

The Heart of Our Difference: Assessing Racial Tensions in Mecklenburg County

By Channing Mathews
Duke University Class of 2009

Introduction

The explosive growth of the Hispanic population in the United States has manifested itself in many ways including music, food, and overall culture. With Hispanic popular destinations such as Miami and New York, it is clear that the Hispanic population is establishing itself well within the melting pot that has described the United States for many years.

However, the growth of the Hispanic/Latino population in the Southeast is a recent development, particularly significant in the past 10-15 years (Durand, J., Massey, D. S., and Charvet 2000, Kochar, Suro, and Tafoya, 2005). Major southern cities such as Atlanta, Nashville, Durham, and Memphis are all experiencing a grand influx in the Latino population (McClain, Carter, DeFrancesco Soto, Lyle, Grynawiski, and Nunnally, 2006). Reasons for such growth have many different sources: better employment opportunities, moving away from corruption and poverty within their respective homelands, and global economic pressures from cross country agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (McClain et. al, 2006). Nevertheless, the Hispanic population is experiencing astronomical growth and despite obstacles such as immigration reform and deportation issues, the growth does not show any signs of slowing down.

Charlotte, NC in the past ten years has strongly affected population growth. Not only has it been a popular spot for Latino growth, it has also been named one of the top spots for African-American growth as well. In addition, Latino growth rates and African-American growth rates have been well in context of African-American population growth (Kochar et. al, 2005). With strong competition for resources among the blacks and whites, the introduction of the Latino population to the area is expected to create a social and economic tension. However conflict will not develop solely based upon economic competition, but also upon the deep racial politics that characterize the American South (McClain et al, 2006).

With the parallel and astronomical growth of African-Americans and Latinos in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the interaction between the two groups is inevitable, as much of the Hispanic population has moved into historically African-American neighborhoods (see Appendices, Census Tracts). Influences such as stereotyping, crime, and media have amplified this interaction as negative, and thus have drawn the spotlight of Charlotte upon its two major minority groups. Yet, in Charlotte limited studies of the interaction of these two groups have given an extremely short depth of insight in understanding if a true tension exists between the two groups or if tension is being highlighted as an issue for reasons other than it truly existing.

In fields such as community organizing, it is necessary to concretely identify if there is a social issue that is both relevant to the community and therefore engaging to community leaders. Community organizers must be wary in “jumping the gun” or i.e. helping to push a social issue that really has no breadth within the community (Mondros and Wilson, 1994). If done in this manner, social justice is concentrated in the hands of the organizer, rather than within the hands of local people, defeating the purpose of empowering people to motivate their own change. Particularly with social issues dealing with race relations, it is important to maintain the mantra of power with the people, in order that progress may be self-perpetuating.

In Charlotte, NC, the community organization Charlotte Helping Empower Local People (HELP) is a grassroots organization that works to bring together, train and organize the communities of Charlotte-Mecklenburg across all religious, racial, ethnic, class and neighborhood lines for the public good. HELP’s primary goal is to strengthen institutions, develop local leadership and organize power to act on behalf of justice and the common good. The organization seeks to hold public and private power holders accountable for their public responsibilities, as well as to initiate actions and programs of its own to solve community and economic problems.

HELP is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF.), the oldest and largest national, congregation-based, community organizing network in the United States. The IAF works with more than 60 community organizations like HELP to take action on community, city, county and state issues.

By concretely defining a social issue relevant to the community by facilitating conversations from motivated citizens, Charlotte HELP invests in local leaders and their ability to make a change in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.

As a result, this study is an assessment of the interactions of African-Americans and Latino/Hispanic populations. Three questions drive this research: Does a tension exist between African-Americans and Latinos in Charlotte? If so, what are the sources of this tension and why does it exist? Finally, are the strategies that the community organization Charlotte HELP uses effective in assessing and lessening these tensions between the two groups?

First, this paper will review the literature that exists on the interaction of black and Hispanic communities historically in cities such as New York, New York and Houston, Texas. Next, the methodology of this experiment in Charlotte will be addressed, followed by the results of the study. Finally, the researcher will draw conclusions based upon comparisons with previous data and research.

Background

Throughout the history of the United States, immigrant populations have caused sociologists to reflect upon the impact of each population upon neighborhood integration and the creation of enclaves. Irish, German, Black, and Hispanic populations have been studied in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Houston, where large populations of migrants settled during years of high immigration rates (mid 1960's). With the passage of the Hart Cellar-Act in 1965, immigrant populations rapidly increased due to the abolition of the quota based upon country of origins among other important factors (Waldinger 1989, Lobo, Flores, Salvo 2002). As a result of such increased immigration trends, there has been economic strain upon many public sectors, including education and health care and public safety (Mayor's Commission Study). Yet, increased immigration has been equated with economic stimulation, particularly in low-paid wage sectors of the economy (Waldinger 1989).

With economic development, immigrant migration inevitably creates new neighborhood contexts with native citizens (Denton and Massey, 1987). Although many theories exist to explain the pattern of residential settlement among immigrant communities, what appears to be common is that new racial communities create different trends of racial segregation. Although many immigrant and minority communities (blacks, Mexicans, and American Natives) share a common interest in regards to low income, the lack of college education, it is rare to observe the communities coming together to change the disparity of their various situations (Farley, 1990).

Many studies have examined the introduction of new racial communities to established neighborhoods, particularly in terms of residential segregation. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's several studies were performed to determine how racial identity and racial interaction influences how different ethnicities live among or are separated from one another. One idea is clear throughout history: the tension caused by black-white segregation carries over to incoming immigrant populations (Denton and Massey 1989). Hispanic immigrants upon entering the United States must chose which side of the black-white dichotomy that they wish to identify. This is not only a source of tension with Hispanics and other minority communities such as African-Americans, but also it causes conflict within differing Hispanic/Latino populations. The contrast in racial perception in such areas as the Caribbean, where there exists a continuum between black and white, and the black-white dichotomy of the United States forces assimilation toward one side or the other. Despite pressure to choose black or right, such force often leads to

definition of one's own ethnic identity, unique to the black/white definition (Denton and Massey 1989).

