Declining Segregation through the Lens of Neighborhood Quality: Does Middle-Class Status Bring Equality?

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September 21, 2012

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Introduction

Residential segregation, particularly between blacks and whites, is on the decline. Logan (2011: 5) finds that the average black-white index of dissimilarity scores in metropolitan America decreased from 73 in 1980 to 59 in 2010. For Latinos during the same period, average levels of segregation dropped more minimally from 50 in 1980 to 48 in 2010 (Logan 2011: 11). Suburbs, which have long been associated with prosperous white communities, have seen a far greater representation of the minorities. In 2010, 51 percent of blacks lived in suburbs, up from 37 percent in 1990, and the percentage of Latinos in suburbs rose to 59 percent from 47 percent (Frey 2011: 10).

Whether concurrent trends of declining segregation and the growing presence of minorities in suburbs have translated into better residential outcomes for individual minorities, particularly those of middle class and affluent backgrounds, relative to whites, is not well known. Some scholars argue that economic differences between whites and minorities are directly linked to residential segregation (Patterson 1997; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Therefore, declines in segregation should result in more equality in the neighborhood quality between well to do minorities and whites. Others argue that the persistence of prejudices and negative out-group preferences (Charles, 2000; Clark, 1991; 1992; 2002; Farley et. al, 1994; Krysan and Farley, 2002) as well as discrimination, particularly in the form of racial and ethnic steering, will make minorities more disadvantaged in their residential outcomes, relative to whites (Turner et al. 2002).

The lack of research on this topic is surprising given that the disparities in wealth between whites and minorities, particularly blacks and Latinos, persist (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Conley 1999). In 2009, the median net worth of households with a non-Hispanic white

householder was $113,149, almost 20 times the median net worth of households with a black householder ($5,677) or Latino householder ($6,325) (Kochhar et al., 2011). Given that black and Latino wealth is much more dependent on their residential circumstances, knowing more about the quality of neighborhoods in which middle class or affluent blacks and Latinos live is important as is focusing on those who live in suburbs where homeownership is even greater (Conley, 1999; Kochhar, 2004; Melvin and Shapiro, 1995).

To our knowledge, only three studies exist in the literature examining the locational attainment of middle-class or affluent blacks using quantitative methods (Adelman 2004, 2005; Alba et al., 2000). They find that race continues to be important in influencing their residential attainment. Although middle-class blacks have greater shares of whites in their neighborhoods, relative to other blacks, the whites are less affluent than those residing in middle-class white neighborhoods. However, no quantitative studies have directly examined the residential outcomes of middle-class or affluent Latinos and Asians.[1] Given the strong connections of the Latino population to immigration, much of the existing conversation centers on the integration of foreign-born Latinos (Hugo et al., 2010; Huntington, 2004; Alba and Nee 2003).

While existing literature has contributed to our knowledge on this topic, they are limited in a number of ways. First, these studies are geographically limited and do not examine the locational attainment of middle-class blacks on a national level. Second, the data utilized within these studies are based upon data from the 1990 decennial census or the 1992-1994 MultiCity Study of Urban Inequality, which are now nearly 20 years old. Little is known about the current neighborhood quality of middle-class blacks. Third, neighborhoods are defined at the census-

[1]There are a number of studies that look into middle class and affluent African American communities without exploring locational attainment directly (for example: Lacy, 2007: Pattilo-McCoy, 1999) or Latino well to do (for example: Bean et al., 2001; Brown, 2007; Delgado, 2010; Kochhar, 2004; Rodriguez, 1996; Vallejo and Lee, 2009; Vallejo, 2010; Vallejo, 2012).

tract level and not as the characteristics near the person's housing unit. The latter can be more instructive in gauging middle-class and affluent black neighborhood attainment because focusing on census-tracts may underestimate the true extent to which middle-class and affluent blacks experience the negative effects of residential segregation. Fourth, these studies do not contrast the living conditions of minorities in suburbs to the overall population. Given the importance placed on suburban residence for locational attainment, this is an essential contrast (Alba and Logan, 1991; Fischer, 2008; Friedman and Rosenbaum, 2007; Logan and Alba, 1993; Massey and Denton, 1985; 1988). Finally, no attention has been paid in this literature as to how middle-class or affluent blacks compare to middle-class or affluent Latinos in their neighborhood attainment.

The question that remains, then, is how important is race and ethnicity in predicting middle-class and affluent household[2] neighborhood conditions in the 21st century. To address this issue, we conduct bivariate and multivariate analyses of data from the 2009 panel of the American Housing Survey (AHS). The distinct advantages of these data are that they are current, are at the national level, and contain information from respondents on the quality of their neighborhoods – in terms of the presence of abandoned buildings, buildings with bars on the windows, trash/litter/junk, and open spaces – within a half a block of their housing unit and crime in their larger neighborhood.

Several questions are addressed using these data: 1) Do racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood outcomes exist among middle-class and affluent households? 2) To the extent that differences exist, are they smaller in suburbs? and 3) If racial and ethnic differences exist, do they disappear when controlling for relevant demographic and socioeconomic factors?

[2] We define middle-class and affluent households as those households with incomes that fall at least two times above the poverty level, own their homes, and whose householder has at least some college education (see the Data and Methods section below for more details).

