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Cheryl E. Matias

Using critical race spatial method to understand disparities in controlled choice plans

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Amos J. Lee, Alice Y. Lee
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Introduction

Racial inequality within U.S. schooling is a time-honored tradition. Never has the U.S. provided an equal or fair education to Black and Brown students. While questionable improvements have been made due to massive social protest (e.g., Civil Rights Movement), these gains rarely stood the test of time. Currently, schools are resegregating at an alarming rate (Orfield, 2013). The educational opportunity gap also continues to grow as school funding, housing, and economic disparities continue to widen along racial lines (Ladson-Billings, 2006). When it comes to education, students of Color are clearly getting the short end of the stick whereas their white counterparts are receiving resources and privileges in exorbitant amounts. And yet, this is not a new phenomenon. Even the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, though heralded as a great equalizer, still had racially inequitable consequences because the ruling never interrogated the root causes of racial disparity (i.e., white supremacy). In failing to interrogate white privilege and white parental resistance to desegregation (Roda & Wells, 2012), the lasting result was the loss of Black teachers, administrators and control of school boards by Black communities (Bell, 1980; Tillman, 2004).

Since white parental privilege meant the prevention of equally bussing white children into Black majority schools, Black children and their families faced the brunt of being bussed into unfamiliar hostile terrain filled with white students, white teachers, white administrators, and white school boards (Bell, 1980; Tillman, 2004). Therefore, making small equity-oriented changes to an enormously large, white-dominated education system continues to ignore the massive systemic privilege held hostage by white parents (Roda & Wells, 2012). While 65 years have passed since the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), segregated schools still remain the norm within U.S. public schools (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019). History teaches us that as a result of desegregation efforts, white families fled urban areas to surrounding suburbs to set up their own publicly funded school systems (Rothstein, 2017). White families were supported by the courts in keeping their school districts segregated (i.e., *Milliken v. Bradley* ruled that schools were not responsible for segregated conditions if they did not purposefully discriminate against students of Color). Furthermore,
local, state, and federal governments were also complicit in upholding and promoting racist policies meant to support segregation and a hoarding of resources in white communities (Rothstein, 2017). To adequately address and critique the complicity of governing bodies upholding white privilege and promoting segregation, education-based methods must continue to adapt as well.

Therefore, in this chapter, we explicitly call for a different approach, using a critical race spatial method (CRSM), that affords new areas of inquiry into education-based problems that traditional empirical studies do not. We particularly hone in on the topic of controlled choice models since this topic is often explored through quantitative studies that do not factor in the permanency of racism within the research designs. Throughout this chapter, we will draw on an amalgamation of critical race theory and a critical spatial perspective to offer a novel theoretical method that we call critical race spatial method (CRSM). CRSM offers a way to explore, examine, and critique school inequity as it relates to space, geography, and segregation. We begin then by first explaining the education-based problem that we are seeking to understand through CRSM.

**Area of inquiry: what is controlled choice?**

Controlled choice is a policy and practice that seeks to ameliorate school segregation by using curricular add-ons, with the hope of enticing white parents and their children into segregated schools. This policy is based on a neo-liberal approach, which emphasizes that creating a competitive market for education will naturally weed out “underperforming” schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). Parents will, in turn, not send their children to schools that are “underperforming” and thus, under-chosen schools will respond by improving their practices in order to attract more parents and their children (i.e., customers). Controlled choice, by design, believes that competition is the key to attract families instead of understanding schools as a public good (e.g., fire departments, health departments) in which everyone can benefit.

Under a market-based (i.e., neo-liberal) controlled choice system, the onus of desegregating schools often falls onto Black and Brown majority schools that are forced to fight for the enrollment of white families by offering: before and after care, foreign-based field trips, brand new facilities, bilingual education (e.g., Chinese, French), Western-centered arts (e.g., orchestra, band, ballet), STEM-related curricula, gifted programming, or the International Baccalaureate (e.g., magnet schooling) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). These shiny objects have focused on the needs and desires of white parents to provide their children with the best education that free public schools have to offer. When confronted with the question of whether or not these practices benefit students of Color, the response is often as follows:

1. Attracting white children and their parents into majority non-white schools will also benefit the Black and Brown children there.
Black and Brown students in segregated schools will get the benefits of the new curriculum and new opportunities used to attract white parents into their school.