Another important trend to note during the 70's and 80's is the increased diversity that characterized local neighborhoods throughout the country. Those neighborhoods with two differing ethnic groups remained ethnically stable throughout the decade and were more prone to the introduction of a third ethnic group by the end of the decade (Denton and Massey, 1991). In those neighborhoods that did not maintain two ethnic groups, neighborhoods generally followed the trend of becoming African-American dominated. This trend is due to the gravitation of blacks to neighborhoods of greater ethnic diversity when compared to Hispanics or Asians of the decade (Denton and Massey 1991).

New York City, a major center for entry and settlement of new immigrant populations, particularly Hispanic populations has been a spotlight of study over the past two decades. With the replacement of blacks as the largest minority population in the area, Hispanics demonstrated a huge population growth that significantly impacted the neighborhood demographics of the city (Lobo, Flores, and Salvo, 2002). Studies of Hispanic populations have revealed that social, economic, and federal policies have shaped where these populations are distributed throughout the city. For example, Dominicans living in New York during the 1970's moved to the West Bronx. The area was attractive because of an enormous city effort to rehabilitate the area due to the prevalence of white flight, and housing abandonment. Rehabilitation efforts were steered toward minority communities, which led to the development of a strong Dominican enclave. Unfortunately, the strong presence of the enclave has resulted in subsequent segregation from other communities in the 1990's particularly blacks and whites (Lobo et al 2002)

In Houston Texas, a study analyzed the interactions between three minority groups: African-Americans, Garifunas (Afro-Caribbean), and Hispanics. Through extensive interviews with key informants, researchers determined the interactions between each of the groups in three areas: North Lyons (African-Americans and Hispanics (mainly Mexican)), Lyons (Garifunas and African-Americans), and Westheimer (Latinos, African-Americans, and Caucasians). Each area was tested in the factors of length of residence, spatial distribution, and sociocultural factors. In North Lyons, Hispanic migration into the historically African-American neighborhood has conceded to the two groups coming together for events or issues of common interest, such as neighborhood blight (Hutchinson, Rodriguez, and Hagan 1996). Despite evidence of common interest, little social interaction occurred between the two groups. Ironically despite having the least spatial distance from one another among the three groups, cultural differences maintain a significant boundary between the two groups (Hutchinson et al, 1996).

In Lyons, the population of Garifunas (Afro-Caribbean Hispanics) are a distinctly separate community from the African-Americans. Language barriers as well as the existence of an established Garifuna community has lead to a distinct division with African Americans. The major point of interaction is among the children, whose English skills give them an avenue of communication with African-American children. (Hutchinson et al, 1996). Spatial distribution between the two groups was significant, in which the only major interaction between the two communities was through a local shopping center.

In Westheimer, duration of time in the area has had a significant affect upon the interaction of Hispanics and African Americans. Because the community has had considerable ethnic turnover, the two communities have limited understanding of one another and resort to stereotyping to explain unfavorable behavior (Hutchinson et al). Spatial interaction has also has a significant affect between the races, particularly minorities and whites because of management residential policies, which cede to segregation (Hutchinson et. al, 1996).

In the new millennium the question remains of whether or not the trend seen in cities such as Houston, TX will hold true with migration trends in the American South. With the new booming economies that characterize the southern United States today, the area serves as a magnet for employment seekers, particularly Latino Males (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). Yet the canvas upon which the Latino migration to the South is occurring is strikingly different from migration to established communities, such as New York and Los Angeles. Although the growth in major southern cities is quite astronomical (up 500% in the decade of 1990-2000 in Charlotte alone), there is limited information on how the influx of Hispanic/Latino migrants have affected other local white and black populations (Kochar et al, 2005). And with the continued existence of the H-2A and H-2B guestworker programs among other driving forces of migration, Hispanic/Latino migrants will continue to enter the South at exponential rates (Southern Poverty Law Center). Therefore, it is necessary to develop studies evaluating effects of the new populations.

One important implication of the new migrant/Latino community is more competition for employment opportunities, particularly between Hispanics and blacks in North Carolina (Johnson-Webb, 2002). With a chronic labor shortage, the need for eager workers has been quite apparent. In a study of North Carolina employer recruitment, researchers sought to determine “the attitudes and recruiting behavior in the Triangle region in the hospitality sector” (Johnson-Webb, 2002). Results determined that employers in the area actively recruited Hispanic workers as opposed to other ethnicities because of a perceived greater work ethic among Hispanics and were willing to accommodate language barriers (Johnson-Webb, 2002). In addition, heavy recruitment of Hispanic workers was effective in bringing in more workers

through social networks. Another incentive was that many employers were fairly lax in checking documentation papers, as long as work was performed adequately (Johnson-Webb, 2002).

In the book, *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place*, Smith and Furuseh describe the “mythical” Latino community and the tensions that have constructed local attitudes and policies toward the Hispanic population. In a study of local citizens, Smith et al sought to identify the mythical perception of Latinos and balance that perception with the truth of statistical facts. Through a series of informant interviews and studies of local media, the study identifies and dispels myths that have been associated with the Latino community. The four myths are as follows: “1.) Charlotte had no Latino population before 1990. 2.) Charlotte’s Latino immigrants are young male Mexicans. 3.) Latino migration to Charlotte is transnational and dominated by undocumented migrants. 4.) Latino settlement processes have formed homogeneous and disadvantaged barrios, particularly in Eastside Charlotte” (Smith and Furuseh, 2006). According to the results of the study, the truths are as follows: “1.) Charlotte has had communities of Cubans, Puerto Ricans and South Americans since the 1970’s. 2.) “Charlotte’s Latino immigration is diasporic and increasingly made up of traditional family structures and non-Mexican ancestry” 3.) Many Latinos of Charlotte’s new Latinos are American citizens and/or legally documented residents moving into the city from other places in the U.S. 4.) Latino settlement processes have led to segmented suburban neighborhood with distinctive socio-economic status and trajectories.” (Smith and Furuseh, 2006). The perpetuation of these myths was found to be strongly influenced by the media, particularly the drastic shift in media portrayals of Hispanics. Once viewed as the ambitious working class, they have now been reduced to drunks and violent gang members (Smith & Furuseh, 2006).

