
UNRAVELING THE PARADOX OF DEEPENING URBAN INEQUALITY: THE MULTI-CITY SURVEY OF URBAN EQUALITY

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In the wake of the civil disturbances in Los Angeles there is a pressing need for a better understanding of the sources, consequences and probable solutions to the ravages of urban inequality that have beset our nation's largest cities (3, 16, 17, 28, 29). Our work and that of other colleagues associated with the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty (CSUP) at UCLA addresses these issues on both the national (2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32) and local level (7, 13, 14, 18). The themes and concerns of our work culminate in a set of surveys that takes a multi-disciplinary and multi-ethnic approach to these issues. This project, generously funded by grants from the Ford Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation at the national level, and from several local funding sources, including the Haynes Foundation in Los Angeles, is part of a larger research initiative involving linked surveys of households and employers in four U.S. cities: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. The project involves 40 scholars at 22 universities who have agreed to undertake this collaborative research initiative. Research findings will be disseminated through working papers, conferences, articles, and in several book length manuscripts.

The purpose of the proposed survey is to gather data that will broaden our knowledge and understanding of how three sets of forces—labor market dynamics, racial attitudes and polarization, and racial residential segregation—interact to foster urban inequality in major metropolitan areas. What follows is a detailed description of the substantive areas of inquiry covered in the survey, with an emphasis on the Los Angeles Survey.

The survey will be administered to a stratified random sample of adults living in households in Los Angeles County. Our goal is to complete a total of 4,000 interviews with a multiethnic sample of Los Angelenos: 1,000 each of black, Latino, Asian American (principally Chinese and Korean), and white households. While many of the major empirical studies that have attempted to understand the new face of urban

poverty (i.e., the University of Chicago's Urban Poverty and Family Structure Project (36) and the The Boston Poverty Survey (33)) have sampled only from poor neighborhoods, this survey is unique in its emphasis on inequality rather than poverty. This will enable us to make statements about the relative impact of forces that generate not only poverty but affluence as well. The interviews will average 70-75 minutes in length.

Interviewers and respondents are matched by race/ethnicity and language in as many cases as possible. This is essential given evidence of race-of-interviewer effects. Previous research has shown that whites will often give more liberal responses to black interviewers and that for some racial questions (i.e., those that might involve expression of an anti-white attitude) blacks will respond more positively to white interviewers than to blacks. Given the ethnic diversity of our sample, the instrument was translated into Spanish, Korean, and several dialects of Chinese. To prevent the exclusion of monolingual Spanish, Chinese, and Korean speaking respondents, native speaking interviewers are used when needed.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Interest in urban inequality in the late 1980s and early 1990s has intensified among both scholars and policy makers as the gulf between the rich and poor has widened. The Los Angeles Survey on Urban Inequality will generate a body of research that will address important research and policy issues in the urban inequality debate by drawing on the unique economic, social, and demographic context of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. While much of the debate is hopelessly mired in biracial conceptions of urban inequality, the significance of this study is its multi-ethnic focus. Such a focus will shed light on the future racial and ethnic composition of America's largest urban centers, rather than on their previous black-white history.

Another weakness of previous research has been its preoccupation with singular focus explanations of urban inequality. This research will transcend such conceptions by exploring the complex interplay of three major forces — racial residential segregation, interethnic attitudes and polarization, and labor market dynamics — which contribute to the maintenance and growth of urban inequality in late 20th century Los Angeles. It is only within a multicultural and multivariate framework that explores how various forces, singularly and in concert, influence the placement of individuals and groups within the urban hierarchy can we begin to understand and, eventually, develop policy to ameliorate the worst features of urban inequality.

COMPONENTS OF THE SURVEY

Labor Market Dynamics: This section of the survey is designed to capture the "real world" experiences of minority workers and job seekers.

The primary objective will be to gather data that will broaden our understanding of the nature of labor market outcomes, that is, of what determines labor force participation, extent of employment, unemployment and earnings. In contrast to the Current Population Survey and other large scale surveys that contain a battery of questions which address labor market outcomes, this section of the Los Angeles Survey on Urban Inequality will gather more detailed information on the processes that surround entry into and exit from the labor market, including hiring, promotion, firing and quits. The following five areas organize this section:

Basic Labor Market Outcomes: earnings and employment, especially on current or last job; industry and occupation; context of job and skills required, etc.

Family and Neighborhood Effects: information on the structure of households, number of earners in household, and sources of income, including welfare

Employment Related Background Effects: health, disability, participation in the armed forces, teenage pregnancy, etc.; role of church, neighborhood organizations, and mentors; etc.

Search Behavior: Answers to the following questions will be sought: How did you get your job? What contacts or references did you use? Where did you search? If you quit, why? etc.

Perceptions of the Labor Market: Answers to the following questions will be sought: What kinds of jobs are out there? Where are the jobs located? How were you treated?

Interethnic Attitudes and Beliefs Previous research on interethnic attitudes typically focused on how the white majority feels about members of minority groups and on black-white relations (35). We thus know comparatively little about how members of different minority groups feel about one another or, for that matter, how whites feel about minority groups other than blacks. This section of the survey measures the attitudes and beliefs that whites, blacks, and Latinos hold about one another, especially as those beliefs may bear on experiences in the labor market or on related processes of residential segregation (7, 21). The primary objectives are: (1) to gather data on the content, level and nature of stereotypes about the traits of the major ethnic categories under examination; (2) to assess social distance preferences; (3), to assess beliefs about whether discrimination is viewed as a barrier to economic and residential mobility;

(4) to assess attitudes toward various strategies intended to improve the economic status and residential mobility of minorities (1, 8); and (5) to better contextualize information on interethnic attitudes by assessing group identity and attachments and embeddedness in ethnically homogeneous networks of interaction. We will be seeking information to address the following types of questions.

