

UCLA

**Volume IV. 1988-89 - Conference on Comparative Ethnicity: The
Conference Papers, June 1988**

Title

Comparative Ethnicity: Salient Policy Issues and Research Agenda

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8jg8r8zz>

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Publication Date

1988-06-01

ISSR
Working Papers
in the
Social Sciences

1988-89, Vol 4, Number 26

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Salient Policy Issues
and Research Agenda**

by

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A version of this paper was prepared for the UCLA CONFERENCE ON COMPARATIVE ETHNICITY, June 1988. The Conference was coordinated by Institute for Social Science Research and sponsored by The President's Office, Chancellor's Office, College of Letters and Science, Institute of American Cultures, Center for Afro-American Studies, and Department of Geography and Sociology, UCLA; and by the Division of Social Sciences and Communication, the Los Angeles Project and Department of Geography and Political Science, USC.

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COMPARATIVE ETHNICITY:
SALIENT POLICY ISSUES AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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The papers presented at this Conference are thought provoking both in the questions they pose and the use of innovative techniques and data sources. The theme of comparative ethnicity -- focusing on Blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans -- introduces new frontiers of investigation for the social scientist interested in race relations, urban America, and social demography. It is an area of inquiry which is pregnant with some of the most wrenching social policy dilemmas that the U.S. will face in the coming decades.

In this essay we identify some of the salient policies raised by the conference participants and assess the policy implications of the academic debates that dominated the conference. These observations draw upon both the paper presentations and the final session of the conference in which some of the participants discussed issues of importance to social policy and outlined the parameters of an emerging research agenda. Because the analytical focus and level of analysis has much to do with the types of inquiries that are pursued and the nature of the policies that are proposed, we focus here on ethnic group behavior, ethnic group interaction, and on the institutional context in which both behavior and interaction occur. It is within these domains that we can identify the salient policy issues of comparative ethnic significance.

ETHNIC GROUP BEHAVIOR

Ethnicity is malleable and forever changing. All of our presenters suggest that ethnicity is a socially constructed and socially mediated phenomenon. What has been clear is that each ethnic group's identity and social structure is dependent upon the social situation in which they find themselves. The central question is: what aspects of that social situation have the primary impact on their behavior?

The first panel, "Ethnic Assimilation, Segregation, and Neighborhood Change," was assembled to provide an overview of what is known about one of the major components of the "social situation": the spatial context. Ethnicity exists and is nurtured through the sharing of a common spatial niche. The major focus of this session was devoted to answering the demographic question of to what extent are American ethnic groups segregated in American society? The answers given by the presenters demonstrated the profound value of the comparative approach to ethnicity. While Blacks, a settled and older American racial and ethnic group, continue to show high degrees of segregation in American cities, Asian Americans, and to a much lesser degree Mexican Americans, fare much better in living in racially integrated and ethnically heterogeneous communities (FARLEY AND LANGBERG; ESTRADA; DARDEN).

The policy issue is made clear when we ask the question of why these different patterns exist. One answer, provided in Clark's (see CLARK) paper, emphasizes the preferences and behaviors of profit-seeking and pleasure-maximizing households. Ethnic group segregation is, from this perspective, a natural sorting of people by social inclination who find

themselves in segregated neighborhoods as a matter of choice as opposed to constraint. The other answer, just as forcefully articulated by Darden (DARDEN), locates the continuation of racial segregation in a system of constraints and opportunities that pattern neighborhoods along racial lines. The history of Blacks in American society show a long line of policies that served as "ghetto makers" and "ghetto shapers" which actively structured the choices that Blacks had available to them, subsequently leading to the development of racially homogeneous neighborhoods.

These two models bring up a significant public policy issue that has implications for housing, educational attainment, and occupational sorting. As several papers emphasized, racial and ethnic disparities in all these areas are present (MORALES AND ONG; WILSON AND TIENDA; ARNOLD; LIGHT; ALLEN; WANG; ORFIELD; SANDEFUR AND POWERS; SNIPP). Those emphasizing preference tend to explain racial and ethnic group disparities by concentrating on the actions of the ethnic group based on their cultural values. For example, the unique cultural values of Japanese Americans are often times used to explain their high educational achievement and economic success. On the other hand, the supposed lack of values -- as expressed in lower levels of commitment, ambition and hard work in pursuing educational attainment -- is often used to explain the low levels of educational achievement among Black Americans. In order to achieve educational and occupational attainment, this model suggest a policy perspective which addresses low minority or ethnic status by changing both the behavior and the underlying values that inform behavior.