Despite the relevance of such research, few studies have identified social tensions that are maintained at the individual level, particularly between different minority/ethnic communities. It is especially important to understand if there is a tension between the African-American and Latino communities in Charlotte because of the prevalence of Hispanics within historically African-American neighborhoods (see Appendices) and their general distribution within the county. It is in this capacity that this study will prove beneficial to existing research and provide a solid building block for future research.

Methods

A total of 23 participants (11 African American, 11 Latino/Hispanic American, 1 Caucasian) were interviewed for the purposes of the study. Each person was asked a series of 15 to 20 questions relating to the tension that exists between the two groups, socially, economically, and racially. Some interviews deviated from the original interview transcript according to the flow of conversation that occurred between the interviewer and the informant.

Research was performed over a month long period. Interviews were done with various clergy, local citizens, and community leaders, a majority of which have been affiliated with HELP for at least one year. Meetings lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour, depending upon how much time the participant decided to give to the interview, as well as the expanse of his or her answers at the time of questioning.

Original contacts were obtained through Chris Bishop, lead organizer of Charlotte HELP. A drafted introductory letter was presented to each contact via email. Seven to ten days after sending the letter, phone calls were made to each contact in attempts to schedule appointments for each interview. Prior to each interview, each interviewee met with the researcher to establish familiarity.

In addition to individual interviews, two focus groups (one African-American and one Latino/Hispanic) were formed in order to define a broad base of themes relevant to the research. Through the discussions, several themes emerged that were used as a base for drawing conclusions from upon individual interviews about general perspectives of the local citizens of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Results

Several themes emerged from each focus group that was common both across focus groups as well as among individual informants. They have been categorized in two groups: causes of tension and strategies to help.

Causes of Tension

1. **Language Barrier**
2. **Competition for Common Resources**
 - a. **Housing**
 - b. **Employment Opportunities**
 - c. **Access to Medical Care**
 - d. **Education**
3. **Violence and Crime**
4. **Media Influence**
5. **Perpetuation of Stereotypes**

1. **Language Barrier**

The inability to communicate with one another is a major cause of friction since communication is the medium through which misunderstandings are prevented. Interestingly, the dynamic of the African-American and Hispanic relationship is not limited to just the inability to talk with one another. Rather, tension is created through insecurity. For example, a response from one of the African-American group informants to the question of language is the following: “I don’t speak their language so they could be sitting over there talking about me,” or “They understand me when I am speaking [English]...I can see it on their faces”. Despite not truly understanding if the Spanish-speaking population truly has a strong grasp of the language, some African-Americans feel as if the Hispanic population is pitted against them in some ways. In addition, the concept of accommodation was another theme that arose amidst the discussion of language. Many African-Americans feel that the Hispanics have more resources and access to bilingual materials than did slaves and those leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Although there is evidence that this statement is very true, there still remain some inequalities that refute the assertion of stronger accommodation for Hispanics. For example, with a chronic labor shortage in the hospitality market, North Carolina employers actively recruit and accommodate Hispanic workers. Yet, undocumented workers are particularly susceptible to employer abuse because of the inability to obtain workers compensation or benefits without proper documentation papers (Johnson-Webb, 2002).

2. Competition for Common Resources

There is some tension, but it is not a tension that politicians and news media cuts it out to be. If you are to realize, you would see that they pick up the traits of African-Americans. They move in African American neighborhoods, they do the jobs that African-Americans used to do. The tension is not between races. The tension is between the workforce, the education, the medical laws and immigration laws and all these things that are balled up. Its not between the races; it is political...because when you look at an African-American who is born here who cant get health insurance, but one who comes from an illegal immigrant can get the medical attention...its not the individuals, it's the policies that have been set up. Its political, its social, its economical. It's not between the races.

-Reverend Daryl Mayfield, St. Paul Community Baptist Church

a. Housing

African-Americans and Hispanic Americans share many socioeconomic statuses. The newer, much less established Hispanic population has integrated itself within predominately African-American neighborhoods, such as in the apartments surrounding the Hidden Valley area, a predominately black neighborhood. Although in past years, Hidden Valley has had a decent relationship with these few complexes, since the introduction of the Hispanic population, it has not been actively reaching out to the community (Smith and Furuseth, 2006). Sources of such distance, according to some informants, have recognized that in addition to the language barrier, some renters and landlords may show preference to Hispanic persons wanting to rent as a result of a cash down payment rather than credit or loan payments.

b. Employment Opportunities

Another source of tension that is common to both focus groups as well as individual informants is the idea that Hispanics are taking jobs from blacks. Yet, it seems to be generally accepted by many African-American informants that that statement may not be true. Rather, modern African-Americans have become complacent in their efforts to better themselves and maintain the legacy that their ancestors have left. Both Hispanics and African-American informants agreed that modern day Hispanics are reflective of the legacy that was left by those who grew up during and pushed the action that characterized members of the Civil Rights Movement. As a result, there is a sense of jealousy and misunderstanding on the part of blacks in the community. In addition, many Hispanics do not realize that their struggles and characterization of generally being "hard workers" because they are not cognizant of the history that African-Americans left during the Civil Rights Movement.

