Economic Development and Suburban Sprawl: Race and Ethnicity

Samuel L. Myers, Jr.
Roy Wilkins Professor of Human Relations and Social Justice
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
Overview

- Key missing issues in debate about measuring sprawl
  - race, racism
  - racial discrimination
  - racial and ethnic economic inequality
- Why are those missing issues?
- What are the implications for policy development
Race and Measuring Sprawl

Depending on sprawl measure adopted, metropolitan areas near the top of the list include cities:

- With fast growing minority populations
  - Riverside

- Heavy concentrations of minority populations
  - Atlanta, Greensboro, Raleigh-Durham

But, heavy minority areas also found at the bottom of the list.
Why is Race Missing?

- Theoretical foundations -- race is neither cause nor consequence
- Empirical foundations -- sampled MSAs are all undergoing demographic shifts and/or have large minority populations
- Researcher biases -- urban planners may feel uncomfortable talking about race
Policy Implications for Including Race in Discussions

- Role of HUD and ECOA Enforcement
- Role of Redistricting and Political Representation
- Role of Schooling and Student Achievement
Role of HUD and ECOA Enforcement

- In many metropolitan areas policy focus has been on the inner-city or central city
  - Public Housing and Enterprise Zones
  - CRA enforcement, lending initiatives
  - Anti-predatory lending initiatives

- Partly due to:
  - Visible concentrations of minorities
  - Location of political leadership among minorities
Role of Redistricting and Political Representation

- But, where is the new political leadership going to be located?
- As communities of color become more dispersed the ability to produce minority elected officials declines
- Unless, new rules for minority representation are devised
Role of Schooling and Student Achievement

Why do we care about the dispersal of the minority population?

Supporters of dispersal (esp. suburban dispersal) assumed or predicted:
- Better schools
- Less segregation
- Improved test scores and student achievement

But this does not appear to be the case in many metropolitan areas
Let’s Talk About Race

Benefits:

- Causes us to make more explicit the role that racial and ethnic minority groups must play as stakeholders in the debate.
- Helps identify connection between the politics of race and the policy developments on suburban sprawl.
Let’s Talk About Race

Costs

- May need to confront possibility that homeowner racialized choices contribute to sprawl
  - Distance for “others”
  - Greater individual autonomy versus group dependence
  - Fewer minority elected officials

- Conflicts associated with talking about race
Conclusion

More attention needs to be paid to the role of rapidly changing racial and ethnic dynamics
- Causes and Consequences of racial attitudes
- Relationships between power and prejudice in new suburbs
- Analysis of political representation and new methods and techniques for political empowerment
- Role of policy development as both cause and consequence