Black and Brown students will also benefit long term from having an integrated school and all the resources that white parents bring.

But what happens when funding for programs end and white parents have the social mobility to move their children to other schools? What happens if white parents do not take the bait and choose not to attend these newly designed schools? Who benefits from this structure and policy? While some may argue that a carrot is more effective than a stick, what happens if white parents don’t like the carrot offered and with no threat of the stick (i.e., mandated desegregation), choose to only apply to white majority schools? By not seriously contemplating these questions, school districts continue to waste expensive resources on white-centric school assignment practices that compound racial disparities.

In our application of CRSM to controlled choice policies, we center our attention on a school district located in Champaign, Illinois and situated next to the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. This school district has had a long legacy of segregated schooling conditions and has tried different approaches to desegregate its schools. Studying this school district affords us the opportunity to employ a critical race spatial method to unearth the racialized spatial inequities embedded within the school’s surrounding geography. Particularly salient to CRSM is Champaign’s controlled choice model (2002) that was lauded, at the time, as being able to overcome school segregation by incentivizing Black majority schools to white parents. Yet, with the passage of time, little has changed for Champaign and the program, once lauded as innovative, continues to fail in redressing segregated schools.

**Critical race spatial method: theoretical constructs**

We draw on an amalgamation of critical spatial perspective (CSP) and critical race theory (CRT) as two theoretical frameworks that inform our critical race spatial method (CRSM). Critical race theory provides the necessary framework to understand the all-encompassing nature of race and racism that is embedded within every institutional and cultural fabric of American life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical spatial perspective provides a robust framework that informs us of the ways that social hierarchies govern the geographic placements within our society (Soja, 2010; Vélez & Solórzano, 2017). Both theoretical frameworks together provide a strong understanding of the ways that racial inequality is permanently embedded in the spatial geography of a community. This intersectional approach assumes that both racial and spatial realities are intricately tied to one another. Without exploring, understanding, examining, and critiquing the ways that racial realities are embedded within geographic conditions, addressing issues of controlled choice inequities will fall short of
Critical race theory emerged as both an explanatory and analytical framework that centers race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The field emerged due to the persistent elusiveness of racial equality in the U.S., even after major U.S. Supreme Court decisions (e.g., Brown v. Board of Education) were passed with hopes of leveling the playing field. In response, law professors such as Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Neil Gotanda, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw made key intellectual contributions that helped form the movement. Their contributions theorized about the shortcomings of the judicial system in rectifying racial inequality and the persistent nature that racism has within core U.S. institutions. As summarized from (Lee & Lee, in press, pp. 82–83) the core CRT tenets are as follows:

- CRT posits that race and racism are endemic within everyday life, have a permanency within U.S. society/institutions, and are so commonplace that only the most egregious forms of racism are acknowledged, thus de-emphasizing all other forms of racism present in daily life.
- CRT argues that under a system of white supremacy, whiteness has value and racism is used to maintain a racial hierarchy in which white people dominate.
- Progress made for People of Color, particularly Black and Brown communities, is achieved only when it “converges with the interests of whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523).
- CRT challenges notions of dominant views that substantiate ideologies rooted in ahistorical notions (e.g., slavery ended a long time ago and no longer affects us today, the law is neutral and fair to all people regardless of race).

