Metropolitan Expansion and Black Social Dislocation: The Link between Suburbanization and Center-City Crime*

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Abstract

A long-standing though unexplained finding is that the degree of suburbanization in a metropolitan area is positively related to the rates of serious crime in the incorporated center city. We account for this relationship by integrating theoretically two underlying features of urban life in the U.S. First, from a human ecology standpoint, suburbanization is part of a broader metropolitan expansion process that undermined and isolated many center-city black communities. Second, serious crime in cities is disproportionately concentrated in black communities. We reexamine the suburbanization/city-crime link using racially disaggregated models for cities and SMSAs in 1980. The findings show that the rate of suburbanization among the total SMSA population is strongly related to the center-city rates of serious crime among blacks, but not among whites. This supports the view that suburbanization increased black center-city crime rates by socially isolating black communities and engendering a variety of social problems. Indeed, upon controlling for potential mediators of the suburbanization-crime link, the relationship between suburbanization and black city-crime rates virtually disappeared.

The relationship between the spatial characteristics of metropolitan areas and crime rates has been a long-standing concern in criminology (e.g., Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Park 1925; Shaw & McKay 1931; Skogan 1990). Within this tradition, several studies have examined the relationship between the size of the suburban population in a metropolitan area and the rate of crime in the center, incorporated, city (cf. Farley 1987; Farley & Hansel 1981; Gibbs & Erickson 1976; Skogan 1977; Stafford & Gibbs 1980). These studies generally have found a persistent positive relationship between the degree of suburbanization in a metropolitan area and rates of serious crime in the center city. That is, when the proportion of metropolitan area residents who live in the suburbs is high, so too are the rates of serious crime in the center city of that metropolitan area (herein referred to as "cities" or "center cities").

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To date, empirical research has focused on two explanations for the relationship between suburbanization and city crime rates. The first suggests that the positive relationship is due to the participation of suburbanites in center-city crime either as victims or offenders (cf. Gibbs & Erickson 1976). A second explanation suggests that the positive relationship between suburbanization and central-city crime is due to the frustration and hostility engendered by city-suburb economic inequality (Farley 1987; Skogan 1977).

While prior research in this area has been instructive, it has not fully accounted for the link between suburbanization and crime in the center city. The purpose of our research is to show that this relationship can best be examined by acknowledging two critical features of urban life that feature prominently in the literature. First, according to the human ecology model, suburbanization is a complex ecological process that represents more than the mere movement of individuals from the city to the suburban fringe. On the contrary, it is a highly *selective* migration of industry and people that, historically, left in its wake an isolated population of minorities, blacks in particular, anchored to center-city areas with bleak economic prospects and a shrinking low-skill job base. Second, although previous research on suburbanization and center-city crime did not use racially disaggregated data, it is widely acknowledged that serious crime and other indicators of social malaise are disproportionately concentrated in black communities within center cities. Homicide is the leading cause of death among urban black males 15-34 years old (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 1990), and although blacks composed only about 12% of the U.S. population in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994), they account for more than one-half of all robbery and homicide arrests (U.S. Department of Justice 1992).

Our objective is to account for the hitherto unexplained link between the degree of suburbanization and the rate of serious crime in cities by showing that the negative outcomes of suburbanization in metropolitan areas are directed mainly toward blacks residing in the center, incorporated, city. We begin by linking the theory of metropolitan expansion to criminal offenses among blacks in the center city. We then model that relationship separately for black and white urban populations using racially disaggregated data for cities in 1980. Our analysis concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of the findings.

Background

An early study by Gibbs and Erickson (1976) using 1970 census and Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data finds that the crime rate of a center city increases as the proportion of suburbanites in the metropolitan area goes up. They suggest that the suburbanization/city-crime relationship is the result of *suburbanite participation* in city crime either as victims or offenders. Cities with larger suburban communities change the opportunity structure of crime in center cities by supplying the core areas with more potential offenders and victims (see also Stafford & Gibbs 1980). Unfortunately, this argument involves unrealistic assumptions about both the movement of criminal offenders (cf. Farley 1987;

Farley & Hansel 1981) and the characteristics of victims. It is at odds with empirical evidence suggesting that criminal offenders tend to commit crimes close to their places of residence (cf. Boggs 1965; Capone & Nichols 1976). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that the victims of serious crime tend to be young, black, poor and substantially more likely to reside in the center city (U.S. Dept. of Justice 1994). The explanation is also inconsistent with results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, which show that the majority of assaults (all types), auto thefts, household larcenies, rapes, and robberies take place between 6:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. — a time when most suburbanites are back home and most retail outlets in the center city are closed.

