol 2003). The unavoidable need for and expectation of collaboration lies at the core of the collaboration schema as nonprofits forge partnerships in the name of progress

(Snavely and Tracy 2000). And because collaboration is such a basic expectation, scholars have offered theoretical and empirical explanations to ensure robust and meaningful collaboration between organizations (Goldkind, Pardaani, and Marmo 2013; Prolx, Hager, Klein 2014; Chandler 2017).

A key part of this schema dictates that organizations judged to be most "capable" – returning to the capacity issue – should be where BLOs turn to forge collaborations. But, for BLOs in Madison, already marginalized in a variety of ways within the RNIC, collaboration was often an opportunity for well-funded white-led organizations to take over programs that were developed and conceived of by BLOs. One leader addresses this challenge during a previous experience where they were asked to collaborate with a well-known white-led organization under the promise that it would increase a prospective program's impact:

> That is also part of why collaboration is so tough because we don't want someone to come in and take over our programs. Collaborating should be a give and take process or a compromise situation. I have been a part of situations where a different, more well-known white organization wants to come in and take over or control the work we are doing. What I have been doing and working on they want to take it as if it is their own without doing any work. They offered to promote it and get more publicity but required their name to be put on it and my organization removed. I rejected their offer and wondered why it couldn't just be about supporting clients whom I was already effectively working with.

This experience addresses BLOs' risk of having their programs co-opted by white-led organizations. Regrettably, this type of co-opting is consistent with what scholars documented in terms of how Black people have not been given recognition for contributions in various contexts

(Higginbotham 1992; Bonilla-Silva 2006; DiAngelo 2018). But, it also references the considerable strength of BLOs as organizations capable of conceptualizing programs that can actually have an impact on their clients. Part of the BLOs' strength in Madison is their access to people. As noted earlier, BLOs and Black people are a decided minority in the city and are each marginalized which further contributed to linked-fate. In this arrangement, BLOs' clients become a prized resource under the collaboration schema as more well-funded white-led organizations encounter difficulty in gaining access to a skeptical Black client base as one leader pointed out:

> What I have learned is that Black clients are the resources. So, you have white-led organizations who have the money but can't connect with the Black clients. Our worth is that we can connect with Black people on the ground and build capacity with them while white-led organizations cannot.

More than the advantage of linked-fate, BLOs have *racial credibility* with clients because they have not only experienced similar hardships, but they have demonstrated that their organizations are serious about intervening in the lives of clients. That these clients are understood as the most valuable resource under the collaboration schema means there are greater opportunities for BLOs' access to be exploited. And, as a leader notes below, white-led organizations have tried to use BLOs to gain access to Black clients only to take credit for a program put on by his organization:

> We [BLOs] have tried to do a lot of work with white-led nonprofits, but it has not always been an equitable collaboration. We have bad blood with white-led organizations that prevent successful collaboration. They assume our connection to Black people can be leveraged so that they can take credit for reaching our population

> by putting on superficial programs. There are several white-led organizations that did work in the predominantly Black part of the city. They had the money but couldn't reach the same audience that we could. They had this program idea and mentioned our name to get access and never gave us credit for all the work that we actually did.

And it is not just that they try to exploit access to clients or take over program; white-led organizations often shift the labor onto BLOs. But, as I mentioned earlier, BLOs in Madison understand the considerable risks facing their clients during a potential collaboration with a white-led organization. Rather than see Black clients as a superficial opportunity, BLOs see them as human beings who deserve respect and dignity. This reality is tied to a counter-schema employed by BLOs that rejects collaboration with the aim of protecting their clients, as one leader noted:

> I find that white-led organizations use you as a platform to move their agenda along. For example, we have a lot of Black clients, but to make the program work white-led organizations have the resources, but they shift the bulk of the responsibility on our shoulders. You will find people in this city saying that I am hard to work with because I don't play that [expletive] and I won't collaborate if I feel like it might harm my clients. When it comes to working with families, they are precious to me. And for me, if I feel like you are out for show I won't partner with you.

Even as BLOs take steps to protect their clients, they are faced with the reality of the marginalized status and the need to provide much needed resources for their clients who are struggling in the city. A final counter-schema that BLOs deployed was seeking collaboration with other BLOs in the city. In addition to the challenge of not many BLOs in the city, this counter-schema was undermined by the collaboration schema that sought to pit BLOs against

each other. The manufactured tensions are created by the collaboration schema which sorts BLOs into two categories: Old Black Madison and New Black Madison. The former represents BLOs who have been in the city for a while and have manageable relationships with white-led organizations and power brokers in the city. However, New Black Madison represents newer, younger BLOs who seek to disrupt the status quo. Under the collaboration schema, both are sometimes pitted against each other as one lead reflected on:

> Sometimes funders try to get you to say negative things about other organizations. I never take the bait. Some donors try to drive the competition by the way they structure the grant competition to appeal to some organizations more than others. They speak negatively about other Black organizations in the meeting and you leave the meeting wondering whether they will do the same thing to you.

In a city like Madison where white people are in positions of power and influence it can induce and manufacture conflicts between BLOs in a way that undermines the larger effort to achieve racial justice. And the reality of BLOs' challenges is further observed when seeking volunteers to help support their mission.

Racialized Volunteers

Like collaboration, volunteers are a critically important part of the work done by nonprofit organizations (Isham, Kolodinsky, and Kimberly 2006; Bowman 2009; Mellor et al. 2009). That volunteers are understood to be so important to the work of nonprofits is an important part of the volunteer schema. In Madison, a city known for its liberal character and overwhelming white population, the schema also implies there are more than enough prospective volunteers to support the work of organizations. As such, organizations should have access to as many volunteers as they need to successfully carry out their mission.

But benefiting from and accessing this volunteer base in Madison is not a simple proposition for BLOs. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 78% of the Madison population is white which means they comprise a significant majority of available volunteers. Additionally, given income and life expectancy disparities between whites and Blacks, those people with "biographical availability" (McAdam 1986) — people who have extra time because they are young and receive parental income support or are retired with a pension, are the most likely source of volunteers—the volunteer base is structurally racialized.

Additionally, an underlying aspect of racialization "blames the victim" rather than the system (Wright 1993) for poverty, and further penalizes those suffering by limiting poverty amelioration to a low-paid or unpaid workforce. Government and funder actors in the sector expect that all NPOs will be able to easily tap into what appears to be a vast resource of white volunteers to carry out their mission. This reality affirms the power of whiteness as a credential because it exposes the belief in the sector that white people, including those without any documented relevant skills, are appropriate volunteers for BLOs. The white volunteer is seen as a key to an organization's success regardless of the racial makeup of the organization or its constituency. Additionally, white volunteers can help create legitimacy for BLOs among white government officials and funders in the sector.

However, for BLOs, having access to a large white volunteer base comes with the challenge of ensuring their cultural competency whose absence can negatively impact clients (Jovanovic 2012). As I have stated, the challenges facing BLOs' clients are complex and one of the reasons why they turn to these BLOs is because of a belief that they will be seen, heard, and respected rather than judged on the basis of their hardships. To ensure this standard is upheld, taking time away from directly serving their clients, BLOs in Madison spend

a great deal of time educating, supervising, and repairing rifts sown by white volunteers. While this race work is very difficult, BLOs are acutely aware of how the absence of cultural competency can impact their clients, as one leader recalls:

> There was a young lady, a white woman, who was pursuing a graduate degree and wanted to volunteer. I thought she would be good based on her profile. And she asked if I could give her a success story; I told her the story of when I went to pick up a Black client and took him to the doctor to get three teeth pulled and he wanted to take medicine at home because he couldn't afford to fill the two-dollar prescription, which I paid. She replied in a sarcastic tone: 'come on, he couldn't afford two bucks?" Afterwards, I walked her back to her car and she gets into a brand-new Maserati. Great person, but she would never step in our place because she could not appreciate the circumstances of the man and our clients. She clearly lived a privileged life and did not understand the struggles of our Black clients.

The experience with this prospective white volunteer underscores the challenge faced by BLOs in Madison; the notion that there are all these willing white volunteers whose help they could use, but who also fundamentally misunderstand the hardships faced by BLOs' clients. And, reluctantly, this leader had to deploy the counter-schema of declining the free labor that comes along with volunteers because it could exacerbate the already difficult circumstances facing his clients – many of whom were dealing with chronic health challenges with very little support beyond what the organization was providing.

But, the absence of cultural competency carries consequences beyond white volunteers' erroneous perception of clients, BLOs also recognize that volunteers do not always share their desire to achieve racial justice by dismantling structural barriers as one leader pointed out:

> I am just very conscious about who volunteers for my organization because I have watched how they [white volunteers] work. And sometimes. you put white people in place with Black people who really shouldn't be in those spaces and do not help us restore Black families.

In addition to the obvious skepticism expressed by this leader, it became clear once again how their work aims to do more than provide basic supports to offer clients temporary relief. Instead, BLOs in Madison are fighting for lasting change and often encounter volunteers who are there temporarily which is not conducive to achieving the long-term aims of organization.

Recognizing the challenge of navigating a predominantly white volunteer base, how it impacts their work, and the reality of already facing capacity restrictions, BLOs enacted an additional counter-schema, which was a strategic and conscious view of volunteers as more than a temporary source of support to meet a particular need. Instead, BLOs often began identifying potential volunteers in clients who come to them for sources of support. These individuals, by virtue of their insider-knowledge and shared oppressive experiences, eventually become *a part* of the organization as a more long-term volunteer and, in some cases, assume a full-time role which one leader described:

> As a service organization, in the course of providing services to [Black] clients, they end up becoming more than a volunteer. We have worked with Black people who have come through our doors and not have the capacity to change their own circumstances but are now leading change. They become a permanent fixture in our organization and use their experiences to develop ideas and programs that support Black people who deal with issues that they have been able to overcome.

This is a notable example of how BLOs seek not only to provide support to clients, but also empower them to be active in trying to affect structural change in their lives. Moreover, taking this approach allows BLOs to resist the pressures imposed on them by the structurally racialized volunteer base and the legitimation that having white volunteers can confer. They instead work to change their circumstances of their Black clients and, through that process, identify the kind of volunteer that both understands the organization's mission in a way that potentially allows them to support other clients struggling to overcome similar structural forces.