c. Access to Medical Care

The influx of the Hispanic population has created a burden on the health care system (Mayor's Commission Study, 2007). Particularly with the births of anchor babies (those born children born to illegal immigrants in the United States), the imbalance in health care is growing. Parents are able to obtain benefits such as welfare and Medicaid through their children who are US citizens according to the 14th amendment. With a health care system that is already currently struggling to accommodate legal citizens, particularly African-Americans, the imbalance in immigrant use of the health care system has been a source of tension with the African-American as well as the dominant communities in Charlotte (Mayor's Commission Study, 2007). In the African-American focus group, there was an expression of disdain towards Hispanic Americans in their ability to obtain health care despite being illegal aliens residing with the United States. "If I was born here, and cannot even get insurance, why should they if they aren't even citizens". On the other hand, Hispanics often complained about coming out of pocket for many survival necessities, including medical bills and insurance. As a result, their expenses are higher, leading to more difficulty surviving by what little means many may have.

d. Education

The issue of education is a source of tension, but it has the potential to be a point of unity among the two groups. With the influx of immigrant populations, there is a strain on the public school systems, as legal citizenship status is not a direct requirement for enrollment of students (Mayor's Commission Study, 2007). There is a perception that Hispanic parents are more involved in student education than African-American parents. In general, it is perceived that Hispanics have more of an investment in education than do African-American parents, who argue that they have many factors stacked up against them, particularly in regards to young black men. In a system that does not seem to be designed for the most positive outcome for minority students, competition for school resources is intense and a strong source of tension for African-Americans.

3. Violence and Crime

During the rise of the Hispanic/Latino population in Charlotte, there has been an increased occurrence of black upon Latino crime in the area. It is evident that many Hispanic do not use local banks, but rather carry enormous sums of money on their person. As a result, Latinos have been assaulted and sources such as the media as well as social networking (i.e. word of mouth) has created a blanket fear among local Latino populations.

To make matters worse, there is a deep rooted fear of the police department among Latinos. Not only do many carry memories of police corruption to the United States, but also the 287 (g) program has created distrust between the Latino community and the police department. The implementation of the 287 (g) program “allows local law enforcement to identify, process and detain immigration offenders encountered during regular law enforcement activity” (Mayor’s Commission Study, 2007). As a result, criminal activity is occurring in Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods, but no one is reporting such activity for fear of being deported.

Since the 287 (g) program is a voluntary program, not all sectors of the police department are required to enroll. Cecilia Mossner a bilingual domestic violence counselor at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department explains the importance of having this option:

There is a lot of fear because is that of a difference in cultures. In our country the police is corruption. It’s what you’d call the corruption. It’s like you get a ticket you pay the police and the police trash the ticket. Or if you call for an assault you pay the police and the police dismiss the charge. And so they think when they come to America, Hispanic people, they think that the police is the same thing equal corruption like in their country but when they arrive here and when the time pass they start to know that there is no corruption here and they start to have fear because they think police equal deportation. But that is not right. Police, we are, you know, we are friends but it is very hard to not to make them trust us because they think that we, the police will get them deported. But that is not our case. We have a policy that says that we do not have to involve in the legal status of any foreign people.

Finally, with the presence of both black and Latino gangs in Charlotte, neighborhood violence is increasing at alarming rates. With the general tension between African-Americans and Latinos continually brewing, it is only a matter of time before the two ethnic gangs begin to clash since tension often manifests itself in violence.

4. Media Influence

Both Hispanics and African Americans expressed a sincere concern for the negative light in which the media spins the two communities. There also seemed to be some concern that the two communities were pitted against each other at times, fueling the tension that already exists between members of both communities:

It [media] really brings it [tension] up to the surface, and not in a positive way. More in on a competition way, more in a contradictory way, but not in a way that it could be more...you know, there is not a lot of coverage of when we come together or when we have efforts to come together. There is a lot of coverage when there is a lot of tension. So it is not balanced and I think it feeds into the perception that there is a lot of tension.

-Angeles Ortega-Moore, Latin American Coalition

In general, both African-American and Hispanic/Latino informants expressed that the media gives a negative image to the community. Particularly in the entertainment industry, group informants expressed concerns of black men being portrayed as villains and gang members, whereas Latinos are portrayed as drug traffickers and alcoholics. Interestingly, many Latinos form stereotypical perceptions of African-Americans from the American media that reaches them in their native countries. Also, negative stereotypes of native Africans or dark skinned citizens of native Latino-American or Hispanic countries cause a significant fear among immigrant populations:

And most of the African-Americans that live in our country they come from the coast...and most of these...AA in our countries, they are bad people, sexual abusers, and murderers. And people in our countries, they are scared of African-Americans. And when they come to this country and they see African-Americans because there is only a small population in our countries, they are scared because they think they are the same as in our countries. But they are great people, smart people.

-Cecilia Mossner, Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department

5. Perpetuation of Stereotypes

Members of each community have reported that the influence of stereotyping as a strong influence in maintaining the barrier between the two races. With words such as “Those Latinos have too many babies”, or “They are always drunk,” many African-Americans have pigeonholed Latinos into a negative box. On the other hand, key informant, Senora Haydee Garcia gave a different perception of the issue:

Piensan que no los quieren. Piensan que los creen que los hispanos les están quitando algo. Este es que nuestra gente piensa. Primero que no los quieren, segundo que...están quitando algo, quizás sus trabajos, quizás su lugar dentro de la sociedad.

They [Hispanics] think that they [African-Americans] don't want them. They think that the Hispanics are taking something from them. This is what our people think. First that they don't want them, second that they are taking something, perhaps their work, perhaps their place within society.