These core tenets provide the framework for interpreting and analyzing school assignment policies known as controlled choice for what they are: a racist neoliberal (market-driven) policy that continues to reinforce whiteness as property by succumbing to white educational demands and interests at the detriment to Black and Brown students. In addition, CRT tenets allow for an in-depth examination in understanding the ways in which school assignment policies continue to be held hostage by white educational interests. However, while CRT is a useful explanatory framework in understanding how race and racism are central to education, the role and function of spatial realities are not clearly integrated. Therefore, critical spatial perspective offers an additional theoretical construct useful in analyzing issues of school segregation that are embedded in the local geography of a community.
Critical spatial perspective

To understand how to use a critical race spatial method (CRSM) in investigating spatially related inequities, we begin first by describing the lineage of a critical spatial perspective. Ideas foregrounding the role of space and/or geography within power structures have multiple lineages (bell hooks, 1990; Foucault, 1986; Said, 1978). However, we choose to specifically emphasize a lineage that stems from Soja’s (2010) work, particularly as his ideas seek spatial justice. Seeking spatial justice by understanding the human struggle over geography and explaining the consequences of geography are essential in understanding Soja’s (2010) work. More specifically, Soja’s critical spatial theory is an “explanatory spatial perspective” that theorizes about the ways in which social justice is both created and maintained through geographic spaces (p. 2).

In our understanding of controlled choice practices, having this spatial awareness means understanding the geographic consequences of a specific school location and also the ongoing struggle that is socially enacted and collectively produced in that particular space (e.g., school building). However, Soja’s ideas do not explicitly articulate the persistent and ubiquitous nature of racism in the U.S. Therefore, we intersect Soja’s critical spatial perspective with an explanatory framework for how race functions in the U.S. (critical race theory) to provide an understanding that when it comes to racial justice, there is “always a relevant spatial dimension” (Soja, 2010, p. 32). Racist housing practices, for example, have spatial consequences: segregated schools. Segregated schools were constructed out of an unjust and racially biased geography that did not randomly appear. They have both a history and a lineage within a community. Together, Soja’s critical spatial perspective combined with critical race theory forms our critical race spatial method (CRSM), which seeks to understand, examine, and ameliorate unjust racial geographies and the consequences that both race and space bear on segregated communities of Color.

Critical race spatial method: methodological implications

What constitutes data in CRSM?

Traditional empirical approaches in analyzing and interpreting controlled choice data focus on whether school assignment policies and practices create desegregated conditions in schools. These traditional approaches, however, do not consider the ways in which the data can lead to skewed notions of desegregation. For example, if a Black and Brown majority school has self-contained gifted classrooms that are predominantly white and affluent, the school may appear to be desegregated because of the racial diversity present in the school. This data is misleading, however, because it does not account for the segregated circumstances that continue to privilege white students within the school. While the school as a whole may seem racially diverse, in-school segregation can still flourish (Mickelson, Bottia, & Southworth, 2008). In this regard, using
a critical race spatial method departs from these traditional empirical paradigms of analyzing data and posits a different way forward. CRSM does not view data collection as a static or neutral process. Rather, we argue through CRSM that data is in fact evidence used or created (i.e., racial mapmaking) to investigate and expose the inherent racial biases seen through the spatial realities of an education system.

In our school of choice case, we use CRSM to transform relevant information into evidence that exposes how race and racism are inextricably ingrained in school assignment practices. The evidence should provide a lens into understanding how race and space work in conjunction with each other to produce and sustain inequities within a school system. Under CRSM, the target is information that provides evidence of a racialized geography that continues to marginalize students of Color. Evidence found by employing CRSM should provide more clarity regarding the unjust intersections between race and space such as how a district chooses where to build its schools or better understanding segregation patterns within a community. Through CRSM, educational researchers then can begin to identify structural issues and suggest how to repair a broken system by targeting racialized spatial inequalities that are oftentimes hidden from plain sight.