Conclusion

What I have tried to describe in this chapter is how BLOs have to navigate the contours of a racialized nonprofit industrial complex (RNIC). The RNIC schema in Madison is particularly powerful because BLOs operate from a marginalized perspective because there are so few of them in the city. This reality means an increased likelihood that they will face structural barrier in doing their work. Within the RNIC, they face legitimacy questions about their leadership, questions about their capacity to manage funds, pressure to produce particular kinds of data – even if unhelpful, pressure to collaborate with white-led nonprofits, and reliance on volunteers who are not equipped to engage their clients.

In the face of these challenges embedded within a complex schema, BLOs in Madison enact various counter schemas with the aim of reclaiming agency of their organizations with the explicit goal of supporting their clients. Madison is an important case study within which to understand racialization in the nonprofit sector. But, it is not the only case and as I show in the next chapter, there is a need to further interrogate the racialized nonprofit industrial complex in a city where Black people a majority of the population and wield power that was not present in Madison.

Chapter 5: The Montgomery Sector

The Madison, Wisconsin case was an opportunity to really begin understanding the impact of racialization within the nonprofit sector. It revealed the ways in which racialization impacted the experiences of BLOs across key areas that I have called organizational success metrics. As a practical matter, that Madison features racialization in the nonprofit sector is hardly surprising. One need only take a look at the *Race to Equity* report that detailed sweeping racial disparities that persist between Black and white residents in the city. And, because Black people in Madison are a clear minority it increases the likelihood that they would be marginalized. While important, the existence of racialization in the Madison sector raises more questions that cannot be answered by solely focusing on a predominantly white city. A critical question concerns the extent to which a predominately Black city also features a racialized nonprofit sector and how this process is facilitated. To understand this issue further, I examine the nonprofit sector in Montgomery, Alabama – a predominantly Black city situated in the Deep South – that is similar to Madison in many ways except racial demographics. Montgomery is a middle city of 200,000, a Republican-controlled state capitol, a Democratic mayor and city council, and home to a major university. The major difference is more than 60% of the population identifies as African American according to the most recent census.

Montgomery, Alabama is a remarkably consequential city as the epicenter of the most well-known civil rights movement in American history. So much of this history has come as a result of well-known nonprofit organizations such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). The MIA was by many people, most notably Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was an important facilitator in many of the tactics used during the movement including the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Against this backdrop, I came to Montgomery expecting to find this majority-Black

city as a place where Black-led organizations were thriving. In particular, given its history, I expected that most of the well-known BLOs would be engaged in work to improve the lives of Black people in this city. I quickly discovered this was only partially true. Of course, BLOs such as the Equal Justice Initiative had carved out a significant footprint in Montgomery as it sought to impressively document past injustices including lynching. Still more, this organization is an important place for people to receive legal representation to help challenge wrongful convictions. But, to my surprise, historically significant organizations that I fully expected to see doing work in the city such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) were literally no longer in existence. I remember being excited about the prospect of touching base with the MIA before I came to understand the city's nonprofit sector. I sent countless emails and visited the website only to discover this organization was inactive within the sector for reasons I would later understand. In fact, when I mentioned my desire to talk to organizations like MIA, people on the ground frequently laughed. The absence of these organizations had been the source of a running local joke based on the fact that most people in the city understood the historical impact of the organization and couldn't believe they were no longer active.

Alongside the historical shadow of the MIA and other well-known BLOs, when I first arrived the very first notable landmark I saw was the statue of Rosa Park which was set at the iconic bus stop that inspired a critical part of the Movement. Yet, in this predominantly Black city, Black residents did not appear to be reaping the benefits of the civil rights struggle. An obvious marker of this reality was the significant homeless population in the city's downtown area and the many residents wandering up and down Dexter Avenue – the vast majority of whom were Black – with obvious signs of drug addiction and mental health issues – not unlike what one might find in Madison on its iconic State Street. What was immediately clear is that this city

was a place where Black residents were struggling to live a basic quality of life. In some ways, this was not as surprising given the structural barriers that exist in all aspects of society. But, given the centrality of nonprofit organizations to the civil rights gains surely BLOs in *this* city would be in a position of strength relative to what I observed in predominately white Madison, Wisconsin.

It is true that the legacy of BLOs in this city is quite impressive. But, as I later discovered, within the broader constellation of BLOs in this city was a group of smaller anti-poverty BLOs, similar to Madison but many more, numbering about 40, that were embedded within high poverty neighborhoods, particularly in West Montgomery, and engaged in the difficult day-to-day work of supporting Black Montgomery residents. What I want to do in this chapter is tell the story of the racialized Montgomery sector and how these small, lesser-known organizations are navigating these experiences on behalf of their clients. In particular, I discuss an important contextual point about how I connected with a key informant which offers a hint into how religion makes the Montgomery sector a unique place. Then, as I did in the previous chapter, I discuss racialization in the sector by focusing on organizational success metrics that both describes the sector schema and how BLOs are responding in carrying out their organizational missions.

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I came to Montgomery not knowing a single person. I had never even visited the state before. And so, like a good qualitative researcher I sought contacts on the ground to make inroads within the sector. It helped that I had gained Visiting Scholar status at Alabama State University because I later learned that this was the most revered institution in the city and the people I needed to know most had strong ties to the campus. This was quite different from Madison because while the University of Wisconsin-Madison was quite prominent in the city,

among BLOs it was not very well regarded due to years of exploitation. That exploitation made it challenging to connect with BLOs in ways that simply did not exist in Montgomery.

The day after arriving in the city I visited campus for the first time to connect with a man whom I had met via email after reading about his role in managing the University's archives and working in the community. He was a New York transplant to the South and had been in the city for nearly two decades. Because of his experience in the city he had deep knowledge of the work being done by various people including nonprofit organizations. In addition to connecting me to key people, he also connected me with one of his colleagues whose office was across campus in the student center. This connection proved to be decisive as his colleague connected me with a member of his fraternity who worked for the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce. From there, he connected me to the most important contact that would be the defining aspect of this work in Montgomery. This critical contact, Kevin, was so full of life, passionate, and woven into the fabric of Montgomery in a way that endeared him to so many people in the city. I later learned that people thought about him as a quasi-politician for his unique ability to connect with people. He agreed to meet me for coffee in a local coffee shop – the only one in the downtown area – which made it a central meeting spot for many of the movers and shakers in the city.

Here, I need to take a moment to explain the dynamics of downtown Montgomery. I decided to live downtown because I thought it would be like most central parts of a city: bustling. There was some evidence of this but, like most places, the pandemic had a significant impact on local businesses which significantly reduced pedestrian traffic. On my way to the coffeeshop I passed by various businesses and clubs that were once bustling with people but now closed. Once I arrived at the coffee shop I noticed its cosmopolitan nature and how it stuck out among otherwise vacant buildings and businesses – many of which had closed since the

pandemic. In fact, the coffeeshop could have easily been among the many in downtown Madison but was the only one in downtown Montgomery. I walked in and saw a man, who was an artist, drawing a picture of everything going on in the building. He was particularly focused on capturing the interactions of patrons who were sitting, doing work, or in meetings; another signal that this was an anomaly in Montgomery and a place where my work could get some traction.

As I looked around I saw Kevin, a Black man in his mid-40s, engaged in conversation with people. Perhaps sensing that I was looking around for him, he approached me and we sat down for our very first conversation. I told him about the work that I planned on doing in the city and why I thought this was important. It immediately resonated with him because of the work he had done in a previous nonprofit prior to starting his own. But, there was something else that struck me about Kevin – he was a person of deep faith and was unafraid to show it; often doing so in humorous ways so as not to offend nonbelievers. It was not uncommon, as I later frequently observed, for him to quote scriptures while in the same breath quote from old rap artists such as Wu Tang. His expression of faith reminded me of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, which I had passed on the way to the meeting. Aside from its obvious connection to Dr. Martin Luther King, part of its symbolism is how it represented an important proxy for understanding a significant reason why Black leaders in this city decide to start nonprofit organizations in the first place: they feel *called*.

The specter of religion echoed throughout every aspect of this city including the nonprofit sector. To be sure, in Madison there was a clear Black religious presence, but it was not as overt as Montgomery; BLOs in Madison, even those with a religious affiliation, did not describe their work as rooted in some obvious religious belief which highlights a critical distinction of place. In contrast, every nonprofit leader I encountered in Montgomery made clear

that their faith in God played a central role in all they did as leaders within the sector including the decision to start their organizations. It is consistent with what scholars have examined about the intersection between nonprofit management and religion (e.g. Chaves and Tsitos 2001; Filistrucchi and Prufer 2018). Of course, that Black leaders in particular are inspired to use religion as a way to make an impact has been a constant theme in the literature (e.g. McRae, Carey , and Anderson-Scott 1998). But, when we think about the intersection of BLOs and social service-based work it is often tied to a particular religious space such as a church (e.g. Lewis and Trulear 2008). However, in Montgomery, it was in the context of BLOs that this religious ethic was also pronounced. Beginning a nonprofit journey with the aim of making a difference is best summed up by one leader who recalled a personal experience that was a precursor to his nonprofit work:

> The Lord was speaking to me that I was going to be a spiritual father to a lot of young men and starting a nonprofit was the best way to answer this call.

Even as BLOs in Montgomery were guided by deep religious beliefs, it is important to note that they also sought to distinguish themselves from organizations that sometimes sought to perform a litmus test that included exposing those in need to religious services or indoctrination. Indeed, every leader that I spoke to as part of this study, including those doing their work within an actual church, made very clear that they do not set a religious litmus test for people to receive any services they provide. Instead, they saw themselves as guided by a larger purpose or mandate to intervene on behalf of those in need. It was a combination of their recognition of all the issues facing people within the city and the intrinsic desire to make a difference that guided their efforts. While scholars have endeavored to understand the relationship between people and a particular religious faith (e.g. Tangenberg 2005), it is more difficult to understand the extent to

which such efforts are guided by intrinsic beliefs (McRoberts 2004). Yet, as one leader pointed out, there was a clear opportunity to use religious faith as a catalyst to effect change:

> I had already been accustomed to being involved. When I was at Tuskegee [University], I was involved in religious outreach that helped me develop love for people. For me, this type of work was important because it allowed us to bring the church principles and evangelism to the community. We could get involved in a deeper way by doing nonprofit work – it allowed me to get a paycheck but also use the work as an extension of the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. I could reach people and build God's kingdom, which was basically uplifting people through nonprofit work.