Theoretical Background

Two theoretical models have been used in the literature to characterize variation in the residential location of households. The spatial assimilation model identifies residential attainment as one of the key outcomes of the status attainment process. Variation in residential outcomes of households is a function of differences in their acculturation, socioeconomic status, and life cycle factors. The model suggests that on the whole, as minorities achieve upward economic mobility, they will transfer these upgrades into superior residences (Massey and Denton 1985). Minority households with fewer socioeconomic resources and that are immigrants and have spent less time in the United States and are less likely to speak English well will tend to live in lower-quality neighborhoods than majority-group households. However, these differences should diminish in the presence of controls for socioeconomic status and acculturation-related variables.

In addition to these variables, life-cycle factors will also play an important role in explaining the variation in household residential outcomes. Such factors shape household residential needs and preferences and thereby encourage or discourage their residential mobility (Rossi 1955; Speare et al. 1975). Marital status and the presence of children will shape household residential preferences as both factors increase the need for more space. In addition, families with children are likely to have stronger preferences for neighborhoods with good schools, low crime, and low poverty (Rosenbaum and Friedman 2001).

Inherent to the assumptions of the spatial assimilation model is the notion that upward economic mobility will translate into better residential outcomes. Therefore, when focusing on middle-class and affluent households, it is expected that there will be little variation in their neighborhood outcomes, particularly after controlling for demographic factors and the variation

that could exist in socioeconomic status of these well-to-do households.

Another important, implicit assumption of the spatial assimilation model is the notion that assimilation involves a move to the suburbs (Alba et al. 1991, 1999). Suburban residence is thought to represent the endpoint of the spatial assimilation process because of its perceived link to the opportunity structure (Alba et al. 1999). As such, minorities and immigrants alike should have greater access to majority-group members, more affluent neighborhoods, and in general better neighborhood conditions.

The main tenets of the spatial assimilation model have found support in the literature. Income and education are positively correlated with tract-level median income, percent white in the neighborhood, and school quality, and negatively associated with neighborhood crime, poverty, and teen fertility rates (Alba and Logan 1991, 1993; Alba et al. 1999, 2000a,b; Logan et al. 1996a,b; Rosenbaum at al. 1999; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007). Acculturation-related variables, such as length of time in the United States as well as English proficiency are also positively related to better neighborhood conditions, although for Asians, English proficiency is not always associated (Alba and Logan 1991, 1993; Alba and Nee, 2003; Alba et al. 1999, 2000a,b; Logan et al. 1996a,b). In addition, households with more income, householders with better education, and native-born households are significantly more likely to live in suburbs than those with less income and education and who are comprised of immigrants (Alba et al. 1999). For Asian households, the tenets of the spatial assimilation model work particularly well. In general, Asians have similar neighborhood outcomes and in some cases even better outcomes than do whites, particularly when controlling for socioeconomic, demographic, and acculturation-related variables (Logan et al. 1996; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007).

On the other hand, studies have shown that blacks and Hispanics reside in lower-quality

neighborhoods than whites, even among those that are middle class or live in suburbs, controlling for relevant socioeconomic and demographic factors, thereby suggesting that other factors are affecting the variation in household locational attainment (Alba et al. 1999; Alba et al. 2000; Friedman and Rosenbaum 2007; Logan and Alba 1991, 1993, 1995; Logan et al. 1996a,b; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007; Woldoff and Ovadia 2009). The majority of the work done so far emphasizes the quality of middle-class minority households using qualitative methodological approaches, with the most prominent work having been done on African Americans (Lacy, 2007: Pattilo-McCoy, 1999; Pattilo, 2007) and Latinos (Vallejo 2010; 2012). Studies using qualitative methods that have focused on the black middle class have drawn similar conclusions finding that well-to-do blacks are often living in better environments than their poorer counterparts but not relative to whites of the same economic status (Lacy 2007; Pattilo-McCoy 1999; Pattilo 2007). Indeed, Patillo-McCoy (1999) finds that many middle-class blacks are in close quarters with their disadvantaged peers and often have to deal with problems found in poor neighborhoods including declining physical conditions, increased crime, and downward mobility for future generations. For Latinos, Vallejo (2012) finds that upward economic mobility is often times delayed for a generation in spite of economic advancement, resulting in reduced residential mobility.

The influence of structural constraints in the housing market on such disparities is captured by a second theoretical model used to explain variation in household neighborhood outcomes, the place stratification model (Alba and Logan 1991, 1993; Logan and Alba 1993). The tenets of this model maintain that the residential opportunities of households are hierarchically ordered, particularly owner-occupied housing. Because housing is a commodity, it can be viewed through its use and exchange values (Logan and Molotch 1987). Majority-group

members who own their housing view it in terms of the wealth that can be accrued through its exchange value. As such, majority-group members maintain social distance from other households that may jeopardize this wealth, thereby constraining access of minority households from the best residential locations (Logan and Molotch 1987). Discriminatory actions, whether they manifest themselves in the search for housing or securing monies to obtain housing, that are built upon majority-group member racial and ethnic prejudices, are the most prominent actions used by powerful groups to constrain other households (Farley et al 1994; Massey and Denton 1993).

Results from the 2000 Housing Discrimination Study are consistent with the main propositions of the place stratification model (Turner et al., 2002; Ross and Turner 2005). Paired tests conducted between whites and blacks and whites and Hispanics reveal that whites are consistently favored over blacks and Hispanics in housing transactions in both the rental and sales markets. Particularly notable is the fact that between 1989 and 2000 there was a significant increase in the steering of black home buyers to predominantly black neighborhoods, the specific mechanism linking discrimination to residential segregation (Ross and Turner 2005).