-Señora Haydee Garcia, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

Her words make clear that the stereotypes have hit home with many Latinos in the community. Yet the consequences of these stereotypes truly manifest in the words of Carlos Betteta, of Mi Casa Su Casa:

... You saw apartment complexes turn 80 and 90 percent Latino and the neighborhoods started changing I saw two things. First I saw black on Latino crime. You had a lot of criminals...just because of the neighborhoods there was a lot of black on Latino crime because they realized that these people don't use banks; they are an easy target. And so they were robbing them, home invasions. You had men on the phone with their wives late at night from another country. And so they would get them at the phones and beat them up. Then you had a reverse in my opinion. You had Latinos saying “You know, I'm tired of this. Im not gonna take this no more and they started talking about retaliation...so people were starting to organize gangs and I guess bring in the drugs and all of that...

Despite sharing a common space, the black Latino relationship is not strong, as a result of not having a common understanding of one another. Instead, both resort to stereotypes and emotions to drive the relationship, which slowly destroys the confidence that they could possibly have with one another.

Another significant stereotype that the Hispanic group of informants expressed was the generalization of Hispanic and Latino people. Often, members of Hispanic or Latino decent expressed that all Americans categorize all Latinos as Mexicans, which undermines the diversity of Hispanic/Latino immigrant groups that enter this country. This diversity ironically is a source of tension within Latino/Hispanic groups because there is a distrust and racist mentality even amongst the group. As a result, the perception of unity that African-Americans often comment about Latinos is very false; although there is unity among Latinos of similar native origin, xenophobic mentality still exists even among different Latino groups.

Strategies to Help

- 1. Conversation**
- 2. Unity/Cooperation**
- 3. Learning one another by learning each other's languages**
- 4. The Influence of the church**
- 5. Common discriminatory experience as a unifier.**

1. Conversation

It (the relationship) has to change. We have to do a lot of work to know each other as people. We need to educate each other; we need to let each other into our community organizations, into our homes, our churches. We need to really get to know where a person is coming from, literally. And even talk about our differences because we have had experiential differences. And even talk about stereotypes, talk about the resistance we have to each other. What does that resistance mean? Where does it come from? Clearly people can dislike each other as individuals because they don't jive with one another. Why do we dislike each other as a community, as a people? Recognizing that kind of exercise is one that opens up a Pandora's Box. So we have to also be willing to go in there with humility, with compassion and the recognition that it is not a one day deal...we have involve ourselves in each other's causes, support each other.

-Adriana Galvez Taylor, Communities for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The major complaint of key informants is a lack of forum to facilitate conversation between the two groups. Although there is some discussion between the leaders of the two groups, such conversation is very limited in that it often stops with the leaders and does not reach the people who are interacting on a daily basis, i.e.; those who are living together. There is a need to have more forums that bring the two cultures together, that allow the explanation of one another's histories and experiences in a way that is both informative and empowering to both groups.

2. Unity/Cooperation

Naturally, the step that follows conversation is often finding an issue of unity between the two groups. Ironically, it appears that in both groups, it is not the adults who are actively seeking to form this relationship, but it is their children. A generation of children of African-American and Hispanic decent are now growing up together; in schools they are forced to learn to cooperate with one another. They are forming friendships and alliances. Particularly with the younger children, there is evidence of cooperation because their innocence blinds them from seeing the color that society uses to separate one another.

Yet there are several themes in which the two groups can come together on that are instead forming sources of tension between the two. Issues such as health care and education can be greatly improved through the two groups working together as one body to support one another through everything. Particularly with involvement in education, there is a need for African-American parents to intensify their roles in their children's education. According to the African-American group informants, there is a severe lack of African-American parental involvement in the schools, particularly elementary schools such as Billingsworth in the Grier Heights community. Yet, unlike their African-American counterparts, there is strong involvement in the PTA from the Hispanic community, as the PTA at Billingsville is 100% Hispanic according to group informants.

3. Learning one another by learning each other's language

I know some people at an apartment complex and there is a language barrier and there is a black lady, that doesn't like Latinos...and occasionally she will get into big arguments with them and they argue with her but they don't understand each other. But they are arguing. Why they [are] arguing is because: 1.) the language barrier and 2.) They are not sharing. One thing that the Latino community and the black community do not do is that they do not share...I believe if you sit down and you share with someone and spend a little time and get to know each other, you get to know a person. And when you get to know a person, you get to know what parts of them you can identify with and they do the same thing...I believe that what happens is we kind of get lost in figuring out what we can do to help somebody, but the easiest thing is to just ask, How can I help you?

-Carlos Betteta, Mi Casa Su Casa

Understanding the history of both African-Americans in the US and the many different cultures that compose Hispanic/Latino America is imperative to forming an effective strategy for change. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations have caused a significant barrier between the two groups. Yet in order to understand the history of one another, to begin the dialogue necessary to strengthen the relationship, there is a need to learn one another's language. Unfortunately there still remains a bitterness among African-Americans about the idea of accommodation. Latinos have had the "luxury" of having Spanish newspapers, Spanish media, and Spanish documentation that was not necessarily available to the enslaved ancestors of African-Americans today. As a result, resentment has developed in that many African-Americans cannot see the accommodation as a

manifestation of the progress that America has made since the elimination of the institution of slavery:

What perhaps some of the Latinos are going through now, the African-Americans have gone through in the past. However, where the conflict may come in as when African-Americans were going through the issues that perhaps the Latinos are going through now, there does not appear to be that the same kind of outreach effort existed maybe 40, 50 years ago while they appeared to be here for the Latinos now. While there are some problems, the outreach appears to be a little bit more aggressive, a little bit more compassionate, and a little bit more understanding. And it's because we are living in a changing society and there might be more conflict. I personally have heard things like "Well, when we went through that, this was not available". Well that was 40 and 50 years ago and longer...It's just a new society now and we tend to be more compassionate. I think that overall we get along much better, but there are some underlying friction...in the back of our minds we have some things that we do not necessarily admit to openly but we're looking at it like "Hmm they are getting all the benefits, or they are getting more people to respond to them better than they respond to us". It's like the big sister little sister syndrome... When the older children came along, Mommy and Daddy might have been struggling. But when the younger children come along times are different, and the older children have a tendency to say, "Well you didn't do that for us!"

