

The New Metropolitan Reality in the US: Rethinking the Traditional Model

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Summary. This paper critically evaluates the traditional metropolitan model of an urban core and a homogeneous suburban ring. Using place data from the US Bureau of the Census from 1980 to 2000, it examines 1639 suburbs from a sample of 13 metropolitan areas in the US. Poor, manufacturing, Black and immigrant suburbs are identified to show that metropolitan areas are less a simple dichotomous structure and more a mosaic of very diverse suburban places. The results suggest the need for more subtle frameworks in order better to understand the structure of contemporary metropolitan areas.

Introduction

A recent article in the *Washington Post* entitled 'Boston's racial barriers slow to fall' reported on the continuing segregation in the Boston metropolitan area (Finer, 2003). The article states that the suburbs are overwhelmingly White.

The report is interesting for the data it relates as well as the model that it invokes, a metropolitan America composed of an urban core and essentially homogeneous suburbs. This general model of similar suburbs somehow different from the urban core still persists in the popular imagination despite the work of many urban scholars. The existence of working-class suburbs, automobile suburbs, industrial suburbs, older suburbs, streetcar suburbs and even 'suburbs as slums' have all been recognised and documented (Berger, 1968; Warner, 1978; Jackson, 1985; Knox, 1994; Lewis, 1999;

Corbin Sies, 2001; Hayden, 2003). Similarly, Orfield (2002), Katz and Lang (2003) and Hudnut (2003) have explored suburban diversity in the context of suburban decline. Despite this research, however, the simple dichotomous model persists in popular imagination, overlooking the complexity of the suburbs. We will term it the traditional metropolitan model of central cities contrasted with essentially homogeneous suburbs. It is still the dominant structure for interpreting data at the metropolitan scale and has a continuing hold over scholarly and popular thinking. In this paper, we want to assess critically this traditional model.

Creating a Suburban Nation and Generating the Traditional Model

The traditional model has a bias in recent history. An unprecedented explosion of suburban population growth and a massive

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expansion in residential construction that began after World War II mark the beginnings of the mass suburbanisation of the US (Jackson, 1985; Fishman, 1987; Knox, 1994; Hayden, 2003). Developers employed a strategy of mass production, using standardised design and styles to create sprawling developments with little variation (Jackson, 1985). An important example of this form of production was the Levittown complex in Long Island, New York. Construction began in 1947 and Levittown eventually contained more than 17 400 homes for some 82 000 residents (Gans, 1967). Such suburban development and growth became symbolic of the post-war pursuit of the 'American dream' (Kelly, 1993). As more Levittown-style, mass-produced and standard-designed developments were created, the post-war suburbs took on a monotonous, almost tedious tone. The early post-war suburbs were primarily White and economically homogeneous, and this Levittown image of suburbia has persisted down the decades to become the classic image of suburban America that still resonates today. It is always contrasted with a stereotype of central cities as places of danger, poverty and decay (Beauregard, 2003). This traditional model had a purchase in reality especially as many central cities were in serious decline by the 1970s. However, this model has persisted over the past 30 years with its focus on crude dualisms of rich suburbs–poor cities, White suburbs–Black cities, residential suburbs–industrial cities, long after major socioeconomic changes have disrupted its patterns and processes.

The glorification of 'rural living' and perceptions of cruelty and corruption in city life have been resounding themes in American culture since the beginning of the country's independence (Marsh and Kaplan, 1976). From their inception, suburbs acquired the image of the ideal environment for healthy, wholesome, family living (Jackson, 1985). Cities acquired the opposite. As Judd and Swanstrom (2004, p. 238) suggest, these sharp descriptions of a city–suburban dichotomy "are still nurtured and kept alive by a drumbeat of overwrought negative images of

the inner city". The traditional model is perpetuated by a bias towards central-city problems and a neglect of suburban diversity, especially in the creation of public policy, urban planning and media coverage (Orfield, 2002; Dreier, 2005).

Identifying More Subtle Metropolitan Realities

The stereotypes of the traditional model have largely been reproduced by the conventional method of organising data, like the Boston study noted above, in which data are presented in terms of the simple dichotomous categories of cities and suburban territory. This form of presentation reinforces the traditional model. In 2003, the US Bureau of the Census developed new standards for defining metropolitan statistical areas, abandoning the designation of 'central city' for 'principal city' in an attempt to move beyond the central-core–periphery structure. A metropolitan area can consist of multiple principal cities identified using population size and employment. However, the Census Bureau has never used the term 'suburb' in tabulating data and does not as yet define suburban settlement types (such as inner suburb, outer suburb, exurb).

Data organisation makes it difficult to show that American suburbs are not a monolithic, homogeneous entity and to move beyond the common practice of analysing data in simple city–suburban categories. In this paper, we use more finely grained, place-level data to examine the suburban areas of selected metropolitan areas. Places are the best available substitute for identifying suburbs. We use the categorisation of metropolitan areas supplied by the US Bureau of the Census. The Census (2000) defines a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) as an area comprised of a nucleus, or core city or cities (that contains a minimum population of 50 000) and adjacent communities that have 'social and economic integration with that nucleus'. The suburbs of our analysis are those 'adjacent communities' that are defined by the Census as places.