As an alternative, Farley and Hansel (1981) and Skogan (1977) suggest an *inequality-aggression* explanation based on the income inequality between cities and suburbs. The relative differences in living standards between those in the periphery and those in the core areas produces frustration and hostility among center-city dwellers, resulting in elevated rates of crime. This perspective is related to the more general relative-deprivation thesis, the most prominent statement of which came from Blau and Blau (1982). The Blaus maintain that in societies such as ours — where egalitarian principles prevail — injustices in the form of income inequality lead to hostile sentiments that can find expression in the form of criminal behavior. Unfortunately, while they find empirical support for their thesis, subsequent studies suggest that a direct relationship between inequality and crime is not clear. While some studies support the relative-deprivation hypothesis and others offer only partial support, most find no direct link between inequality and criminal behavior (see the review in Harer & Steffensmeier 1992). Using 1980 data, Farley (1987) finds that differences between center cities and suburbs in family income were a significant predictor of two out of seven index crimes. But rather than explaining the suburbanization/city-crime relationship, controlling for the spatial differences in family income either left the association virtually unchanged or, in the case of robbery and burglary, marginally increased the strength of the association.

In sum, while research has identified a positive relationship between the degree of suburbanization in a metropolitan area and the rate of serious crime in the center city, no studies have adequately explained this persistent finding. We argue that the suburbanization/city-crime relationship can be clarified by considering that (1) suburbanization is one element in a broader redistribution of people and industry that works to the social and economic disadvantage of center-city blacks, and (2) that serious crime in urban areas is overwhelmingly concentrated in black center-city communities. Through the theoretical and empirical intersection of these ideas we examine a possible causal mechanism between suburbanization and serious crime in center cities. Although the overriding objective of this analysis is to examine the *cross-sectional* relationship identified in previous research, for background and theoretical clarity we recognize in the discussion below the processual nature of these social dynamics.

Metropolitan Expansion and Minority Crime in Center Cities

Derived from the human ecology framework, the theory of metropolitan expansion relates population redistribution to the changing organizational structure of metropolitan areas. Rather than conceptualizing metropolitan growth as merely an increase in population size and density, the theory is predicated on the notion that outlying areas of a system are socially and economically integrated into a functional whole. But this incorporation of outlying areas also presupposes the development of a center-city nucleus that is sufficient to coordinate an expanding system. That is, population growth and the functional integration of the periphery is matched by an increase in command and control functions in the core of the metropolitan area (Berry & Kasarda 1977; Bidwell & Kasarda 1985; Hawley 1981).

During the previous century, when there were no efficient means of citywide transportation, individuals were confined to living close to their places of work. Since the distance to work was defined by the limits of reasonable pedestrian movement, this produced segmented and self-contained work-residence enclaves throughout an area (Frisbie & Kasarda 1988; Hawley 1981). But in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a series of technological improvements in transportation and communication commenced an irreversible process of *population deconcentration*. The advent of electric trolleys, rapid transit and eventually the automobile extended the commuting distance between residence and work and made it no longer necessary to live in areas adjacent to ones' place of employment (Frisbie & Kasarda 1988; Hawley 1950). In addition, widely accessible telephones, radios, daily local newspapers, and eventually television facilitated the social and economic integration of the surrounding communities and further reduced the physical, social, and economic cost of distance, giving residents a new locational flexibility and the option of moving away from congested places of work in center cities to the more attractive suburbs (Berry & Kasarda 1977).

As the population deconcentrated to the suburbs, a structural reorganization of metropolitan areas occurred. In particular, industry was spatially sorted according to function and specialization — a structural transformation referred to as *industrial drift*. The outskirts became zones of manufacturing and other low-order industries that were attracted by the low-cost land and accessible roadways of the suburbs. This differentiation in the periphery, however, was matched by the development of a center core capable of administering and coordinating an expanding though integrated urban system (Frisbie & Kasarda 1988). Essentially a command-and-control hub, the center became the focal point for professional, administrative, and other higher-order services. Results show that between 1970 and 1980, center cities of several major SMSAs experienced a net loss of clerical, sales, and blue-collar jobs to the suburbs but gained substantial numbers in the managerial, professional, technical and administrative-support sectors (Kasarda 1985; 1989; Noyelle & Stanback 1984). Among six major SMSAs, Kasarda (1993) finds that during the 1970s the number of low-skill jobs declined in center cities but increased in the suburbs. Of particular concern to the present study, however, is that population redistribution and industrial drift are selective processes that disenfranchise large segments of the

