

# Perceiving the Metropolis: Seeing the City Through a Prism of Race

Maria Krysan, *University of Illinois at Chicago*

Michael Bader, *University of Michigan*

*Investigating the role of preferences in causing persistent patterns of racial residential segregation in the United States has a long history. In this paper, we bring a new perspective – and new data from the 2004 Detroit Area Study – to the question of how best to characterize black and white preferences toward living in neighborhoods with people of different races. White and black residents of the Detroit metropolitan area (n = 734) were asked in an area probability sample survey about their evaluations of 33 actual communities throughout their metro area. These evaluations are used as an indirect measure of racial residential preferences by viewing how race – both of the respondent and of the community – shapes them. We find modest racial agreement about which communities would be “seriously considered” and “never considered” as a place to live, but by and large perceptions of the metropolis are racialized. Whites are influenced by the percentage white in a community (net of the community’s social class characteristics) and very unlikely to consider communities where they are anything but the strong majority. African Americans are also influenced by race, but in different ways and less fundamentally: 1.) Communities with high percentages of African Americans are among those most likely to be “seriously considered,” but so are communities with just a handful of African Americans; 2.) African Americans are*

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Population Association of America in Philadelphia, PA. Reynolds Farley and Mick Couper, along with the first author, were the principal investigators of the 2004 Detroit Area Study. They, along with Elizabeth Bruch, Sapna Swaroop, James S. House, Jeffrey Morenoff and the first author’s writing group colleagues, Tyrone Forman, Amanda Lewis, Omar McRoberts and Beth Richie, also provided invaluable assistance, feedback and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Support for the data collection came from the National Science Foundation (SES-0317740), University of Michigan, Ford Foundation and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Data analysis was supported by Grant Number (1R03HD051677-01A1) from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The article’s contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Direct correspondence to Maria Krysan, Department of Sociology (m/c 312), University of Illinois at Chicago, 1007 W. Harrison Avenue, Chicago, IL 60707. E-mail: Krysan@uic.edu.*

*less likely to “never consider” all communities, and more likely than whites to consider both communities where they are in the majority and in the minority; 3.) African Americans are unaffected by a community’s percent white net of community social class characteristics. We place these results in the context of the debate about racial residential preferences, arguing for the importance of grounding our understanding – and measures – of racial residential preferences in the context of real urban landscapes.*

## Introduction

That race and housing are inextricably linked is clear from even a cursory look at the neighborhoods in our nation’s metropolitan areas. While racial residential segregation declined modestly over the past three decades, this change has occurred mainly in smaller and newer metropolitan areas (Farley and Frey 1994; Logan et al. 2004). Residential segregation, especially at the high levels persisting in Detroit, Chicago and other older and larger metropolises in the Midwest and Northeast, has been called a “structural lynchpin” of racial inequality (Bobo 1989).

The causes of racial residential segregation are complex, but sociologists and demographers typically focus on three main explanations, one of which is that segregation persists because of the preferences people hold about the racial composition of the neighborhoods in which they live.<sup>1</sup> The preferences of whites to not live in neighborhoods with more than about 20 percent African Americans, and African Americans’ preferences for a 50-50 or slight majority black neighborhood have been the basis of a long and controversial debate about their role in maintaining segregation. In essence, proponents of this position argue that if preferences for in-group presence in one’s neighborhood are patterned like this, then integration – or reductions in segregation – are unlikely (e.g., Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; Clark 1986; Fossett 2006).

A long line of research has investigated the implications of this preference structure for patterns of segregation. A now-classic article by Schelling (1971) demonstrated that even small differences in racial residential preferences could generate persistent and substantial racial residential segregation. Clark (1986, 1991, 1992) continued this tradition, drawing on survey data of racial residential preferences to make the case that preferences – as against discrimination – were largely responsible for sustaining segregation. The late 1990s brought a somewhat different emphasis. Rather than focusing on white preferences as critically important for persistent segregation, as Schelling did, Thernstrom and

Thernstrom (1997:229) observed the survey data on racial residential preferences and concluded, based on a thought experiment, that “The strong preference of blacks for living in neighborhoods that are half black constrain how much neighborhood integration can be achieved – to a quite surprising extent.” In a series of simulation exercises, Fossett (2006) essentially formalized the “thought experiment” described by Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1997) and concluded that segregation could persist at high levels in the absence of discrimination and in the presence of the kinds of ethnic preferences documented by survey data. Moreover, he concluded that it was especially the preferences of African Americans that were “segregation promoting.”<sup>2</sup>

Outside of academic research settings, Supreme Court justices have heralded this pattern of white and black preferences as one piece of evidence justifying the dismantling of court-mandated school desegregation plans (*Freeman v. Pitts* in Yinger 1995:119). The courts argued that these racial residential preferences set in motion “continuous and massive demographic shifts” that the courts could not hope to overcome with school desegregation efforts.

By and large, studies of the implications of the preferences of whites and blacks for sustaining segregation – whether they are theoretical musings, thought experiments or complex simulation exercises – all hinge critically on the notion that the preferences are much like those described above (50-50 for blacks; 80-20 for whites). While the debate about *if* preferences like this could sustain persistent patterns of segregation is deeply contested and widely discussed, comparatively little attention has been given to whether this characterization of preferences is an appropriate one to use in the real world of actual neighborhoods, communities and housing decisions.

An exception to this general neglect is a line of research that focuses on what underlies racial residential preferences. Specifically, Harris (1999, 2001) and to some extent Ellen (2000) ask whether *racial* residential preferences (particularly as typically measured and construed) are really about race – or if, perhaps, they are more about social class. This question flows directly from a critique of how racial residential preferences have been traditionally measured, but it also raises important theoretical and practical questions about how we interpret all indicators of *racial* residential preferences and how we address the question of what underlies these preferences.

Our purpose in this paper is to bring a new perspective – and new data – to bear on our understanding of the structure of white and black racial residential preferences. We do this by asking residents about their perceptions of large numbers of communities within their metropolitan area. We then use these perceptions of communities and link them to the racial composition of the communities to assess if and how community

evaluations are shaped and colored by race. Our purpose is twofold. First, we use this new approach to provide an alternate characterization of the structure of racial residential preferences. Given the centrality of this preference structure to debates about the causes of segregation, this exercise is more than methodological. In essence, we ask if the traditional measures of racial residential preferences are a relevant gauge of how people, acting in real worlds and real housing markets, feel about living in racially integrated or segregated communities. Second, we pay particular attention to the substantively important question of whether racial residential preferences are really about a community's racial composition, or if a community's social class drives people's perceptions.

## Background

### *Traditional Measures of Racial Residential Preferences*

The first systematic measures of racial residential preferences were developed by Farley and colleagues (1978) for the 1976 Detroit Area Study and have been replicated in recent years and different cities (MCSUI, DAS 2004). Using small cards with drawings of houses on them (see figures 1 and 2), survey respondents are presented with hypothetical neighborhoods that portray a limited number of levels of racial integration or segregation.

Although the results of this traditional measure vary somewhat across time and place, for the most part they show that whites are open to modest integration, but the majority objects to neighborhoods that are more than one-third African American. For example, in 2004, 78 percent of Detroit area whites said they were willing to live in a neighborhood that was 20 percent African American but this dropped to just 51 percent when African Americans represented a third of the houses in the neighborhood and 34 percent in a slight majority (53 percent) black neighborhood. Along with reports of other kinds of racial attitudes related to social distance (Schuman et al. 1997), trend data for Detroit show that these figures represent a softening of attitudes: Detroit area whites are more willing to consider integrated neighborhoods in 2004 as compared to 1976 (Farley et al. 1978, 1994).

African American preferences were measured somewhat differently. When asked to rank the five different neighborhoods on the showcards (see Figure 2) ranging from 7 percent black to 100 percent black, the 50-50 neighborhood was most often ranked as most attractive by Detroit-area African Americans in 1976, 1992 and 2004. In the most recent, 56 percent of African Americans ranked the 50-50 neighborhood as their first

Figure 1. Neighborhood Cards for Whites

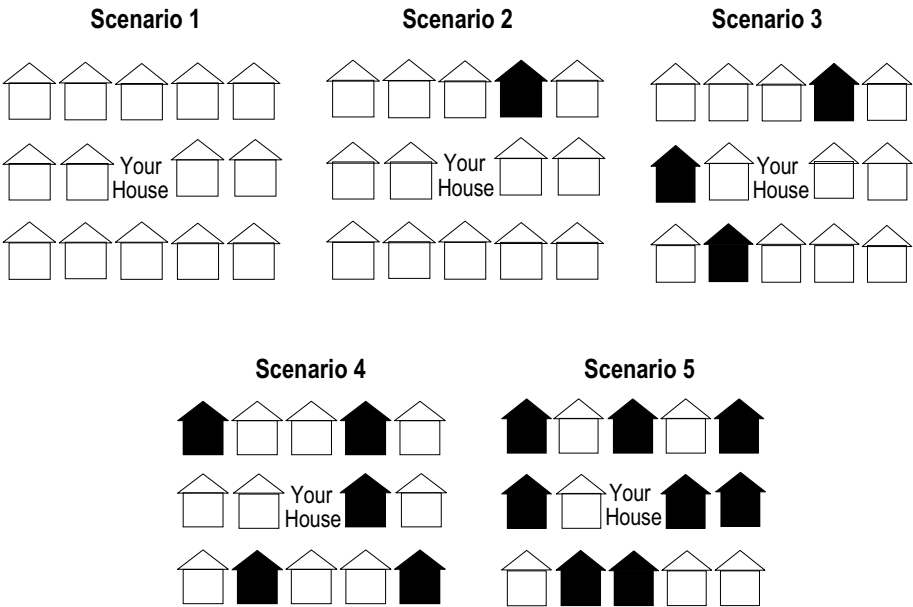
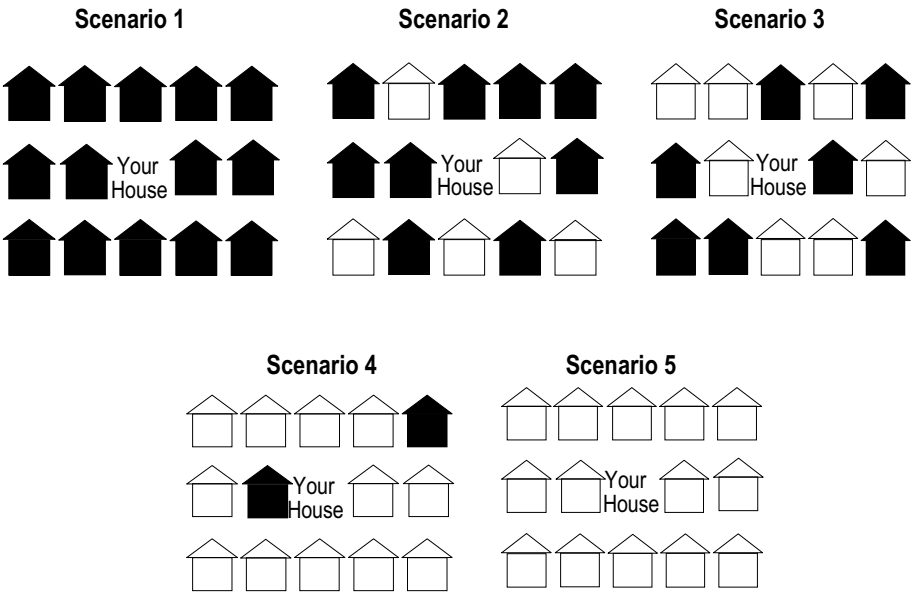