That leaders are guided by religious principles and recognize how such beliefs can be central to positively impacting the lives of disadvantaged groups is notable. Coupled with the power of BLOs in Montgomery, largely because of their critical mass in contrast to Madison, made me initially believe that within this particular nonprofit sector, BLOs would be thriving in ways that were in stark contrast to Madison. Yet, despite the unyielding faith of all the leaders in this study, they were still faced with and working within a racialized nonprofit sector that shaped every aspect of their operation – all of which I show below across the same key organizational success metrics that were central in Madison: leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteering.

Racialized Leadership

To understand the leadership schema of Montgomery's nonprofit sector requires an understanding of the regional context. For starters, Montgomery is perhaps the most well-known place for the existence of white supremacy given the various ways in which whites sought to undermine the rights of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Most prominently, the historical record of the civil rights movement makes clear all the ways in which Black people were

subjected to second-class citizen status and treatment in this city (Morris 1986). The structural imposition of white supremacy created a dynamic that privileged whiteness in leadership roles and afforded them opportunities that were not available to Black people (Logan 2011). To that end, in this sector, whites are often regarded as the most legitimate in terms of being able to address problems – even those facing people of color (McIntosh 1990). Related to this point, and similar to Madison, there is an impulse towards identifying white leaders as engaging in necessary reconstruction work to atone for the ways in which they undermined Black people in the past. Ironically, the sector leadership schema exploits historical injustices in ways that empower whites and reflect what some have called white guilt (e.g. Steele 1990)

In contrast to the sector schema, as a counter-schema, BLOs are guided by a Civil Rights Movement ethic in a manner that makes them quite well-known and visible within the sector and local community. Those leading BLOs in this city are natives of the Deep South, primarily Alabama, but also Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This is significant given the importance of each state to the civil rights movement. BLOs have been heavily influenced by their unique vantage point of the Movement which impacts how they lead organizations. They understand, for instance, the power of being charismatic in a manner that both inspires those whom they serve and stands up against white supremacy. Indeed, in this nonprofit sector, the BLO Leadership Schema is reflexively deployed to represent the interests of those in their community. Take, for instance, a local Pastor who leads a BLO and travels throughout the city promoting the wellness of Black people as part of his holistic plan to empower. One day, during a ribbon cutting event where his organization was receiving a donated building, he came to the podium and confidently extolled the virtues and impact of his organization in the Black community. He also forcefully called out white supremacy while the city's previous white Mayor and other white powerbrokers

flanked him. I was surprised by his forthrightness because I had been used to leaders in Madison being punished for speaking out in this way or having their leadership questioned as community organizations.

The challenge with this dynamic is that the sector schema and BLO schema conflict around questions of what constitutes the most effective leadership in the sector. Whereas the sector leadership schema standardizes leadership as white and an opportunity for whites to make up for past injustices, the BLO leadership schema expects Black people to charismatically wield power without regard for the existence of white supremacy and to best serve their clients. This conflict creates a crisis of legitimacy where whites receive particular accommodations in the course of doing their work that are not afforded to BLOs as one leader noted:

> Because they are white [led-organizations] donors have to make sure that they are comfortable to do this work. There was one instance before I started my own organization where I was about to quit because the [white] CEO basically delegated the work to me and I was doing that job and my full-time job. It was a difficult situation because I really believed in the impact we were having on Black people. I told him that I would either quit or find another job.

This question of accommodation is particularly relevant in Montgomery because nonprofit organizations are often situated within the communities they serve as part of a larger community development strategy that appeared unique to this place. One of the truly unique aspects of BLOs working in this sector is their larger commitment to making a place-based difference including changing how communities physically look in addition to improving the overall well-being of Black people. A prominent example of an accommodationist ethic for whites is evidenced when white leaders make a decision to move into a Black community to do work. Montgomery is a

segregated city where Black communities are saturated with social problems. In particular, the West Side is known for its many issues and is often a place where whites are induced to move to carry out their nonprofit work. This is where racialized leadership becomes even more pronounced as those in positions of power are deeply committed to ensuring that the conditions under which whites are working are as ideal as possible as one leader pointed out:

> Oftentimes white people did not want to move in a Black community because of its reputation for crime and blight. But to make it easy for them [whites], those people in power [funders] worked to make sure a white leader and their family is comfortable living in the Black part of the city. That means a lot of benefits for them including living in a nice renovated home when all other homes in the neighborhood are the opposite. White leaders leverage relationships to get comfortable in the nonprofit sector. A lot of them also get vehicles as part of moving into the Black area.

For context, urbanists have a very particularistic view of downtrodden Black communities. Rich ethnographic accounts recall the physical disrepair of these communities resulting from disinvestment and other factors. Perhaps surprisingly to those who have contributed to this empirical record, Montgomery is similar to these traditional urban areas. An area where BLOs are doing extensive work is at the intersection of Early and Oaks streets in Montgomery. In addition to abandoned businesses signaling a lack of organizational resource infrastructure, the intersection is defined by dilapidated homes. It is not unusual to walk down the street and be reminded of an infrastructure that looks more akin to a traditional Chicago "ghetto" such as Englewood. Additionally, the majority of BLOs' efforts takes place on the city's West Side, where white nonprofit leaders were inclined to move and frequently encountered homes that had broken windows and worn siding. It was often hard to imagine that someone was living in these

homes, but I frequently observed people coming in and out - going to and from the local car repair shop at the corner of Oak and Early. Against this backdrop the sector leadership schema believed so much in the legitimacy of whites that they moved here as one leader pointed out:

> When you're white and moving into the hood, they want you to do the work and they believe that if the white person is not doing the work it won't get done. Because of that, they get showered with all sorts of things.

Another part of the sector leadership schema in Montgomery is the professional distance that is maintained between organizations. For white-led organizations, this is not difficult because there are so many BLOs in the city that it decreases the likelihood that white-led organizations are going to be as engaged with Black clients. However, similar to Madison, the BLO leadership schema is rooted in deep engagement with communities, not just because BLOs are embedded within their communities, but also because it represents an opportunity to have an optimum impact. BLOs in Montgomery do not merely share a unique relationship to their clients through linked fate, but they are also embedded within their communities - physically and otherwise. An important site for such embeddedness is the West Montgomery community called Washington Park:

> We work directly with members of the community and we use artistic expression to engage them. And so, our bylaws are purposely structured to include that we are not merely an arts-based organization, but also home to an art gallery. This was important because we wanted to give people an opportunity to show their work and eliminate the barrier that was present in the city that was disconnecting the art community from Black artists.

Leadership in the Montgomery Sector is different because of the ways in which the civil rights movement impacts the region. Many of the BLOs report being inspired by the legacy of the civil rights movement which creates a set of expectations that people are born leaders.

Racialized Funding

Consistent with a dominant perception within the national nonprofit sector that there are limited resources, it was rather unsurprising that funding is also the perennial issue facing all nonprofit organizations in Montgomery. But, in contrast to the northern United States, the Deep South has a complicated historical fundraising structure for Black organizations that has made it particularly challenging to consistently secure funding (e.g. Gasman and Drezner 2010; Walters and Wallis 2021). Part of the challenge for BLOs in Montgomery, which is a key part of the sector funding schema, is a prevailing perception that they are somehow incapable of adequately managing funds which serves as a justification for the unequal distribution of resources. This kind of racialized skepticism has historical precedent in the Deep South where Black people (and organizations) encountered white powerbrokers whose trust they had difficulty gaining (e.g. Branch 2007). One leader captured the contemporary reality of this trust deficit in the nonprofit sector:

> It takes a lot of effort as a Black organization to get money. White funders embrace stereotypes thinking that we [BLOs] mismanage money and have ulterior motives for the money. They think we are here to do something for ourselves. Those are the norms that you deal with every day in Montgomery. These are daily beliefs that white people have of us in the nonprofit sector. I have seen my white brother [leader of white-led organization] go to the same funder and get $10,000 and I get $1,000 and the funder thinks it is fair because they think the white organization will manage the money better. In reality, I had

> a surplus and showed the ability to manage money and he had a deficit and they thought he was doing better than my organization.

On the one hand, there is nothing surprising about racial stereotypes impacting the ability of BLOs to secure funding in the nonprofit sector (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). On the other hand, and what's different, is that white funders also project the same kinds of racial stereotypes onto BLOs to imply that they would misuse funds as a justification for not giving them money. Because of this reality, a significant dimension of the sector funding schema in Montgomery entailed a unique permission structure; one where BLOs would have to seek permission from more credible white organizations and leaders who have power within the city if they wanted to be competitive for funding (e.g. Mills 1965). One leader recalled seeing this permission structure in action:

> I wanted to schedule a meeting with a [white] funder to discuss ways that my organization could get some support and I wanted to bring my [Black] colleague to the meeting as well. When I reached out to the funder I was told explicitly that I was not allowed to bring him and the only way I could get the meeting was if I bought Jim – a long-time white nonprofit leader in the city with whom I had worked with previously.

This permission structure underscores how whiteness can be a credential in the pursuit of funding within the Montgomery sector. Within this permission structure, BLOs are not only regarded as incapable of managing funds, but also face a perception that they are not in charge of an organization that is receiving funding from a white funder, as one leader pointed out:

> When I first started working in my nonprofit as CEO I had white females working under me in administrative roles. Every time someone walked into the door they went to the white female because they thought they were in charge. I have been in the office by

> myself and people wanted to leave a check for the end of year contribution and I almost have to pull out ID to assure them that leaving the check in the office was ok.

The important part of this experience is that more than being skeptical of management capability, this leader was essentially criminalized in the course of leading his organization. This is consistent with what Feagin 2020 has called the white racial frame – a historically reified view of Black people as dangerous and as criminal. Still more, BLOs in Montgomery experienced additional complications under the sector funding schema that illustrated a distinction in how white-led organizations and BLOs pursue funding which one leader described as the *White Ask* and *Black Ask*:

> The white ask does not come with proven results. You don't have to prove anything when you are a white-led organization. The white ask can be simply because they know the funder and are a part of the white community or the white infrastructure [e.g. unseen country club]. The Black ask is very different: we are required to prove our results. And even if it is effective, it is coming in the form of my Black skin and does not always get a favorable result. I remember one instance where we applied for funds and actually got selected after putting together a long application. But, someone I know from a white nonprofit who had clout and status and could pick up the phone did not even submit an application and got selected. White orgs have an advantage and start out ahead.