**Application of CRSM**

The application of critical race spatial methods (CRSM) is employed to investigate how racism and spatial injustice persist in policies that impact the lives of children of Color, and generate new ideas and theories of how racialized spatial injustices continue to exist. Using CRSM, we can spatially understand through visuals (e.g., maps) the nature of racist policies and procedures embedded within school of choice practices. GIS systems and existing maps have been utilized to analyze race and historic racism in schools (Morrison, Annamma, & Jackson, 2017; Vélez & Solórzano, 2017). Through CRSM, we extend the repertoire of using maps by centering mapmaking on specific intersections of race and space. While other forms of critical race spatial analysis (Morrison et al., 2017; Vélez & Solórzano, 2017) exist, which “utilizes maps in powerful ways to spatially analyze the role of race and racism in the historical and contemporary context of schools” (Morrison et al., 2017, p. 11), we present CRSM as a complement that focuses on generating maps to explore spatial realities in ways that target racial inequities embedded within geographic spaces. In our case, CRSM goes beyond exposing the role of race and racism in socio-spatial realities, and instead generates new ideas that question the pursuit of desegregation within a system (i.e., judicial, state, local, and federal governing bodies) that privileges white families.

A wide range of assumptions also support the use of controlled choice policy in desegregation efforts. In our work, using CRSM, we specifically target these assumptions and precepts held to support and advocate for a school of choice model for student assignment into schools. We aim to show not only the ways
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in which school assignment practices fall short in desegregating schools and in meeting the educational needs of families of Color but equally challenge the idea that desegregation is what will produce equity for children of Color. Using CRSM, we create maps using a process we call racial mapmaking, to think about the ways that school of choice can never work within specific locales. CRSM–generated maps challenge the narrative of color-blind, neo-liberal policies being able to rectify racism embedded within school of choice decisions.

This counter-narrative rejects the premise that racism in school assignments can be rectified by making schools into commodities with varying educational opportunities. Critical race spatial method (CRSM) also helps us understand that de facto segregation in schooling is not a random phenomenon but intentionally and systematically practiced (e.g., housing prices, racial makeup of neighborhoods, school locations). Geography is not neutral. Boundaries are not simply spatial markers but point to historic and systemic power differences in lived experiences. Therefore, desegregation requires rectifying white parents’ racism when selecting schools for their children. Without this fundamental understanding of how white supremacy is embedded within every aspect of schooling, anti-racist transformation and new imaginings are not readily possible.

Modeling CRSM application on school of choice policies

We illustrate critical race spatial method (CRSM) using Amos’s research of Champaign school district and their use of controlled choice (i.e., school of choice) in their school assignment processes. We employed CRSM to create racialized maps that presented a lived reality that challenges the notion that controlled choice models can rectify embedded geographic racism. We also employed CRSM to see the ways in which white supremacy continues to function within geographic realities. While we present what may seem like traditional empirical data sets, we apply CRSM to the numerical information to theorize about racism and how white supremacy is embedded deep within the local landscape. CRSM also explores the historical context of school referendum outcomes which illuminate the ways white interest convergence governs how many and where new schools are constructed.

Contextual background

Champaign school district was selected for its long history of a controlled choice program that began in the early 2000s under a court-mandated consent decree. This consent decree required Champaign schools to address multiple issues related to educational inequity for Black students (e.g., discipline, special education placement, gifted enrollment, etc.), as well as rectifying segregated schools in the north end of the community. Champaign schools responded with a controlled choice plan to remove the arbitrariness of previous school
assignment practices, which were found to maintain segregated schools – majority Black in the north side and majority white in the south side. The new policy was aimed at attracting white parents into Black majority schools situated in the north end of town, while also giving Black families greater access to white majority south end schools.

In the 2000s, Champaign’s controlled choice plan was heralded as innovative and dynamic for using educational programs (e.g., STEM, International Baccalaureate, Self-Contained Gifted Programs) to draw white families into north end schools. Subsequently, the gains made in the early 2000s were short lived and in 2019 the schools in the north end were once again segregated with a Black majority. Given the persistent nature of segregated schooling, we model for the reader how we use CRSM to challenge the assumptions based on Champaign’s failed controlled choice policies. We offer the following three examples to model the ways in which we employed CRSM.