Figure 2. Neighborhood Cards for Blacks



choice. A less-often reported figure from these same Detroit data is that the vast majority of blacks (between 87 percent and 99 percent in 2004) said they were willing to live in the neighborhoods on the showcard that were 20 percent black, 53 percent black and 73 percent black (scenarios 2, 3 and 4 on Figure 2). Only all-black and all-white neighborhoods face any real resistance among African Americans: in 2004, 26 percent of African American Detroiters said they were unwilling to live in an all-black neighborhood, and 57 percent said they were unwilling to be the pioneer in an all-white neighborhood. Nevertheless, it is the preference for 50-50 neighborhoods that typically receives the most attention when black preferences are described. These have been the foundation of the thought experiments and simulation studies (Fossett 2006; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997).

Given the centrality of survey findings like these in the debate about the significance of preferences in shaping patterns of segregation, it is noteworthy that there has been relatively little attention paid to how appropriate it is to apply the findings from the hypothetical neighborhood cards technique to questions about housing decisions in actual urban settings. That is, although the hypothetical neighborhood cards technique has provided valuable information about patterns of preferences and useful insights into the demographic, social and social psychological foundations of this kind of racial attitude, it is not clear whether we should take the exact preferences from these studies at face value and apply them to real world urban contexts.

As noted above, one key theoretical question that has been raised – and which flows in part from the manner by which racial residential preferences have traditionally been measured – is the degree to which racial residential preferences are about race as compared to social class. For example, Harris (1999, 2001) suggests that preferences to avoid integrated or black neighborhoods are not the result of a specifically racial animus of whites toward blacks, but rather that a neighborhood's racial composition serves as a proxy for negative neighborhood characteristics – in particular those associated with social class. Given that the traditional hypothetical neighborhood measurement tool identified only racial composition, this method is ill-equipped to directly answer this important question. Ellen's (2000) neighborhood stereotyping hypothesis makes a related argument.

Measures of racial residential preferences have in some cases become more methodologically advanced and nuanced in the decades since its introduction, in part to respond to this weakness. Most recently, Emerson et al. (2001) conducted a factorial experiment in which the descriptions of the neighborhoods presented to respondents included several

neighborhood features in addition to racial composition, such as property values, taxes, school quality and crime rates. They found that even in the presence of controls for these characteristics, race of the neighborhood had an independent effect on neighborhood desirability for whites.

Nevertheless, although an improvement, most studies of racial residential preferences still rely on questions about *hypothetical* neighborhoods. Thus, the question remains: Is it appropriate to apply, at face value, these preference structures to causal models about persistent patterns of segregation? For example, there may be little connection between the kinds of hypothetical neighborhoods presented to respondents in the showcards and the options available in the actual metropolitan areas in which people reside. Indeed, the “50-50” neighborhood that is especially attractive among African Americans is a rarity in the United States (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001). In essence, the hypothetical neighborhood cards technique emphasizes the ideal world – it is what people say they would like if there were no constraints, and they were not held to the options that exist. Housing choices, however, are made very much in the real world.

One final shortcoming of the traditional measure is the potential social desirability bias of direct measures of racial attitudes. The increasing openness to integration among whites may be due in part to changes in racial norms in the United States (Schuman et al. 1997). Whites may not so much have changed their views as changed what they think they ought to say out loud (as they must do with this technique) to an interviewer when directly asked about living with African Americans. Thus, there may be response bias in the direction of over-stating openness to living with African Americans (Krysan 1994; Schuman et al. 1997).

### ***Reactions to Real Communities as a Gauge of Racial Residential Preferences***

One solution that overcomes some of the limitations of the hypothetical neighborhood card technique and which may provide useful indicators of racial residential preferences as they apply to actual urban contexts is to ground the measure in the realities of the places in which people live. In other words, ask people about real places and real neighborhoods and whether they would consider (or never consider) living there. Two studies from the early 1980s established that people hold perceptions of the metropolitan areas in which they live. Logan and Collver (1983) and Semyonov and Kraus (1982) both showed that places have reputations, and there is a fair amount of social consensus with respect to “good” and “bad” places to live. However, the analyses focused on consensus along lines of social class and did not examine the possibility that this consensus might break down along racial lines.



More recently, explicit analyses of how race and racial considerations shape people's views of the metropolitan areas in which they reside have been conducted using the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality. Residents of four metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit and Los Angeles) were asked to evaluate five to seven communities as places they found desirable or undesirable. In analyses of these data, Charles (2001) and Krysan (2002) find evidence of racial differences in rating the desirability of communities. Whites tended to find communities with large proportions of minorities the most undesirable while minorities found these neighborhoods to be the most desirable. African Americans rated communities with a significant range of racial compositions (from overwhelmingly white to racially mixed) as desirable and, with a few exceptions, rated all of the communities as more desirable than did whites (Krysan 2002).

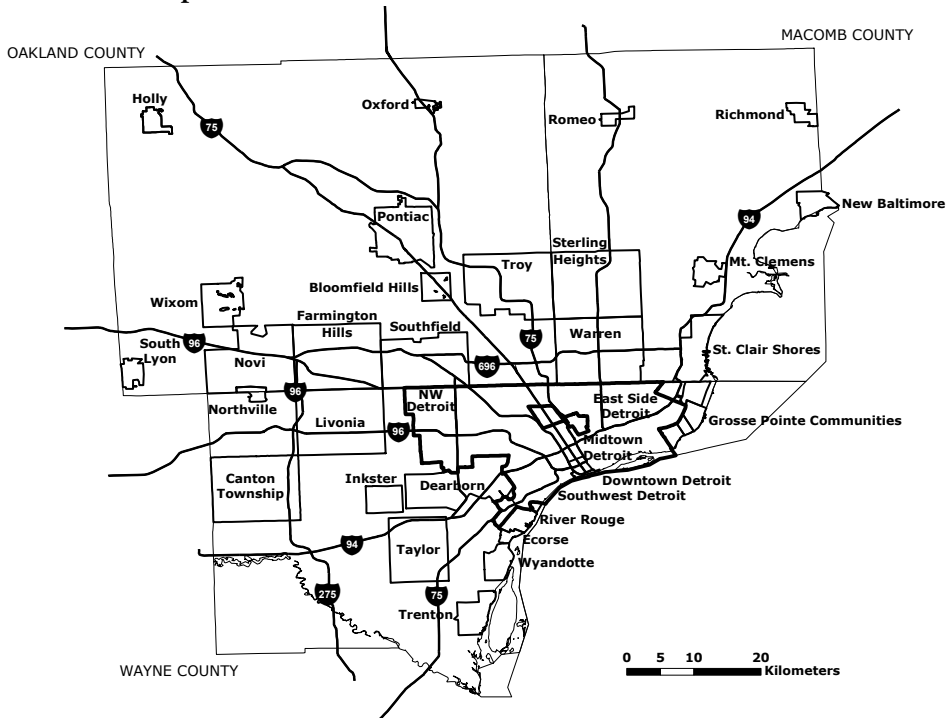
The MCSUI data, as a tool to infer racial residential preferences is limited by the small number of communities assessed within each metropolitan area. This means that formal statistical tests of how racial composition – especially in contrast to social class characteristics – shaped perceptions of communities were not possible. In addition, respondents were asked about the “desirability” or the “undesirability” of the community, but not explicitly whether they would seriously consider or never consider living there.

Because we are using evaluations of actual communities as our window into racial residential preferences, we are by definition complicating our task. That is, real communities, unlike hypothetical neighborhoods, have real histories, geographies, amenities, taxes, property value trends, schools, housing stock, shopping, housing costs and a myriad of other characteristics. This is both a benefit and a liability. It is a benefit because it more closely reflects reality; it is a liability because the understandings and impressions of a community are likely to be multi-faceted and influenced by any number of factors. While it is not our overarching goal in this analysis to examine the impact of all of the different neighborhood features – nor is it feasible given our data constraints – our analyses control as well as possible for these other factors to allow us to isolate the impact of racial composition and therefore use community perceptions as a measure of *racial* residential preferences. Of primary interest is the social class characteristics of the community,<sup>3</sup> but the analysis also includes controls for geography in part because intra-metropolitan moves are more likely to take place closer to one's current residence.