This above quote captures the different sets of expectations that face BLOs in Montgomery in contrast to white-led organizations when pursuing funding. And how BLOs have to work twice as hard to achieve results that are more readily available to white-led organizations (Pattillo 1999). A related part of the sector funding schema is an extension of what BLOs experienced in Madison that required BLOs in Montgomery to not only engage in a form of mission drift, but

also be required to invest their own organizational resources to be competitive for funding. Two leaders recalled this experience:

> The biggest challenge is knowing what's your money and what's not your money. With grants in Montgomery, they are set up in a way that can easily pull you outside your mission. Not all money is our money, especially if it compromises our mission. For instance, we got money from a funder and there were restrictions on it but it was a sacrifice and we had to give the money back.
>
> Finding a grant has been difficult because some funders require a high cash match which required us to put up cash as well. That hurt us early on because it took cash from us and also inflated our budget.

A final part of the sector funding schema concerns a similar exploitation as BLOs experienced in Madison. BLOs in Montgomery were often subjected to funders who were interested in using their clients as props. But, as the leader below noted, these sorts of requests were routinely rejected:

> They dangled a carrot and what comes along with taking their money. There have been funders that have come along and requested pictures with black kids for money. We declined this request because we didn't want to exploit our clients.

This is an example of how BLOs in Montgomery began using a funding counter-schema to just outright refuse to accept money from white funders if they deemed it to be potentially harmful to their clients.

An additional powerful BLO funding counter schema in Montgomery was the capacity of organizations to self-fund themselves because they often worked full-time jobs outside of leading their organizations. One leader captured this unique capacity:

> I get tired of begging people for money. Most people can give us basic non-monetary stuff like t-shirts. I am not being mean, but our guys are in the hood and they can't use that kind of stuff. I am a Black man who has a professional background and most funders I encountered thought I should use my own money and they often just gave money to organizations led by white men. So, I just started giving my own money to the organization and that is how we are funded and not beholden to the priorities of white funders.

Racialized Data

The data schema in Montgomery exhibited similar characteristics as in Madison. There was a basic expectation that all organizations will collect data to confirm who they served, success of programs, and overall organizational impact. In Montgomery, the data schema also has a neoliberal dimension that drives funder demands that organizations be accountable to funder expectations. And, like Madison, BLOs in Montgomery understand the importance of collecting data to be seen as legitimate within the sector. More than understanding the importance of data, BLOs seemed to embrace (and use data) in more substantive ways than those in Madison. For instance, one leader recalled the importance of data as a central strategy to standing out in the sector:

> We have been using data for a very long time which some funders regarded as impossible for a Black organization in the city because of their stereotype against us. One reason why we are emphasizing data more is because we want to contrast with what white organizations are doing. We want to prove that we are a legitimate nonprofit and we can show that with evidence.

When I spoke to this leader and others I thought they were conforming to the sector data schema without any serious objections. After all, within the RNIC across each city, data appeared to have the most straight-forward schema that made it difficult to argue that it is racialized. Again,

nonprofit analysts have been quite consistent in discussing the importance of evaluation and data collection (Fine, Thayer, and Coghlan 2003; Carman 2011; Coupet and Berrett 2018). But, as I learned in Madison and Montgomery, consensus should not preclude us from interrogating the extent to which data might be racialized. Indeed, in the Madison case, I argued that data is racialized by, among other things, inducing data trauma within BLOs' clients to appease funders. But, the data schema in Montgomery is also racialized in ways that emphasize quantitative experiences that reduce clients to data points. The primary way in which it is racialized is the belief that BLOs are uniquely opposed to data and would rather just operate in absence of demonstrating an impact based on the sector's expectation – one usually rooted in a neoliberal ethic that places an emphasis on numbers.

In response to the sector data schema, as was the case in Madison, BLOs in Montgomery used a data counter-schema that fully embraced qualitative data. But, in stark contrast to Madison, BLOs in Montgomery were more successful in collecting and utilizing qualitative data. They were often embedded in impoverished communities within the city where they frequently came into direct contact with residents who relied heavily on their services. And because of such close contact, many of the BLOs in this city were intimately familiar with not only the challenges facing clients, but how the work of their organizations had a positive impact. Still more, they understood the power of hearing and telling the stories of clients based on their civil rights ethic. One leader provided a succinct summary of the centrality of storytelling in the work of BLOs in Montgomery:

> We want to tell the story of our clients and the work of our organization because when they get out of prison they ended up doing lots of things that allow them to live a good life. We know just counting them as part of our program is not enough.

There is already a body of knowledge that has documented, through storytelling, the importance of work done by Black organizations (e.g. Carson 1995; Morris 1984). But, in this historic city, that means always telling the story of clients in a manner that seeks to empower them.

Another way BLOs challenge the sector data schema is by making their own determination about what kind of data matters for their organizations. This is difficult because the literature has been prescriptive in identifying the specific kinds of data that matter for the success of organizations (e.g. Herman and Renz 2008; Sowa and Selden 2004). Making matters worse is that conforming to this standard is also tied to funding (Benjamin 2010). Yet, the success of BLOs in Montgomery stemmed both from being embedded within communities served by their organizations and, like Madison, because they were deeply committed to not requiring clients submit to intrusive data collection just to receive services. One leader summarized this data preference of BLOs in Montgomery:

> One of our volunteers is a data whiz and created forms that makes it easier for us to collect data. That has allowed us to use qualitative data and other cool data stuff in a really streamlined way. But, because of the kind of clients we work with – mostly those who are just getting out of jail, we make a point to not have a litmus test in providing services.

In addition to demonstrating engagement with qualitative data, BLOs were mindful of the ways in which data requests might impact the kind of services they are able to provide their clients. In this way, they often tried to strike a balance between making these requests and serving vulnerable clients. More concretely, as a data counter-schema, BLOs in Montgomery are mindful of data trauma and take a similar approach as those in Madison in rejecting the kind of data

requests clients frequently have to respond to when seeking government services as one leader pointed out:

> We do not want to contribute to the shame that people feel. We want to know what kind of family or friend support network that people have and other things that can help support clients. We don't want to interrogate them in a way that seems invasive or make them relive their experience with the government. In fact, we don't even have time (or the desire) to collect that kind of information.

It is worth pointing out here how BLOs are attentive to more than the needs of clients. Instead, as the quote above notes, they are deeply committed to preserving the dignity of clients rather than relegating them as part of a culture of poverty that presumes they are responsible for their own downtrodden condition (Small, Harding, and Lamont 2010).

Ultimately, while the sector data schema is one where powerbrokers are more easily able to claim race-neutrality, it is hardly free from having a racializing effect on BLOs. And, in Montgomery, this racialized impact is best understood by requiring BLOs to produce data on their work and clients which reduces each to a metric rather than an actual human being. But, like Madison, but in a more powerful way, BLOs in Montgomery are better positioned to use their own data counter-schema to produce qualitative data and protect the dignity of their clients.

Racialized Collaboration

We already know that perceptions of limited funding availability and impact as measured through data means that the nonprofit sector is a place where collaboration is a basic expectation of all organizations (e.g. Suarez and Esparza 2017). Scholars have discussed the possibility and benefits of all sorts of collaboration including with government and the private sector (Brinkerhoff 2002; Gazley 2008; Austin and Seitanidi 2012). And I learned that these expectations were a central part of the collaborations schema in the Madison sector. Similarly,

BLOs also understood the importance of collaboration as one leader pointed out in a nod to the white power structure in Montgomery:

> You have to have the buy-in from the white community and that means collaborating – even when it isn't in the organization's best interest.

The buy-in that this leader discusses is an indication of how BLOs need the stamp of approval from whites that what they are doing is somehow legitimate. This often took place during collaborative partnerships. But it also point to highlights how white engagement is decoupled from a sincere commitment to racial equity in ways that empower BLOs.

Another part of the sector collaboration schema is how BLOs seek to accommodate whites. Subscribing to an accommodationist approach is not particularly new in the Deep South (Payne 2007; Fairclough 2001). And this was something that guided the approach BLOs took to collaboration in the interest of doing their work as one leader noted:

> It is really a survival skill to be able to deal with the individuals who you are trying to impact while also trying to deal with white collaborative partners that you don't like. And you have to come off as though they are giving you the ideas even though you are the pinwheel of success because in Montgomery you don't want whites to see you as uppity.

Prominent civil rights activists including Malcolm X warned against such an accommodationist approach. But, in 21st century Montgomery, BLOs in pursuit of supporting clients were willing to accommodate white organizations and concede their own agency. However, we should not think about this solely as a concession made by BLOs. Instead, this was part of their own collaboration counter-schema. The challenge BLOs face in collaborating with white-led organizations was similar to what BLOs faced in Madison--takeover--as one leaded noted:

> I remember one instance where we wanted to do a program. We had to go out and do all the risk including going door to door to get our kids to participate in the program. Once we identified the participants and put on the program we had a white organization show up and expressed an interest in collaborating after we had done all the work and they wanted to take credit for the entire program. If it is going to be a collaboration it should be mutually beneficial. There are a lot of white groups in here [Montgomery] that make this difficult because that is not their angle.

Another part of the sector collaboration schema was the imposition of views onto the clients of BLOs as one leader recalled during a collaboration experience:

> We have collaborated with white organizations. We did an enrichment program in the public housing community. They wanted to come out and assist with an already captured audience – a group of low-income Black residents that are suspicious of outsiders. They wanted to present their ministry and show they were engaged with Black people. I am not prejudiced toward collaboration. But, it has to be a true mutual collaboration where everyone does work.

Like in Madison, BLOs in Montgomery were sensitive to how white-led organizations sought to establish partnerships without making contributions to a particular program. But, as I discussed earlier, BLOs are also sensitive to how these collaborations might potentially create a litmus test for clients, particularly when it came to partnering with religious organizations. As noted, BLOs in Montgomery, while guided by a religious ethos, do not require clients to share such beliefs.