The "new" inequality found in lending patterns is also consistent with the tenets of the place stratification model and no doubt will lead to disparities between minorities and whites in neighborhood outcomes, regardless of their affluence or location in suburbs (Williams et al. 2005). That is, although blacks and Hispanics had achieved record levels of homeownership in the early part of the 2000s, they experienced significant levels of discrimination in financing the purchase of their homes, being more likely to have received high-priced, subprime loans (Avery, Brevoort, and Canner 2007). Such inequalities in financing have led blacks and Hispanics to be much more likely than whites to buy homes in predominantly minority neighborhoods. In 2000,

29% of subprime loans were made in minority neighborhoods, compared to 14% of conventional home purchase loans made by traditional lenders (Williams et al. 2005)

Studies have shown that the negative out-group residential preferences of whites, upon which discrimination in the housing and financial markets are built, have persisted into the 21st century. Research has consistently found that whites maintain unfavorable out-group views of African Americans, regardless of their economic background, reinforcing residential segregation (Charles, 2000; Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996; Farley et. al, 1994; Farley and Krysan et al., 2002; Krysan et. al, 2009). Similar negative white out-group views have been found to exist towards Latinos - but not to the same degree for Asians, who themselves prefer not to live in communities with a large African American presence as well (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996). The fact that blacks and Hispanics often fare worse in their neighborhood outcomes, relative to whites, than do Asians is no doubt attributable to the individual actions of whites based upon their negative out-group residential preferences.

Although not directly associated with the tenets of the place stratification model, recent research has raised questions about the primacy of suburbs implicit in the spatial assimilation model. Several studies have found that African Americans and some immigrant ethnic groups living in suburbs can experience poverty and dilapidation comparable to their counterparts in central cities (Holliday and Dwyer, 2009; Hanlon, 2010; Logan et al. 2002; Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Wilson et al., 2010). The work of Hanlon (2010), in particular, stresses that suburban communities that closely border cities, so called 'inner ring' suburbs, are especially notable for their poverty and high minority concentration, more similar in nature to central cities than outer-ring suburbs. Thus, while suburban residence can lead to improved residential conditions for some, it is not a universal guarantee of better living for all (Alba et al., 1999; Friedman and

Rosenbaum, 2007; Singer et al., 2008).

Hypotheses

Our study focuses on answering three major research questions, which were posed in the introduction. The preceding theoretical discussion suggests the following hypotheses in answering each of these questions.

1) Do racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood outcomes exist among middle-class and affluent households? The spatial assimilation model predicts that few racial and ethnic differences will exist in neighborhood outcomes between well-to-do whites and minorities because of their superior socioeconomic status. Those that do exist will be attributable to life cycle stage differences across groups as well as variation in other demographic characteristics. The place stratification model, on the other hand, suggests that substantial differences in neighborhood outcomes will exist between whites and blacks and whites and Hispanics. However, relatively fewer differences will exist between whites and Asians. According to the theory, middle-class and affluent whites will be more likely to distance themselves from their black and Hispanic counterparts rather than their Asian counterparts because of the potential threat that might be incurred to the wealth generated from their exchange values by residing near black and Hispanic neighbors.

2) To the extent that differences exist, are they smaller in suburbs? The spatial assimilation model maintains that racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood outcomes should be smaller, if present at all, in suburbs. Mobility to the suburbs is seen as the endpoint of the spatial assimilation process and the focus here is on well-to-do households, thereby leaving little room for racial and ethnic disparities. The place stratification model suggests, however, that

racial and ethnic disparities will be just as large in suburbs because of the operation of an explicit stratifying system built upon the profits generated from exchange values.

3) If racial and ethnic differences exist, do they disappear when controlling for relevant demographic and socioeconomic factors? According to the spatial assimilation model, the answer would be yes. The place stratification model predicts that such differences would persist, despite such controls. As discussed above, this finding would result from the fact that discrimination in the housing and financial markets exist, the precise mechanisms used by majority-group members to distance themselves from minority-group members. If the neighborhood quality of middle-class blacks and Latinos is notably inferior to that of similarly-situated whites, but the neighborhood conditions of Asians is relatively similar to whites, it would likely result from the fact that white prejudices and the structural barriers built upon such prejudices could be constraining the housing choices of particular groups of middle-class minorities.

Data and Methods

Our analyses are based on data from the 2009 panel of the American Housing Survey (AHS), a multistage probability sample of approximately 50,000 housing units located throughout the United States that is surveyed every other year. We take advantage of data from the 2009 AHS because these data are recent and contain many indicators of neighborhood quality. Until now, the quantitative research done on middle or upper class residents on a national level have relied on data that are nearly 20 years old (e.g., Alba et al., 2000; Adleman, 2005). In our analyses, we use sampling weights (scaled down to maintain unweighted cell sizes) to correct for sampling design effects and potential under coverage.

We restrict our analyses here to focus on middle-class and affluent households. Following previous research, we define a household as middle class when its total income falls between two and four times the poverty threshold for a family of four[3], it owns the home, and the householder has at least some college education (Alba et al., 2000; Adleman, 2004). Affluent households are those whose income falls above four times the poverty level, own their homes, and whose householders have at least some college education. In addition to restricting our analyses to middle-class and affluent households, we disaggregate our data on the basis of suburban location.[4] One set of our analyses examines the middle class and affluent householders in metropolitan areas, overall, while the second focuses on householders who live in suburbs. As other researchers have done, we define suburbs as areas that are inside metropolitan areas but not within central cities (e.g., Alba and Logan, 1991; Alba et al., 1999).

