Social Science Research 39 (2010) 215–230

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Residential segregation in new Hispanic destinations: Cities, suburbs, and rural communities compared

Daniel T. Lichter [a,*], Domenico Parisi [b], Michael C. Taquino [b], Steven Michael Grice [b]

[a] Department of Policy Analysis and Management, Cornell University, 249 MVR, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA
[b] National Strategic Planning & Analysis Center, Mississippi State University, 203 Robert Louis Jones Circle, Mississippi State, MS 39762, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online 29 August 2009

Keywords:
Segregation
New destinations
Hispanics
Immigration
Migration
Rural
Urban
Suburban
Race relations

ABSTRACT

This paper provides new estimates of Hispanic–white residential segregation in new destinations and established Hispanic places. New Hispanic destinations are defined broadly to include metropolitan cities, suburban places, and rural communities with unusually rapid Hispanic growth rates. The analysis is framed with the spatial assimilation and place stratification perspectives and is based on block data from the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses. The analysis confirms our basic hypothesis – that Hispanics are highly segregated in new Hispanic destinations, often at levels greatly exceeding those in established places. Hispanic suburbanization or exurbanization into new destinations is no marker of spatial assimilation. Consistent with the place stratification perspective, differences in Hispanic–white segregation between new destinations and established Hispanic areas cannot be explained by place-to-place differences in ecological location, population composition, economic growth, employment, or Hispanic–white income inequality. Hispanic segregation in new destinations is especially sensitive to the size of the foreign-born population and to preexisting "minority threats" in communities with large black populations. Segregation levels in new destinations also are less responsive to income disparities between Hispanics and whites; economic assimilation does not insure Hispanic spatial assimilation. Understanding how newcomers are spatially incorporated in new destinations will be a continuing challenge for scholars concerned about the spatial diffusion and apparent geographic balkanization of America's growing Hispanic population.

1. Introduction

America's Hispanic population is on the move. One-third of recent Mexican immigrants to the United States (i.e., between 1995 and 2000) settled outside of traditional gateway states in the Southwest (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California). This represents a remarkable break from the past. During 1975–80 and 1985–90, only 9 and 13 percent of Hispanic immigrants, respectively, settled outside of traditional gateway states (Durand et al., 2005; Leach and Bean, 2008). Big cities like Atlanta and Washington, DC, as well as many smaller metropolitan cities (e.g., Winston-Salem or Reno), are now magnets for Hispanics and other immigrant populations (McConnell, 2008). But perhaps more significantly, 51 percent of Hispanic immigrants in new gateway states live in small suburban places, and 21 percent live in rural towns (Kandel and Parrado, 2005; Singer, 2004). To be sure, the rapid growth of Hispanics has transformed the social and economic fabric of many new destination communities, where they have come to live and work – often at low wages – in meat processing plants, agriculture, construction, landscaping, and the service industry (Hirschman and Massey, 2008).

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: DTL28@cornell.edu (D.T. Lichter).

0049-089X/$ - see front matter © 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.08.006

In this paper, we ask a straightforward but heretofore unanswered question about the spatial assimilation or incorporation of Hispanic populations in new destinations. That is, has the growing racial and cultural diversity in new Hispanic destinations been accompanied by more racial segregation? Or, instead, has the new in-migration led to the emergence of racially integrated places, where Hispanics and whites live together in the same neighborhoods? Our study bridges a large residential segregation literature with new research on emerging Hispanic destinations and provides empirical evidence of changing ethnic relations between whites and America's new immigrant groups. Here, we use data from the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses to identify new Hispanic destinations, defined broadly to include metropolitan cities, suburban communities, and rural towns with unusually rapid growth in the Hispanic population. We then compare – for the first time – patterns of Hispanic–white segregation in new destinations with established places having sizeable and longstanding Hispanic populations (located mostly in the American Southwest). We also estimate several multivariate regression models, drawn from previous ecological studies of metropolitan segregation (e.g., Logan et al., 2004), that identify significant correlates of place-to-place variation in Hispanic–white segregation in new Hispanic destinations and established places. Our baseline estimates of segregation address longstanding questions about ongoing demographic processes of spatial assimilation or place stratification (e.g., Iceland and Nelson, 2008; Waters and Jimenez, 2005).