While the collaboration schema in Montgomery posed some obvious challenges, BLOs enacted a very powerful collaboration counter-schema that principally included collaborating with each other. This was distinctly possible in Montgomery because there is a critical mass of

Black-led organizations in the city that made it more likely that they will stick together. One way in which this collaboration was evidenced was by leaders of BLOs serving on the boards of other BLOs. By assuming a role on the Board, BLOs reported not only positive relationships, but also the freedom to do the work they knew was best for their organizations. The decision to serve in this manner contrasts with literature that has documented the ways in which boards have sought to control nonprofit organizations (e.g. Golensky 1993). And so, BLOs use serving on each other's board as a way to challenge the RNIC. But, it also fosters a collaborative ethic that has positive implications for all BLOs in the city.

Racialized Volunteering

I have already argued and shown in Madison that volunteering is an important part of a nonprofit organization achieving success (e.g. Handy and Srinivasan 2004; Brudney and Handy 2019). The volunteering schema dictates that organizations will easily tap into a local volunteer base that will supply them with the human capital to ensure their programs are successful. The schema further presumed that people are inclined towards volunteering as part of their different motives including a desire to help people (Wilson 2000; Clary, Snyder, and Stukas 1996). But, as in Madison, BLOs in Montgomery did not always have a positive experience with white volunteers as one leader noted:

> Because I was Black, a white volunteer group always wanted to come and try to assist. Me and my partner moved into the community and renovated the houses for local residents. But at some point the leader of a white volunteer group came in and she asked me if one of her friends, a white nonprofit leader, could help volunteer. We thought he was there to help, but he ended up buying one of the renovated houses because he wanted

> to move into the community to do work. We essentially helped him get into the community and maintain a lifestyle rather than support what we were doing.

One of the unique aspects of the Montgomery sector is that leaders, even white-led organizations, find themselves establishing organizations in poor Black communities. That one white leader used a volunteer opportunity to renovate a home that he eventually moved into highlights a key challenge and risk of soliciting volunteers for BLOs.

But, similar to Madison, managing volunteers has become a challenge even for a place like Montgomery where there is a Black volunteer base to tap into, as one leader lamented:

> The difficulty with getting Black volunteers is because the communal awareness is limited; people might not know where to place themselves. We also have difficulty communicating about opportunities for volunteers to get involved. We are lucky to have 10-12 Black volunteers at a time.

Another interesting contrast to Madison is the issues of identifying volunteers as potential staff members. One leader pointed to the challenge of identifying both:

> Well it is hard to find volunteers, but it is even harder to find staff. We have had turnover the last few years; a lot of people will see our organization on social media and they think our clients are saints instead of people with challenges. We are doing all these things because that is what they are not getting; we are trying to expose clients to positive things. [Before hiring staff and volunteers], you have to be intentional about discerning people's spirit; some people say one thing, but do something else. We are holding people [who want to work with us] accountable to a high standard. It is hard to get volunteers because they want to come and don't want to be a feel good story; We have had people who want to engage our clients but end up being very condescending.

Returning to the religion dimension of city, one leader reported how churches serve as a reliable volunteer base for BLOs:

> Over the years it has not been that difficult to identify volunteers because we have a network of churches. But, I think we can do more for our volunteers. Being small makes it difficult as we do not have anyone to coordinate with volunteers. A lot of the things that make orgs successful we have them in our DNA. But it is human capital is most important for us.

Some leaders express skepticism, just as BLOs did in Madison, about how assembling a large group of volunteers might not be in their organization's best interest:

> We don't have a big volunteer base because we don't want to deal with a high concentration of people [volunteers]. We don't function as a traditional business. We have a more flexible approach to doing things. We find that volunteers, especially whites, can't support the work that we are trying to do. There were times when we did the mural and a couple of volunteers came through to help with that, but on a consistent basis we don't have people coming over because they don't have the necessary skills and connection to our people.

One of the reasons why the volunteering schema looks so different in Montgomery, in contrast to Madison, is because of population. Unlike Madison, Black people have more availability combined with an inclination towards service. BLOs in this study frequently reported being able to take advantage of this reality to accomplish their organizational aims.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the racialized nature of the Montgomery nonprofit sector. Like Madison, the RNIC is powerful and has an on the day-to-day operations of BLOs in the city. They face questions about their leadership and find themselves struggling to secure funding.

What is unique about this sector is that the sheer number of BLOs combined with their civil rights ethic equips them with not only a unique perspective, but capacity to push back against the RNIC in ways that simply were not possible in Madison.

Chapter 6: **Towards a More Equitable Nonprofit Sector**

One of the most important things that I want to immediately point out before offering concluding thoughts is that I embarked on this work because I was frustrated by the prevailing narrative of the nonprofit sector as race-neutral – free from any of the issues that sociologists have long documented as part of a larger effort to understand social inequality. And I knew that embarking on this work would be difficult and not for the traditional reasons that one might expect when undertaking any research study. Instead, a major challenge was both interrupting the dominant narrative around the nonprofit sector and getting people to understand that money was not the only issue that should be of concern. Of course, I understand the centrality of funding in terms of organizations being able to do their work (e.g. Brooks 2004). However, I knew that a narrow focus on money, while ignoring all other aspects of an organization's experience, would not allow for a robust analysis that changed the conversation. After all, even as the nonprofit sector is viewed as race neutral, there was already evidence of funding disparities (e.g. Cheng, Yang, and Deng 2022). But, there was not a serious explanation for *why* and *how* such funding disparities existed in the first place. Beyond a narrow focus on a money as a perpetual issue facing nonprofits, there was the challenge of being entrusted with telling the stories of Black-led organizations who sincerely believed they were being treated differently within the sector but were hesitant to speak out for fear of facing retaliation – some of which was documented in the preceding chapters. With all of this in mind, I want to use the conclusion as part of a larger effort to articulate the "So what?" of this dissertation and I want to do so in five ways: (1) clearly explain the nature the RNIC; (2) consideration of the BLO counter-schema idea; (3) highlight how it differed across Madison and Montgomery in the context of organizational success metrics; (4) discuss implications for further research; and (5) discuss

practical implications of this work – all of which are important for getting us closer to a more equitable nonprofit sector.

The Nature of the RNIC

I have spent a great deal of time illustrating the importance of Black-led organizations to the well-being of those they serve – predominately Black clients. Those whom BLOs serve are facing overwhelming structural barriers that is preventing them from living lives of dignity. Further complicating the lives of clients is the fact that BLOs,

themselves, also face structural barriers that prevent them from providing the best possible support for their clients. Until now, there has been reluctance by scholars to dig into the nonprofit sector in a manner that raised questions about the extent to which it represented a context that contributes to different organizational outcomes. Indeed, the narrative of the nonprofit sector as a public good has been predominant and ostensibly placed the burden of success on the shoulders of organizations; of which a disproportionate is borne by BLOs. The closest that we have come to addressing issues of perceived inequality within the sector is on the question of funding and unequal funding structures as discussed as part of critical work done by INCITE! In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Of course, as I have argued, funding is an important part of any organization's successful operation. Yet, it is not the only issue meriting consideration when thinking about the outcomes experienced by organizations.

Instead, what I have tried to argue in this dissertation is that the time has come for us to begin thinking about the nonprofit sector, itself, as racialized and how this structural context significantly impacts the experiences of BLOs. To begin this necessary conversation, I have suggested that we think about the sector as having a racial character; one replete with a cultural schema that is implicit and taken for granted in ways that allow it to go perennially unexplained

and unchallenged. That is, we must understand the nonprofit sector as part of what I have called a racialized nonprofit industrial complex – a racialized social system that sorts organizations into categories on the basis of race and holds them to a set of unequal standards rooted in whiteness. Making matters more difficult as the engine of this system, these standards are reflected in an invisible, cultural schema; a perfunctory way of doing things that everyone in the sector has just become accustomed to and learned to accept.

Within this powerful system, it makes it nearly impossible to raise any substantive questions about unfairness because established standards seem entirely reasonable and, crucially, race-neutral. Why, for instance, would one even question a basic sector expectation that organizations should look and behave a certain way consistent with what is understood as best practices based on isomorphic preferences. After all, best practices have been an engrained standard in every sector as they are believed to be an important way to replicate success (e.g. Anderson 2019). On the surface, it seems sensible for organizational leaders to behave in certain ways or to be held to certain standards where the management of funding is concerned. But, what I have argued is that the sector's cultural schema is one that is rooted in whiteness; where standards are based on neoliberal preferences that reflect the characteristics of white-led organizations. Put more simply, the sector has standards rooted in whiteness that white-led organizations are more likely to meet and achieve success. This is entirely consistent with what an interdisciplinary group of scholars have long argued about the power of whiteness (e.g. Nayak 2007). Du Bois (1920) is an important reminder of how whiteness functions as a reference category to which everyone else is compared. And so, it is not surprising that the nonprofit sector has a definitive white racial character and set of standards to which BLOs are expected to meet. The result of the RNIC is a set of unequal experiences and outcomes that creates a *dual*

structural disadvantage whereby not only marginalized clients face barriers but so too do their sources of support BLOs thereby making it nearly impossible for clients to be lifted out of poverty.

The BLO Counter-Schema

There is no question about the dominance of the RNIC as a powerful system in all the ways I have described including its obvious racial character and schema buttressed by a racial ideology. Yet, an important animating feature of my own work is the impulse towards trying to understand the agency of those who are up against systems such as the RNIC. In my view, there have been far too many scholarly contributions focused on the dominance of systems such as the RNIC and how they simply overpower marginalized groups. It is true that these systems, particularly those with a racial character, have a profound impact on marginalized groups. And, I fundamentally reject those who argue that marginalized groups should be responsible for disrupting these systems. That burden must never be unilaterally shifted to oppressed groups, particularly when the expectation is that marginalized groups must work within the existing oppressive system. One reason why this is not possible is because, as Lorde (2003) pointed out, "…the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Thus, in understanding how BLOs engage an RNIC, I am inspired by the work of Eve Tuck (2009) who urges scholars to reject what she calls "damage-centered" research – inquiry whose principle aim is to document the challenges facing marginalized groups as part of an effort to call out oppression in individuals, systems, and structures.

