

Kevie Lamour
End of Summer Report
FURSCA 2023

My name is Kevie Lamour, and throughout the Summer FURSCA program, my research focused on investigating the impact of race and racial perception on political and community engagement in Albion, Michigan. The primary objectives of this project were threefold. First, through this project, I wanted to gain insights into how perceptions of race influenced residents' interactions with one another and their level of engagement in political and community activities in Albion. Second, drawing on qualitative interviews, observations, and comprehensive literature reviews, this research aimed to explore the complex interplay between race, racial perception, geographical divide, and the social dynamics of political and community involvement in the city. Lastly, with this research, I hope to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of racial challenges and promote inclusivity, equality, and active civic participation in Albion and beyond. With that being said, while conducting interviews and literature reviews, the project had an emphasis on understanding the enduring relevance of the color line, which is the set of social, economic, or political barriers that exist between different racial groups.

During the summer, my research efforts involved conducting a total of 16 qualitative interviews with Albion registered voters (18+ y/o). Most interviews lasted around 15-30 minutes, with some lasting from 7 minutes to an hour. They included questions such as: *“What is your racial identity?”* *“How do you feel about the current state of race relations in Albion?”* *“Have you ever attended a city council meeting or other public activity in Albion? If yes, what was your experience like?”* *“Do you feel that your voice is heard in Albion's political process?”* The interviews provided valuable data on how race is perceived and its impact on community dynamics and political engagement. With that being said, I am currently in the process of transcribing and analyzing the patterns encountered during these interviews to gain deeper insights into the research question. So far, analyzing the data revealed that residents' perceptions of race plays a role in their level of engagement in community work, advocacy organizations, and politics. Notably, those who acknowledged the role of race were more politically active and involved in advocative groups. However, most interviewees were hesitant to address racial relations directly, even though they acknowledged the clear racial divide in the city. With that in mind, the geographical division along Superior Street, with White Americans predominantly on the east side and the Black population on the west side, has been a central theme in my research.

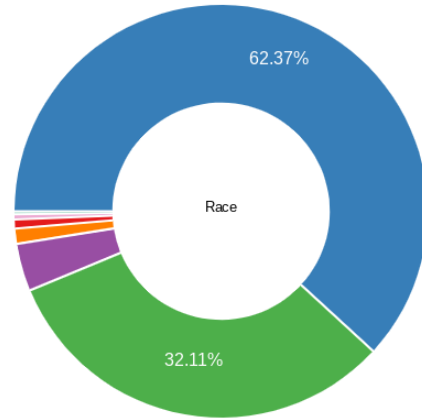
It seemed to me that this division has significant implications for racial perceptions, community dynamics, and political involvement in Albion.

Below are a graph of Albion's demographics in terms of race, a few pictures of the city of Albion, and a draft of my research paper's introduction:

Population by Race

All Hispanic NonHispanic

Race	Population	Percentage (of total)
White	5,227	62.37%
Black or African American	2,691	32.11%
Two or more races	302	3.6%
Other race	87	1.04%
Asian	46	0.55%
Native American	20	0.24%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	7	0.08%



White Black or African American Two or more races
Other race Asian Native American
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander



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“ *W.E.B. Du Bois once proclaimed that the color line, which is the set of social, economic, or political barriers that exist between different racial groups, would be the defining issue of the 20th century. Although more than a century has passed since Du Bois's powerful assertion, the enduring relevance of the color line and its impact on society remains undeniable. With that being said, drawing on qualitative interviews, observations, and comprehensive literature reviews, this research, aimed to examine how perceptions of race impact political and community engagement in the city of Albion, Michigan, sheds light on the ongoing impact of the color line in contemporary society. While the investigation initially did not explicitly focus on the color line, its presence became apparent through the convergence of evidence from interviews, observations, and the broader literature.*

During an Albion bus tour and subsequent personal research, it became evident that Albion, a city with a rich racial history, presented an intriguing context for exploring the intersection of race, political, and community engagement. Inspired by the historical racial dynamics of Albion, this study sought to delve deeper into the ways in which race influences residents' interactions with one another, as well as their engagement with the community and politics. Interestingly, observations, interviews, and literature reviews reveal a notable division racially, economically, and geographically along Superior Street, where the east side of the city is predominantly populated by White Americans, while the west side is predominantly inhabited

by the Black population. These divisions suggest a complex interplay between race, geography, and social dynamics of political and community engagement.

By exploring the intricate interplay between geography and race, this study focuses on how these factors shape racial perceptions, community dynamics, and political engagement. Although it was not the first focus of this study, it became apparent that the connection between geography and race is a critical lens through which to comprehend the complexities of Albion's social and political fabric, and it forms a significant part of this research's analytical framework.

In a nutshell, this research paper investigates the impact of race on political and community engagement in Albion, Michigan, in light of the enduring relevance of the color line and the geographical division in the city. By uncovering the perceptions of race among Albion residents and exploring the geographical division within the city, this study seeks to deepen understanding of how race influences community dynamics and political involvement. Through this exploration, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by the color line, and the importance of fostering inclusivity, equality, and active civic participation in Albion and beyond.”

As a Black woman from Haiti studying race in Albion, Michigan, this research experience has been both enlightening and challenging. On the one hand, it has been enlightening because it allowed me to uncover and reflect on the complexities of race relations in Albion and its impact on community and political engagement. On the other hand, it was also challenging not to find a single definitive pattern in the data. The answers to my interview questions varied and I witnessed a reluctance of most people to answer questions and have conversations related to race. And although that desire for colorblindness seems to stem from good intentions, it can inadvertently hinder progress toward addressing racial divisions and fostering genuine inclusivity.

By exploring the intricate connection between race, racial perception, and community engagement, this study aimed to contribute to our understanding of how racial perceptions shape residents' interactions and their involvement in political and community affairs. As I continue my studies at Albion College, I plan to build upon this research and develop it into my thesis. I am

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also particularly interested in presenting my findings at the Elkin Isaac symposium and potentially to Albion's elected officers and working with them to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all residents. With that being said, the impact of this research extends beyond Albion, as the insights gained can inform policymakers, community organizations, and researchers seeking to address racial challenges and promote active civic participation. Through dissemination and sharing, I hope to contribute to the larger discourse on racial dynamics and their influence on community and political engagement. When it comes to the impact this research has had on my life, analyzing the interviews and engaging in this research experience has deepened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing race-related issues. I have come to appreciate the importance of promoting open discussions about race and fostering an environment that encourages individuals to confront uncomfortable truths.

Finally, without the Robert M. Teeter Research Fellowship Endowment, I would not have been able to embark on this journey of exploration and learning. With that being said, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the donors whose generous support made this research opportunity possible for me and many others. Your belief in fostering academic and intellectual growth among students like myself is sincerely appreciated. I would also like to thank the FURSCA team, particularly Renee Kreger and Elizabeth Palmer, and my advisor Dominick Quinney. Thanks to their support, this summer research has been an invaluable experience, shaping my academic and personal growth. As I continue my research journey at Albion College and beyond, I am committed to leveraging the insights gained during this project to contribute to the pursuit of social justice, inclusivity, and positive change in my communities.

The link below is the presentation I created on my research project:

[Kevie Lamour- FURSCA presentation](#)