The constraints model, on the other hand, does not look to the behavior of the ethnic group as the basis of low or deficient socio-economic progress. Instead, this perspective argues that ethnic group behavior is shaped by a system of constraints. The policy implied in this argument would suggest that we change institutional structures and opportunities if we want to address ethnic or minority disadvantages.

Clearly data exist to support aspects of both of these perspectives. By focusing on comparative aspects of ethnicity each argument benefits from the introduction of new factors and new historical situations. The Black vs. Asian comparison, for example, alerts us to the importance of "color" both historically and contemporaneously. However, in terms of policy the adoption of one perspective without sufficient appreciation of the other, can skew public policy debates significantly. Witness the use of the "model minority" argument as an antidote to Black aspirations. This perspective discounts both the historical and contemporary significance of race in preventing Black inclusion into the mainstream of society, while at the same time, substituting a stereotypical conception of the Asian American experience that belies its social and economic diversity.

ETHNIC GROUP INTERACTION

A comparative perspective on ethnicity also propels us beyond an exclusive concern with the interaction patterns between dominant and subordinate groups and toward an analysis of interaction patterns among and between subordinate groups. The history of social science in American society has concentrated so exclusively on how the "other" compares and interacts with Whites, that we have failed to note and appreciate the significance of newly emerging communities of ethnics whose social and institutional lives penetrate other ethnic communities as much as, if not more than, it does traditional worlds dominated by Whites. Urban areas are becoming mosaics of ethnic neighborhoods whose close proximity to traditional Black communities

make for a potentially explosive environment: explosive in the positive sense of activating new and original ways of urban life created by the symbiotic borrowing of elements of each groups existing culture; and in the negative sense of exacerbating the already heightened sense of deprivation felt by resident minorities who may perceive ethnic diversity in competitive terms.

Professor Rose's (ROSE) paper on the Cuban-Black nexus in metropolitan Dade County, Florida is a model of inquiry of this sort. Using existing research and recent census data Rose explores the changing pattern of racial demography in Dade County. How have Blacks fared when new ethnics have come in great numbers to inner cities? Rose argues that the influx of Cubans into Miami appears to have had a negative impact on the economic assimilation of the city's Black population. Placing Cuban immigration in its proper social and historical perspective, Rose argues that the unique social and economic characteristics of various waves of Cuban immigrants, the governmental support given them and the changing economy of Miami propelled the Cubans into significant and important statuses both in the general Miami economy and in their particular enclave economy. Blacks, starting from a disadvantaged economic position in a city characterized by southern race relations, found themselves increasingly marginalized in an economy that became more and more responsive to international capital from Latin America. The growing acceptance of the Spanish language in the world of commerce also contributed to Black economic marginalization, as well as the Latino monopolization of the illegal, but highly profitable, drug economy. This situation strained Black-Cuban relations and the prospects of political alliances to resolve the tension between the two groups have been thwarted by the incipient racism and deep conservatism of the middle-class White Cuban society.

Rose's paper highlights the importance of examining inter-ethnic relations on several levels. The analysts interested in public policy must be aware that inter-ethnic relations cannot be reduced to group dynamics; one must focus, instead, on the larger societal context. The relationship of Cubans and Blacks in Miami, of Koreans and Blacks in Los Angeles, and of Chicanos and Blacks in Houston, cannot be understood without understanding the international context which drives them that is, the relationship of Cuba to the USA in the case of Miami, of Korea and the USA in the case of Los Angeles, and of Mexico and the USA in the case of Houston. The economic context which creates opportunity for ethnic economic success or failure must also be closely examined. And finally, the analysts must examine the political dynamics that either reinforce or have the potential to change the social context in which interaction occurs.