To that end, a significant part of this work has been implicitly framing, Black-led organizations as unique, insider-led organizations. What I mean is that BLOs have achieved insider status among their clients by virtue of a shared experience with marginalization and other

structurally imposed hardships; they share what scholars have called linked-fate – an intrinsic feeling of closeness. BLOs and their clients are bound by shared experience with poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, disrupted families, addiction, educational inequity, and other issues that equips them with a unique perspective that informs all they do as organizations. It is no wonder, then, that so many of the BLOs in this study are inclined towards supporting their clients' needs even if it takes them beyond a publicly declared mission – a decision that frequently placed them at odds with basic expectations within the sector. This interconnectedness borne out of challenge is one of the most powerful examples of how BLOs leverage their experiences and unique vantage point to challenge the existence of an RNIC. It is also an important starting point for understanding the existence of what I called a *counter-schema* – a direct challenge to the existence of the RNIC's dominant cultural schema. It is important to note that the deploying of counter-schemas was both conscious and unconscious. That is, in some instances BLOs made a decision to overtly challenge the RNIC while in other instances their counter-schema emerges by virtue of their very existence. The presence of these counter-schemas are an integral part of this work not just because of how they reflect the agency of BLOs, but also how they underscore the strategic nature of how these organizations engage the RNIC.

RNIC Operating in Madison and Montgomery

Before moving forward, I want to address a consistent source of critique regarding understanding the nonprofit sector as a racial system. More often than not, the critique has been the following refrain: all organizations face the same challenges and there is nothing particularly unique about the experiences of BLOs. Supporters of this position cite different intellectual and practical arguments to affirm this point. For instance, some note that all small organizations face

challenges within the sector and support this position by citing the work of scholars who focus on the liability of smallness (Bruderl and Schussler 1990). According to this argument, larger organizations because of their capacity advantages face lower risks than smaller organizations and are more likely to thrive in an organizational field. The basic point is that it is logical that organizations with capacity issues would encounter difficulties in their day-to-day operation. The capacity challenge is often extended to the ability of organizations to appropriately manage money and the resulting reporting expectations. It is true that organizational size can be an impediment for organizations carrying out their mission (e.g. Lefebvre 2022). But, it is also true that while small white-led organizations certainly deal with issues, they enjoy the credential of whiteness which still affords them an advantage over BLOs within the sector. That is, whiteness grants a greater chance to be seen as legitimate in ways that BLOs do not enjoy.

I have argued that the operation of an RNIC existed in two places that I have called middle cities. The decision to venture into these places was bold and certainly took me beyond the urban canon that all too often forces scholars to unreflexively study prototypical cities such as Chicago. But, there was considerable value in studying the RNIC across these two middle cities because it permitted me to hold many variables constant while being able to study how the RNIC differed across place along with distinct racial demographics differed. Additionally, the decision to examine these two cases was quite strategic. Unbeknownst to many people, Madison is home to some of the greatest racial disparities in the nation. This reality meant that many of its residents were suffering against a number of structural barriers. And more often than not, Black residents rely on the resources of BLOs to help lift them out of poverty. But, what became clear is that BLOs, too, were facing a number of structural barriers that were impacting how they were able to deliver services to clients. To fully understand the extent to which this was true required

engagement with BLOs. In Madison, while there were thousands of nonprofits, there were only a small number of BLOs, and an even smaller number of those that I was most interested in: organizations that had an anti-poverty focus. The reality of a small BLO infrastructure alone suggested that there might be some unique challenges. But, after hearing directly from leaders over a two-year period it became clear that their issues were the result of a racialized nonprofit sector; one where their experiences and desire to support clients was fundamentally at odds with the sector rules and expectations. Rather than accept Madison as a unique case of racialization in the nonprofit sector, I ventured into predominately Black Montgomery, Alabama to examine the experiences of BLOs and determine the extent to which place impacted the nature of an RNIC. While I found a more robust BLO infrastructure, beyond the more well-known nonprofits, the condition facing clients was quite similar to Madison. This made for a very meaningful and interesting comparison case.

Controlling for variables and studying two cities with different racial demographics created an opportunity to primarily focus on material and social resources within the sector; what I called organizational success metrics (OSMs) – key areas thought to be central to an organization's success that include leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteering. Based on the data, I argued that the RNIC's cultural schema sets the standard for each OSM and that BLOs enacted different counter-schemas reflecting their own unique perspective. That is, the sector's dominant cultural schema dictates what leadership looks like; how funds are pursued and allocated; what counts as acceptable data; who can, should and is available to volunteer; and the nature of collaborative partnerships. The standards undergirding each of these OSMs are rooted in whiteness. Within the RNIC, the dominant cultural schema and BLO schema converge around each OSM and produced as a racialized outcome.

As mentioned earlier, a significant aim that I sought to achieve through this work was to ensure that people understood that navigating the nonprofit sector was about far more than raising money. One issue that set the tone for the success or failure of BLOs in the sector was this question of leadership. Across both Madison and Montgomery, the RNIC's leadership schema presupposed what successful organizations looked like. This was typically measured by the organizational structure (e.g. org chart) and the professional distance between organizations and clients. The reason why this matter so much is because in both cities this was a proxy for legitimacy in the sector. That is, the way organizations were perceived as legitimate within the sector is if they physically resembled those organizations which exhibited a pyramid organizational chart and maintained professional distance which signaled a professional operation. But, this standard was incommensurate with BLOs across both cities because they operated within a non-traditional inverted organizational chart where the CEO/Executive Director was at the center and the arrows point towards them with the average BLO only having 3 full-time employees. To some, this type of organizational structure implied dysfunction and inability to operate under the standards of the RNIC leadership schema. Yet, the inverted organizational chart of BLOs in both cities constituted a counter-schema that had the expressed purpose of positioning the Executive Director as something of a gatekeeper for their organization; what Pattillo called a "middle-man". In this role, Executive Directors were not merely the face of the organization – they *were* the organization; often the most, and only, recognizable figure associated with a BLO. This often positioned leaders to defend their clients, interface with white actors within the RNIC, and make decisions about the work of their organizations.

Crucially, BLOs decisions about the work of organizations in both cities was at odds with the RNIC leadership schema that expected organizations to have narrowly tailored missions. Yet, the data showed that BLOs in both cities routinely encountered clients dealing with a number of issues often beyond the scope of their organizations' stated mission. Rather than turn them away or spend allocated funding in prescribed ways, BLOs engaged in what I called mission-drift because they understood the consequences of not supporting their clients. The decision to deviate from a publicly declared mission offered further insight into the unique, linked relationship between BLOs and their clients. It also prompted BLOs in both cities to exercise charismatic leadership as a counter-schema to boldly take stances on behalf of clients. However, within the RNIC, the charismatic leadership of BLOs in Madison was taken more derisively as community organizers rather than nonprofit executives which precluded them from operating from a place of authority within the sector. Conversely, the charismatic leadership demonstrated by BLOs in Montgomery was far more successful in achieving outcomes and being seen as legitimate likely as a result of the obvious Civil Rights Movement legacy that richly informed the leadership style of BLOs.

I have been clear in underscoring the way funding is a significant point of emphasis for scholars and BLOs navigating the sector. While BLOs in Madison and Montgomery have similar difficulties in getting funding, they navigated different permission structures. BLOs in Madison reported having difficulty accessing funding and navigating an RNIC funding schema that frequently restricted public stances on issues of racial justice that might be deemed offensive by funders. Moreover, because the RNIC funding schema expected organizations to possess the capacity to manage funds, BLOs in Madison often were shut out of funds. This prompted BLOs in Madison to use a counter-schema that called a racialized finesse that strategically framed

funding applications and the work of the organization to demonstrate their impact. For BLOs in Montgomery, it was more difficult for funders to impose restrictions on the advocacy of BLOs. As noted, those leading BLOs in Montgomery were informed by the Civil Rights Movement. And so, BLOs reported fundings being far more amenable to their postures and not seeing them as disqualifying for funding opportunities. However, BLOs in Montgomery were tasked with navigating a unique permission structure that reflected a general skepticism of BLOs to appropriately handle funding. It was also indicative of the underlying racism still present in the Deep South. These competing challenges facing BLOs in each city can be explained, in part, by virtue of place.

A really important part of this work has shown the problematic nature of RNIC's data schema. Under this schema there were obvious standards for what counted as acceptable data which primarily included quantitative measures of impact. The schema expected that organizations would be serving as many people as possible reflecting a deep preoccupation with counting more than substance. While BLOs in both cities shared the desire to reach as many people as possible, their impact tended to be more personal and deeper. They are able to point to many examples of how they have helped clients in a variety of ways, often beyond their mission. And because of this, they reported never being able to meet the quantitative standards. They were more inclined towards telling the stories of their clients which best captured all that they meant.

I showed how the RNIC collaboration schema demanded collaboration amongst all nonprofit organizations. While BLOs in both cities experienced exploitation as part of the RNIC collaboration schema, it manifested itself in different ways. When trying to collaborate, so much of the challenge facing BLOs in Madison was the result of the ultra-minoritized status in a

predominately white nonprofit sector. That is, BLOs were often forced to collaborate with white-led organizations even if it meant being sidelined or exploited for access to clients. From a purely methodological standpoint, the marginalized status of BLOs in Madison made it very difficult to even gain access as they were constantly on edge about how speaking out on these issues might impact their organizations within the sector. This was despite assurances that they would not be identified by name in this work. Their fears were only exacerbated by virtue of all that we know about the tensions that exists between university and community consistent with longstanding research on town and gown relationships (e.g. Kemp 2013). The complete opposite was true of BLOs in Montgomery who by virtue of their larger organizational infrastructure and predominantly Black population, were much more successful in identifying collaborative partnerships and did not have to pursue collaborations as much as BLOs in Madison.

Another casualty of this reality was the ease at which BLOs were pitted against each other within the racialized sector, particularly in Madison. Too often, white-led organizations and funders were able to successfully create division amongst BLOs by making disparaging remarks or favoring certain BLOs over others. Indeed, within the racialized Madison sector, BLOs were divided into what was known as Old Black Madison and New Black Madison. The former comprised of organizations that had been in Madison for decades and were more inclined to work within the white supremacist structure if it meant support for the clients. The latter, New Black Madison, represented a new age, more outspoken BLO, that did not play by the established rules of the racialized sector. Rather than accept the status quo, they frequently took adversarial public stances against white funders in ways that exacerbated their alienation within the sector. Seizing on this, white-led organizations and funders frequently disparaged New Black Madison in ways that sought to lift up Old Black Madison organizations. The result was

manufactured tensions amongst organizations that served to strengthen the RNIC in ways that created a third-level of marginalization for New Black Madison.