Our research uses this new approach to provide a more grounded understanding of racial residential preferences. We do this through three inter-related analyses. First, we ask if blacks and whites hold different preferences about which communities they would and would not consider living in. Second, we develop an indicator of racial residential preferences



**Figure 3. Map Identifying the 33 Communities Labeled on the Survey Instrument Map**



by characterizing the racial composition of the mix of communities that individuals would and would not consider. Third, we ask whether these community preferences are driven by the racial composition of a community above and beyond its social class characteristics.

## Data and Methods

### Data

This analysis is based on data from the 2004 DAS, which is a multi-stage area probability sample of adults aged 21 and older living in households in the Tri-County area (Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 734 respondents from April through October 2004 and the study achieved a 56 percent response rate.<sup>4</sup> African Americans and those living in racially mixed neighborhoods were over-sampled. The survey was conducted primarily as a computer assisted personal interview; however, for one portion of the survey, respondents

were given a booklet of colorful maps showing major roads and 33 communities in the Tri-County Area. Figure 3 shows a map similar to the one developed for use in our survey. On the survey map, next to each of 33 areas labeled, there were boxes that allowed respondents to mark any community/neighborhood that corresponded to their answer to a particular map question. The first map asked respondents to identify any communities that they “don’t know anything about.”<sup>5</sup> Our central data come from the fourth and fifth maps,<sup>6</sup> which asked respondents to identify the communities where they would “seriously consider” looking for a house or apartment and where they would “never consider” looking for a house or apartment, respectively. In this paper, we treat whether a respondent identifies the various communities as one they would “never consider” or would “seriously consider” as a measure of residential preferences. By then examining these evaluations through the lens of race, we argue that we can also view them as expressions of *racial* residential preferences.

### *The Detroit Context and the Map Communities*

The Detroit metropolitan area has experienced a great deal of change and migration since the end of World War II (Farley et al. 2000; Sugrue 1996). The primary demographic change has involved large numbers of whites leaving the city and moving to the suburbs. The contrast in the population’s racial composition between the city of Detroit and its suburbs is stark. In 2005, the overall racial composition of the Detroit metropolitan area<sup>7</sup> was 67 percent white, 26 percent African American, and 3 percent Hispanic. But 97 percent of the white population lived outside the city of Detroit while 68 percent of the African American population lived within the city of Detroit. Based on 2000 census data, the index of dissimilarity for the Detroit metropolitan area is the highest in the nation (Lewis Mumford Center 2001).

Not unexpectedly, suburban growth began adjacent to Detroit, and has most extensively (though not exclusively) expanded to the north and west. Today, there is an inner-ring of older suburbs that are primarily white, but they include a handful of racially integrated areas such as the middle-to-upper-class suburb of Southfield and the predominately black working class enclave of Inkster, a town originally established for black workers laboring in Ford’s factories. The metropolitan area then expanded beyond these inner-ring suburbs to new areas to the north and west of the city of Detroit – which we refer to as middle-ring suburbs – and which are generally affluent compared to other suburbs. Beyond the middle-ring suburbs are the “ex-urbs,” or suburban communities that are quite distant from the city of Detroit. These are continuing to expand toward the north and west of Detroit and are overwhelmingly white. South of Detroit, along

the Detroit River, are the “downriver suburbs,” which are close to the main manufacturing plants of the Ford Motor Company. These are a mixture of industrial and residential land use and the housing stock is comprised of the modest working class homes of industrial laborers. The 33 communities on the map have examples of each of these different types of communities – as well as five distinct neighborhoods within the city of Detroit itself. All the communities were selected to be recognizable within the Tri-County area and to include different socio-economic and racial compositions, histories of racial animosities and geographical proximity to the city of Detroit. For community demographic characteristics of the 33 communities, see the appendix.

Because the map identified only a subset of all possible places, it is useful to characterize the kinds of communities included on the map as compared to the overall Tri-County Area. Treating the city of Detroit as a single Census Designated Place, and treating the multiple Grosse Pointes as one community, the map identifies 29 distinct places. The vast majority – 76 percent – are predominately white (80 percent or more), 3 percent are predominately black (80 percent or more), and 21 percent are racially mixed (20 percent or more of at least two racial groups). Considering *all* CDPs in the three counties, about 88 percent are predominately white, 2 percent are predominately black, and just 9 percent are racially mixed; another 2 percent are some “other” racial mix. Thus, our 29 places somewhat “over-represent” racially mixed places and “under-represent” predominately white communities.

### *Measures of Independent Variables*

We use a self-reported measure of respondent race permitting individuals to select more than one category, though very few did ( $n = 29$ ). Respondents were also asked to self-report on Hispanic origin. Combining the responses to these two questions, we classified individuals as non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white. Respondents were regarded as white only if they did not identify as being of Hispanic origin or report that they were of Arab, Chaldean or Persian descent.<sup>8</sup> In addition, where respondents reported an “other” category, and also provided a description which had recognizable racial signifiers, we assigned appropriate codes (e.g., Italian or Irish were coded as white). Only non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites are used in this analysis because there were insufficient cases to allow for analyses of other racial/ethnic groups. For the multivariate models, respondent education is measured with three dummy variables, with one year of college or less as the reference category. Income was measured by four dummy variables (with a reference category of \$80,000 or more annual family income). Stata’s impute procedure was

used to impute missing data on income since it was the only variable with very much missing data (10 percent).<sup>9</sup> Life course and demographic controls include respondent's age and gender, the presence of children under 18 years of age<sup>10</sup> and a dichotomous variable identifying whether the respondent is currently married. We also included a measure of the number of years the respondent has lived in the Detroit metro area. For the community level variables used in the multi-level models, we draw on the 2000 Census to identify the percentage of the population that is non-Hispanic white, as well as controls for the total population, percentage of owner-occupied homes, median housing value,<sup>11</sup> distance from the centroid of the respondent's block-group to the centroid of the community being rated, and the distance from Detroit's city hall to the centroid of the community being rated.

### *The Analytic Methods*

In order to address our first research question about whether blacks and whites have compatible evaluations – or preferences – with respect to the various communities in the Detroit metropolitan area, we calculate the percentage of respondents (separately for blacks and whites) who identified a particular community as one they would seriously consider or would never consider and then assess racial differences in these levels. We also conduct logistic regression analyses to determine whether these racial differences disappear after controlling for the individual level characteristics listed above. Then, as a summary measure, we rank order the communities from the community that is most often selected (in the aggregate) to the community that is least often selected. This ranking is done separately for black and white respondents. We use these rankings to calculate a Spearman's rank order correlation allowing us to assess whether the relative aggregate rankings of the communities are the same or different for blacks and whites.

Second, to move beyond a description of the compatibility of general community evaluations between whites and blacks to the use of these evaluations as an indicator of racial residential preferences, we classify each of the 33 communities into one of seven categories based on their racial composition as reported in the 2000 U.S. Census:

1. All white (n = 19): communities where 85 percent or more of its residents is white, and there is not more than 10 percent of any other single racial/ethnic group;
2. Mostly white (n = 4): communities where 70 percent or more of the residents is white and

- less than 25 percent any single other racial/ethnic group;
3. All black ( $n = 2$ ): communities where 85 percent or more of its residents is black, and no more than 10 percent any single other racial/ethnic group;
  4. Mostly black ( $n = 2$ ): communities where 70 percent or more of the residents is black and less than 25 percent any single other racial/ethnic group;
  5. Black/White Mixture with White Majority ( $n = 2$ ): communities where 50-69 percent of the residents is white and 11-44 percent is black.
  6. Black/White Mixture with Black Majority ( $n = 2$ ): communities where 50-69 percent of the residents is African American and 11-44 percent is white;
  7. Three-Group Mixture ( $n = 2$ ): communities where three racial/ethnic groups have populations in excess of 10 percent.

We treat each of the seven categories as dummy variables and first examine the percentage of whites and blacks who would or would not consider each “type” of community. Then we use logistic regression models to determine if race of respondent predicts the likelihood of seriously considering or never considering a particular neighborhood type, net of respondent’s background or social class characteristics.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we create a summary measure that categorizes each respondent depending on the racial composition of the set of communities they selected as ones they would “seriously consider.”

Third, in order to test whether respondent reactions to communities are based on racial composition – net of a community’s social class characteristics – we specified multi-level models (one for “seriously consider” and a second for “never consider”) where responses to communities are nested within individuals. Thus, the dependent variable is composed of the set of answers a respondent gave for all 33 communities. For example, for the “seriously consider” question, there are a maximum of 33 repeated independent observations of any given respondent’s yes or no answer to whether he or she would “seriously consider” a community.<sup>13</sup> A separate and identical model is specified for the “never consider” dimension. Because each of these 33 evaluations is a response to a specific community, we can then include in the first level, as predictor variables, the community characteristics described above. The second level of the model then includes controls for the individual

level characteristics (age, sex, homeownership, education, presence of children under age 18 in the household, marital status, number of years lived in the metropolitan area and family income).<sup>14</sup>

We estimate two models for each question (seriously consider and never consider). In the first model, we assess the impact of community racial composition and community social class on whether respondents would seriously consider or never consider a community. Therefore, we model the log-odds of person  $j$  indicating that they endorse a question (seriously consider or never consider) for community  $i$  as follows:

$$\ln \left[ \frac{P_{\text{preference}}}{1 - P_{\text{preference}}} \right] = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0R}W_{Rj} + \sum \gamma_{0C}W_{Cj} + \sum \gamma_{0D}W_{Dj} + \gamma_{r0}X_{rij} + \gamma_{c0}X_{cij} + \sum \gamma_{d0}X_{dij} + u_{0j} + u_{rj}X_{rij} + u_{cj}X_{cij}$$

where the respondent-level effects in the model are as follows:  $\gamma_{0R}$  is the effect of the race,  $W_{0Rj}$ , of respondent  $j$ ;  $\gamma_{0C}$  is the effect of the social class,  $W_{0Cj}$ , of respondent  $j$ <sup>15</sup>;  $\gamma_{0D}$  are the effects of other demographic characteristics,  $W_{0Dj}$ , of person,  $j$ , on selecting a community. The respondent-level effects (the  $\gamma_0$ s) in this model only control for the log-odds that a person with those characteristics (the  $W$ s) will select *any* community; in other words, we are controlling for the differential rate at which respondents with different demographic characteristics select communities. The community-level effects in the model are as follows:  $\gamma_{rj}$  is the effect of racial composition,  $X_{rij}$ , of community,  $i$  for person  $j$ ;  $\gamma_{cj}$  is the social class,  $X_{cij}$ , of community  $i$  for person  $j$  centered around the overall mean of community social class; and  $\gamma_{dj}$  are the effects of the other characteristics of community  $i$  for person  $j$ , described above. This model also allows for variation of the effect of community racial and social class composition across people by adding the random effects,  $u_{rj}$  and  $u_{cj}$ , respectively for person  $j$ . Additionally, we add a random term,  $u_{0j}$ , which is the residual for person  $j$ .