Given the relative deprivation of all of the various ethnic groups we have discussed, the interesting political question is: to what extent do the political orientations of these groups create the potential for coalitions and alliances that can challenge barriers to full participation in American society? As the papers presented in the conference have suggested, this is not a straightforward issue. Some ethnic groups arrive with a propensity for particular political orientations; for example, the anti-communism of many Cuban exiles predisposes them to a conservative and racially exclusionary kind of politics. Mainstream political scientists have always assumed that ethnic political orientations will, after a reasonable period of acculturation, converge with the general population and reflect the economic status of the group; as ethnic groups become economically better off their political orientations will reflect their class interest. What does this portend for ethnic group politics? Jackson's (JACKSON) paper on Los Angeles ethnic group politics seems to suggest that

a political coalition acceptable to both Blacks and new immigrant ethnics may be possible. Blacks and Latinos were much more likely than Whites to oppose the "English Only" initiative in California and to give their support Tom Bradley in the recent Los Angeles mayoralty election. However, Jackson cautions that the formation of other political events, such as the issue of redistricting, may inhibit such coalitions.

A finely drawn portrait of multi-ethnic politics is presented in Horton's paper on Monterey Park (HORTON). This paper analyzes how multi-ethnic politics develops in the context of both the struggle for slow-growth and ethnic self-determination. In Monterey Park the clash over "ethnic representation and local control over land use, space, language and the very definition of community" (HORTON, 3) created a morass of political intrigues and complications. Anti-growth ideologies in this context degenerated into nativistic and racist pleas. Combined with the lack of Latino, Japanese-American, and Chinese-American representation in city offices, a politics of ethnicity developed wherein a candidate opposed to un-restrained growth, but openly anti-racist, achieved victory. An analysis of the city elections of 1988 results shows the degree to which ethnicity and self-interests interacted in this process. As one of our participants (GILLIAM) argued, when issues are salient to an ethnic group they tend to override other determinants such as class, age and length of residence. Language retention is a particularly powerful issue for non-English speaking natives. The drive in California that led to the successful passage of an "English Only" initiative helped politicize and energize the political consciousness of both a sleeping Latino constituency and an apolitical Asian vote. At the same time, Blacks and other native minorities, while significantly more likely than Whites to oppose such nativistic legislation, are still uncomfortable with what they see as the imposition of a "foreign" language in the schools and world of commerce. The saliency of different interests for various ethnic groups highlights the difficulties inherent in forging a broad ethnic and racial minority coalition.

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

Several major institutions were identified by participants as important policy and research concerns for students of comparative ethnicity. The most detailed attention was paid to economic outcomes related to labor markets and higher education. The relevance of labor market status and the participation of minorities in higher education have obvious implications for the social and economic status of minorities.

The study of labor markets has escalated over the past twenty years. We now know that it is not just the attributes of an individual that determines their access to economic rewards but also their placement in particular labor markets. Several of the participants (ONG AND MORALES; MOORE; SANDEFUR AND POWERS; SNIPP) document the well known finding that Latinos, Native Americans and Blacks are overrepresented in secondary labor markets. Jobs in the secondary labor market pay less, are more likely to be unstable, have fewer benefits and have less opportunity for career advancement than jobs in the primary sector of the labor market. However, the most interesting findings about labor markets that the papers from this conference document is the differential between ethnic groups in terms of labor force participation itself.

One of the dominant debates surrounding the economic status of Blacks relates to the issue of the development and maintenance of a group of

people who are increasingly found outside the realm of employment. This group, for an important yet varied set of reasons, do not participate in the labor force. It is this non-participation which helps define them as an "underclass." Several of our participants were interested in the determinants of this non-participation and in variations among various racial and ethnic groups in rates of non-participation. For example, Sandefur and Powers' (SANDEFUR AND POWERS) paper showed quite convincingly that non-participation rates have increased for Blacks over the 1969-1984 period. However, for Mexican-Americans their participation rates appear to be converging with similar Whites. But Puerto Ricans and Native Americans increased their non-participation rates in the same period at a rate approaching that of Black Americans. Blacks and Puerto Ricans seem to be more adversely affected by the industrial restructuring which has decreased dramatically the number of entry level un-skilled jobs available. Concentrated in those areas most decimated by industrial displacement, Blacks and Puerto Ricans find themselves with little economic opportunity and incentive to enter the labor market. Sandefur and Powers' findings suggest that the creation of good jobs, with decent pay are the only alternative to high levels of Black and Puerto Rican labor force non-participation and the development of underclass populations.