urban black population. Residents moving to the suburbs traditionally were white and middle class, while those remaining behind were mainly blacks or other minorities who were often poor, unemployed, and undereducated (Long 1981; Wilson 1987). While blacks composed 12.6% of SMSAs in 1980, they made up 21.8% of cities but only 5.9% of the suburbs (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1986). Contributing to these problems was the industrial restructuring of urban areas, which exacerbated the economic isolation of inner-city black communities. The movement of clerical, sales, blue-collar, and other low-skill sectors to the suburbs, and the reverse flow of management, professional, technical, and administrative jobs to the city center, created a spatial job mismatch. Low-skill inner-city blacks were constrained to areas with a shrinking low-skill job base and were unable to compete for high-skill jobs in their midst. This has lowered the job access for many blacks residing in cities (Blackley 1990; Ihlandfeldt & Sjöquist 1989; Leonard 1987), which has reduced their earnings (Holzer 1986) and widened the racial disparities in the labor market (Cain & Finnie 1990). Indeed, blacks who reside in more central areas than whites tend to have lower incomes (Galster 1987) even after controlling for personal characteristics (Rosenbaum & Popkin 1991).

The review above suggests that metropolitan expansion introduced into urban areas a number of changes that had negative consequences for black inner-city communities and displaced them from the mainstream occupational and social system. First, the decline in entry-level jobs in center cities reduced job access for blacks (Leonard 1987), thereby increasing the rates of black unemployment (Cain & Finnie 1990). Of particular concern is the high rates of *black male unemployment* in center cities, which may increase the rates of *black mother-only families* by reducing the economic incentives for marriage among black women (Testa et al. 1993; Wilson & Neckerman 1986). And as Sampson (1987) and Shihadeh and Steffensmeier (1994) have shown, the rates of black male unemployment and black female-headed households are both strong positive predictors of black violent crime in center cities.

To the extent that it increases joblessness, suburbanization also would tend to increase the rates of *poverty* and *welfare use* in many black center cities. But it also exacerbates poverty and welfare use by shifting resources such as human and social capital, as well as the urban tax base, away from center cities. Suburbanization refocuses the attention of banks and other lending agencies and redirects funds for municipal development toward the suburbs. This concentrates poverty and associated problems in core areas, further distancing blacks from legitimate opportunity structures (McLanahan & Garfinkel 1993; Murray 1984; but see Bane & Ellwood 1994). Moreover, Farley (1987) has pointed out that this sorting process inevitably leads to a *city-suburb income differential* in which income and socioeconomic status of neighborhoods increases with distance from the center of the city. He finds that city-suburb income inequality is positively associated with (racially nondisaggregated) serious crime rates in center cities.

Another offshoot of suburbanization are federally funded housing projects. Although initially conceived as a temporary shelter for low-income families left behind in the inner cities, these housing developments have become central dumping grounds for black mother-only families below the poverty line

(Chandler 1992; Friedman 1967; Rainwater 1970). This is important because prior research has found that these *structurally dense housing units* may increase the opportunity for crime (Sampson 1983).

Suburbanization also sorts the urban population on the basis of race, leading the Kerner Commission to comment that the nation is divided into two distinct societies; one black and residing in the inner city and the other white and located mainly in the suburbs (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968). Thus, suburbanization has shifted the racial composition of center cities in favor of blacks. Since blacks have higher serious crime rates than whites, this demographic shift in center-city populations further concentrates preexisting negative social and economic characteristics associated with black urban life, which in turn may increase black crime (Shihadeh & Flynn 1996). Thus, suburbanization may increase the *proportion of blacks* in center cities, leading to higher rates of black crime. Yet we recognize that racial composition variables have had competing interpretations and therefore may lack a clear and unambiguous meaning (see results section). Moreover, we do not imply that the mere presence of blacks should increase crime rates. In our opinion it is the aforementioned characteristics that are often collinear with the black experience that lead to higher rates of crime in black communities. Our models will control for some of these characteristics (e.g., poverty, joblessness, etc.) and thus the association between racial composition and black crime remains an important empirical question.