The second model tests the impact of the cross-level interaction between the respondent's own race and the racial composition of the community as well as the respondents' own social class and the social class of the community. We do this by modeling the slope of the community racial composition (measured as percent non-Hispanic white) by the respondent's race (i.e., if the respondent is white). We similarly model the slope of community economic class (measured as median household

$$\ln \left[ \frac{P_{\text{preference}}}{1 - P_{\text{preference}}} \right] = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0R}W_{Rj} + \sum \gamma_{0C}W_{Cj} + \sum \gamma_{0D}W_{Dj} + \gamma_{r0}X_{rij} + \gamma_{rR}X_{rij}W_{Rj} + \gamma_{c0}X_{cij} + \sum \gamma_{cC}X_{cij}W_{Cj} + \sum \gamma_{d0}X_{dij} + u_{0j} + u_{rj}X_{rij} + u_{cj}X_{cij}$$

where  $\gamma_{rR}$  is the interaction of the racial composition of community  $i$ ,  $X_{rij}$ , and race of respondent  $j$ ,  $W_{Rj}$ , and  $\gamma_{cC}$  is the interaction of the economic class of community  $i$ ,  $X_{cij}$ , and the economic class of respondent  $j$ ,  $W_{Cj}$ .<sup>16</sup> These "cross-level interactions" allow us to test whether whites and

**Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Would “Seriously” and “Never” Consider Searching for a House or Apartment in a Community, by Race**

| Community                           | Seriously Consider |                      | Never Consider |                      | (n)   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------|
|                                     | White (%)          | African American (%) | White (%)      | African American (%) |       |
| <i>City of Detroit</i>              |                    |                      |                |                      |       |
| Northwest Detroit                   | 2                  | 33 ***               | 77             | 18 ***               | (542) |
| Southwest Detroit                   | 0                  | 8 ***                | 82             | 46 ***               | (512) |
| Midtown Detroit                     | 0                  | 18 ***               | 76             | 23 ***               | (534) |
| Downtown Detroit                    | 3                  | 24 ***               | 75             | 27 ***               | (583) |
| East Side Detroit                   | 1                  | 22 ***               | 82             | 44 ***               | (527) |
| <i>Inner-ring Suburbs</i>           |                    |                      |                |                      |       |
| St. Clair Shores                    | 17                 | 11                   | 41             | 32                   | (480) |
| Grosse Pointe Communities           | 7                  | 18 **                | 48             | 23 **                | (506) |
| Livonia                             | 16                 | 16                   | 36             | 27                   | (547) |
| Warren                              | 13                 | 14                   | 45             | 35                   | (560) |
| Dearborn                            | 10                 | 16                   | 57             | 39 **                | (564) |
| Southfield                          | 6                  | 40 ***               | 50             | 16 ***               | (594) |
| Inkster                             | 2                  | 10 *                 | 77             | 43 ***               | (482) |
| <i>Middle-ring Suburbs</i>          |                    |                      |                |                      |       |
| Bloomfield Hills                    | 21                 | 29                   | 35             | 19 *                 | (538) |
| Troy                                | 23                 | 21                   | 33             | 19 *                 | (536) |
| Sterling Heights                    | 21                 | 17                   | 36             | 28                   | (534) |
| Novi                                | 23                 | 16                   | 27             | 23                   | (499) |
| Farmington Hills                    | 24                 | 35 *                 | 30             | 17 *                 | (554) |
| Pontiac                             | 3                  | 7                    | 60             | 41 **                | (532) |
| <i>Downriver Suburbs</i>            |                    |                      |                |                      |       |
| Taylor                              | 6                  | 10                   | 68             | 43 ***               | (463) |
| River Rouge                         | 2                  | 3                    | 81             | 49 ***               | (434) |
| Ecorse                              | 1                  | 5 *                  | 80             | 48 ***               | (411) |
| Wyandotte                           | 7                  | 3                    | 57             | 47                   | (379) |
| Trenton                             | 7                  | 5                    | 48             | 31 *                 | (336) |
| <i>Northern and Western Ex-urbs</i> |                    |                      |                |                      |       |
| Holly                               | 17                 | 7                    | 37             | 41                   | (324) |
| Oxford                              | 25                 | 3 ***                | 34             | 37                   | (276) |
| Richmond                            | 22                 | 2 ***                | 34             | 30                   | (230) |
| Romeo                               | 33                 | 5 ***                | 33             | 45                   | (316) |
| Mt. Clemens                         | 16                 | 9                    | 40             | 31                   | (471) |
| New Baltimore                       | 17                 | 7 *                  | 38             | 40                   | (326) |
| South Lyon                          | 9                  | 4                    | 32             | 37                   | (386) |
| Northville                          | 21                 | 10 *                 | 26             | 30                   | (453) |
| Canton                              | 14                 | 22                   | 39             | 27                   | (414) |
| Wixom                               | 15                 | 9                    | 38             | 36                   | (354) |

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  <sup>a</sup>Data include responses only if the respondent did not indicate that they “didn’t know anything” about the community.



blacks respond differently to the percentage of the population that is non-Hispanic white and to see if people with different incomes respond to the median household income differently. Again, we leave the random effects on the slopes for community racial composition,  $u_{ij}$ , and community social class,  $u_{cj}$ , and overall random effect,  $u_{0j}$ .

## Results

### *Racial Differences in Reactions to Communities*

#### *Do blacks and whites agree on where they would seriously consider moving?*

On average, Detroit residents identified about 3.5 communities where they would “seriously consider” moving; African Americans identified slightly more than whites (4.0 vs. 3.3), a difference that is not statistically significant ( $p = .112$ ). In the first two columns in Table 1, we report the percentage of whites and African Americans who would “seriously consider” looking for a place to live in each community. These range from a low of 0 percent to a high of 25 percent for whites and a much greater range from 0 percent to 40 percent for African Americans.

Blacks and whites are equally likely to “seriously consider” more than one-half ( $n = 18$ ) of the communities. These communities include a number of inner-ring, middle-ring, and downriver suburbs, all of which are mostly or all white communities. There are nine communities that blacks are more likely than whites to seriously consider—and they include all the neighborhoods in the city of Detroit, the majority black suburb of Inkster, the racially mixed communities of Southfield and Ecorse, and the predominately white suburbs of Farmington Hills and the Grosse Pointe Communities. Whites are more likely than blacks to seriously consider six of the northern and western ex-urbs, all of which are overwhelmingly white communities.

Despite this overlap in levels of selecting various communities as ones to “seriously consider,” the same communities do not make it to the top (and bottom) of whites and blacks lists of “seriously consider” communities. The Spearman rank order correlation between the rank order list (from most to least likely to seriously consider) of whites and blacks is just  $-.06$ ; a correlation that is not statistically significant.

#### *Do blacks and whites agree on where they would never consider looking for housing?*

The list of communities where any particular respondent would “never consider” is, on average, much longer than the list of those they would “seriously consider.” Detroit area residents would “never consider,” on average, 15 communities. And, unlike the case for the “seriously

consider" question, there is a statistically significant Spearman's rank order correlation (.41;  $p < .01$ ) between the relative ranking of blacks and whites. Thus, in the aggregate, whites and blacks consider undesirable – relatively speaking – quite similar communities. As is evident in the third and fourth columns in Table 1, the unpopular communities include in particular the downriver suburbs of River Rouge and Ecorse, as well as Southwest Detroit, East Detroit, Pontiac, Inkster, Dearborn, and Taylor.

Despite this fairly substantial *relative* agreement about which communities are likely to be "never considered," whites and blacks are nevertheless quite different on this question. This is revealed in two ways. First, whites simply rule out far more of these 33 communities than do African Americans (mean = 18 for whites and mean = 13 for African Americans ( $p < .001$ )). Second, in 17 of the 33 communities there are racial differences in the likelihood of saying one would "never consider" a community; in all 17, it is whites who are more likely to "never consider" the community. In some cases these differences are quite dramatic. For example, even though Southwest Detroit ranks very low for *both* whites and blacks, fully 82 percent of whites say they would "never consider" it; for African Americans, this figure is just 46 percent ( $p < .001$ ).

*A Portrait of the Racial Characteristics of Communities Detroiters Will "Never Consider" and "Seriously Consider"*

Our second analysis asks the question: to what extent do whites and blacks "never consider" or "seriously consider" communities with various racial compositions (all white, mostly white, mixed, etc.) and, when considering all of the communities that any given respondent will "seriously consider," what are the racial features of the set of communities? Table 2 shows that it is the all-white communities that are most frequently seriously considered by whites – 71 percent of whites said they would "seriously consider" at least one of the all-white communities. The next most frequently "seriously considered" community type was "mostly white." Fewer than 7 percent of whites said they would "seriously consider" any of the remaining five community types.