Wilson and Tienda (WILSON AND TIENDA) enter into this debate through another window. Conceding the disappearance of industrial jobs and mainstream economic opportunities in many of the nation's inner cities, particularly in those regions where Blacks and Puerto Ricans are most often found, they test a hypothesis that conservatives find as a useful antidote for these problems: if jobs are not where the people are then why don't they just move to where the jobs are located. They test this notion by examining whether migrants were successful in finding employment when they moved. The findings suggest that the conventional conservative wisdom may be wrong. For American born populations (Blacks, Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and non-Hispanic Whites) migration did little to increase their likelihood of becoming employed, even among the college educated. The exception was the foreign born, who seemed to increase substantially their chances of being employed by moving. These findings show how social scientists can enter into important policy debates about the nature of employment and low labor force participation by testing aspects of the conventional wisdom in ways that allow policy makers to develop more factually based policies.

Industrial restructuring and the changing modes of production in advanced industrial societies also create opportunities for the development of an informal sector that exists outside of, but is intricately connected to, mainstream labor markets. Sassen (SASSEN), in her paper, describes this contradictory set of developments on New York City's informal economy. Her point is clear: the niches filled by immigrant labor in the informal sector is a consequence of a highly complex set of demands emanating from the very structure of industrial production, that is, from pressures in certain industries to reduce costs (i.e., the garment industry); from the inadequate provision of services and goods in the formal sector, particularly those in low income communities (i.e., transportation, child-care, low-cost furniture); and from the supply side in the demand for products in highly specialized boutiques and exclusive shopping areas. Ultimately, however, behind the growth of the informal sector is access to cheap labor. Thus, while informal labor provides employment to its practitioners, the dark side is the degree of exploitation that is contained within these sets of relationships. However, from a policy perspective we need, as Sassen points out, a more differentiated

perspective on the informal sector. At present, the informal sector is not differentiated from the illegal sector. All informal sector activities are transformed into illegal activities because of tax evasion. However, given the employment and services that these immigrants provide to usually impoverished communities we must try to develop policies that will promote the growth of those activities that provide real employment opportunities with the least amount of exploitation and, at the same time, improve the level of services and products available in low income communities.

No other institutional arena is more important from a social policy perspective than education. While the papers on education concentrated primarily on higher education, they provide a focus on the inability of the educational system as a whole to provide quality education in an age of diversity. They all point to important areas of concern and suggest important roles for analysts of comparative ethnicity in reconstructing the institutional foundations of an American educational system that must absorb and successfully educate and train an increasingly diverse student population. As these papers indicate (ORFIELD, ALLEN, WANG, FARRELL), the educational system appears to be failing in this task at the present time.

The failure is at multiple levels and therefore compels us to pay attention to various levels of policy formulation and implementation. For example, Orfield's (ORFIELD) assessment of public policies affecting minority access and achievement in the metropolitan Los Angeles higher education system reveals that Blacks and Latinos are systematically disadvantaged at each educational level. From highly segregated and educationally inferior primary schools, he shows that the flow of Blacks and Latinos through the education pipeline has declined sharply over the last decade or so, in large measure due to the implementation of discriminatory "get tough" educational policies. Orfield estimates that over half of all minority students dropout before graduation. With respect to the steadily declining numbers of minority students who manage to graduate and are eligible for college, Orfield's analysis indicates that California admission standards tend to stratify attendance in such a way that the majority are channeled into the community college system, the poorest funded sector of higher education. Whites and middle and upper class students, by contrast, tend to be channeled into the four year state college and university system, the most well funded sectors. Irrespective of whether Black and Latino students enroll in community colleges, the California State University, or the University of California system, however, Orfield's data indicate that most do not graduate. He attributes this state of affairs to a decreasing commitment to equality of opportunity and social justice throughout the education system. At the least such an analysis exposes the myth that the educational system is the generator of social mobility for all; instead, the education system at present appears to be reproducing the inequalities that already exist, particularly those that systematically vary by race and ethnicity.