~Reverend Wilson, Life Baptist Church

Yet, in spite of the resentment that may be fostered by African-Americans, it is apparent that the two communities have valuable lessons to learn from one another:

And that is as the Latino community is going through a lot of challenges as far as becoming citizens of this county, those that are coming over here illegally and so on and so forth. Whenever you understand their narrative, when you take time to hear their story, you realize that they are not necessarily illegal aliens as we tend to give them that name. But in fact their purpose for coming is in fact family oriented. Not only is it family oriented but the methodology of their translational...is family oriented as well. They have relationships with families; they tend to live together so they can support each other with families. While they may not have much, what they do have is support of the family, and that is probably consistent throughout the nation. And that is something we had at one point, but we have somewhat lost. This sense of family. We have become very complacent with some of the things we have gained. Education we've gained and some of the wealth we've gained. And it seems as though we don't rely as much as once upon a time. So I imagine there is a lot that we can learn about how they continue that family strength and culture of sticking together. There is a lot that we can learn from that. There is a lot that they can learn from us in regards to our history of civil rights and how we engaged and how we engaged the churches to get involved as well.

-Reverend Claude Forehend, Buncombe Baptist Church

4. The Influence of the church

[We need] churches that recognize a greater influx in their communities making a greater effort to bring the two communities together and making them one. I see as a part of churches doing their outreach, they can incorporate some gatherings where the two come together. Not necessarily just allow them to have space to worship but also to build relationships. I see community neighborhood associations...more than just recognizing the influx, recognizing their presence and wanting to do for them...understand that relationship building is important. Whether its churches, whether its neighborhood associations, making an effort and constructing ways for people to come together...we've got to live together.

-Reverend Donnie Garris, Antioch Baptist Church

In both the Latino and African-American communities, the church is an important institution for not only spiritual but also social guidance. Preachers and priests wield a lot of power with members of their congregations as they connect the spiritual truths to daily living. Both communities have identified that what comes from the pulpit is a strong force for social change in building the relationship between the two communities. Yet it is a force that is often overlooked, particularly because of the different denominations that exist between each community. With a legacy of strife between Catholicism and Protestantism, ritualistic differences have prevented the two sects to come together. African-Americans and Hispanic Americans have expressed that there seems to be little outreach from the other church, possibly because of traditional differences and personal preference in religious practice. Though both groups have expressed a need to come together through religious connections, little outreach seems to have been done to ensure that such connections are made. Yet, there is a need to change the mentality of the people to get them in the mindset of reaching out to the other community:

I think it is going to require my doing some teaching within my congregation in terms of teaching them that we have a responsibility to reach out to them [Hispanic]. We might often times consider ourselves benevolent and Christian like. But many times we do not realize until we are challenged that we are benevolent and Christian like to people who look like us or who somewhat think like us or people who we identify with in some capacity. It's rather easy to be compassionate toward someone who looks like you. But it might not be so compassionate who might not look like you or who does not have the same social or ethnic background.

-Reverend Fred Wilson, Life Baptist Church

6. Common discriminatory experience as a unifier.

I have had blacks tell me with a real sad face, "What is happening to the Latinos is what happened to us in the 60's." The difference is that they are coming across the border, but it is happening to them the same way they are being exploited. And as far as in this country, you have different areas that are flourishing. When Charlotte was flourishing and really starting to shoot up like you put some beans in some water in the fridge... the Latinos were out here working like crazy, building everything, everything was quiet cause they were doing that in different places across the country. Nobody said anything. And the money that they made was being put right back into the community because they were buying goods and services which kept things down. And you know, 9/11 had a lot to do with it too but I think the economics, the economy...I think what is happening is they are not needed like that right now...so many people are here now its like, " Hey, there are too many". But before, it was like the more we could bring here, the faster we can build and sell...and then you have politics involved...my thing is, if you do something illegal, does that make you an illegal person? I don't understand. You might be illegally here, but does that make you a bad person?

-Carlos Betteta, Mi Casa Su Casa

With several informants, the connection between discriminatory experiences of African-Americans and Latinos was clear. The issue at hand is that so many others do not seek to use the discriminatory connection as a commonality between the two groups, but rather it a source of division. Yet, as Carlos shares in his own reflection, there is a since that the discriminatory experience shared by Latinos is the same as that shared by African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement and the

destabilization of Jim Crow South. Yet, without a strong understanding of one another's histories, there is a failure to connect and form any sort of support system. In addition, the connection also cannot be realized with the resentment that many African-Americans feel toward Latinos in terms of accommodation; if there is no movement to push beyond this mentality, such connections will never form.

Charlotte HELP as an Example to the Community

A final question in for all individual informants pertained to the effectiveness of Charlotte HELP and in its strategies to build a relationship between the Latino and African-American community. For those that were familiar with the strategies used, which mainly consist of grassroots style organizing and relationship building, the overwhelming answer was affirmative. Charlotte HELP appears to be one of the few, if not the only local organization that is actively seeking to bring the two communities together through various seminars and forums of community education. For example, on June 7, 2007, Charlotte HELP hosted an immigration seminar that was open to Charlotte HELP affiliates. The room consisted of black, white, and Latino leaders and local citizens, sharing their experiences with one another about issues of immigration and integration within the local community. Although the seminar was entitled “immigration” the goal was not to highlight the ongoing political immigration debate, but rather to introduce and reach out to the newest community in Charlotte.

Yet, even with the successes of Charlotte HELP, some questions do remain as to how to maintain the effectiveness of the strategies used by the organization:

Yes, I think it's effective. However, I don't know if I am reaching a point within my congregation and don't know how it is in other congregations where there are a larger number of people and so forth...there is a real thing to burnout to the extent of being attached to an idea...one of the things I am concerned about right now is whether or not we have reached some type of glass ceiling where everything is noble or needed but everything has something to do with HELP., they might be a little tired of riding the HELP train...