Thus, what may underlie the suburbanization/city-crime relationship is a process of metropolitan expansion that worked to the benefit of more affluent members of urban areas and to the detriment of poor minority residents. In our view the negative effects should be mainly discernible in black communities for two reasons. First, as we noted earlier, suburbanization sorts individuals on the basis of race. This produces a strong color differential between city and suburbs and tends to isolate blacks in center-city areas. Second, because suburbanization sorts also on the basis of class, blacks are at an overwhelming disadvantage, since they are more likely to possess any negative characteristics that disqualify participation in the suburbanization process. While some whites have also been left behind by suburbanization, this cannot compare to the catastrophic transformation that took place in black inner-city areas. In other words, the problems embedded in urban ghetto black communities are distinguished not so much by their uniqueness but by their scale (Kasarda 1989; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1993), and this may explain the disproportionately high rates of black serious crime in cities.

Research Design

The units of analyses in this study are the 136 cities in the U.S. in 1980 that number 100,000 or more residents, have at least 1,000 blacks, and are singular center cities of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs). That is, *center city* refers to the city located at the center of the SMSA. City and SMSA-level socioeconomic data are taken from the 1980 Summary Tape File 3C and the State and Metropolitan Area Data Book (1986). Race-disaggregated arrest data

for cities are from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) of the FBI. The arrest data are used to derive race-specific offense rates for the index crimes (homicide, robbery, rape, assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft) for U.S. cities in 1980 (see below).

While UCR arrest data have been subject to criticisms, at least with regard to homicide, robbery, and burglary, these data are generally regarded as unbiased measures that accurately reflect levels of black and white offenses (cf. Hindelang 1978; LaFree, Drass & O'Day 1992). While the estimates of the other four index offenses may be less accurate, we nonetheless include them for comparability with prior research on this question. However, because some law enforcement agencies are more efficient and have better recording procedures than others, all arrest rates are multiplied by the local offense/arrest ratio to correct for possible jurisdictional bias that could affect comparison of crime rates across ecological units (see Sampson 1987; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier 1994). For instance, the arrest rate for robbery in a given city is multiplied by the ratio of total robbery offenses to robbery arrests in that same city.[1] Also, in order to avoid year-to-year fluctuations in crime rates, we derive 1980 rates by averaging the rates for 1979-81 period. Finally, since the distribution of city-crime rates is heavily skewed to the right, the rates are also logarithmically transformed to induce homoskedasticity.[2] The main analytical tool in our analysis is OLS regression. We begin by estimating "reduced" models separately for blacks and whites. We then compare the results for suburbanization in the reduced models to those derived from "full" models that contain additional variables identified in the theoretical discussion as potential mediators of the suburbanization-crime link.

Reduced Set of Predictors

Our major predictor, *suburbanization,* is measured as the percentage of all SMSA residents who live in the suburbs. We also control for the *SMSA population* (natural-log transformed because of its heavy right skew). We include a north-south indicator (*north*=1) to account for regional variations in crime rates (Curtis 1975; Gastil 1971; Huff-Corzine, Corzine & Moore 1986; Messner 1983). Shihadeh and Steffensmeier (1994) find that within-race inequality is an important predictor of both black and white city-level violence rates and, therefore, we include a measure of *white-to-white inequality* and *black-to-black inequality* in our white and black models, respectively. Each is calculated as a racially bounded gini coefficient of income inequality in the city.

Farley (1987) suggests that since crime is concentrated in the core of cities, those cities with political boundaries that extend far beyond the center high-crime areas (i.e., overbounded cities) are likely to have lower crime rates than cities with political boundaries closer to the city core (i.e., underbounded cities). This occurs because the overbounded cities contain more residents from the low-crime outlying areas. Our audit of the literature reveals that this intriguing idea has never been tested. Therefore, in our racially disaggregated models we include a *boundedness* indicator measured as the ratio of the center-city land area to the SMSA land area. Since the area of both the city and SMSA are politically defined,[3] this indicator is conceptually valid and is consistent with that suggested by Farley (1987).

Mediators

In addition to the predictors noted above, we include a set of potential mediators of the suburbanization-crime link (see the introduction for more detail). Given that a deficit of economically viable black males is potentially linked to both black marital instability and to serious black crime, we include the *black MMPI*. This is a marriage market indicator measured as the number of employed 16- to 64-year-old black males per 100 similarly aged black females in the city (see Sampson 1987; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier 1994). *Black family structure* is measured as the percentage of black households in the city that are headed by a female with children under the age of 18.

To reflect black income differences between the city and suburbs we include racially disaggregated measures of city-suburb inequality. *Black city-suburb inequality* is the ratio of black mean family income in the center city to black mean family income in the remainder of the SMSA. While this measures relative poverty, we also measure *black poverty* as the proportion of blacks under the poverty line. *Black welfare* is the mean public assistance payment (in $1,000s) to center-city blacks and includes supplementary security income transfers to low-income persons, aid to families with dependent children (AFDC), and general assistance (Medicare not included). *Structural density* is the percentage of black housing in the city that is located in attached clusters of five units or more. Finally, *proportion black* is the common indicator for racial composition of the city population.

