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Sociologist Angela Simms, PhD Publishes 'Fighting for a Foothold'

Why do majority-Black middle-class suburbs, like Prince George's County, MD, have fewer resources for public goods than wealthier neighbors?

Fighting for a Foothold by Angela Simms (Russell Sage Foundation, February 2026)

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, February 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In "Fighting for a Foothold: How Government and Markets Undermine Black Middle-Class Suburbia" (Russell Sage Foundation, February 24, 2026), sociologist Dr. Angela Simms, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University, examines why majority-Black middle-class suburbs struggle to sustain strong public goods and services, even when they follow the same fiscal rules as Whiter, wealthier neighbors.

Simms focuses on Prince George's County, Maryland, home to the highest concentration of Black middle-class residents in the United States, and investigates a central paradox: why a jurisdiction so well positioned to thrive continues to face persistent fiscal challenges. Through two years of observation of the county's budget and policy development processes, interviews with nearly sixty local leaders and residents, and comparative budget analysis with neighboring Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia, both of which have smaller Black populations, Simms uncovers how tax revenue generation disparities between majority-Black and majority-White jurisdictions reflect economic interdependencies between local jurisdictions based on their racial composition. Simms contends that local political boundaries enable White Americans to hoard resources at Black Americans' expense.

She argues that legacy and ongoing government policies and business practices—among them, pre-1968 federal mortgage insurance policies, heavy reliance on property taxes, and private investment patterns—have shaped stark disparities in wealth accumulation among individuals, families, and local jurisdictions. Prince George's is the most affordable county bordering Washington, D.C. and thus attracts a disproportionate share of middle- and working-class

residents, which increases budget pressures while limiting its capacity to build wealth through development and property valuation at the same scale as its wealthier, Whiter neighbors.

Dr. Angela Simms

Despite taxing at similar rates and competing for development opportunities, Prince George's does not achieve comparable financial returns. Simms describes this dynamic as a "relative regional burden," arguing that majority-Black jurisdictions effectively subsidize regional prosperity while facing structural constraints on their own growth.

"Fighting for a Foothold" concludes with policy recommendations aimed at addressing these inequities, including increased federal and state taxation on wealthy Americans and corporations to strengthen redistributive capacity, expanded state-level funding of public goods to reduce reliance on local tax bases, and the creation of equity funds to remediate harms inflicted upon Black Americans at the household, neighborhood, and local jurisdiction levels. The book has been praised by Andre M. Perry of the Brookings Institution as a work that invites readers "to remove the drags of racism that throttle growth that would otherwise occur."

> "Fighting for a Foothold reveals the connection between a long legacy of racist policies in America and the struggle among local leadership in an iconic middle-class Black suburb."
>
> *Karyn Lacy, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan*

Simms grew up in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area (Woodbridge, Virginia) and draws on her research and firsthand policy experience in the federal government to offer a timely account of how race, class, and municipal boundaries shape Americans' access to public goods and services and other material resources. "Fighting for a Foothold" is essential reading for policymakers, scholars, community leaders, and anyone seeking to understand how local government finance reproduces racial inequality, as well as what it would take to build a more equitable metropolitan future for all Americans.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Simms is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies at Barnard College-Columbia University. Prior to academia, Angela served in the federal government for seven years as a Presidential Management Fellow and legislative analyst at the Office of Management and Budget during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations.

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