-Reverend Fred Wilson, Life Baptist Church

Despite some worries about potential burnout, it appears that the constituents of Charlotte HELP are maintaining a healthy pace in changing the relationship that exists between the two cultures. Yet it will be necessary for Charlotte HELP to assess the dangers of congregations becoming overtaxed with responsibility toward HELP social actions in the future.

Discussion and Conclusion

With Hispanic succession currently occurring within African-American neighborhoods, it is evident that the two cultures will clash eventually as daily lives begin to intertwine. Although the Hispanic/Latino population has not established itself firmly in North Carolina, it is clear that the immigrant community is a strong force that is here to stay. As a result of heightened interaction between blacks and Latinos it is important that such interaction remains positive as the two groups could wreck havoc upon a growing city if tension continues to build.

With all of the aforementioned themes that emerged from the African-American and the Latino focus groups, it appears that the most important element to overcome the tension that exists between the two communities, both socially, racially, and economically is to overcome the language barrier. If the two communities are able to talk to one another, they are more likely to interact. Yet another stringent barrier that is maintained is determining how to change the mentality of those who are not open to building the relationship. Many of those ideas appear to be rooted in people learning to be set in their own ways, particularly adults over 30. When asked why she did not personally want to form a relationship with the Latino community, one informant confessed "I'm old. I just want to sit and enjoy my family and my own community." In spite of some desire that exists among people of both communities, the ability and the strength to take a formidable action for change among local citizens of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.

However grim the situation may be, there is a strong hope and potential for the relationship to change in the upcoming years. The two major sources of such hope are local church congregations, such as those affiliated with Charlotte HELP. Members of both communities expressed the strong influence of the church, particularly in black communities. Many pastors recognized their roles as both spiritual and community leaders, and their role in changing the mentality of their congregations:

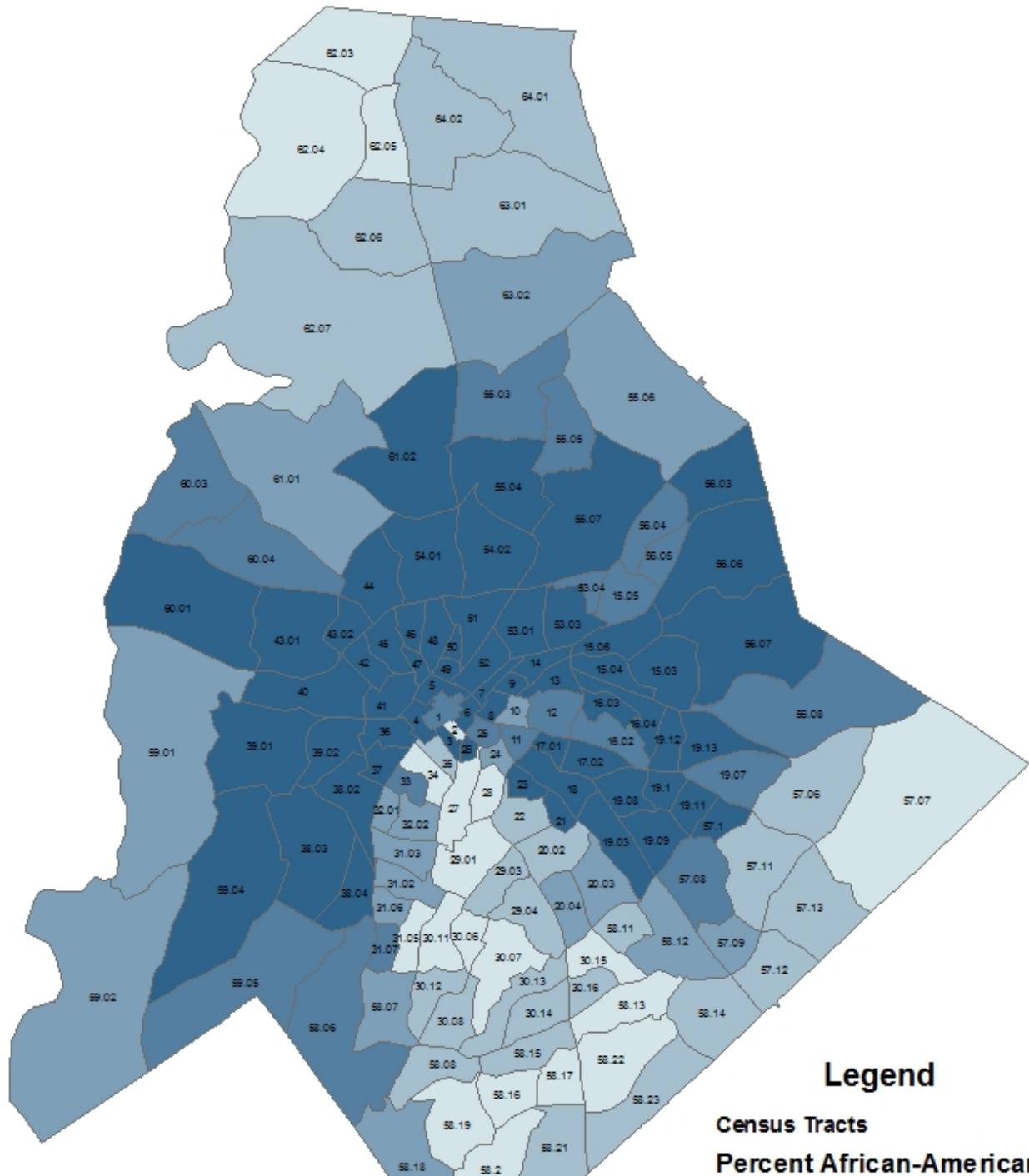
I think it is going to require my doing some teaching within my congregation in terms of teaching them that we have a responsibility to reach out to them. We might often times consider ourselves benevolent and Christian like. But many times we do not realize until we are challenged that we are benevolent and Christian like to people who look like us or who somewhat think like us or people who we identify with in some capacity. It's rather easy to be compassionate toward someone who looks like you. But it might not be so compassionate who might not look like you or who does not have the same social or ethnic background.