Results

Before estimating separate models for blacks and whites, we estimated racially nondisaggregated models and found that the degree of suburbanization among the total population is, as expected, positively related to the rates of four out of seven index crimes (robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny theft). We do not report these in tabular form, since our findings confirm those of earlier studies (see Farley 1987), which show that suburbanization is a significant predictor of the rate of serious offenses in the incorporated center city. But as our earlier discussion suggests, theoretical interpretations and empirical models based on racially nondisaggregated populations are potentially misleading because they mask striking differences between black and white communities in their structural conditions and the rates of serious crime.[4]

The results from models using racially disaggregated data appear in Table 1. As we suspected, the reliance of previous research on racially nondisaggregated data conceals major race differences in the effect of suburbanization on center-city crime. Based on race-specific models, our findings strongly support the view that suburbanization contributes to the disinvestment and decline of black communities in the city, thereby engendering high crime rates. According to the results of Table 1, suburbanization significantly predicted 6 of 7 black serious crimes, and the effect in each case appears to be substantial. For instance, a one-standard-deviation rise in suburbanization is associated with a nearly one-quarter-standard-deviation rise ($\beta = .240$) in the (log) rate of black homicides per 100,000 population, and a $\beta = .183$ rise in black robbery. Su-

burbanization has a similar effect on black burglary ($B = .220$) and black auto theft ($B = .207$), and weaker though significant associations with black aggravated assault ($B = .093$) and black larceny theft ($B = .098$). Indeed, the standardized estimates suggest that suburbanization among the total population appears to be a robust and consistent predictor of black serious crime in center cities. In sharp contrast, the effect of suburbanization on white center-city crime is virtually nonexistent. According to the models predicting crime data for whites, the rate of suburbanization is not related to any of the white index crimes, with the exception of a negative association with rape ($B = -.209$).

Contrary to the expectation that boundedness should be negatively related to center-city crime rates (see Farley 1987 and methods section), we find no consistent effect on either black or white crime. Boundedness negatively predicted three black crimes (homicide, rape, and aggravated assault) and two white crimes (rape and larceny theft) and positively predicted the rates of both white and black auto theft. It was not a significant predictor in the rest of the models. Despite the logical integrity of the boundedness argument, we find that the size of the incorporated city relative to the entire metropolitan area is not systematically related to the rate of serious crime among blacks or whites in the center city.

According to our interpretation, suburbanization contributes to urban black crime because it leads to a number of negative outcomes in center-city black communities — in effect, creating black-dominated areas with multiple structural disadvantages. To the extent that these outcomes mediate the link between suburbanization and crime, controlling for them should reduce/negate the association observed in Table 1 between suburbanization and black city crime. To address this issue we present two types of models in Table 2. Models labeled 1 predict the rate of black city crime using a reduced set of predictors. These are the same black-crime models shown previously in Table 1 but are depicted again in Table 2 for comparison. Models labeled 2, on the other hand, are full models that incorporate the additional mediators.

The results in Table 2 appear to support our expectation that controlling for black mediating characteristics suppresses the effect of suburbanization on black city crime. For instance, the effect of suburbanization on black homicide in model 1 is significant and substantial at $B = .240$. In model 2, which controls for a host of black mediating variables, the effect of suburbanization on black homicide is no longer significant. For black robbery, burglary, larceny theft, and auto theft, the inclusion of the mediating variables similarly negates the effect of suburbanization. The only exception occurs for black aggravated assault, where the effect of suburbanization remains significant. Nonetheless, the results support the view that suburbanization engenders high rates of crime through its negative social and economic impact on black communities in center cities.

We also note that the proportion of the center city that is black is negatively associated with the rates of black crime. This is at odds with the view that suburbanization engenders high rates of black crime by concentrating blacks in center cities. But while some macrocrime research finds negative effects similar to ours (Sampson 1987; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier 1994), other research finds positive effects (see Land, McCall & Cohen 1990 for a review). These differences in results have been matched by differences in substantive interpretations of the

TABLE 1: OLS Regression Estimates Predicting Race-Disaggregated Crime Rates in U.S. Cities, 1980