Likewise, Allen (ALLEN) covers some of these same issues with a special focus on the state of Michigan. Using a multi-level analysis examining national, state, institutional, and individual factors, Allen assesses the correlates of Black student access, adjustment and achievement in higher education. In terms of access, Allen shows how colleges and universities in Michigan have actually retreated in their commitment to equal opportunity and social justice for Blacks. His data indicate that Black student enrollment in Michigan colleges and universities has declined dramatically since 1976. In terms of degree production, his data show the number of B.A., M.A., Ph.D., and surprisingly, professional degrees, awarded to Black students by Michigan colleges and universities also declined precipitously

over the past decade. Allen attempts to explain these enrollment/degree trends by examining statistically the influence of various institutional and personal factors on Black student performance in higher education. The results of this analysis provides a rich and detailed picture of the factors that accompany Black student success and failure in these institutions. From this analysis Allen sets forth an agenda for action that stresses institutional policy changes that will facilitate both increased Black access and achievement in these settings.

Traditionally, access to four year college has not been a problem for Asian Americans. As Ling-Chi Wang (WANG) carefully documents in the third paper, however, Asian Americans appear now to be victims of recent changes in the admissions policies of elite White universities and colleges. Concentrating on the competitive channels of admission, Wang argues that both public and private universities have purposefully manipulated admissions policies in such a way as to limit the entry of talented and qualified Asian American students in order to preserve space in these institutions for less qualified Whites. Using a host of data, particularly from the University of California, Berkeley, Wang reveals how these changes have evolved within the context of a call for "diversity," examines the effects of these changing standards on Asian Americans, and shows how Asian Americans are challenging these policies. Wang argues that the call for diversity has created an opportunity for elite universities to create "affirmative action" programs for Whites at the expense of more talented and academically successful Asian-Americans. In an ironic twist, we find the call for quality and increased selectivity being subverted when non-Whites appear to successfully challenge on academic grounds the prerogatives of privilege for the few. Wang's analysis is important for its continued reminder of the depth of racism in higher education.

Analyzing the recent resurgence of racially motivated violence on American colleges and university campuses, Farrell and Jones (FARRELL and JONES) links these incidents to the rising atmosphere of racial and ethnic intolerance promoted on the national level by an explicit politics of exclusion that finds expression in acts of violence and bigotry directed toward Blacks and other ethnic minorities throughout the country. Farrell insist that, if such acts are to be curtailed, the upper levels of college administration must be firm in assuring all students and faculty that the university will not condone or stand idly by in the face of racial and ethnic violence. As a policy prescription, he concludes that, in general, the maintenance of an academic environment that values racial and ethnic diversity is mostly dependent upon an administrative structure that actively supports, encourages, and promotes this type of diversity.

CONCLUSION

We hope that the issues and topics presented at this conference will serve as an agenda for future research on comparative ethnicity in American society. As this summary has indicated they range from issues having to do with the degree of racial segregation and integration to the meaning of community in America in the light of the presence of new and established ethnic and racial groups; from issues of explaining the differential achievement of various race and ethnic groups to their role in the labor market as entrepreneurs or participants in ethnic and/or informal economies; from issues of political identification and the possibilities of group coalition and alliances to issues of the role of education as a motor

of mobility or inequality. This volume has touched upon all of these and others.

At the same time, the example of a multi-disciplinary perspective that this conference has achieved is equally as important. Only through a multi-disciplinary perspectives can we generate the right questions that must be pursued as well as arrive at appropriate policy recommendations. And finally, the conference has also set out another important prerequisite for the analysis of comparative ethnicity: multi-racial and multi-ethnic analysts. In order to achieve the degree of understanding and the depth of analysis necessary to unravel the dilemmas we have identified, we must have the input and expertise of social scientists who represent the divergent racial and ethnic groups under analysis. This is important not just for the "insider" knowledge that is generated, but also for the creative syntheses of diverse cross-cutting insights generated from the mix of insider-outsider knowledge. Our conference has been self-consciously designed to provide that creative mixture. From the feedback received at the conference, from the responses of the participants, and from other appraisals, we are inclined to think that we have been successful in that endeavor. If that is the enduring legacy of our efforts then we will have made a contribution to diversifying the nature of scholarship in an area where the achievement of diversity is itself a prerequisite to identifying and solving the major dilemmas of an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse America.