**Example 1: racial mapmaking and segregated demographic history**

We used critical race spatial method (CRSM) to create a map that shows the amalgamation of a core critical race theory tenet of challenging the dominant view with a critical spatial perspective which understands that geography has consequences. We use the amalgamation of these ideas (what we call CRSM) to design and create a map showing the racialized geographic consequences within Champaign, Illinois. As Figure 14.1 shows, residential segregation continues to persist within the city.

We created this map from a portion of The Racial Dot Map provided by the University of Virginia in order to show the persistent nature of racial housing segregation that continues in Champaign separating the north end from the south end of town. We highlight the historic north end of town (i.e., labeled as Historic North End) due to its long and rich Black history within the community. We show visually how this area continues to be predominantly Black, which we know dates back to the Great Migration. When Black families first moved into Champaign they were forced into the underdeveloped north end where white families did not live. Black families were then restricted to this geographic area through redlining and restrictive covenants that prevented them from obtaining mortgages in south end neighborhoods. This history of racism in housing continues to have geographic consequences in the present as the north end continues to be majority Black, while the south end of town continues to be majority white. This history and spatial reality then have consequences within public schools.

Table 14.1 shows the continued impact that historical housing segregation has on schools situated in those neighborhoods.

BTW (Booker T. Washington), Stratton, and Garden Hills are all elementary schools situated in the north end of town and are majority Black. While the consent decree and the controlled choice mandate first began in the early 2000s, the advent of time shows that in 2019, the schools on the north end
Figure 14.1 A demographic map of Champaign, IL with 2010 Census data. This map shows the continued housing segregation in Champaign.

Source: Reprinted from The Racial Dot Map, D. Cable, 2013, retrieved from http://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map/

have resegregated. This table was generated by using CRSM to understand the consequences of housing segregation as seen through Figure 14.1 and the impact it had on schools situated within the Black majority north end. Through CRSM, we purposefully ranked the schools in the district by the percentage of white students at each school, to show the continued state of segregation within school buildings across the district with IPA being an outlier due to its bilingual status. We wanted to show that after 20 years of controlled
choice policies, the schools in the predominantly Black north end still had the lowest percentages of white students. What we see, then, is that overcoming white parents’ discriminatory reluctance to send their children to Black majority north end schools is unsustainable.

Traditional empirical analyses would suggest that the current incentives used in the control choice model are ineffective, and suggest other incentives to employ. However, by using CRSM, we are able to create Figure 14.1 and Table 14.1 to clarify how race plays out within geography (i.e., segregated north end), and the consequences that a segregated geography has on schools situated in traditionally marginalized neighborhoods (i.e., Black and Brown). No amount of magnet programming or new building facilities retained white parents’ interests long enough to desegregate Black majority schools in Champaign on a long-term basis.

Example 2: racial mapmaking and racism embedded in spatiality

We employ CRSM in our second example to provide a counter-narrative (e.g., CRT tenet) that shows how the geographic locations of schools (e.g., CSP tenet) within Champaign have always favored white families in the school of choice process. In Figure 14.2, all the elementary schools in the district are transposed onto The Racial Dot Map with the north/south end racial divide.

In Figure 14.2, the majority of the schools, in 2019, are located in the south end of town within predominantly white areas. Using the intersectional nature of CRSM to investigate the history of race and space as it relates to each school building in the district, we see that the overabundance of schools in the south end of town was not by accident. For decades, referendum-approved tax dollars built brand new south end schools while leaving north end schools dilapidated.

Table 14.1 Elementary school racial demographic (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Total enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie Busey</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottenfield</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southside</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkstall</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westview</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robeson</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Howard</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTW*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratton*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden Hills*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA**</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* North end schools
** Bilingual school

Source: Data taken from Illinois Report Cards
Figure 14.2 The location of the 12 elementary schools in Champaign school district.

While most schools including north end schools eventually were remodeled or rebuilt, the number of north end schools did not increase. The geographic consequences of listening to white educational needs meant building more south end schools that were further away from the north end of town. This historical discriminatory process then had consequences that plagued the school of choice process.