Our picture of racial preferences is quite different for African Americans. At least one in four African Americans would "seriously consider" five of the seven different community types: all white, all black, mostly white, mostly black, and mixed black-white with majority black. Thus, whereas whites' pool of "seriously consider" communities is limited to only those where whites predominate, African Americans in quite substantial numbers would seriously consider a variety of different communities

One last way to examine these basic racial residential preferences is to consider the complete set of communities that any given respondent identifies as ones they would seriously consider, and ask whether any

Table 2: Percentages, Logistic Odds Ratios and Multinomial Logistic Odds Ratios of Race on “Seriously Considering” Communities of Different Racial Compositions

|   | Percentage |            | Odds Ratio of Non-Hispanic White |                            |
|---|------------|------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
|   | Blacks     | Whites     | No Controls                      | With Controls <sup>a</sup> |
| <b>SERIOUSLY CONSIDER</b>                                   |            |            |                                  |                            |
| <b>Panel A</b>  |            |            |                                  |                            |
| <i>Selected at least one community that is<sup>b</sup>:</i> |            |            |                                  |                            |
| All White   | 57.5       | 71.1*      | 1.824*                           | 1.953*                     |
| All Black   | 26.5       | 1.9***     | .054***                          | .051***                    |
| Mostly White  | 45.7       | 42.7 n.s.  | .884 n.s.                        | .784 n.s.                  |
| Mostly Black  | 38.3       | 3.5***     | .058***                          | .054***                    |
| Mixed BW White Majority                                     | 4.1        | 1.9 n.s.   | .458 n.s.                        | .631 n.s.                  |
| Mixed BW Black Majority                                     | 40         | 6.5***     | .104***                          | .114***                    |
| Mixed Three Groups  | 12.1       | 3.5***     | .26**                            | .233***                    |
| <b>Panel B</b>  |            |            |                                  |                            |
| <i>Selected communities that are<sup>c</sup>:</i>           |            |            |                                  |                            |
| Majority own race only                                      | 10.2       | 65.77***   | (reference)                      | (reference)                |
| Majority other race only                                    | 17.5       | .51***     | .005***                          | .004***                    |
| Both majority-own and majority other                        | 55.51      | 10.52***   | .294***                          | .032***                    |
| None on Map   | 16.8       | 23.19 n.s. | .214**                           | .257*                      |

\* $p < .05$     \*\* $p < .01$     \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Controls are included for age, sex, education, income, current marital status and years lived in the metro area.

<sup>b</sup>Odds ratios reported are for logistic regression of selection of community type.

<sup>c</sup>Odds ratios are reported for multinomial logistic regression comparing selection of community type compared to Majority Own Race Only community type.

of these are communities with different racial compositions, or if the communities are all of similar racial compositions (e.g., do whites look only in majority white communities, or do they look in some that are majority white and others not majority white?). The second panel of Table 2 shows that 66 percent of whites would “seriously consider” *only* those communities where their own racial group dominates. This is true of just 10 percent of African American respondents. In other words, among the mix of communities whites would “seriously consider,” the majority have in their mix only communities that are at least 50 percent white. Just 10 percent of African Americans would “seriously consider” only communities with at least 50 percent African American residents. Rather, African Americans are most likely to “seriously consider” a mix of communities, including those where blacks predominate and where whites predominate. Combining the percentage of African Americans who would “seriously consider” a mix of communities with those who would seriously consider *only* those where *whites* dominated accounts for nearly

three-quarters of all African Americans. Controlling for a respondent's background characteristics does not change the racial differences in the likelihood of seriously considering the various community types, as is evident in a comparison of columns 4 and 5 on Table 2.

*Are these racial preferences or just social class preferences?*

One of the central critiques of the hypothetical neighborhood card technique is that the exercise specified only a neighborhood's racial composition – and was silent on the question of the other characteristics of the community – thus making it possible that what were thought to be racial residential preferences might be influenced by presumptions on the part of respondents about the associated social class characteristics of these hypothetical neighborhoods. The problem is perhaps even more severe when we use real communities as our measure of racial residential preferences; these are communities with a whole range of characteristics – including among them a particular social class makeup.

Thus, in our third analysis, after we control for social class characteristics of the *communities themselves*, does the community's racial composition cease to influence how respondents react to it? In Table 3, the results of this test are reported using hierarchical logistic regression models where the dependent variable can be understood as the likelihood that a respondent will "seriously consider" up to 33 communities (where the yes/no response to the community comprises a series of independent repeated observations that, together, constitute our dependent variable).

*Seriously Consider Looking for Housing*

Model 1 in Table 3 shows the odds ratios for a hierarchical logistic regression that models whether a respondent would "seriously consider" a community as a function of both community- and individual-level factors (levels 1 and 2, respectively). The odds ratios represent the increase in the odds that a community is selected (the dependent variable) with a one-unit increase in the independent variable. The level two (individual) odds ratios represent the effect of the individual characteristics on the odds of selecting a community.<sup>17</sup>

Before turning to the key independent variables of interest (community level racial characteristics) we note briefly the results for the individual level (level two) variables. First, whites overall are less likely to select *any* community as one they would seriously consider, regardless of the characteristics of the community. In addition, homeowners are less likely to select communities that they would "seriously consider."

The level one (community) variables in this model represent the characteristics of communities that contribute to the community being more (or less) likely to be selected. Communities that are larger and

Table 3: Hierarchical Logistic Regression Odds Ratios for “Seriously” and “Never” Considering Communities

|   | Seriously Consider |          | Never Consider |           |
|---|--------------------|----------|----------------|-----------|
|   | Model 1            | Model 2  | Model 3        | Model 4   |
| <b>LEVEL 1 (Community Preference)</b>               |                    |          |                |           |
| Total Population (in 1,000s) <sup>a</sup>           | 1.008***           | 1.009*** | .998           | .997*     |
| Percent Non-Hispanic White                          | 1.022***           | .995     | .982***        | 1.003     |
| Interaction:  |                    |          |                |           |
| x Non-Hispanic White Respondent                     |                    | 1.044*** |                | .973***   |
| Percent Owner-Occupied <sup>a</sup>                 | .975***            | .974***  | 1.012**        | 1.015***  |
| Median Home Value (in \$1,000s) <sup>a</sup>        | 1.005***           | 1.002    | .992***        | .998      |
| Interaction:  |                    |          |                |           |
| x \$20,000-\$39,999                                 |                    | 1.001    |                | 1.000     |
| x \$40,000-\$79,999                                 |                    | 1.003    |                | .996*     |
| x \$80,000 or more                                  |                    | 1.005    |                | .994**    |
| Distance from Detroit (in km)                       | 1.083***           | 1.091*** | .944***        | .949***   |
| Distance from Detroit (in km) Squared               | 1.000              | 1.000    | 1.000          | 1.000     |
| Distance from Community (in km)                     | .856***            | .859***  | 1.108***       | 1.087***  |
| Distance from Community (in km) Squared             | 1.001***           | 1.001*** | .999***        | .999**    |
| Percent of Housing Units Built 1970 or After        | .999               | .998     | .998           | .998      |
| <b>LEVEL 2 (Individual Characteristics)</b>         |                    |          |                |           |
| Non-Hispanic White                                  | .517**             | .032***  | 3.108***       | 15.716*** |
| Age <sup>a</sup>                                    | .987               | .985     | 1.014          | 1.020     |
| Sex   | .972               | .989     | 1.009          | .956      |
| Owns Home   | .543*              | .542*    | .983           | .954      |
| Education   |                    |          |                |           |
| Less than H.S. Degree                               | .989               | 1.009    | .706           | .645      |
| H.S. Degree or G.E.D., < 1 Year College (reference) |                    |          |                |           |
| One or Two Years of College                         | 1.596              | 1.632    | 1.031          | 1.013     |
| Three or More Years of College                      | 1.250              | 1.310    | 1.455          | 1.203     |
| Child Under 18 Present in Household                 | 1.025              | .994     | 1.199          | 1.156     |
| Currently Married                                   | 1.435              | 1.433    | .668           | .685      |
| Years Lived in Metro Area <sup>a</sup>              | .990               | .991     | 1.021          | 1.016     |
| Income  |                    |          |                |           |
| Less than \$20,000 (reference)                      |                    |          |                |           |
| \$20,000-\$39,999                                   | 1.483              | 1.535    | 1.209          | 1.133     |
| \$40,000-\$79,999                                   | .895               | .917     | 1.834          | 1.411     |
| \$80,000 or more                                    | 1.228              | 1.207    | 1.977          | 1.419     |

Table 3 *continued*

|               | Seriously Consider |         | Never Consider |         |
|---------------|--------------------|---------|----------------|---------|
|               | Model 1            | Model 2 | Model 3        | Model 4 |
| Intercept     | .050***            | .213**  | .355           | .220**  |
| N (Level - 1) | 15,077             |         | 15,022         |         |
| N (Level - 2) | 665                |         | 665            |         |