	Homicide		Robbery		Rape		Assault	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Suburbanization	-.378 (-.101)	.727* (.240)	.303 (.083)	.644* (.183)	-.699* (-.209)	-.540 (-.168)	-.619 (-.167)	.294** (.093)
SMSA pop.	.383** (.461)	8.235** (.348)	.345 (.420)	.273 (.343)	.177** (.240)	.119* (.167)	.117 (.143)	-.015 (-.022)
North	-.605** (-.399)	-.091 (-.074)	-.238** (-.163)	.196* (.139)	-.182 (-.135)	-.101 (-.078)	-.378** (-.253)	-.161 (-.127)
W-to-W inequality	3.146** (.241)	—	3.508** (.281)	—	2.313** (.200)	—	3.688** (.287)	—
B-to-B inequality	—	1.365 (.130)	—	-.683 (-.057)	—	-2.095** (-.189)	—	-1.771 (-.162)
Boundedness	1.229 (.074)	-2.728* (-.203)	.742 (.044)	-.370 (-.023)	-2.916** (-.197)	-3.924** (-.275)	-2.212 (-.135)	-3.537** (-.252)
R^2	.397	.127	.338	.249	.120	.111	.161	.118

[a] Standard coefficients are in parentheses.

* $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$

effect of racial composition. On the one hand, proportion black has been viewed as an indicator of a presence of a black subculture, which is presumed to place greater emphasis on violence (e.g., Curtis 1975). But on the other hand, proportion black may indicate police neglect of crime in areas with high black concentrations. According to Liska and Chamlin (1984), the benign neglect occurs because as the proportion of blacks increases so does the opportunity for black-on-black crime. Since both black victims and law enforcement may view black-on-black crimes as a personal or family issue, the likelihood of official response declines. Moreover, law enforcement may regard blacks as less worthy of official intervention because they perceive them as having lower status than whites. These factors, in turn, may lead to lower reporting on the part of black victims, who may become frustrated by their inability to legitimate their complaints and to secure police resources to resolve them. While this is not likely to occur for something as serious as homicide, it may be a possibility for the other serious crimes. We find it, therefore, more than a coincidence that racial composition has a negative effect on all black crimes except homicide. By this reasoning, our findings seem to undermine the subculture-of-violence thesis and lend support to the neglect hypothesis. But given the diffuse nature of the

TABLE 1: OLS Regression Estimates Predicting Race-Disaggregated Crime Rates in U.S. Cities, 1980 (Continued)

	Burglary		Larceny Theft		Auto Theft	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Suburbanization	.213 (.098)	.537* (.220)	-.056 (-.023)	.244* (.098)	.087 (.026)	.765** (.207)
SMSA pop.	-.019 (-.040)	-.086 (-.158)	-.122** (-.229)	-.151** (-.276)	.225** (.310)	.291** (.356)
North	-.194** (-.221)	-.065 (-.065)	-.311** (-.319)	.024 (.024)	-.174 (-.131)	.042 (.028)
W-to-W inequality	1.839** (.243)	—	.170 (.020)	—	3.172** (.278)	—
B-to-B inequality	—	-.816 (-.097)	—	-1.149 (-.134)	—	-.799 (-.063)
Boundedness	.513 (.053)	-.379 (-.035)	-1.679* (-.157)	-1.622 (-.147)	2.962** (.203)	2.558* (.156)
R^2	.112	.051	.175	.108	.219	.235

[a] Standard coefficients are in parentheses.

* $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$

proportion black measure, the inconsistency in past results, and its use as an indicator for diametrically opposed perspectives, we suggest that its primary importance remains as a sensible control for a host of factors that are collinear with the urban black experience.

Our findings suggest that the suburbanization/city-crime relationship is actually due to an underlying association between suburbanization and *black* city crime. In contrast, the relationship between suburbanization and white city crime is virtually nonexistent. This also demonstrates the utility of racially disaggregated data, since it can reveal critical race differences in the sources of crime. Furthermore, to the extent that suburbanization is detrimental mainly to center-city blacks, the findings support our theoretical interpretation, since the effect of suburbanization on black crime all but disappears upon controlling for black underclass characteristics.