-Reverend Fred Wilson, Life Baptist Church

Yet it appears that, along with changing the mentality of the parents, we must look to the younger generations as a guide. The generation of Latinos and African-Americans who are growing up together in the local elementary, middle, and high schools are the ones who are going to set the standard of the direction in which the relationship between the

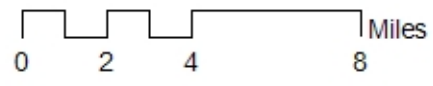
two communities either will grow or will be stifled. With the presence of both black and Latino gangs composed of Charlotte youth, a negative stigma has been associated with the relationship potential. Yet, an interesting implication for future research would be to compare generation difference in the relationship between African-Americans and Latinos. In addition, it will be pertinent to study how the influence of crime from local ethnic gangs as well as general violence influences the relationship. Finally, it will also be important to investigate the effectiveness of local bodies, such as local churches and advocacy organizations. Such studies will allow the development of more strategies to facilitate the development of a stronger relationship between blacks and Latinos and more importantly understand the strategies that are not effective in this process.

Mecklenburg County Census Tracts



Legend

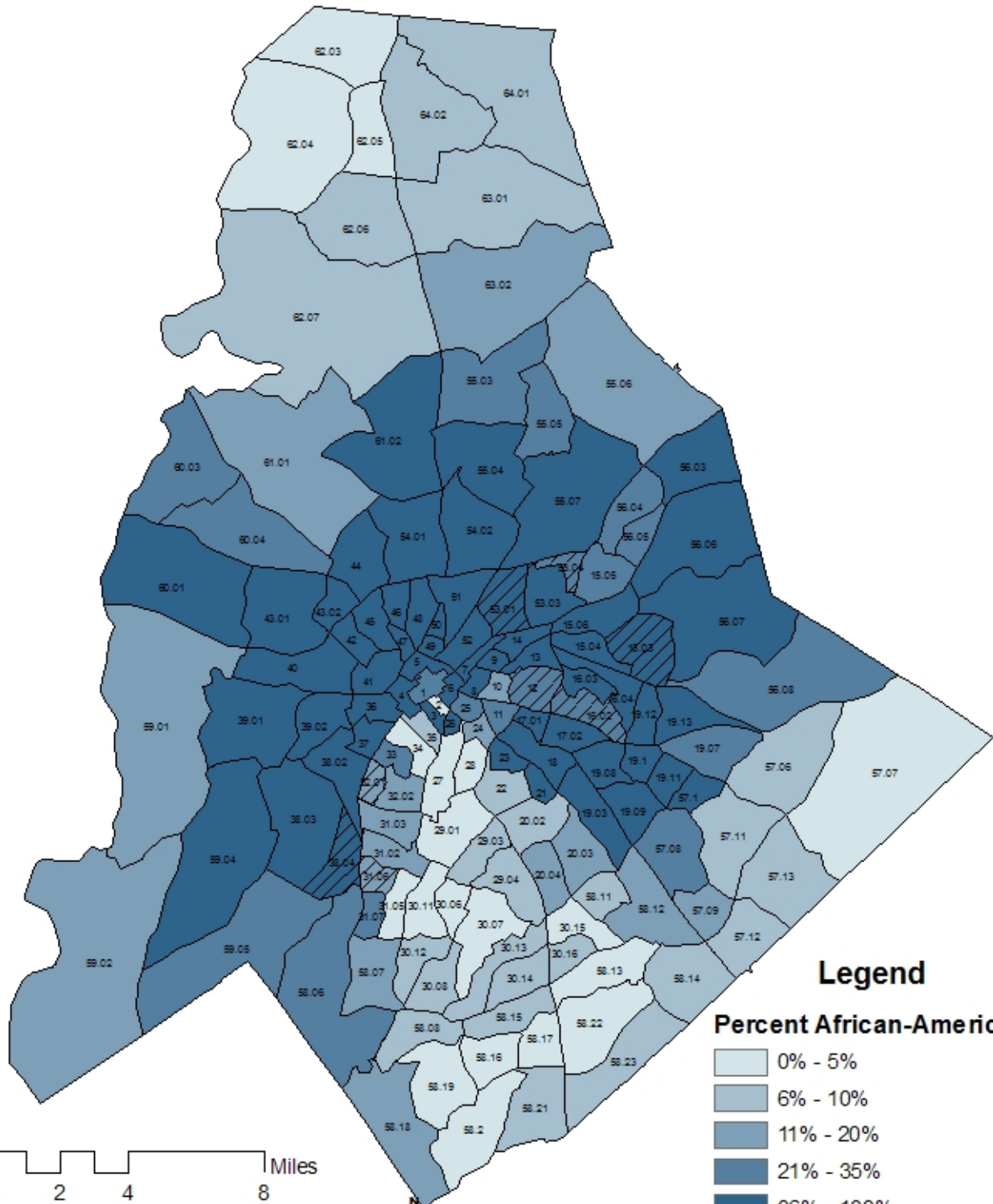
- Census Tracts
Percent African-American**
- 0% - 5%
 - 6% - 10%
 - 11% - 20%
 - 21% - 35%
 - 36% - 100%



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Mecklenburg County Census Tracts



Legend

Percent African-American

- 0% - 5%
- 6% - 10%
- 11% - 20%
- 21% - 35%
- 36% - 100%

Percent Hispanic/Latino

- 0% - 30%
- 31% - 63%

0 2 4 8 Miles

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