\* $p < .05$     \*\* $p < .01$     \*\*\* $p < .001$

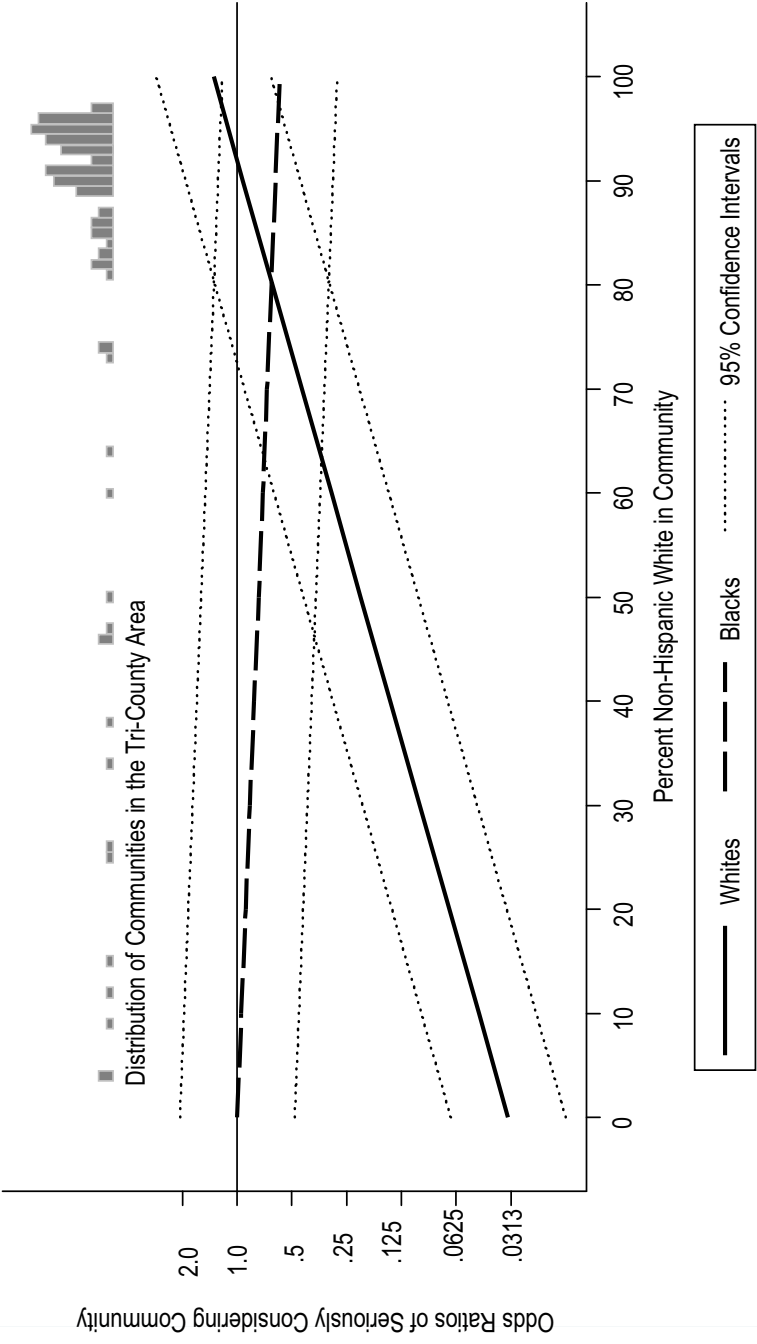
<sup>a</sup>Variable has been centered around its grand mean.

have more renters (fewer homeowners) are more likely to be seriously considered as are communities farther from Detroit. The distance of the community from the respondent's current residence is complicated; respondents are more likely to seriously consider communities closer to their homes, but the statistically significant distance-squared term means that the negative effect of distance levels out as distance increases.

Consistent with the expectation that social class shapes residential preferences, the social class characteristics of a community are a significant predictor of whether a community will be "seriously considered." An increase of \$100,000 in median home value increases the odds of the neighborhood being "seriously considered" by 5 percent. However, even after controlling for these differences, the effect of racial composition does not disappear. For example, increasing the percent of the population that is white by 10 percent in a community increases the odds of respondents seriously considering the community by 24 percent.

What we are centrally interested in, however, is not the overall difference in the selection of whiter communities, but in the interaction between the respondent's race and the racial composition of the community. Model 2 in Table 3 reports the results of a model with cross-level interactions that account for the effect that individual characteristics have on the evaluation of community-level characteristics. In this model, the percentage white in a community is very important, but only for whites. For every percentage increase of the white population share in a community, white respondents are 1.044 times more likely to seriously consider it. This means that for a 10-percent increase in the percentage of whites in the community, a white respondent is 53 percent more likely to consider that community.<sup>18</sup> If a community has no white residents, a white respondent is 31 times less likely than an African American respondent to seriously consider that community. However, there is no effect of the percentage of whites in a community on whether African Americans will seriously consider it,

Figure 4. Effect of Percentage Non-Hispanic White on “Seriously Considering” Communities for Whites and Blacks



Note: 2004 DAS and 2000 U.S. Census. Values on all other covariates set equal to zero.



controlling for the other factors in our model. As an aid in understanding the interaction between race of respondent and race of the community, Figure 4 shows the predicted probabilities of selecting a community as one they would “seriously consider” – separately for blacks and whites.

### *Never Consider Looking for Housing*

Models 3 and 4 in Table 3 are the same as models 1 and 2, except this time using the “never consider” outcome variable. Race of the respondent is the only significant individual level variable: consistent with the bivariate results, whites are three times more likely than African Americans to indicate that a given community, *independent* of the community characteristics, is a place that they would never consider looking for a house or apartment. In terms of the community-level predictors, the pattern is similar to that reported for the “seriously consider” outcome in that both social class and race are independently significant. Communities with a higher median income are less likely to be places respondents would never consider, as are communities with more whites. Respondents are less likely to never consider looking for a house or apartment in communities close to them. But “distance squared” is statistically significant, which means that at some distance the likelihood of a respondent indicating that they would never consider a community does not increase. Finally, the closer a community is to downtown Detroit, the more likely respondents are to indicate that they would never consider that community.

Turning to the interactions, we note first that social class of respondent and community do interact: people who make \$20,000 or less are more likely than people who make \$80,000 or more to indicate that they would never consider a community as the home value increases. Finally, the cross-level interaction between respondent race and community race again shows that whites are significantly less likely to “never consider” a community as the percent white in the community rises. And, it is again the case that African Americans are unaffected by percent white. In communities where there are no whites, a white respondent is almost 16 times more likely than an African American respondent to never consider that community.

## **Conclusions**

The results reported above have several limitations that are worth bearing in mind as one considers what has been learned about racial residential preferences through an analysis of community perceptions. First, by definition, this approach is limited to a single metropolitan area. A study using this approach would not be feasible at a “national” level given the

reliance on actual metropolitan areas. Beyond this, however, our selection of Detroit as focal city must be acknowledged as a limitation. Detroit may be a special case that encourages more than ordinary caution in generalizing the results. Detroit is one of the most segregated cities in the United States, and the city-suburban racial divide is one of the starkest in the nation. In addition, the entire metropolitan area is still very much "black and white." Although rapidly growing, the Asian and Hispanic populations in the Detroit metropolitan area remain quite small. These high levels of segregation and the striking city-suburb divide mean that there are many community types that are not reflected among the options presented to respondents on the map – or, indeed, in the metropolitan area overall. For example, we have just a single middle/upper-middle class 50-50 community among the options and there are no upper-class predominately black communities. On the one hand, this is a liability as it does not provide insight into preferences across all possible combinations; on the other hand, it is the reality of the Detroit housing market in which residents are operating and so must be taken seriously.

Using an approach for assessing racial residential preferences that is grounded in the realities of a particular city thus necessarily limits our ability to generalize beyond that city. To be sure, there are cities that are quite distinct from Detroit on all of these features; but at the same time, there are other cities that have quite similar patterns to Detroit. Future analyses of other metropolitan areas both similar and different are warranted. In the meantime, we have attempted to demonstrate that using such an approach yields valuable insights and a more complex and nuanced understanding of how racial residential preferences are reflected in real urban landscapes.

What do our Detroit results suggest about the makeup of *racial* residential preferences? First, there was evidence of agreement between whites and blacks about many of the communities. Indeed, more than half of the 33 communities showed no racial differences in the percentages of whites and blacks who would "seriously consider" or "never consider" it. And, although there are far fewer African Americans than whites who will "never consider" many of the communities, based on the Spearman's rank order correlations, blacks and whites agree, overall, on the *kinds* of communities they would be most likely to "never consider" – specifically, it is racially diverse and economically downtrodden communities that are at the bottom of the lists of both blacks and whites.

At the same time, the patterns show clearly racialized perceptions of the metropolis. Beginning with whites, we found that they were very likely to "never consider" all black, mostly black and racially integrated communities – many of which are also economically disadvantaged.

But, they were also quite likely to “never consider” the community of Southfield, which is a racially mixed (55 percent black) and economically prosperous suburb. Similarly, whites are extremely unlikely to seriously consider any communities with a majority of African Americans and they are most likely to “seriously consider” overwhelmingly white middle ring suburbs and northern and western exurbs. The prevailing impact of racial composition – above and beyond social class – was confirmed in multi-level analyses: the percent white in a community had a significant impact on whites’ likelihood of seriously or never considering a community, net of a variety of other community traits, including social class. This result suggests that there is a racial effect, *per se*, above and beyond the characteristics of class or “racial proxies.” (Harris 2000)

It is difficult to draw direct comparisons between the racial compositions provided to whites in the hypothetical neighborhood cards and the perceptions of various specific communities analyzed here. In part this is because of the reality of the Detroit metropolitan area: there are few communities that match anything but the most minimally integrated community on the neighborhood card (7 percent African American). The best example – which has the benefit of being an economically prosperous community – is Southfield where the population was 55 percent black in 2000. Based on the general results from the neighborhood card technique, one might anticipate that at least a third of whites would find this community desirable; but results showed that just 6 percent of whites would “seriously consider” looking for a house or apartment in it.

One ought not to take this simple comparison too far because it is a single community with a myriad other characteristics. But it is nevertheless a useful example and highlights the difficulty of taking the structure of preferences gauged by the hypothetical neighborhood cards too literally. First, there are few actual communities in the Detroit metropolitan area that have the range of racial compositions shown in the neighborhood cards. Second, the levels of openness to racially mixed communities appear overstated by the hypothetical neighborhood cards: an actual community with a racial composition that, in principle, a third of whites would be willing to live in – is “seriously considered” by only a very small percentage of whites.

One explanation for the over-statement of willingness to live in mixed neighborhoods may be the explicit nature of the traditional showcard technique. In the contemporary racial climate, there are social pressures – particularly for whites – to suppress negative racial attitudes. Our map technique downplays these social pressures because it is only implicitly about race; this more subtle measure thus likely reduces biases associated with social desirability. Indeed, the attitudes gauged

by the hypothetical neighborhoods cards might best be understood as a reflection of the principle of integrated living; putting these principles into action by selecting actual communities irrespective of race or, indeed, to promote racial integration, is far less universal. As a result, taking the preference structures revealed by such questions and applying them to actual cities may be misleading.

