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White ethnic residential segregation in historical perspective: US cities in 1880 ☆

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ABSTRACT

Investigating immigrant residential patterns in 1880 offers a baseline for understanding residential assimilation trajectories in subsequent eras. This study uses 100% count information from the 1880 Census to estimate a multilevel model of ethnic isolation and exposure to native whites in 67 cities for individual Irish, German and British residents. At the individual level, the key predictors are drawn from assimilation theory: nativity, occupation, and marital status. The multilevel model makes it possible to control for these predictors and to study independent sources of variation in segregation across cities. There is considerable variation at the city level, especially due to differences in the relative sizes of groups. Other significant city-level predictors of people's neighborhood composition include the share of group members who are foreign-born, the disparity in occupational standing between group members and native whites, and the degree of occupational segregation between them.

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1. Introduction

Immigrant groups in the United States have typically experienced a high degree of residential segregation, though from the perspective of spatial assimilation theory this separation is expected to be transitory (Massey, 1985). Individual members of these groups, as they move into the second and third generation, learn English, and improve their educational and occupational status, should be less likely to live in ethnic enclaves and more likely to find homes in mainstream neighborhoods. Some of the clearest evidence for this view comes from trends from the early to mid-20th Century (Lieberson, 1980), showing that segregation for white ethnics declined substantially in this period. But most emphasis in this historical account has been on what we might call ''second wave'' white ethnics, the Italians and East European Jews who arrived in very large numbers, predominantly to cities, during 1890–1920. These groups were highly segregated at that time. Lieberson (1963) found segregation of immigrant Russians and Italians from US born whites at the ward level in 1910 (Index of Dissimilarity) to be .48 and .66, respectively, in Boston and .58 and .61, respectively, in Philadelphia. Much less is known about the earlier 19th Century arrivals, mainly Irish, Germans, and British. There is scattered evidence that these groups experienced only modest residential segregation in the 19th Century. Kantrowitz (1979, p. 45) reports that in Boston at the ward level the magnitude of segregation between immigrant Germans and immigrant Irish as early as 1850 was only .36. Tract-level segregation in Philadelphia between native whites (third and later generation) and immigrant Irish or Germans was in the range

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of .30–.33 in 1850 (Hershberg et al., 1981) and .35–.37 in 1880 (Greenberg, 1981). If these early arriving groups were never highly segregated, how do theories of residential assimilation apply to them?

This study adds substantially to the evidence regarding segregation of Germans, Irish, and British in 1880, fully three decades earlier than the most comprehensive previously published data for white ethnic groups (Lieberson, 1959). We document the extent of segregation for these groups at the enumeration district level for all cities with population over 25,000 in 1880. Further, we analyze the predictors of their residential location in a multilevel framework that allows us to estimate relationships at the individual level that are key to assimilation theory and also to identify independent effects of the cities that people lived in. For the first time in this period it is possible to determine how residential patterns were affected by the size of the group, the share that were foreign-born, their socioeconomic standing relative to native whites, and their occupational segregation from native whites.

Working with publicly available aggregate census data, researchers interested in contemporary situations have searched for ways to decompose segregation into a component that can be attributed to group differences in income (or education, or any other single variable for which the necessary tables are available) and a component that is net of such differences. A significant development in research on minority residential patterns has been examination of the determinants of locational outcomes for individual group members. A series of studies (Alba and Logan, 1992, 1993; Logan et al., 1996; Alba et al., 2000) established the utility of locational attainment models for the study of segregation. Recent research has exploited multilevel datasets to understand the individual-level processes that result in group differences in neighborhood characteristics such as value of housing (Woldoff and Ovadia, 2009) and environmental hazards (Crowder and Downey, 2010) and has taken advantage of longitudinal surveys to examine inter-neighborhood mobility (South et al., 2008; Sampson and Sharkey, 2008). One aim of our use of multi-level modeling is to determine how variations in people's socioeconomic status, attributes associated with immigration, and other personal characteristics feed into the creation of separate racial and ethnic communities. Another is to assess whether and why outcomes differ across cities.

2. Historical and theoretical background

A key theoretical perspective in this field is spatial assimilation, the hypothesis that over time minority racial and ethnic groups will tend to become integrated into the social mainstream and that this integration will be reflected in where they live. Typical hypotheses from this perspective, mostly confirmed through locational attainment models, show that minority persons with higher income and education, born in the US and who speak English well, are likely to live in higher status neighborhoods and with greater exposure to the non-Hispanic white majority. Another viewpoint emphasizes place stratification (Logan, 1978), positing that there is a hierarchy of neighborhoods in most cities whose racial/ethnic composition mirrors a durable hierarchy of groups. Past work with locational attainment models has addressed this perspective by evaluating whether members of some groups do not attain locational outcomes equivalent to comparable majority group members even after controlling for background characteristics, or whether the locational payoff to income, education or home ownership is lower for minorities than for non-Hispanic whites.

We contribute to this research tradition on sources of residential segregation in two ways. First, we apply the logic of locational attainment modeling at a national level, including not just one or several cities, but all identifiable urban areas. This breadth allows us to extend individual-level models to a multi-level framework, where we examine the relationship of characteristics of the city where people live to the extent of their ethnic isolation or exposure to the majority group. Introducing contextual variables in this way extends the reach of locational attainment models, allowing a more direct assessment of conditions that are important from the place stratification perspective, such as the strength of group boundaries in the labor market. Second, we shift attention from the contemporary period to a much earlier point in the history of immigration and intergroup relations in the United States, the late 19th Century just prior to the wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, when the principal white ethnic groups in US cities were German, Irish, and British. We are studying intergroup relations for groups who are the earliest illustration of spatial assimilation and the model against which the experience of subsequent groups has been assessed (Foner, 2000; Perlmann, 2007).

In 1880, the date of this study, the main newcomer groups in the United States were Irish, Germans, and British. These were the Northern Europeans whom the Dillingham Commission (1911, p. 13) would later describe as "quickly assimilated ... while the racial identity of their children was almost entirely lost and forgotten." Some historians have argued that though these groups established ethnic enclaves in some cities, the 19th Century walking city limited ethnic segregation. People needed to live close to work, and except for cases where a particular industry was geographically concentrated and effectively restricted to members of a single group, this meant that segregation would be based more on occupation than on ethnicity. As noted above, demographic studies have documented that these white ethnic groups experienced only modest residential segregation in late 19th Century cities and even less in the second generation (Kantrowitz, 1979; Greenberg, 1981), and that their segregation declined further in the 20th Century (Guest and Weed, 1976; Alba et al., 1997). Their experience appears to contrast with later arriving groups from Europe (Italians and Jews), from the American hinterland itself (blacks and Puerto Ricans), and more recent waves of immigrants from Latin America and Asia for whom separation into distinct ethnic neighborhoods was initially more pronounced and proved to be more persistent. We examine the earlier experience of Northern Europeans in order to evaluate how the models of spatial assimilation and place stratification apply in their case. How did the relatively early arriving immigrants from Britain, Ireland, and Germany fit into the neighborhoods

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