We also know that the RNIC volunteer schema expects that nonprofit organizations will be able to tap into a robust volunteer base that further contributes to an organization's operational effectiveness. However, in a predominantly white Madison, BLOs often had access to a larger volunteer base filled with individuals who lacked the cultural competency that was required to engage marginalized groups. As a result, BLOs in Madison enacted a counter-schema that critically evaluated prospective volunteers to ensure they were the right individuals to support their work. Conversely, BLOs in Montgomery accessed a robust volunteer pool that did not necessitate collaboration with white people.

The ultimate point that I want readers to understand is that the RNIC represents an interconnected system where success is deeply tied to each of these OSMs: leadership, funding, data, collaboration, and volunteers. Deviating from established standards around OSMs makes it very difficult to be seen as legitimate within the sector. For BLOs in Madison, it was more difficult to deviate largely because of their limited organizational infrastructure and the predominantly white population in the city. These distinct aspects of Madison served to create a more powerful RNIC that made resisting more difficult. However, Montgomery by virtue of its robust network of BLOs and predominately Black population meant that there were more opportunities to exercise agency and challenge the RNIC. Despite these different experiences, the RNIC remains the dominant structure in each place.

Implications for further research

Given that we have not thought about the nonprofit sector as a racialized space has dramatically limited the ability of scholars to critically interrogate the sector in profoundly

important ways. As such, there is a fruitful research agenda ahead for scholars to continue this work. In particular, there are three lines of inquiry that I think could animate a generation of interdisciplinary scholarship on the nonprofit sector in four key areas: (1) philanthropy; (2) nonprofit board; (3) other organizations led by people of color including women; and (4) Black clients.

As I have indicated at various points in this dissertation, my argument is not that scholars have failed to address the issue of race in the nonprofit sector. Indeed, there is a robust, multidisciplinary literature that focuses on the areas. Instead, what I contend is that the absence of a critical examination of the sector as racialized has prevented a great deal of research from going forth. One area meriting future research is philanthropic. Scholars have documented both the importance of funding for nonprofits doing their work as well as the existence of funding disparities. But, there has been very little work done on the racialized nature of philanthropy and how race might impact funding allocations. Relatedly, philanthropy has been largely a white space that has not allowed Black people to be active participants (Anderson 2015). Yet, my work with the MacArthur Foundation has revealed a significant number of Black people working in philanthropy and presents an opportunity for us to think about the ways in which they navigate a potentially racialized philanthropic sector.

Another line of research that has garnered a great deal of attention from scholars is nonprofit boards. Scholars have theorized about the nature of boards and the role they play in the management of organizations. And the presence of Boards loomed large over this work even though not a part of the study. However, BLOs in Madison frequently made references to their interactions with their Board which suggested the need to understand whether these relationships were racialized. Conversely, in Montgomery BLOs frequently reported having far more diverse

boards that afforded them more autonomy over their day-to-day operations. There is research on how diverse boards positively impact organizations (e.g. Buse, Bernstein, an Bilimoria 2016). But, an important question is how BLOs perceive the role and influence of predominantly white Boards on their work.

An additional line of research must necessarily consider the experiences of other organizations led by people of color. Too often, there is a presumption that marginalization is universally experienced (e.g. Williams 1999; Reynolds, Sneva, and Beehler 2010). That is, racism is typically understood as having the same kind of deleterious impact on people of color regardless of their racial identity. Of course, the effects of racism have been well documented (e.g. Schell et al. 2020). However, we should not presume that racism impacts racial groups in the same ways. Still more, the issues that organizations led by people of color are also different. A challenge with this line of inquiry is that there has not been a lot of work done which disaggregates organizations on the basis of race. Indeed, one reason why the nonprofit sector continues to be understood as race-neutral is because we don't think about organizations on the basis of race. Latinx-led organizations have not received a great deal of attention in the literature and they are often confronting issues quite different from BLOs including immigration. Therefore, we need to understand how Latinx-led organizations navigate an RNIC.

A final aspect of a future research agenda can examine the experiences of Black clients who utilize nonprofit organizations. In this work, I have made a number of references to these individuals and the hardships that BLOs work to alleviate. But, I did not ever talk directly to clients and their voices are an important part of understanding racialization in the sector. There is evidence that marginalized groups engaging with nonprofit and community-level resources can have a positive impact on their lives (e.g. Small 2009). But, there is still a need to hear directly

from Black clients to more fully understand how they navigate nonprofits to help lift them out of poverty.

The research agenda is promising. But, it is important to understand that more research by itself is not going to lead to a more equitable nonprofit sector. Instead, it will require reforms aimed at having an immediate impact on the sector.

Implications for Practice

After all that I have argued up to this point, it is important to acknowledge that the nonprofit sector is not going anywhere. Its sheer availability as a continued tax shelter for the wealthy means that it will continue to be a place where capital freely flows to all kinds of organizations. Moreover, the persistent erosion of the social safety net, particularly in more conservative states, make clear that the sector has an important, indispensable role to play in the lives of disadvantaged individuals. Thus, we are still left with a nonprofit sector that can be a useful space to positively impact the lives of disadvantaged groups. It is BLOs who have been at the forefront of this impact and there is evidence that despite these challenges, BLOs have and continue to have a profound impact in their communities. But, their impact can be so much greater if we are able take seriously the structural reality that so often impedes their work.

The fundamental question is: how can the nonprofit sector truly become an *equitable* public good? I believe we can take three steps that would immediately lead to a more equitable nonprofit sector: (1) a robust public awareness strategy; (2) a sincere commitment to the elimination of racism; and (3) facilitation of genuine collaboration with BLOs.

The first way that this is possible is by using this research to raise public awareness about the consequences of racialization. There is already evidence that public awareness can be effective strategy for increasing the confidence of work done by nonprofit organizations (e.g.

McDougle 2014). This is an important initial step because notwithstanding concerns raised by the public about nonprofits, so much of the nonprofit sector narrative has centered on the idea of this as a public good where anyone can start an organization aimed at making a difference. This narrative has become so embedded in the minds of everyday people that it makes any effort to raise the specter of inequality a difficult task. In this way, the sector has become the quintessential race-neutral space that has largely avoided critical consideration. It is one of the primary reasons why this work represents one of the first attempts at really uncovering not just the racialized nature of the sector, but also its underlying mechanisms. And, how the racial structure impacts more than just the bottom line for organizations. Instead, this work gives us a common language with which to understand these issues. And, it provides an empirical test – across two very different geographical locations and sectors – to fully capture the varied nature and impact of racialization in the sector.

A viable public awareness strategy also entails a more concerted effort to lift up the experiences of BLOs within the sector. It is not enough to publish data that illustrates disparities in funding allocations. Instead, we need more public discussion about how organizations purportedly committed to equity fall short in their effort to legitimize BLOs.

We already know funding is the most important issue for any nonprofit organization. In order to achieve a more equitable nonprofit sector, we need to fundamentally change the nature of funding processes. So often throughout this research I heard directly from organizations that lost confidence in the funding process and found it to be designed in such a way that makes it difficult for them. Their lack of confidence was the result of a process where they not only felt unseen, but also treated unfairly. One way that we can achieve more equitable outcomes is by having more transparent funding processes.

Another way that we can arrive at a more equitable nonprofit sector is by reimaging the kind of data that is regarded as acceptable in the sector. BLOs in both Madison and Montgomery understood the value of data. But, where they differed from the RNIC data schema is the emphasis on producing quantifiable outcomes. The reason why this posed a challenge for BLOs is because their work on behalf of clients cannot be quantified in ways that meet the standards set by the RNIC data schema. And because they're incapable of meeting these standards they are branded and penalized as not being able to produce measurable outcomes. Yet, the work of these organization is significant when measured qualitatively. Therefore, to get closer to equity we need to expand what counts as acceptable data. Funders could allow BLOs to produce qualitative evidence of their impact.

If we take seriously this work, we can arrive at a place where the nonprofit sector can have an optimum impact. I know the road towards equity is difficult, but I sincerely believe the nonprofit sector can be a place that has a profoundly positive impact on the lives of those who need help the most.

Methodological Note

Embarking on this work was immensely important because it sounded the alarm on such a profoundly important issue - the racialized experiences of BLOs. But, doing this work was hardly easy, particularly in Madison. BLOs in Madison were uniquely marginalized within the nonprofit sector and the city more generally. This reality meant that they were not interested in discussing their racialized experiences for fear that they might be identified and further marginalized. I first learned of their marginalization when meeting with a small local funding organization who had been supporting BLOs in the city and had been hearing about their challenges for years. When I told the leader of this funding organization about my interest in doing this work there was a palpable level of excitement because these experiences had been ignored for too long. Not only did the leader provide anecdotal information about BLOs, crucially, I was also provided with initial BLO contacts.

At first, I figured it would be easy to establish contact with BLOs given that I had already met this person, who was my key informant, and gave me credibility. Moreover, based on the inclusion criteria for BLOs I settled on: (1) anti-poverty mission and (2) executive director and a majority of full-time employees identified as African American, I immediately identified 20 BLOs in the city. Armed with this perceived advantage, I cleared IRB protocols fairly quickly and deferred to my contact script that had been developed as part of the review process. Prior to pursuing contact with BLOs, I used a combination of insights from my key informant, and the scholarly literature, to make a determination about the kinds of questions I would ask BLOs during future interviews which are reflected in the Interview Protocol available in Appendix 2.