TABLE 2: OLS Regression Estimates Predicting Black Crime Rates in U.S. Cities, 1980

	Homicide		Robbery		Rape		Assault	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Suburbanization	.727* (.240)	-.422 (-.119)	.644* (.183)	.266 (.064)	-.540 (-.168)	-.216 (-.055)	.294** (.093)	.701* (.184)
SMSA population	.235** (.348)	.253** (.358)	.273** (.343)	.212** (.257)	.119* (.167)	.174** (.224)	-.015 (-.022)	.036 (.048)
North	-.091 (-.074)	.095 (.080)	.196* (.139)	.217* (.161)	-.101 (-.078)	.046 (.035)	-.161 (-.127)	-.165 (-.130)
Black-to-black inequality	1.365 (.130)	2.545 (.232)	-.683 (-.057)	1.562 (.126)	-2.095** (-.189)	2.082 (.172)	-1.771* (-.162)	1.387 (.118)
Boundedness	-2.728* (-.203)	-1.432 (-.114)	-.370 (-.023)	-1.176 (-.077)	-3.924** (-.275)	-3.607** (-.260)	-3.537** (-.252)	-2.974** (-.221)
Black MMPI	—	.020** (.291)	—	.008 (.105)	—	.022** .265	—	.009 (.120)
Black family structure	—	-.030** (-.388)	—	-.017 (-.189)	—	.017 (.198)	—	.005 (.063)
Black poverty	—	1.579 (.134)	—	2.078 (.157)	—	-.094 (-.007)	—	-.964 (-.077)
Black welfare	—	.186 (.201)	—	.405** (.376)	—	.196* (.192)	—	.091 (.092)
Black city-suburb income inequality	—	-.246 (-.101)	—	-.303 (-.111)	—	.142 (.054)	—	.282 (.110)
Proportion black	—	.014 (.004)	—	-1.336** (-.323)	—	-1.555** (-.386)	—	-1.871** (-.479)
Structural density	—	.004 (.001)	—	2.121** (.300)	—	.579 (.090)	—	.663 (.107)
R^2	.127	.292	.249	.587	.111	.547	.118	.463

TABLE 2: OLS Regression Estimates Predicting Black Crime Rates in U.S. Cities, 1980 (Continued)

	Burglary		Larceny Theft		Auto Theft	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Suburbinization	.537*	.442	.244*	.280	.765**	.142
	(.220)	(.152)	(.098)	(.092)	(.207)	(.033)
SMSA population	-.086	-.080	-.151**	-.100*	.291**	.258**
	(-.158)	(-.138)	(-.276)	(-.166)	(.356)	(.301)
North	-.065	.013	.024	.095	.042	.074
	(-.065)	(.013)	(.024)	(.093)	(.028)	(.051)
Black-to-black inequality	-.816	2.063	-1.149	3.038**	-.799	5.873**
	(-.097)	(.230)	(-.134)	(.323)	(-.063)	(.439)
Boundedness	-.379	-.535	-1.622	-1.716*	2.558*	.934
	(-.035)	(-.052)	(-.147)	(-.159)	(.156)	(.061)
Black MMPI	—	.011*	—	.011*	—	.012
		(.199)		(.179)		(.136)
Black family structure	—	-.010	—	-.005	—	-.014
		(-.161)		(-.078)		(-.147)
Black poverty	—	-.138	—	-1.805	—	-3.305*
		(-.014)		(-.180)		(-.232)
Black welfare	—	.160*	—	.117	—	.559**
		(.213)		(.147)		(.503)
Black city-suburb income inequality	—	.039	—	.253	—	-.388
		(.020)		(.123)		(-.133)
Proportion black	—	-1.393**	—	-1.471**	—	-.840*
		(-.466)		(-.470)		(-.188)
Structural density	—	.692	—	.563	—	.568
		(.146)		(.113)		(.080)
R^2	.051	.526	.108	.562	.235	.515

Discussion and Conclusion

Building on previous research that found an association between the degree of suburbanization within SMSAs and the rate of crime in the incorporated center city, the present study reanalyzed that association by blending two prominent themes regarding urban life in the U.S. First, according to metropolitan expansion theory, suburbanization involves a selective movement of industry and people that ultimately leaves behind a locus of minority poor in areas with a declining low-skill job base. Second, serious crime in center cities is disproportionately concentrated in black communities. We reexamined the suburbanization-crime link by integrating theoretically these ideas and then modeled them using racially disaggregated data for cities and SMSAs.

Although prior research shows that suburbanization is positively related to the rate of index crime among all residents of center cities, our study reveals major differences by race. Racially disaggregated models suggest that the suburbanization rate had little or no association with white city crime but exhibited a strong association with black city crime. This supports our theoretical interpretation that the effect of suburbanization is selective; though it benefits many whites, it isolates center-city black communities from mainstream society by creating wells of structural disadvantage and social dislocation and thereby generating high rates of black serious crime. Indeed, when we controlled for several of the negative outcomes of suburbanization for center-city blacks, we found that the association between suburbanization and black serious crime essentially disappeared.