To measure neighborhood conditions, our central dependent variables, we mainly rely on data from householders' answers to questions about the characteristics of the neighborhood immediately surrounding the housing unit that are indicative of physical quality, social disorder, and undesirable land uses.[5] Specifically, we use responses to questions asking about the presence of the following conditions within a half block of the building: abandoned buildings; buildings with bars on the windows; trash, litter, or junk in the streets, roads, empty lots or on any properties; and lack of nearby open spaces, such as parks, woods, farms, or ranches.[6] We

[3] In 2009, the poverty threshold was $44,100.
[4] We could not disaggregate the data for middle-class and affluent households because the sample cell sizes were relatively small for the affluent households in the suburban-specific analysis.
[5] The householder is the person 18 years or older in the household who rents or owns the housing unit and answers the survey. The householder's name appears on the lease or deed, mortgage, or contract to purchase. If no household member within the unit owns or rents the unit, the householder is the first household member listed on the questionnaire.
[6] Although these dependent variables are subjective in nature, the items ask respondents about the presence of particular physical or tangible conditions rather than respondents' opinions or attitudes. The fact that the questions delineate the geographic area comprising the neighborhood, moreover, improves the chance that respondents' characteristics are much less likely to influence their responses to questions about the neighborhood (Lee and Campbell, 1997). These factors heighten the objectivity of respondents reports.

also use data from a question asking householders if crime was present in the neighborhood. However, the question asked to generate this response does not restrict householders to considering crime within a half block of the building. In addition to the five indicators being analyzed one-by-one, we examine a summary index of neighborhood problems based upon the sum of these indicators. This index, therefore, ranges in value from 0 (no negative conditions) to 5 (all negative conditions are present) and measures the extent to which undesirable conditions are concentrated in neighborhoods. Lastly, we include the respondent's rating of their neighborhood as a place to live, which is based on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being best.

Our key independent variable is the householder's race/ethnicity. We use four categories of race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander).[7] We include controls for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. While we have restricted our sample to middle-class and affluent households, variation exists in their household income and the householder's education and therefore, we control for these factors. Education is represented by two dummy variable indicating whether the householder has a college degree or more than a college degree, with less than a college degree forming the reference group. Demographic factors are represented by the householder's age and three dummy variables indicating: (1) whether the householder is native born; (2) whether the household is headed by a married couple and (2) whether children under 18 are present. We also control for the region within which the household lives.[8]

We conduct bivariate and multivariate analyses of these data. Bivariate analyses are used to identify how race and ethnicity affects household neighborhood conditions, overall, and within

[7] It would have been preferable to disaggregate Hispanics by their race or nationality. However, the majority of Hispanics within the AHS sample—66.2%—are white. Only 2.7% are black; the rest are of other races.
[8] Ideally, we would like to control for specific characteristics of metropolitan areas that affect households' neighborhood conditions. Due to the Census Bureau's efforts to maintain confidentiality of respondents within the AHS, however, 40 percent of housing units within metropolitan areas are not identified. Therefore, the only contextual variable we can control for is region.

suburbs. Multivariate analyses will be used to identify how race and ethnicity affect household neighborhood conditions, after controlling for household socioeconomic status, demographic factors, and region of residence. Through these analyses, hypotheses derived from the spatial assimilation and place stratification models are tested. Because most of our dependent variables are dichotomous, the data will be analyzed using logistic regression models. For the index of neighborhood problems and the neighborhood rating variables described above, however ordinary least squares regression is used.[9]

Results

Do racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood outcomes exist among middle-class and affluent households? Table 1 addresses this question, presenting the means for our main dependent variables, with separate panels focusing on middle-class and affluent households in metropolitan areas, overall, and those in suburbs. With respect to the overall metropolitan results, the data indicate that racial and ethnic differences do indeed exist in neighborhood outcomes among middle-class and affluent households. Well-to-do blacks and Latinos live in lower-quality neighborhoods than middle-class whites on several dimensions. For example, 15.2 percent of middle-class or affluent blacks and 12.2 percent of Latinos report the presence of buildings with barred windows within one-half block of their housing units, a rate more than twice as high as that of middle-class or affluent whites (5.24 percent). The average index of neighborhood problems for blacks and Hispanics is nearly one and one-half times as high as that of whites. Middle-class and affluent Hispanics are more than twice as likely as whites to report the presence of abandoned buildings in their neighborhoods, but the difference between middle-

[9] Given the cross-sectional nature of our data, we draw any inferences about the causal relationships between our independent and dependent variables. Our analyses here are designed to ultimately determine the association between race and ethnicity and neighborhood outcomes.

class or affluent blacks and whites is not statistically significant.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

Less pronounced but significant differences exist between whites and blacks, and whites and Hispanics for the variables indicating a lack of open spaces, the presence of crime, and whether households live in suburbs. In addition, the average neighborhood rating of well-to-do blacks, 8.1, is significantly lower than that of well-to-do whites, 8.4. The only variable for which no racial and ethnic differences exist is that gauging the presence of trash, junk, or little within one black of the housing unit. Interestingly, not only are middle-class and affluent blacks and Hispanics living in lower quality neighborhoods than their white counterparts, but on four of the eight indicators – the presence of abandoned buildings, buildings with barred windows, crime, and the index of neighborhood problems – their average values are significantly lower than those of middle-class and affluent Asians.[10]

