



DC's Black Residents Increasingly Live East of the Anacostia River

By Claire Zippel

The District's African American residents increasingly live east of the Anacostia River, where the poverty rate is three times higher than the rest of DC. This reflects two important trends: continued economic depression on the east side of the river despite the economic recovery of the city as a whole, and a decline in the Black population on the west side. The city should take steps to bring more economic opportunity East of the River, and to prevent low-income and Black families who live west of the river from being displaced from changing neighborhoods.

The city has experienced significant economic gains since the recession, yet this growth hasn't crossed the Anacostia River, which includes all of Ward 8 and most of Ward 7. As DC's Black residents increasingly live east of the river, this means more Black residents now live in the part of the city with the greatest economic challenges.

- **Black residents are a shrinking portion of the city west of the river.** 21,000 fewer Black residents live west of the river than before the recession. Just 33 percent of residents living west of the Anacostia River are Black, down from 42 percent in 2007. By contrast, nearly all residents living east of the river are African American – 92 percent – reflecting the [legacy of segregation](#) in DC.
- **Nearly half of DC's Black population lives east of the Anacostia River.** The share of the city's Black residents who live east of the river climbed from 41 percent in 2007, to 47 percent in 2015.
- **Poverty remains very high east of the Anacostia River, while it is decreasing somewhat elsewhere in DC.** The poverty rate East of the River remains stubbornly high at 33 percent in 2015, up from 27 percent in 2007. Meanwhile the share of residents in poverty west of the river stood at 12 percent in 2015, down slightly from 13 percent in 2007.

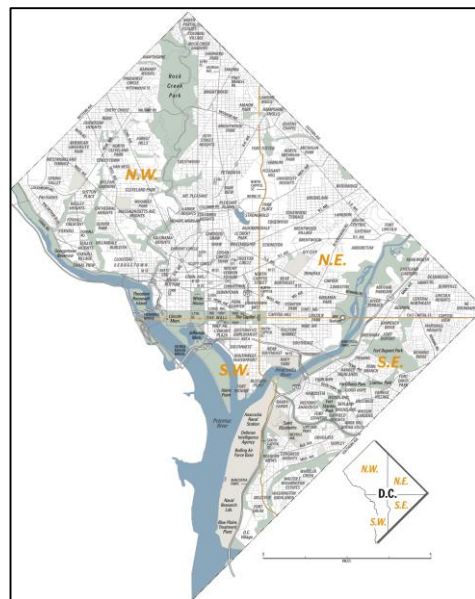


Image credit: Washington Post

- **Nearly half of children living east of the river are in poor families.** The poverty rate among children living east of the river is a staggering 46 percent, compared with just 13 percent for children in the rest of the city. Of all poor children in DC, 71 percent live east of the Anacostia River.
- **Poverty is increasingly concentrated east of the Anacostia River.** The share of the city’s poor residents who live east of the river rose to 47 percent in 2015, from 40 percent in 2007.
- **No post-recession income boost for households east of the river, unlike DC overall.** Median income for the city as a whole rose to \$75,600 in 2015, from \$62,100 in 2007, adjusted for inflation. Yet median income for households living east of the Anacostia River remained stuck at just \$34,000.

The District needs to do more to ensure that DC’s economic growth reaches residents East of the River. And low-income and African American residents west of the river should be better protected from being displaced due to gentrification. In addition to enacting and strengthening [citywide](#) policies to expand economic opportunity, DC should:

- **Ensure economic development projects located east of the River provide strong community benefits and address potential residential displacement.** Every economic development effort East of the River should include enforceable commitments to provide job training and apprenticeships, hire a significant portion of the workforce from within the community, and build deeply affordable housing. In addition, economic development projects should incorporate initiatives to combat residential displacement from the get-go. A great example is the 11th Street Bridge Park, which started with an [equitable development plan](#), and is now linked to a [\\$50 million effort](#) to build and preserve affordable housing within the future Bridge Park area. Another promising initiative is [proposed legislation](#) to boost [Schedule H](#), a tax credit for low-income residents with high housing costs, in “displacement risk zones” such as area around the future Washington Wizards practice facility.
- **Preserve affordable housing in transforming neighborhoods west of the river.** Owners of low-cost rental housing in gentrifying neighborhoods face significant pressure to opt out of subsidies that currently keep them affordable, to hike rents, or to convert to condominiums. The Mayor’s [Housing Preservation Strike Force](#) wrapped up this spring, offering recommendations on how to combat this trend. Now it’s time to put those ideas into action by identifying at-risk properties in transforming neighborhoods, identifying needed funding, and utilizing the District’s right to buy low-cost housing that’s at risk, under the [District Opportunity to Purchase Act](#).