2. New destinations and Hispanic incorporation

2.1. National estimates of Hispanic segregation

Neighborhood residential segregation has been used as an indirect measure of social distance between different racial and ethnic groups (Park, 1926; Taeuber and Taeuber, 1965). Recent studies provide a rather mixed view of changing relations between Hispanics and whites, despite the optimism implied by accelerated Hispanic suburbanization in the nation's largest metropolitan areas during the 1980s and 1990s (Charles, 2003). Logan et al. (2004), for example, found that the 1990s brought virtually no change in Hispanic–white residential segregation (based on the index of dissimilarity). In fact, a larger number of metropolitan areas experienced increases in Hispanic–white segregation than declines over the 1990s. At the same time, Hispanic–white segregation (51.6) was much lower on average than black–white segregation (65.2) in 2000 but higher than Asian–white segregation (42.2) (Logan et al., 2004).[1]

Other studies show that Hispanic–white segregation is lower on average in suburban areas than in central cities (Alba et al., 1999; Clark, 2006). Like black suburbanization (Fischer, 2008), Hispanic suburbanization is often viewed as a positive indicator of the economic and cultural incorporation of Hispanics into mainstream American society (Farrell, 2008; Frey, 2001). This presumably reflects upward socioeconomic mobility. Hispanic suburbanization, however, may increasingly take the form of new ethnic enclaves or multiracial "melting pot" suburbs (Frey, 2001). Indeed, Logan (2001) showed that the average Hispanic person in 2000 lived in a suburban neighborhood that was 49 percent Hispanic, up from 44 percent Hispanic in 1990.[2] Suburban Hispanics are increasingly living in Hispanic neighborhoods.

The movement of Hispanics to exurban or rural areas has also received rather mixed interpretations about incorporation (Donato et al., 2007; Kandel and Parrado, 2005). Recent studies show that Hispanic–white segregation is surprisingly high in America's small rural towns and micropolitan statistical areas (Lichter et al., 2007a; Wahl et al., 2007). For example, average Hispanic–white segregation in nonmetro places in 2000 was higher overall than in metropolitan places, with indices of dissimilarity equal to 49.7 and 41.6, respectively (Lichter et al., 2007a). Even when metropolitan places are reweighted to reflect higher segregation rates in heavily populated central cities, Hispanic–white indices of dissimilarity remained virtually identical in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. Racial and ethnic segregation clearly is not restricted to large cities or suburban communities. This begs new questions about whether the accelerated spatial diffusion of Hispanics into emerging destinations broadly increases spatial assimilation – a finding indicative of economic and cultural incorporation – or leads instead to greater spatial isolation and exclusion from mainstream American culture.

2.2. Hispanic segregation in new destinations

Most segregation studies have been framed conceptually with the spatial assimilation and place stratification models (e.g., Iceland and Nelson, 2008; Alba and Logan, 1993). The spatial assimilation model posits that Hispanics will follow the classical assimilation process, as differences between Hispanics and whites in socioeconomic status (e.g., educational and occupational attainment) decline and distinctive cultural expressions (e.g., mother tongue) fade over successive generations or with length of residence in the United States (Iceland and Nelson, 2008). According to this perspective, upward socioeconomic mobility leads to improvements in neighborhood conditions and therefore reduces segregation from whites (White and Sassler, 2000).

[1] These estimates are based on the index of dissimilarity which, in this case, shows the percentage of Hispanics who would have to move to largely white neighborhoods in order to achieve residential parity with whites across all neighborhoods (i.e., the percentage Hispanic in each neighborhood would be identical to the percentage Hispanic for the metropolitan area overall).

[2] This estimate is the isolation index, which in this case was calculated in metropolitan suburban areas where Hispanics constituted 10 percent or more of the suburban population (Logan, 2001). Higher percentages of co-ethnics indicate higher levels of neighborhood social isolation from whites.