When initially reaching out to BLOs I did not mention my contact's name because I wanted to engage them from as neutral of a position as possible - recognizing this is an

impossible standard. However, my initial outreach efforts were widely unsuccessful. The common response from BLOs was to initially ignore my attempts at contact or, in a few cases, bluntly express an unwillingness to discuss their experiences. The explanations were quite consistent: (a) fear of being "outed" as part of this work that would damage their already tenuous standing in the sector and (b) skeptical of my affiliation with the University. I was initially surprised by the challenge of establishing contact, but certainly understood their trepidation. So, I began mentioning my key informant's name when making additional outreach to BLOs. Here it is important to note that while my key informant was helpful in ways I noted above, this relationship did not move the needle with respect to establishing contact with BLOs. While this person was obviously an ally of BLOs in the city, their identity as a progressive white member of the philanthropic community did not grant them the requisite credibility to broker contact between me and the organizations. Despite this ongoing challenge, I was entirely determined to do this work and pressed forward until I finally met an influential BLO in the city. Not only did he provide me with an important perspective, he also helped broker contact with other BLOs in the city - including those that I had initially identified. Ultimately, when I left the field I had established contact with and interviewed 15 of the BLOs in Madison.

When I concluded the Madison case, I was fascinated by what I had learned about the experiences of BLOs, but hardly surprised. As I noted in Chapter 1, the extraordinary racial disparities in Madison meant that Black people were struggling and would ostensibly be expected to also be having challenges leading organizations. That is not to suggest studying Madison was for naught. Indeed, by studying these organizations I was able to discover the existence of a racialized nonprofit industrial complex that impeded the work of BLOs in the city. But, I was unsatisfied with only studying Madison for the reason I noted above and because this

was a predominantly white city where Black people had very little power as they were a minority in population and organizations. This prompted me to begin contemplating whether or not the experiences of BLOs in Madison were *generalizable* to other places. I want to note that I am using generalization here, not in the positivist sense that places an undue emphasis on ensuring that results are replicable in a manner that gives them credibility. Instead, my concern was whether or not racialization was both present and impacting BLOs in nonprofit sectors in different cities. At the time, I thought I would just study Chicago as a second case because that is just what credible urban sociologists do. I later learned that while Chicago has a historic and impressively large sector, it hardly represented the kind of comparison that would help make better sense of the Madison case. Instead, I wanted a case that would allow me to hold as many variables constant as possible to really understand the nature of racialization, how it operated, and impacted the experiences of BLOs. And, critically, I wanted a place where Black people were in a stronger position. The idea of a stronger position was simple: a majority Black city. Having read a number of books and articles on majority Black cities, it was a meeting with an advisor that led me to identify Montgomery as an ideal comparison case.

When I decided to study Montgomery I had the Madison case in the back of my mind. I remembered the challenges I had with establishing contact with BLOs in Madison and thought the same would be true in Montgomery. In an attempt to mitigate the potential challenge of establishing contact, I took an exploratory pre-pandemic (February 2022) trip to Montgomery to get a better sense of the local nonprofit scene. For context, I had never even visited the state of Alabama before and had absolutely no contacts on the ground. This was in stark contrast to Madison where being anchored in the city was not enough to overcome the initial challenges of establishing contact with BLOs. Given that I would only be visiting Montgomery for 4 days I

had to make the most of the visit. Hoping to avoid the same initial pitfalls in Madison, I strategically established contact with someone on the ground whom I had identified on the local university's website who had extensive work with the community. To my surprise, he was eager to talk and provided me with important local context about the experiences of organizations much like the key informant in Madison. But, this felt different because this was a Black man who seemed to have a unique connection to various community-level constituencies in this city. After our meeting I basically knew that Montgomery would be a great comparison case to Madison.

Meeting the community liaison was important, but doing so at Alabama State University (ASU) proved to be decisive in many ways. ASU was a historical HBCU and, like UW-Madison, an anchor institution in the city. But, in contrast to UW, ASU was a pillar of the community as many of the residents in this community had a deep and proud connection to this institution. I later learned that being associated with ASU came with enormous credibility. All throughout this city, people spoke fondly about their time at "Old Mother Dear" as they referred to it locally. Given that I had decided that Montgomery would be my second case, I thought about ways that I might establish a relationship with ASU. I also knew that I did not want to come to this city and extract information without giving something back.

Following my brief visit, I returned to Madison with the clear intent of moving to Montgomery at the end of the summer. But, then the world literally changed with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. While navigating this new normal, I maintained contact with the community liaison on the ground and plotted ways that I might study Montgomery remotely which had become part of a routine part of the IRB process during the pandemic. However, I also knew that remotely doing this work would not allow for the same kind of immersive

experience that I knew was necessary. So, I took a leap of faith and moved in August in the middle of the pandemic.

Moving to the Deep South came with obvious challenges including, as I noted earlier, not having any previous connections beyond the community liaison I had met during my exploratory visit. And, of course, the pandemic created its own set of challenges including being out in public. However, in the Deep South the pandemic did not disrupt my work as much as I thought it would. Because the weather in the Deep South is generally nice all year round it allowed me to conduct interviews outside and in-person while being socially distant from respondents.

The week after arriving in Montgomery I had a virtual meeting with the Social Sciences department at ASU to pursue Visiting Scholar status, which they granted. As I noted earlier, having an affiliation with the university proved to be decisive because of its immense credibility in the city. I quickly learned this when trying to establish connections within the local community. When I sent cold emails from my gmail or Wisconsin email I received very few responses. But, part of my Visiting Scholars status at ASU critically came with an email address which squarely situated me within the community. When I sent emails from this address I received a 100% response rate to any request I made.

It wasn't just my status with ASU that made a difference in this work. It was also my connection with people on the ground that I met within the first few weeks of arriving. For context, the Deep South was more "open" than Madison had been when I left. I attributed this to regional differences about perceptions of the pandemic. As part of my Visiting Scholar status I met a university administrator who was well connected within the community who introduced me to another community member who worked in the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce. Each of these individuals were deeply embedded within the Montgomery community and both

recommended the individual who would be my key informant on the ground. The individual they recommended was a leader of a BLO who had extensive experience doing work within the nonprofit sector. He ultimately connected me to all the people I needed to be in touch within the city.

Madison and Montgomery were very different in ways that I summarize in Table 1. But, their differences extend beyond demographic, economic, and political dynamics. From a methodological standpoint these two cities offered very different experiences. Whereas in Madison, my relationship to UW was actually a barrier to access, in Montgomery being affiliated with ASU was a prerequisite to gaining access. In Madison, I labored to establish contact with BLOs while establishing contact in Montgomery was significantly smoother - even during a pandemic. Ultimately, my experience with this project showed that place not only matters for understanding the substantive issues around racialization, but it also mattered methodologically.

Table 1: Summary of Cases		
	Madison, Wisconsin	Montgomery, Alabama
Region	North (Midwest)	Deep South (Southeast)
Total Population	269,840	200,603
White Population	191,627	58,367
Black Population	20,019	120,950
Total NPOs	4,000	4,000
BLOs in the Study	15	40
Median White Household Income	$72,530	$66,276
Median Black Household Income	$42,788	$35,548
White Poverty Rate	16%	10.6%
Black Poverty Rate	22%	30.8%
White Unemployment Rate	2.3%	5.%
Black Unemployment Rate	7.3%	10.5%
State Capitol	Yes	Yes
Governor	Democratic	Republican
State Legislature	Republican	Republican
City Mayor	Democratic (white female)	Democratic (Black male)
Local Government	Democratic	Democratic
Major University	University of Wisconsin - Madison (PWI)	Alabama State University (HBCU)

Appendix 1

Madison Interview Guide

Pseudonym: _____

Time/Duration of Interview: _____ Date:_____ Location:_____

Facesheet Descriptors

Demographic Information: Race, age, gender
Organization Name
Mission/Vision (if not available online)
Hours of operation
Number of people working in organization (full and part-time) & Organizational Structure
Organizational Status: 501c3, other 501c, informal with/without fiscal sponsor
Years of Operation

Interview Questions:

Organizational impact

1. Can you talk about what your organization does?
2. What would you say are your organization's successes?
3. What drives your work? Why do you do it?

Funding

1. How is your organization funded?
    1. If not funded, how is your work done?
2. How does your organization pursue grants?
3. Can you talk about any funding challenges your organization has had? What do you think are the reasons for those challenges?

Capacity Issues

1. What does the day-to-day operation of your organization look like?
2. What role do various staff members play in your organization?
3. How is data used in your organization?
4. How much more funding and staff do you need?
5. How easy or hard is it to get the volunteers you need? Why?
6. What further skills and/or knowledge do you think you or your staff need? How easy or hard is it to get those skills or that knowledge? Why?

Collaboration and Engagement with other Organizations

1. Can you talk about experiences you've had working with other organizations?
2. How do you interact with other organizations?
3. How welcome do you feel in the broader Madison nonprofit and funder networks?

Appendix 2

Montgomery Interview Protocol

Pseudonym: _____

Time/Duration of Interview: _____ Date:_____ Location:_____

Facesheet Descriptors

Demographic Information: Race, age, gender
Organization Name
Mission/Vision (if not available online)
Hours of operation
Number of people working in organization (full and part-time) & Organizational Structure
Organizational Status: 501c3, other 501c, informal with/without fiscal sponsor
Years of Operation

Interview Questions:

Entry in the Nonprofit World

1. What did you do before getting involved in nonprofit work?
2. How did you get involved in this work?
3. How does religion impact the work of your organization?
4. How does your organization feel about the Montgomery nonprofit sector?
5. Can you talk about the neighborhood where your organization is located?

Organizational impact

1. Can you talk about what your organization does?
2. What kinds of people do you serve? What are their issues?
3. What would you say are your organization's successes?
4. What drives your work? Why do you do it?

Funding

1. How is your organization funded?
    1. If not funded, how is your work done?
2. How does your organization pursue funding?
3. Can you talk about your organization's relationship with the local philanthropic (funding) community?
4. Can you talk about any funding challenges your organization has had in Montgomery? What do you think are the reasons for those challenges?

Capacity Issues

1. What does the day-to-day operation of your organization look like?
2. What role do various staff members play in your organization?
3. How is data used in your organization?

4. How much more funding and staff do you need?
5. How easy or hard is it to get the volunteers you need? Why? Who are the people who volunteer in your organization?
6. What further skills and/or knowledge do you think you or your staff need? How easy or hard is it to get those skills or that knowledge? Why?

Collaboration and Engagement with other Organizations

1. Can you talk about experiencing collaborating with white-led organizations?
2. Can you talk about experiences collaborating with Black-led organizations?
3. How welcome do you feel in the broader Montgomery nonprofit and funder networks?

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