With respect to suburbanites, the findings in Table 1 reveal fewer differences between whites and minorities than are present in the overall metropolitan analysis. No racial and ethnic differences are present for the variables gauging the presence of abandoned buildings in the neighborhood and crime as well as average neighborhood ratings, findings that depart from the overall metropolitan results. In addition, no significant difference continues to be found between whites and minorities on the variable gauging the level of trash and junk in the neighborhood. However, affluent and middle-class blacks and Hispanics are more likely than similarly situated whites to live in neighborhoods with buildings with barred windows, a lack of open spaces, and more neighborhood problems. Thus, suburban residential location attenuates some but not all racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood outcomes.

<TABLE 2 HERE>

[10] The results for these significance tests are not shown on the table but are available upon request of the authors.

Table 2 focuses on our independent variables, race/ethnicity compared by socio-economic attributes. Our analysis finds that with both the overall population and in suburbs alone whites and Asians report significantly higher incomes than blacks and Latinos. This partially attests to the differential meaning of residential and social class mobility across ethnicities. In other words, blacks and Latinos may achieve middle-class status but still fall behind whites and Asians in terms of economic mobility. This contrast may be connected to the nativity of the respondents. As would be expected, middle-class Asians are significantly more likely than all other groups to be foreign-born, followed by Latinos. On average, Latinos and Asians are younger than their white counterparts. Significant regional variations are also reported both for the MSAs overall and in suburbs. Well off Latinos and Asians represent a significantly larger share in the West while blacks and white are more likely to reside in the South (and Midwest for whites).

The descriptive statistics overwhelmingly lend credence to hypotheses derived under the *place stratification* model. Taken together, these preliminary results reveal that race/ethnicity continues to matter in shaping middle-class and affluent blacks' and Latinos' neighborhood outcomes. Moreover, it appears that suburban location does not attenuate differences between middle-class whites and blacks, contrary to the tenets of the spatial assimilation model. Middle-class and affluent whites and Asians consistently fare better than their Latino and black counterparts. At the bivariate level, the majority of these significant disparities exist throughout all areas examined within the MSA. In the next section, we will conduct multivariate analysis to examine whether these results remain present in the face of controls for demographic and socioeconomic factors.

Multivariate Findings

Table 3 addresses the logistic and OLS results with our eight models of neighborhood conditions, comparing the entire middle class and affluent population against those specifically living in suburbs. With this paper's attention on race and ethnicity, we focus on those results first. From there, we will assess the importance of background characteristics of the householders surveyed.

#TABLE 3 HERE#

Overall, nonwhite middle class households tend to have poorer neighborhood conditions in comparison to whites - both with the total population and also when looking specifically at suburban residents. The Asian householders are an exception to this, though they will be discussed directly shortly. As table 3 shows, the well to do African American MSA population in particular suffers from serious disparities in neighborhood conditions in comparison to whites. For example, the well-off black population is more likely to report bars on windows, the presence of abandoned buildings, and tend to be less satisfied with their neighborhood conditions based on the neighborhood satisfaction score. Suburban residence does not seem to offer strong improvements for black residential conditions in comparison to whites. Looking at the suburban results, while the results pertaining to suburban African American householders bear fewer significant findings, they do show that their likelihood of bars on windows and the lack of open spaces actually increase in comparison to the total population.

In relationship to African Americans, the situation of middle class and affluent Latinos is in some ways better and in other ways worse. On one hand, Latinos have a reduced likelihood of reporting bars on windows and the presence of crime than blacks; also, they have a slightly better chance of living in suburbs. On the other hand, well to do Latino householders are more likely to live in neighborhoods with abandoned buildings, are less likely to report open spaces nearby, and

score worse on the index of problems. However, when looking at middle class and affluent Latinos who live in suburbs, their neighborhood disparities grow worse in comparison to both other suburban minorities and for the overall minority population - blacks included. Notably, there are statistically significant results which show that the well off middle class Latino householder community has a higher likelihood of reporting abandoned buildings, bars on windows, and fewer open spaces than the other minority groups both in and out of suburbs. Moreover, their score on the index of problems increases dramatically in the suburbs.

There are some exceptions in the disparities we have observed among minority middle class and affluent householders. In contrast to the disproportionate neighborhood conditions that middle class and affluent black and Latino householders have in comparison whites, the local conditions of well to do Asian homeowners not only match but by some measures surpass the conditions of their white peers. For instance, there are statistically significant results which demonstrate that prosperous Asian householders are both less likely to report bars on their and have lower crime than their white peers. There are a couple of exceptions to this advantage. For one, Asian homes tend to have less access to open spaces in comparison to their white peers. More notably, the superior conditions that Asian householders do have mostly disappear when looking at those who live in suburbs.

In all, these findings show that household conditions for non-white minorities lend credence to the *place stratification* hypothesis. There is great variation between the situation of middle class and affluent minorities, and suburban residence not only fails to translate into clear advantage but actually results into inferior conditions for some. On one hand, the overall well to do Asian population performs better than their white peers, while on the other; there is disparity in the conditions of blacks and Latinos in comparison to whites. However, when looking at

suburbs, Asians loose the advantage they had to whites and some of the problem areas blacks had are reduced while others remain consistent; meanwhile the disparity of Latinos actually grows to where they become the most disadvantaged middle class or affluent ethnic population. On a more positive note, the presence crime seem to go away for well to do minorities in suburbs, offering some support to locational attainment. To put these results into better context, we now turn this discussion towards the supporting variables.