Turning to what we have learned about African American racial residential preferences, we find that race also matters for African Americans – but, we would argue, it matters differently and less fundamentally. First, to be sure, a fairly high percentage of African Americans would “never consider” the overwhelmingly white and geographically distant northern and western exurbs. But the top five communities that blacks are most likely to “seriously consider” (and more than 3 in 10 do so) include the overwhelmingly black (86 percent black) neighborhood of Northwest Detroit, the slightly majority black and economically prosperous Southfield; the middle class, largely white (82 percent white) suburb of Farmington Hills; and the overwhelmingly white (90 percent white), upper middle class suburb of Bloomfield Hills (29 percent would “seriously consider” it). Thus, African Americans are far more likely to consider majority and overwhelmingly black communities than whites. Race, then, does matter. But, turning to the *set* of communities that African Americans would “seriously consider,” we find that most would “seriously consider” communities where they are both in the majority *and* in the minority. And, in our multi-level models – after several of the communities’ other characteristics are held constant – we find that percent white does *not* influence African Americans’ selection of a community as one to “seriously consider” or to “never consider.”

This means that when asked about real options in real metropolitan areas, African American preferences appear to be for a greater diversity of community types than the hypothetical neighborhood cards technique suggests. To characterize African American preferences as simply for “50-50 neighborhoods” (or slight majority black neighborhoods) and, taken further, to conclude that it is African American preferences for such neighborhoods that is an especially important factor contributing to patterns of segregation is deeply troubling given the wide diversity of neighborhoods that African Americans will “seriously consider.” For example, in the simulated city that Fossett (2006) builds to assess the role of preferences – and especially African Americans preferences – as segregation promoting, he sets the preference structure of African Americans based on results from hypothetical neighborhood card studies. He uses the “most attractive” component of the preferences data and dismisses the importance of the high percentages of African Americans

who are “willing” to live in a wide range of racial compositions. He does this because he proposes that it is unlikely that individuals choose neighborhoods based on “willingness” to live in them – but instead use their rankings of what they find “most attractive.” In short, Fossett (2006) discounts the more flexible view of African American preferences in favor of a description of African American preferences that is centered on a majority preference for a 50-50 neighborhood.

This may be a safe assumption for a simulated city, but actual housing decisions are made in real cities. This means not only that there are real constraints on what choices are available, but it also means that any particular community has real features above and beyond its racial composition. And real housing choices are made where people must balance their preferences for racial composition with all of the other real-life advantages and disadvantages of a neighborhood’s problems and attractions. Our study illustrates that African Americans’ racial residential preferences are not constrained to merely their “top choice.” There is a great deal of diversity in the kinds of neighborhoods blacks identify as ones they would “seriously consider” and African Americans are far less likely than whites to completely eliminate from consideration any communities – regardless of racial composition. In a simulated city, it may work to apply the hypothetical neighborhood preference structures to draw conclusions about how patterns of segregation are generated by these preferences, and to make simplifying assumptions about these choices and constraints. But taking these preference structures at face value and applying them to the real urban landscape is problematic.<sup>19</sup>

In the real city of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs, African American preferences are more consistent with the full complement of the preference data we have available (that is, preference structures that include more flexibility) than with the more narrow slice relied upon by simulation models (Fossett 2006; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Given the realities created by past segregation, the choices of whites and African Americans for the full complement of neighborhood diversity are constrained. In the face of these constraints, whites appear to narrow their options and retreat largely to consideration of white neighborhoods – and explicitly exclude integrated or black communities. African Americans, by contrast, broaden their options and consider communities with a wide range of racial compositions. Although race matters for African Americans in neighborhood choices, it does not constrain in the same way that it appears to for whites.

Thus, as a foundation for the kinds of thought experiments and simulation exercises that in turn establish the segregation-promoting preferences of African Americans in particular, the hypothetical neighborhood preference structure appears to us as ill-suited. And policy recommendations based

on the simulated neighborhoods that do not account for the complexities of real communities are bound to be misdirected and short-sighted.

Our results indicate that future research should take the intricacies of real urban contexts seriously. The neighborhood cards technique has provided decades of valuable insight into racial residential preferences. But it is important to recognize that those preferences do not precisely follow the limited types of neighborhoods depicted in the cards. It is also important to recognize that social class plays a role in shaping preferences, but it does not mitigate the effect of race on neighborhood evaluations. And, given the research on the intersection of race and class in selecting communities (Pattillo 2003, 2007; Hartigan 1999), having a realistic knowledge of the options available to people of different races is important in any study of the role of preferences in sustaining or mitigating segregation. That is, whites can find communities with a variety of social class compositions that have fit their historically stated preferences on the neighborhood cards measures. But African Americans do not have that luxury. What we find is that African Americans are willing to consider a far wider array of communities and eliminate fewer from consideration than whites. Models – particularly simulation models that attempt to determine the processes of segregation (Fossett 2006; Schelling 1971) – must account for this complexity before using them to draw conclusions about the prospects for integration in the real world.

## Notes

1. The other two main explanations are that segregation is caused by racial differences in economic status and that persistent discrimination – both blatant and subtle – maintains segregation. There is a substantial body of research debating these causes (e.g., Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Fischer 1999; Darden and Kamel 2000; Alba et al. 2000; Krivo and Kaufman 1999; Turner et al., 2002; Yinger 1995). Few scholars argue that segregation is caused by just one of these factors but the debate centers on which is most important. Our focus on preferences should neither be taken as an argument in favor of a single-factor model nor as supporting the perspective that preferences are the most important cause.
2. While the preference patterns of African Americans may appear to be more integration promoting than the preferences of whites because the former are more tolerant of contact with greater numbers of out-groups in their neighborhoods, he argues that they are not. This is because integration, as frequently measured, is a function of evenness of distribution, not “50-50 neighborhoods.” In most metropolitan areas, since African Americans do not comprise 50 percent of the population, Fossett (2006) argues, a preference for 50-50 or slightly black majority neighborhoods is not integration promoting.
3. We note that in addition to the social class characteristics of the community,

we control for respondents' economic status. It would not be surprising if those with fewer economic resources were less interested in high cost communities since not being able to afford a community is a good reason to not seriously consider it. Alternatively, individuals of all social class backgrounds may find attractive (and unattractive) communities at the high and low end of the economic spectrum in the same way.

4. This response rate is calculated based on AAPOR standards and we report RR2, the calculation of which is described at [http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs\\_4.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs_4.pdf).
5. Respondents who said they "didn't know anything about" a community are excluded from all analyses.
6. The second and third maps asked respondents where they had searched for a job and housing, respectively, in the past 10 years.
7. We define the "Detroit metropolitan area" as the three counties of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb. The Census bureau now includes three additional outlying counties in its definition of the Detroit Metropolitan Area but we do not use their definition because it is not customarily the one used by residents in the area.
8. In Detroit, the third largest racial/ethnic group (behind whites and African Americans) is Arab Americans.
9. The imputation model included measures of race/ethnicity, housing tenure, education, median family income of the block group in which the respondent resided, gender, marital status, presence of children under 18, welfare receipt, employment status and age. The resulting continuous income variable was collapsed into the four categories used in the analysis.
10. No distinction is made for whether the children are the respondent's or simply children in the home.
11. Because the communities in the city of Detroit were created by aggregating census tracts into the larger geographic (neighborhood) unit, median housing value was not available. But using publicly released census data about the distribution of housing values allows us to calculate the median *category* of housing values. We use the midpoint of that category. We do the same thing for the Grosse Pointe communities.
12. All logistic regression analyses adjust the standard errors in light of the sample design, which was both clustered and stratified. In addition, data were weighted to adjust for differential probability of selection across strata as well as segment-level non-response rates.
13. Because in our analyses we exclude respondents who said they "didn't know" a community, any given respondents' set of repeated observations on the dependent variable may be fewer than 33. The unweighted average number of communities respondents identified as ones they "didn't know



anything about" was 9.3 (sd = 7.8); there was no racial difference in this average number.

14. Our approach is counter-intuitive to the way that multi-level analyses are often conducted in urban research, where respondents are nested within communities where they live. Our approach is similar to nesting repeated observations of individuals across waves of longitudinal studies and is, therefore, not without precedent (Singer and Willet 2003; Raudenbush and Byrk 2002).
15. The terms  $\gamma_{oc}$  are summed because income,  $W_{oc}$ , is measured as a three-categorical dummy variable and so  $\gamma_{oc}$  represent the unique effect of each income category *compared to* the reference category (less than \$20,000).
16. Again, the terms are summed because respondent's social class is measured as a series of dummy variables for each income category.
17. The effects at this level control for the differences in the number of communities selected by respondents with socio-demographic differences, controlling for the differences among communities.
18. Here and elsewhere, our calculations of the increases are the exponentiated value of the product of the natural log of the odds ratio multiplied by the increase. In this case, the natural log of the odds ratio of 1.044 is multiplied by the percentage increase of 10 percent, i.e.,  $\exp[\ln(1.044)*10]$  (Raudenbush and Byrk 2002).
19. All of this is not to dismiss the value of the hypothetical neighborhood card technique. Despite the limitations, it has its merits. It allows us to gauge reactions to living with people of different races in a way that is unconstrained by reality; it is what people say they would desire, if there were multiple options. In addition, it enables direct comparisons across cities and times as a gauge of how local context shapes general preferences and how these may have changed over time. It is also a valuable tool for understanding the social, demographic, and social psychological factors underlying racial residential preferences more generally.

## References

- Alba, Richard D., John R. Logan and Brian Stults. 2000. "How Segregated are Middle Class African Americans?" *Social Problems* 47(4):543-58.
- Bobo, Lawrence. 1989. "Keeping the Linchpin in Place: Testing the Multiple Sources of Opposition to Residential Integration." *International Review of Social Psychology* 2(3):305-23.
- Charles, Camille Zubrinsky. 2001. "Processes of Racial Residential Segregation." Pp. 217-71. *Urban Inequality: Evidence from Four Cities*. Alice O'Connor, Chris Tilly and Lawrence Bobo, editors. Russell Sage Foundation.