As Figure 14.2 shows, the further south a family lived, the less likely they would attend a school on the north end. When reviewing the figure, this benefited white families in particular as they occupied most of the south end.
neighborhoods. Particularly, Carrie Busey, which was relocated from a more central location (IPA location) in the community to a location further south. Due to proximity factors incorporated into the school of choice process, if you live around the Carrie Busey school, you had a better chance of attending that school given all the factors used to assign students. White parents could choose, however, to instead attend a north end school by ranking it higher on their registration form; but as Table 14.1 shows, this was rarely the case. By applying CRSM to create racialized maps of where schools are placed in the community, we can visually see that Champaign’s controlled choice process was flawed from the beginning because more choices were available for white families in the south end of town. The further south a family lived in the community the lower the chances of being assigned to a north end school due to proximity issues (i.e., 1.5 mile radius from school to home).

By applying CRSM, we sought to further explore the nuances between race and space by investigating how white educational interests have historically pressed for more south end schools further away from the Black majority north end of town. We thus turned to voting records to reinforce our argument of structural geographic privilege. Due to continued additions of south end elementary schools, the Black activists fought for a new school of their own that was situated in the north end. This school eventually became Stratton Elementary. The history behind Stratton showcases how benefits for the Black community (i.e., a new school) only happens when it aligns with the interests of white families. This was all too clear for the Black activists when the school district put a referendum forward to build a new north end school. Surely after all the referendums passed throughout the past few decades that purposefully built more schools on the south end of town, the Black north end would get one as well. As Table 14.2 shows, that was not the case.

The original 1993 referendum failed. The public responded by stating that the bond was too expensive to pay for which resulted in the 1994 referendum, with a reduced bond. That too failed. When the school district sought community input regarding the two failed referendums, the idea was introduced

| Table 14.2 Three referendums pertaining to new elementary school construction |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1993 Referendum             | 4,933          | 5,294         |
| New north end elementary building (11.3M bond) | Fail |
| 1994 Referendum             | 5,808          | 6,591         |
| New north end elementary building (10.5M bond) | Fail |
| 1997 Referendum             | 6,529          | 3,391         |
| New north and south end elementary building (21.6M bond) | Pass |

Source: https://champaigncountyclerk.com/elections/docs/referenda_1940_present_dateorder.pdf
that if a new north end building was coupled with a new south end building, the community would approve it. This new south end school was Barkstall Elementary. Barkstall became the furthest southern location for Champaign school district, prior to Carrie Busey being relocated even further south. When employing CRSM, the information we seek is based on a critical understanding of the intersections of race and space. In this example, we see that white educational interests that play out in school placements in the community must always be appeased first before Black families get an educational need or want (i.e., new building in the north end). Traditional empirical studies would not necessarily explore the referendum data in the same way as we have done here. By using CRSM, we explore the racial/spatial context and politics in which the referendums existed. We use relevant information to pursue how racial equality for Black families only occurs when white parents structurally benefit as well. White parents’ geographic advantage in the school of choice process is not ahistorical. The white community chose to continue to build more south end schools outside of the north end even though they were not in need for additional capacity. Overbuilding south end schools thus created a paradigm in which more south end choices were available for white parents to choose from.

**Example 3: racial mapmaking and geographic racial privilege**

In our third and final example, we employ CRSM to showcase how white interests continue, over time, to have spatial material value and power in terms of keeping schools segregated by moving them further and further away from Black-dominated spaces. School districts often have short institutional memories and educational research needs to continue to show the ways in which racial inequality reproduces harm within the educational system. In 2006, the school district under the consent decree was required to increase seats in the north end. What was finally proposed by the school district can be seen in Figure 14.3.