Background Characteristics

The results of the predictors of background characteristics at best loosely verify some of the assumptions of the *spatial assimilation* argument. Socio-economic variables like higher education, native born status, having a college degree, and better income tend to increase the likelihood of better neighborhoods both in suburbs and for the overall middle and upper class population. However, these background variables do not presuppose unilateral improvement across all neighborhood conditions. For example, while having kids lowers the presence of bars on windows, translates into a lower score on the index of problems score and increases ones neighborhood satisfaction rating, in suburbs the presence of kids actually increases the presence of neighborhood crime. Also, save for crime, races remain a significant predictor of ethnicity even with such socio-economic controls in place.

The regional differences of well to do neighborhoods are worth noting. For this aspect of the analysis, western middle and upper class householders are used as the reference category. The findings show western middle class householders tend to report inferior conditions in comparison to other regions while those residing in the Midwest in particular tend to boast superior residential circumstances. For example, Midwestern well to do householders are less likely to report trash in their neighborhoods, both overall and in suburbs. Midwestern and

Northern residents tend to live in neighborhoods with less crime and report higher satisfaction. Also, Midwestern and Southern respondents are less likely to report bars on windows. One advantage that western householders seem to have is that they have more open space. The bottom line is that region matters in determining the conditions of middle and upper class households.

Discussion

The goal of this paper was to see if middle or upper class economic status meant equal household conditions across different racial and ethnic groups. One would expect that middle class status would translate into equal success regardless of race, in keeping with the *spatial assimilation* model. However, the results of this study offer support to the *place stratification* argument for locational attainment for the well to do. As Logan (et al., 2002) put it, ‘‘this is not a time, if ever there were a time, for a one-pattern-fits-all theory of residential location’’ (321). Our analysis has shown that racial and ethnic status is a strong predictor of neighborhood conditions even when controlling for other socio-economic variables. Regardless of being in the same economic bracket, ethnic groups fare differently in their neighborhood conditions. Our bivariate and multivariate analyses show that the residential conditions of well to do black and Latino householders are inferior to their white and Asian peers.

The common expectation is that suburban residence would equalize access to quality neighborhoods. However, our analyses indicate this is not the case. While some of the disparities for blacks and Latinos against whites diminish, such as the presence of crime and trash, other conditions actually worsen for them. This is particularly the case for middle class Latino householders who are more likely to report abandoned buildings, bars on windows, a lack of open spaces, and a score higher on the index of problems than any other minority both in and out

of suburbs. On the other hand, while well off Asian suburbanites may lose the advantage they had over whites with the total population, they also experience little in the way of worsening conditions. The one aspect of suburban residence that seems to unite all minorities is that they are less likely to report nearby open spaces than whites. It can be argued that the disadvantage that some non-whites report results from their settlement in older, denser suburban communities (Fennelly and Orfield, 2008; Holliday and Dwyer, 2009). Hanlon (2010) has stressed that such suburbs can be more disadvantaged than cities themselves. On the other hand, the implied density of minority suburbs we identified does not seem to correlate to any measurable impact on the Asian middle class suburbanites – indicating that denser living arrangements alone does not guarantee poor conditions. Also, it is important to also note that in spite of some worsening conditions for blacks and Latinos in some areas, ethnicity is not a significant predictor of crime in suburbs. Regardless, ethnicity is still one of the strongest predictors of neighborhood conditions in both cities and suburbs.

The low ratings that blacks give their neighborhoods in comparison to whites is statistically significant and could indicate that blacks may not be living in poorer neighborhoods by choice but instead could be constrained to such areas because of their race. Although our analyses cannot pinpoint the precise mechanisms underlying these patterns, it is likely that continuing racial discrimination in the housing market and mortgage-lending industry constrains the residential choices of affected households. Research by Friedman and colleagues (2006) for example has revealed that housing discrimination occurs in the rental housing market for similarly qualified black and Hispanic renters relative to whites on the basis of their names in email correspondence tests. White avoidance of minorities also likely plays a part in supporting

the discrimination perpetuated by institutional actors within the housing market (Charles, 2000; Farley et al., 1994).

The objectives of this paper were to describe the current situation of various middle class and affluent minorities and determine what neighborhood conditions say about the nature of upward mobility for various minorities. As the minority population grows and segregation patterns shift, are the neighborhood conditions currently identified indicative of what minorities will be able to achieve, even after holding socioeconomic status constant? The results here reveal that, in spite of recently identified patterns indicating desegregation (Logan 2011; Logan and Stults, 2011), we expect a continued fragmentation of different communities based on one's racial and ethnic background.

This paper provides a starting point in looking at the neighborhood conditions of middle-class and affluent blacks and Latinos, and as such, there are a few weaknesses that need to be noted. More detailed work needs to be done contrasting the various groups within each race and ethnicity. Latinos for example constitute a wide range of nationalities with varying levels of segregation (Iceland and Nelson 2008), and it can be expected that the various well off residents live in different community conditions based in part on these backgrounds. Next, future work should look more closely at different regions. We were unable to identify specific metropolitan areas and examine the neighborhood conditions of nativity-status and racial/ethnic groups within such areas. Lastly, more ethnographic research needs to be done directly contrast the households of different racial and ethnic groups. The research provided here provides a quantitative assessment of the racial and ethnic variation in middle-class and affluent household neighborhood conditions. However, it is unclear from the present analysis why such patterns exist and qualitative research could help in that vein.