Are blacks, Latinos and Asians viewed by whites as lacking qualities that make for economic success or for good neighbors?

How do blacks and Latinos view one another? Do they accept the views of one another prevalent among Anglos? Do they adopt a posture of minority group unity by resisting negative images held by the white majority, or do they completely acquiesce to dominant outlooks?

Are stereotypes, whether held by whites, blacks or Latinos, categorical and extreme? Do they involve rational information processing and reason or prejudice and systematic bias?

Do blacks and Latinos expect potential employers or potential white neighbors to have biased and stereotyped expectations about them? If so, how do they behave to deflect, disconfirm, mitigate, or challenge such expectations?

How much social distance in terms of residential communities and interpersonal ties do whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians wish to maintain from one another?

Is discrimination seen as major impediment to economic and residential mobility? Do minorities think of discrimination as both more widespread and more systematic than do whites?

Does the expectation of confronting discrimination among blacks and Latinos discourage seeking certain types of jobs or housing in areas?

What are the social roots of interethnic attitudes and beliefs? Do individuals feel their own fate is linked to that of the ethnic groups to which they belong? Do they feel stronger emotional bonds to members of their own group than to out-group members?

Residential Segregation This section of the survey will build upon and expand the types of questions included in the 1976 Detroit-Area Study of racial residential segregation conducted by Farley and Schuman of the University of Michigan. While the Detroit-Area Survey focused solely on black-white residential segregation, the Los Angeles area survey will explore the issue of segregation in a multi-ethnic context. The issues we will explore include:

Do Anglos, Blacks and Latinos have accurate information about housing costs and other neighborhood characteristics for different parts of the metropolitan area?

Are neighborhoods or parts of the metropolitan area color coded? Are there areas that either Anglo, Black and Latinos perceive as unacceptable areas to live in?

What racial or ethnic mixes do Blacks, Latinos and Anglos (a) ideally prefer, (b) find tolerable or acceptable and (c) find intolerable or unacceptable? However, we will also probe reasons for the preferred racial mix (e.g., crime, drugs, gangs, school quality, city services, property values).

What information does Blacks, Latinos and Anglos have about access to residential finance?

Do Blacks, Latinos and Anglos perceive the ethnic and racial mix of their current neighborhoods to be changing?

KEY QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY THE RESEARCH

The survey will provide data that will enable us to test research hypotheses and address policy questions in the areas of labor markets, housing and intergroup relations, and the interconnections among these domains. In the labor market area, the results of the survey will enable us to address the following research questions/policy concerns:

Does job search behavior differ mainly along race or ethnic lines, neighborhood characteristics, or other individual factors (i.e., gender)? These answers will provide insights into group differences in reliance on formal versus informal channels of information in the job search process and on the possible contextual factors (e.g., residential segregation, size, composition and diversity of friendship networks) that affect labor market outcomes.

To what extent do perceptions of the type and range of labor market opportunities approximate the objective structure of metropolitan wide employment opportunities? Do these perceptions inform job search behavior, and if so, how? How do these perceptions vary by race and gender? Our working hypothesis is that the link between perceptions and actual behavior is stronger for whites than for blacks and Latinos. The survey will allow us to determine which of several factors (e.g., beliefs about employer preferences, commuting distance, reservation wages and conditions of work, etc.) might underlie such differences.

What characteristics commit an employee to a job? To what degree does reservation wages and conditions, commuting distance, employer attitudes, and alternative

income opportunities influence the decision to remain or leave a job? Do these vary by race and gender?

For residential segregation, the survey results will enable us to address the following issues:

To what extent are people willing to use residential mobility as a way to improve their economic status and does that differ by race and ethnicity? One might hypothesize that whites have greater ability than blacks and Latinos to move in search of employment. The answer to this question will have strong implications for the utility of the "people to jobs" versus the "jobs to people" strategies debated among policy analysts.

What are the major barriers to residential mobility in the metropolitan housing market? Is it the cost of housing, access to financing, perceptions of discrimination by realtors, anticipation of hostility by potential neighbors, or other neighborhood characteristics (e.g., schools, city services, etc.)? Do perceptions of the barriers vary by race and ethnicity? These findings could affect policy vis a vis lending institutions, real estate and insurance industries, delivery of city services, and enforcement of fair housing laws.

To what extent are whites, blacks, and Latinos willing to share residential space? To what extent is the racial tipping point still a relevant concept and if so, how does it operate in a multi-racial context? Answers to these questions will provide insights into the likely success of encouraging residential mobility as a policy strategy for achieving social and economic mobility for blacks and Latinos.

Regarding interracial attitudes and polarization we will be able to determine:

What are the dimensions, extent and sources of tensions between racial and ethnic groups? To what extent do they reflect perceptions of group competition and differential opportunities or group stereotyping and prejudice? These findings will have bearing on whether the target of policymakers' efforts to address issues of interethnic conflict should equalize groups' access to mainstream opportunities, educational programs to mitigate or eliminate negative group stereotypes, or both.

How do groups differ in their perceptions of whether and how government should address issues of racial and class inequality? What are the prospects of black-Latino coalitions on issues affecting both communities (e.g., affirmative action and anti-discrimination enforcement)? The findings here have implications for the viability of government efforts in the areas of employment, education, housing and criminal justice.

Finally, the Los Angeles Survey data will enable us to move beyond single factor to more complex explanations of contemporary urban inequality. Perhaps most important, we will be able to statistically assess how the forces of interethnic attitudes and polarization, racial residential segregation and labor market dynamics, through a fairly complex web of interactions, influence urban inequality. Empirical tests of these and alternative causal models will significantly enhance our ability to develop comprehensive policy prescriptions larger urban centers.

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