- Clark, W.A.V. 1986. "Residential Segregation in American Cities: A Review and Interpretation." *Population Research and Policy Review* 5(2):95-127.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "Residential Preferences and Neighborhood Racial Segregation: A Test of the Schelling Segregation Model." *Demography* 28(1):1-19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Residential Preferences and Residential Choices in a Multi-Ethnic Context." *Demography* 29(3):451-66.
- Darden, Joe T., and Sameh M. Kamel. 2000. "Black Residential Segregation in the City and Suburbs of Detroit: Does Socioeconomic Status Matter?" *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22(1):1-13.
- Ellen, Ingrid Gould. 2000. *Sharing America's Neighborhoods: The Prospects for Stable Racial Integration*. Harvard University Press.
- Emerson, Michael O., George Yancey and Karen J. Chai. 2001. "Does Race Matter in Residential Segregation? Exploring the Preferences of White Americans." *American Sociological Review* 66(6):922-35.
- Farley, Reynolds, Sheldon Danziger and Harry J. Holzer. 2000. *Detroit Divided*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Farley, Reynolds, and William H. Frey. 1994. "Changes in the Segregation of Whites from Blacks during the 1980s: Small Steps toward a More Integrated Society." *American Sociological Review* 59 (1):23-45.
- Farley, Reynolds, Howard Schuman, Suzanne Bianchi, Diane Colasanto and Shirley Hatchett. 1978. "Chocolate City, Vanilla Suburbs: Will the Trend Toward Racially Separate Communities Continue?" *Social Science Research* 7 (December):319-44.
- Fossett, Mark. 2006. "Ethnic Preferences, Social Distance Dynamics, and Residential Segregation: Theoretical Explorations Using Simulation Analysis." *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 30(3/4):185-274.
- Glaeser, Edward, and Jacob L. Vigdor. 2001. "Racial Segregation in the 2000 Census: Promising News." *Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy Survey Series*. April. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Harris, David R. 1999. "Property Values Drop When Blacks Move In, Because..." "Racial and Socioeconomic Determinants of Neighborhood Desirability." *American Sociological Review* 64(3):461-79.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "Why Are Whites and Blacks Averse to Black Neighbors?" *Social Science Research*, 30(1):100-16.
- Hart, Kevin D., Stephen J. Kunitz, Ralph Sell and Dana B. Mukamel. 1998. "Metropolitan Governance, Residential Segregation and Mortality among African Americans." *American Journal of Public Health* 88(3):434-38.

- Hartigan, John. 1999. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton University Press.
- Krivo, Lauren J., and Robert L. Kaufman. 1999. "How Low Can It Go? Declining Black-White Segregation in a Multiethnic Context." *Demography* 36(1):93-110.
- Krysan, Maria. 1994. "Privacy and the Expression of Racial Attitudes: A Comparison of Three Context." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62(4):506-44.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Community Undesirability in Black and White: Examining Racial Residential Preferences Through Community Perceptions." *Social Problems* 49(4):521-43.
- Lewis Mumford Center, 2001. *Ethnic Diversity Grows, Neighborhood Integration Lags Behind*. Albany, NY: Lewis Mumford Center.
- Logan, John, Brian Stults and Reynolds Farley. 2004. "Segregation of Minorities in the Metropolis: Two Decades of Change." *Demography* 41(1):1-22.
- Logan, John R., and O. Andrew Collver. 1983. "Residents' Perceptions of Suburban Community Differences." *American Sociological Review* 48(3):428-33.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Harvard University Press.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Mary J. Fischer. 1999. "Does Rising Income Bring Integration? New Results for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in 1990." *Social Science Research* 28(3):316-26.
- Pattillo, Mary. 1999. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. University of Chicago Press.
- Raudenbush, Stephen W., and Anthony S. Byrk. 2002. *Hierarchical Linear Models: Applications and Data Analysis Methods*. Sage.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1971. "Dynamic Models of Segregation." *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 1(1):143-86.
- Schuman, Howard, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo and Maria Krysan. 1998. *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Harvard University Press.
- Semyonov, Moshe, and Vered Kraus. 1982. "The Social Hierarchies of Communities and Neighborhoods." *Social Science Quarterly* 63(4):780-89.

- Singer, Judith D., and John B. Willet. 2003. *Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis: Modelling Change and Event Occurance*. Oxford University Press.
- Sugrue, Thomas J. 1996. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press.
- Thernstrom, Stephan, and Abigail Thernstrom. 1997. *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*. Simon & Schuster.
- Turner, Margery Austin, Stephen L. Ross, George C. Galster and John Yinger. 2002. *Discrimination in Metropolitan Housing Markets: National Results from Phase I HDS 2000*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center.
- Yinger, John. 1995. *Closed Doors, Opportunities Lost: The Continuing Costs of Housing Discrimination*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Appendix A. 2000 U.S. Census Characteristics of Communities Included on the Map in the 2004 Detroit Area Study

| Community                  | Total<br>Population | % Non-<br>Hispanic<br>White <sup>a</sup> | % Non-Hispanic<br>Black or African<br>American <sup>b</sup> | Median<br>Household<br>Income  | Owner-<br>Occupied<br>% | Median Home Value<br>(Owner-Occupied Units) |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <i>City of Detroit</i>     |                     |  |   |                                |                         |   |
| Northwest Detroit          | 91,066              | 12                                       | 86  | \$35,000-\$39,999 <sup>c</sup> | 65                      | \$70,000-\$79,999 <sup>d</sup>              |
| Southwest Detroit          | 69,955              | 26                                       | 26  | \$25,000-\$29,999 <sup>c</sup> | 51                      | \$35,000-\$39,999 <sup>d</sup>              |
| Midtown Detroit            | 17,579              | 4  | 94  | \$20,000-\$24,999 <sup>c</sup> | 36                      | \$60,000-\$69,999 <sup>d</sup>              |
| Downtown Detroit           | 12,117              | 15                                       | 81  | \$15,000-\$19,999 <sup>c</sup> | 2                       | \$90,000-\$99,999 <sup>d</sup>              |
| East Side Detroit          | 128,847             | 9  | 88  | \$30,000-\$34,999 <sup>c</sup> | 63                      | \$60,000-\$70,000 <sup>d</sup>              |
| <i>Inner-ring Suburbs</i>  |                     |  |   |                                |                         |   |
| St. Clair Shores           | 63,096              | 96                                       | 1   | \$49,047                       | 86                      | \$123,700                                   |
| Grosse Pointe Communities  | 47,780              | 94                                       | 1   | \$85,000-\$89,999 <sup>c</sup> | 88                      | \$250,000-\$299,999 <sup>d</sup>            |
| Livonia                    | 100,545             | 94                                       | 1   | \$63,018                       | 89                      | \$161,800                                   |
| Warren                     | 138,247             | 90                                       | 3   | \$44,626                       | 80                      | \$117,800                                   |
| Dearborn                   | 97,775              | 85                                       | 1   | \$44,560                       | 73                      | \$129,300                                   |
| Southfield                 | 78,296              | 38                                       | 55  | \$51,802                       | 54                      | \$155,400                                   |
| Inkster                    | 30,115              | 25                                       | 69  | \$35,950                       | 58                      | \$68,000                                    |
| <i>Middle-ring Suburbs</i> |                     |  |   |                                |                         |   |
| Bloomfield Township        | 43,021              | 87                                       | 4   | \$103,897                      | 90                      | \$356,800                                   |
| Troy                       | 80,959              | 81                                       | 2   | \$77,538                       | 77                      | \$219,800                                   |
| Sterling Heights           | 124,471             | 90                                       | 1   | \$60,494                       | 79                      | \$160,700                                   |
| Novi                       | 47,386              | 86                                       | 2   | \$71,918                       | 71                      | \$236,300                                   |
| Farmington Hills           | 82,111              | 82                                       | 7   | \$67,493                       | 67                      | \$227,300                                   |
| Pontiac                    | 66,337              | 34                                       | 49  | \$31,207                       | 53                      | \$74,300                                    |

|                              |        |    |    |          |    |           |
|------------------------------|--------|----|----|----------|----|-----------|
| Downriver Suburbs            |        |    |    |          |    |           |
| Taylor                       | 65,868 | 84 | 9  | \$42,944 | 71 | \$93,000  |
| River Rouge                  | 9,917  | 50 | 43 | \$29,214 | 58 | \$45,500  |
| Ecorse                       | 11,229 | 47 | 41 | \$27,142 | 62 | \$44,300  |
| Wyandotte                    | 28,006 | 94 | 1  | \$43,740 | 73 | \$101,700 |
| Trenton                      | 19,584 | 95 | 1  | \$49,566 | 81 | \$137,800 |
| Northern and Western Ex-urbs |        |    |    |          |    |           |
| Holly                        | 6,135  | 93 | 2  | \$46,436 | 75 | \$117,700 |
| Oxford                       | 3,540  | 95 | 1  | \$53,885 | 68 | \$165,200 |
| Richmond                     | 4,897  | 93 | 0  | \$43,378 | 72 | \$135,300 |
| Romeo                        | 3,721  | 91 | 5  | \$48,015 | 70 | \$151,600 |
| Mt. Clemens                  | 17,312 | 74 | 21 | \$37,856 | 61 | \$99,900  |
| New Baltimore                | 7,405  | 96 | 1  | \$60,699 | 72 | \$165,800 |
| South Lyon                   | 10,036 | 96 | 1  | \$53,395 | 75 | \$160,400 |
| Northville                   | 6,459  | 95 | 0  | \$83,961 | 76 | \$237,000 |
| Canton                       | 76,366 | 82 | 5  | \$72,495 | 79 | \$194,100 |
| Wixom                        | 13,263 | 89 | 3  | \$44,320 | 44 | \$195,000 |

<sup>a</sup> This represents the percentage of respondents who are non-Hispanic white alone  
<sup>b</sup> This represents the percentage of respondents who are non-Hispanic black or African American alone or in combination  
<sup>c</sup> Because this community is not a Census-defined community, the median income was calculated to be within this range  
<sup>d</sup> Because this community is not a Census-defined community, the median house value was calculated to be within this range