In spite of these limitations, the analyses here reveal that despite the progress made in terms of desegregation, the neighborhood quality of middle-class and affluent minority households remains, for the most part, inferior relative to whites of the same socioeconomic standing. Future research on residential segregation should not just focus on the residential distributions of minorities and whites but should instead focus on the quality of such neighborhoods. In addition, paying attention to where such households with children live is important to understand how inequality may be transmitted across future generations of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Tables

Table 1. Neighborhood Characteristics of Middle-Class and Affluent Households 2009

	Percent							
	All Households				Suburban Households			
Variables	Non-Hispanic Whites	Non-Hispanic Blacks	Hispanics	Asians	Non-Hispanic Whites	Non-Hispanic Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
Reference person reports within 1/2 block of housing unit:								
Abandoned buildings	2.77	4.57	5.94**#	1.66	2.31	2.23	4.70	1.67
Buildings with bars on windows	5.24	15.16***	12.20***#	4.74	1.57	6.25***	7.98***#	2.53
Trash or junk	4.31	5.94	5.96	3.06	2.96	4.61	4.30	1.99
No open spaces	56.92	63.92*	66.27*	63.46**	53.61	65.17***	65.25**	60.99*
Presence of crime	16.74	21.91*	20.89**#	12.09	12.96	15.10	0.18	11.12
Average Index Score	0.86	1.12***	1.11***#	0.85	0.73	.93***	1.00***#	0.78
Suburban	72.19	65.00**	63.66**	677.75	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Neighborhood Satisfaction (10=best)	8.37	8.10***	8.25	8.31	8.45	8.28	8.41	8.35
N	5815	400	388	480	4350	260	254	341

***p<.001 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and whites

**p<.01 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and whites

*p<.05 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and whites;shaded cells refer to significance of p<.05 between group and blacks.

#p<.05 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and Asians

Table 2. Household and Socio-demographic Characteristics of Middle-Class and Affluent Households 2009

	Percent							
	All Households				Suburban Households			
Variables	Non-Hispanic Whites	Non-Hispanic Blacks	Hispanics	Asians	Non-Hispanic Whites	Non-Hispanic Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
Householder characteristics								
Native Born	5.27	13.72***	33.86#***	76.41***	4.96	14.47***	34.52#***	77.21***
Age	48.66	47.58	46.02**	44.96***	48.65	47.13	45.77**	46.26**
Male	63.03	44.17***	63.38	67.01	63.11	43.32***	61.68	70.04
Education								
College degree	59.65	57.21	62.28	56.71	61.15	52.61*	60.91	56.55
More than a college degree	40.35	42.79	37.72	43.29	38.85	47.40*	39.09	43.45
Household / Housing unit characteristics								
Married household	75.26	60.60***	69.61#***	81.43	78.32	60.72***	72.38#*	84.94*
Presence of kids under 18	41.66	49.11*	48.09	47.46	44.44	50.63	51.67	49.15
Total household income	139826.17	108152.32***	118650.39#***	146078.19	140176.82	112387.37***	126428.27#*	149096.34
Region								
West	22.87	14.04***	32.58#***	50.82***	19.74	14.09	31.87#***	46.61 ***
Northeast	22.26	17.24	11.12***	15.17**	25.96	16.02***	11.22***	16.97***
South	31.23***	54.21***	45.50#***	22.33***	31.19	59.28***	45.78#***	23.49*
Midwest	23.64	14.52***	10.81***	11.68***	23.11	10.61***	11.12***	12.93***
N	5815	400	388	480	4350	260	254	341

***p<.001 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and whites

**p<.01 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest
and whites

*p<.05 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest and whites;shaded cells refer to significance of p<.05 between group and blacks.

#p<.05 - differences refer to those between the minority group of interest
and Asians

Table 3a. Logistic Regression Models of Neighborhood Conditions of Middle-Class and Affluent Households, 2009 (weighted)