Employing CRSM, we created this map to show the two new locations the school district proposed in 2006 to meet increasing enrollment and satisfy their consent decree requirement in adding north end seats. The idea of overlaying the new proposed sites onto our demographic map was generated by our use of CRSM. As we thought about the way in which racial biases and privilege are embedded within the local geography, visually displaying the socio-spatial realities are important. While the school district used terms insinuating that the new school location would be in the north end, Figure 14.3 clearly shows the proposed site would be outside of the Black majority north end and placed in the white majority subdivisions newly built in the northwest part of town. Black activists rightfully called foul at the locations claiming that white families would be getting two brand new schools at the expense of the Black north end community. Purposefully overlaying the new proposed school sites within The Racial Dot Map show the continued power that whiteness has in public education systems. The map also shows the continued spatial advantages given
to white families by situating schools in their neighborhoods, which then grant them a key factor in the school of choice process: home distance from the school (i.e., proximity factor).

We then examined the consequences for Black families of placing schools (i.e., Carrie Busey) in the furthest south end of town. CRSM allows us to question the seriousness of Champaign’s commitment to equity when they continue to structurally advantage white families by building schools that are further away from the north end of town (i.e., Carrie Busey). Not accounting for the ways that current housing patterns impact the racial demographic of school buildings continue to demur to the needs of white families in the district. We present, in Figure 14.4, the recent ramifications of relocating Carrie Busey as far away from the north end as possible. In 2020, Figure 14.4 shows the spatial advantage for
the white families who lived closest to Carrie Busey. Out of all the families who ranked Carrie Busey as one of their choices for kindergarten, we see that 68% of white families were within 1.5 miles of Carrie Busey holding a proximity advantage in the school of choice process. For Black families, only 16% of those who chose Carrie Busey had a proximity advantage. Using CRSM, we purposefully look for information that shows the racial inequality that exists within the geographic space. Using racial mapmaking to show the location of new proposed sites calls into question the school district’s commitment to equity. Understanding school placement proposals through CRSM’s racial mapmaking affords the opportunity to confront new school proposed sites for what they are, continued structural advantage for white families.

**Implications and conclusion**

Traditional empirical studies, on one hand, continue to use demographic data as the key indicator in whether a certain practice or policy was helpful in desegregating schools. This approach continues to examine practices (e.g., magnet schooling, gifted programs) that are used for incentivizing the choice process. If a practice or policy was not successful in desegregating schools, the researcher then moves onto a different practice or policy waiting for the right one to be applied. This assumes that it is even possible to incentivize the choice process to begin with. It is, therefore, a matter of finding the right program instead of questioning all the premises and assumptions school of choice policies make. CRSM, on the other hand, provides researchers a method that can investigate the reasons why school of choice is not realistic for particular communities who seek to desegregate their schools. Using CRSM, researchers can generate theories as to why desegregation through a school of choice paradigm is implausible by design and practice.
CRSM also provides a method that allows us to not only interrogate racial-spatial inequities but provides an avenue to generate new critiques, ideas, and lenses that ask fundamentally different questions. CRSM is generative by examining the intersection of race and space within school districts and its applications to desegregation efforts. Using CRSM also provides an avenue of debunking the accepted assumptions in a study. For example, in our case, using CRSM we question the belief that desegregation is the holy grail of educational equity for Black and Brown children. Continuing to pour time, money, and attention into desegregation plans makes children of Color wait perpetually for progress that has never come. In addition, applying CRSM to our three examples informs us that trying to find a correct incentive that will consistently convince white parents to attend non-white majority schools is a futile endeavor.

CRSM, then, provides a path forward in understanding the ways in which school choice policies will never be what they were intended to be: a market-based solution for desegregation. Only when we realize the futility of convincing white families to join Black and Brown majority schools on their own accord can we begin to shift our attention to issues that do not require the approval of white families. Proximity to whiteness does not guarantee equity. By not using CRSM, researchers will continue to study avenues of school desegregation that, from conception, are not plausible due to a lack of understanding of how race and space intersect in the school assignment process. CRSM scholars, by challenging the uplifted position that desegregation holds in our fight towards racial equality, can begin to move the equity-based conversations towards other models of combating racial inequity.

**Note**

1 Not 100% across the four racial groups due to leaving out two or more races in order to keep data as brief as possible.

**References**