We draw several implications from these findings. First, this analysis reveals that using racially disaggregated macro models of crime avoids a basic problem intrinsic to previous racially nondisaggregated research. On the one hand, structural predictors (e.g., percentage of poor, total inequality, etc.) based on racially nondisaggregated populations reflect mainly the characteristics of the white population, since they compose the vast bulk of the U.S. population. On the other hand, these racially nondisaggregated variables are used to predict serious crime, which is disproportionately located in urban black communities. Race-disaggregated ecological models of crime avoid this problem and, as we show, can expose the underlying causal mechanisms of major predictors of crime. Given the fundamental differences in the urban experience of blacks and whites, it is surprising that previous research on suburbanization and crime — indeed the bulk of extant criminology at the ecological level — ignores the race differences in the structural correlates of serious crime. This is surprising, given the sustained intensity of social problems in black ghettos, which makes life intrinsically different from that faced by other segments of urban society. Perhaps there is a reluctance to address race differences in a potentially stigmatizing behavior such as crime. But we agree with Wilson (1987) when he says that "the liberal perspective on the ghetto underclass has become less persuasive and convincing in public discourse principally because many of those who represent traditional liberal views on social issues have been reluctant to discuss openly . . . the sharp differences in the pathologies in ghetto communities" (6).

Second, rather than focusing on the race differences as individual traits and potential (e.g., Herrnstein & Murray 1994; Lewis 1968), we argue that the sources of black crime can be found in the changing organization of metropolitan areas. Metropolitan expansion triggered a number of structural changes that completely overwhelmed many black communities and ensured their decline. As more privileged individuals — among all racial and ethnic segments of the population — relocated to the fringes of the city and enjoyed the advantages of suburban life, they left behind a locus of black social dislocation and community decline. This undermining of black communities led to a hyperghettoization of many center-city black areas that, in turn, had a number of negative outcomes including a rise in the rates of serious black crime. Contrary to most macrolevel analyses of crime, which tend to conceptualize and model the *internal* organization or opportunity structure of neighborhoods as a cause of crime (as noted by Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Finestone 1976; Hunter 1985), our analysis conceptualizes the broader social and political dynamics of the urban complex that are external to neighborhoods. Identifying these forces of change is both necessary and possible, and of potentially enormous benefit to systemic, opportunity, and other macro perspectives on urban crime.

Finally, we suggest several avenues for future research that build upon the present findings and can address the limitations of this analysis. First, our conceptualization of the suburbanization-crime relationship involves trends in metropolitan expansion and the associated decline in black center-city communities over time. Given the longitudinal dimension of this (and any other) macrosocial process, support for our assertions also needs longitudinal data that go back perhaps as far as 1950 during the time of accelerating white suburbanization. However, analysts must be cautious about the quality of UCR urban crime data before 1970. Second, subsequent research should examine the degree to which *black* suburbanization influences the rates of black center-city crime. In the most prominent statement of that thesis, Wilson (1987) suggests that a major factor in the transformation of black communities was the migration of black residents to the suburbs. At the very least, future macrosocial research on crime must acknowledge that although blacks and whites may reside in the same cities, they often live in two different social worlds.

Notes

1. Although the adjustment accounts for interjurisdictional bias in police efficiency in making arrests, the offense/arrest ratio is potentially sensitive to the underreporting of offenses (or sudden changes in the reporting of arrests — see Chilton 1982). All else being equal, the adjustment would tend to bias downward the rates in cities that suffer from underreporting of serious offenses. To determine the sensitivity of our findings to the adjustment procedure, we reestimated our models using only arrest data. The results are very similar and do not change the substantive conclusions of the analysis.

2. Multicollinearity can be a problem in aggregate-level studies. We address this issue in several ways. First, we do not incorporate independent variables in our models if their correlation with other predictors is equal to or greater than 0.80. Second, we examined variance inflation factors (VIF) associated with each parameter estimate and found none to be greater than 3.0. Third, since multicollinearity is not based solely on the intercorrelations among the independent variables, we examined for multicollinearity while taking the dependent variables

— the crime rates — into account. We observed that the significant estimates in our models exhibited considerable stability when selected predictors were removed.

3. Unlike cities, SMSAs are not politically autonomous units. Nonetheless, they are political to the extent that they are defined by the country boundaries, which are themselves politically designated.

4. Descriptive statistics for index crime rates and the socioeconomic predictors are available from the authors. These findings are not reported in tabular form, since they reveal what has been repeatedly shown in other macrocrime research; that in comparison to whites, blacks have much higher crime rates and are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

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