	All Households							
	Abandoned buildings	Bars on Windows	Trash	No Open Spaces	Crime	Suburban Location	Index of Problems[1]	Neighborhood Rating[1]
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Race/ethnicity (ref. white)								
Black	0.583**	1.110***	0.254	0.217**	0.194	-0.331***	0.199***	-0.198***
	(.250)	(.164)	(.220)	(.106)	(.126)	(.109)	(.039)	(.069)
Hispanic	0.853	0.758***	0.244	0.320***	0.164	-0.282**	0.199***	-0.019
	(.246)	(.190)	(.240)	(.117)	(.140)	(.118)	(.042)	(.075)
Asian	-0.308	-0.386	-0.398	0.267**	-0.336**	-0.032	-0.009	-0.042
	(.409)	(.261)	(.314)	(.119)	(.170)	(.125)	(.044)	(.078)
Householder characteristics								
Native-Born	-0.515*	0.039	-0.193	0.007	-0.254**	-0.076	-0.051	0.081
	(.288)	(.175)	(.226)	(.092)	(.126)	(.097)	(.034)	(.060)
Age	-0.012**	-0.006	-0.025***	-0.001	-0.010***	0.007***	-0.051	0.017***
	(.006)	(.004)	(.005)	(.002)	(.003)	(.002)	(.034)	(.001)
Female	0.088	-0.235**	-0.107	0.156***	-0.209***	-0.086	-0.003***	-0.141***
	(.152)	(.111)	(.123)	(.052)	(.068)	(.058)	(.001)	(.035)
More than college degree	-0.080	0.093	-0.222*	0.033	-0.114*	-0.169***	-0.004	0.009
	(.148)	(.108)	(.125)	(.051)	(.068)	(.055)	(.0196)	(.033)
Married household	0.124	-0.328***	-0.166	-0.242***	0.028	0.420***	-0.015	0.165***
	(.175)	(.121)	(.139)	(.063)	(.082)	(.066)	(.019)	(.041)
Presence of kids under 18	-0.317**	-0.371***	-0.356***	-0.080	0.134*	0.320***	-0.081***	0.111***
	(.165)	(.127)	(.137)	(.057)	(.075)	(.063)	(.023)	(.038)
Total household income	-0.002*	0.001	-0.004	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.046**	0.001***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.0214)	(.001)
Housing unit location								
Located in suburb	-0.580***	-2.151***	-0.947***	-0.395***	-0.830***	N/A	-0.001	0.250***
	(.145)	(.118)	(.120)	(.056)	(.067)	N/A	(.001)	(.036)
Region (ref. West)								
North	-0.160	0.305**	0.137	-0.004	-0.468***	1.0112***	-0.415***	0.153***
	(.214)	(.144)	0.171	(.074)	(.106)	(.085)	(.028)	(.049)
South	-0.363**	-0.314**	-0.156	0.144**	0.094	0.416***	-0.039	0.017
	(.189)	(.132)	(.156)	(.067)	(.084)	(.070)	(.025)	(.044)
Midwest	-0.098	-1.226***	-0.288*	-0.109	-0.156*	0.288***	-0.110***	0.135***
	(.200)	(.193)	(.179)	(.073)	(.096)	(.077)	(.027)	(.0485)
Intercept	-2.191***	-0.900***	-0.778***	0.688***	-0.356**	-0.084	1.446***	7.024***
	(.350)	(.251)	(.279)	(.132)	(.168)	(.136)	(.0487)	(.086)
N	7083	7083	7083	7083	7083	7083	7083	7083

***p<=.01; **p<=.05;
*p<=.10
[1]OLS regression is used here.

Table 3b. Logistic Regression Models of Neighborhood Conditions of Middle-Class and Affluent Households in Suburbs, 2009 (weighted)

	Suburban Households						
	Abandoned buildings	Bars on Windows	Trash	No Open Spaces	Crime	Index of Problems[1]	Neighborhood Rating[1]
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Race/ethnicity (ref. white)							
Black	0.103	1.311***	0.435	0.411***	-0.002	0.161***	-0.09
	(.417)	(.287)	(.303)	(.129)	(.175)	(.042)	(.082)
Hispanic	0.938***	1.502***	0.420	0.418***	0.250	0.238***	0.026
	(.331)	(.287)	(.340)	(.142)	(.180)	(.046)	(.090)
Asian	0.242	0.220	-0.111	.243*	-0.212	0.047	-0.11
	(.499)	(.430)	(.459)	(.140)	(.212)	(.046)	(.091)
Householder characteristics							
Native-Born	-1.012**	0.053	-0.533	0.112	-0.078	-0.016	0.071
	(.443)	(.299)	(.355)	(.109)	(.158)	(.036)	(.070)
Age	0.003	0.002	-0.017**	0.001	-0.006	-0.001	0.017***
	(.007)	(.008)	(.007)	(.002)	(.004)	(.001)	(.002)
Female	0.075	-0.383**	-0.050	0.186***	-0.277***	0.005	-0.147***
	(.201)	(.203)	(.171)	(.061)	(.087)	(.020)	(.040)
More than college degree	0.019	-0.256	-0.258	0.031	-0.058	-0.011	-0.004
	(.192)	(.205)	(.176)	(.059)	(.087)	(.020)	(.038)
Married household	0.463*	0.090	-0.050	-0.235***	0.129	-0.034	0.148***
	(.262)	(.231)	(.204)	(.074)	(.111)	(.025)	(.048)
Presence of kids under 18	0.066	-0.674***	-0.125	-0.060	0.309***	0.005	0.118***
	(.216)	(.231)	(.184)	(.066)	(.096)	(.022)	(.043)
Total household income	-0.004**	-0.001	-0.002**	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001**	0.001***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Housing unit location							
Located in suburb	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Region (ref. West)							
North	-0.321	-1.160***	-0.076	0.013	-0.643***	-0.097***	0.120**
	(.276)	(.320)	(.237)	(.084)	(.133)	(.028)	(.055)
South	-0.372	-0.442**	-0.169	0.176**	0.054	0.024	-0.025
	(.251)	(.223)	(.221)	(.079)	(.109)	(.026)	(.052)
Midwest	-0.071	-1.421***	-0.361	-0.039	-0.343***	-0.088***	0.148***
	(.263)	(.376)	(.258)	(.087)	(.128)	(.029)	(.057)
Intercept	-3.652***	-2.951***	-2.012***	0.182	-1.419***	0.877***	7.311***
	(.510)	(.476)	(.411)	(.153)	(.226)	(.0511)	(.100)
N	5205	5205	5205	5205	5205	5205	5205

***p<=.01; **p<=.05; *p<=.10
[1]OLS regression is used here.

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