The black middle class has trekked to suburbia in the same way previous groups have. But in many cases they have struggled to keep pace economically.
One of the nation’s best examples of the promise and peril of the black middle class’s prospects exists in Chicago’s south suburbs in south Cook County.
Let’s establish the context.
South Cook’s historical origins

- Prior to World War II South Cook County was largely a truck farming area growing local produce for the local Chicago market.
- After World War II the area became a favored affordable bedroom community destination for manufacturing workers.
- South Cook later added its own manufacturing jobs in key job center areas.
South Cook’s post-World War II development patterns
South Cook’s key distinction

- Four South Cook communities – Dixmoor, Ford Heights, Phoenix and Robbins – spurred change in South Cook.
- Each initially developed prior to World War II as semi-rural, working-class communities designed to serve black manufacturing workers in the very segregated mid-twentieth century.
- After World War II the communities became the entry point for blacks into South Cook.
South Cook’s demographic patterns since 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>454,229</td>
<td>499,986</td>
<td>478,658</td>
<td>496,161</td>
<td>487,629</td>
<td>487,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct. Black</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Population</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Alsp
- Blue Island
- Bannock
- Calumet City
- Calumet Park
- Chicago Heights
- Country Club Hills
- Crestwood
- Dixmoor
- Dolton
- East Hazel Crest
- Hazel Crest
- Homewood
- Lansing
- Lynwood
- Markham
- Matteson
- Merrionette Park
- Midlothian
- Oak Forest
- Olympia Fields
- Park Forest
- Phoenix
- Posen
- Richton Park
- Riverdale
- Robbins
- Sauk Village
- South Chicago Heights
- South Holland
- Steger
- Thorn

The data shows significant demographic changes over time, with increases in population and black population percentage.
Moving to the suburbs provided some increased wealth and prosperity for black newcomers, but not all.

Today South Cook is in a tenuous position as a subregion of the Chicago metro area, and in need of policy action to reverse its decline.
Indicators illustrating South Cook’s change

- Comparing South Cook with the metro area, Chicago, and historically adjacent or comparable communities in the following areas:
  - Income
  - Home values
  - Jobs
  - Taxes
South Cook: Income

Actual Median Household Income, 1980-2017
South Cook: Income

Median Household Income in 2017 Dollars, 1980-2017

- Chicago MSA
- Chicago
- Orland Park
- Elk Grove Village
- Average South Cook
South Cook: Home Values
South Cook: Home Values

Median Home Values in 2017 Dollars, 2000-2017

- Chicago MSA
- Chicago
- Orland Park
- Elk Grove Village
- Average South Cook
South Cook: Jobs
South Cook: Taxes

Cook County Composite Tax Rates, 2016

- Chicago
- Orland Park
- Elk Grove Village
- Average South Cook
South Cook: Taxes

- South Cook’s property tax problems are created by:
  - Cook County’s regressive property tax structure
  - Property tax competition from two adjacent low tax areas (suburban Will County, IL, Lake County, IN)
What happened to South Cook?

- Manufacturing job loss
- Lack of contemporary job centers
- Adherence to “bedroom community” mindset
- Affordable location in a regressive tax environment
What happened to South Cook?

- Low tax area competition
- Key subprime mortgage target area prior to the Great Recession
- Subject to the same segregation forces that plagued Chicago’s South (and West) Sides
Possible examples of similar suburban areas nationwide

- Prince George’s County, MD (suburban Washington, DC)
- DeKalb County, GA (suburban Atlanta)
- North St. Louis County, MO (suburban St. Louis)
- Parts of Cuyahoga County, OH (suburban Cleveland)
- Parts of Wayne County, MI (suburban Detroit)
- Parts of Camden County, NJ/Delaware County, PA (suburban Philadelphia)
Impact: lack of middle class formation, economic/social inequality
Possible Policy Directions

- Reimaging the physical environment of South Cook
- Consider taxing district consolidation – even municipal consolidation
- Push Cook County for property tax reform
- Actively seek and establish networks with other Chicago subregions
- Make racial and economic equity a priority
CITY OF COUNTRY CLUB HILLS Welcomes You
Mayor James W. Ford INCORP. 1958

Thanks!