According to the Census, there are three types of places: census designated places (CDPs), consolidated cities and incorporated places. CDP boundaries are delineated to collect data on unincorporated areas with concentrations of population, housing and commercial sites and a degree of local identity. Consolidated cities consist of two or more local governments that have merged to form a regional government. A consolidated place is a unit of local government for which the functions of an incorporated place and its county or minor civil division unit have merged. Incorporated places are municipal incorporations that operate a local government other than the central city within a metropolitan area. An incorporated place is established to provide governmental functions for a concentration of people as opposed to a minor civil division unit, which is generally created to provide services or administer an area without regard to population. We have combined these three designations to identify what we term as suburban places. Our primary data source is the *State of the Cities Data System 1970–2000*, produced by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Census data at the place level provide a finer spatial mesh to detect suburbs with specific political, commercial or community identities. Using this spatial unit of analysis also provides a measure of political fragmentation, an important feature of US suburban development. Political fragmentation impacts the stability of metropolitan areas, shaping social, economic and fiscal characteristics of suburban communities (Teaford, 1979; Miller, 2002; Feiock, 2004). Of increasing concern is how declining suburbs cope with rising social and economic problems in highly fragmented metropolitan areas (Orfield, 2002; Hudnut, 2003). Despite the fact that place-level data do not capture all residents within a metropolitan area, they provide a finer analysis of suburban communities than the traditional city–county divide.

The boundaries for suburban places, like census tracts, can change from one census to the next. However, such boundary changes

typically occur for incorporated places where there has been municipal annexation, detachment or mergers of two or more places. We believe that the minor boundary changes that have occurred in our sample of suburban places since 1980 do not invalidate our comparative analysis.

We have identified 13 metropolitan areas for our study. All such selections can be criticised. Our aim was to provide a representative sample rather than undertake the enormous task of looking at all metro areas in the US. Our sample is relatively small to make data analysis manageable but large enough to capture the major sources of metropolitan variation in the US. These areas provide a representative sample of the major socioeconomic trends across the country. They can be classified by regional growth and decline patterns based on the transition to a service-based economy (see Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Sassen, 1990). First, we have included Baltimore and Philadelphia to capture the decline of older Rustbelt cities along the Northeastern corridor. Secondly, Midwestern cities like Cleveland, Cincinnati and St Louis are included because they have experienced manufacturing decline and share similar economic functions (Bernard, 1990). Thirdly, we include Atlanta and Phoenix as examples of metropolitan areas that are fast-growing while at the same time recognising that they are exemplars of two very different models of Sunbelt-style sprawl (Bernard and Rice, 1983; Lang and Rengert, 2003). Fourthly, San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose represent the west coast population and economic boom–bust cycle. Lastly, Boston, Chicago and Washington, DC, are large regions with highly specialised service economies that contain substantial interdependence between their suburbs and central cities.

Table 1 lists the metropolitan regions, the respective number of suburban places and the total population for identified suburban areas. In total, we examined 13 metropolitan areas containing 1652 places (13 central cities and 1639 suburbs). This is a fine-grained

Table 1. Suburban places of selected metropolitan areas

Metropolitan area	Number of suburbs	Population
Atlanta MSA	126	1 246 799
Baltimore PMSA	91	1 457 910
Boston PMSA	128	2 817 688
Chicago PMSA	299	4 795 144
Cincinnati PMSA	133	684 722
Cleveland PMSA	117	1 474 743
Oakland PMSA	44	1 880 857
Philadelphia PMSA	188	1 213 030
Phoenix MSA	36	1 719 610
San Francisco PMSA	40	872 029
San Jose PMSA	18	715 474
St Louis PMSA	223	1 426 286
Washington, DC, PMSA	196	2 973 308
Total	1639	20 572 891

Notes: Number of suburbs is based on places that existed in 1980. Population is based on 2000 census data.

mesh that allows suburban variations to be more easily noted than the standard central-city–suburban dual categorisation.

While there is a tremendous amount of data on these places, in this paper, we restrict our analysis to preliminary remarks on a few variables. For the moment, we examine four key variables, suggested by the current literature as important sources of suburban diversity, to explore the socioeconomic mosaic of suburban areas: income, employment, race and immigration (Bluestone and Stevenson, 2000; Bobo *et al.*, 2000; Farley *et al.*, 2000; O'Connor *et al.*, 2000; Sjoquist, 2000).

Rich and Poor Suburbs

The traditional model of metropolitan America posits a poor city and wealthier suburban ring. It also suggests that the suburbs maintain their higher economic status over time (Farley, 1964). However, when we use the finer-grained mesh of place data, a more complex pattern emerges. Figure 1 shows income data for the sample of 13 metropolitan areas. The vertical lines for each metro area

represent the range of median family incomes. There is substantial variation in the median family income of suburban places and, in all cases, the poorest suburban place has a lower median family income than the central city.

Figure 2 shows the spatial distribution of median family income in the Atlanta metropolitan area. While richer suburban places can be found along a south-east–north-west axis from the central city, significant numbers of moderate-income places can be found in the outer periphery. One such suburb in Atlanta is Griffin, located in Spalding County on the outskirts of the metro area. It is approximately 40 miles south of the City of Atlanta. Traditionally a manufacturing town, it still has almost 24 per cent of its population employed in manufacturing. The suburb has grown considerably to a population of 23 000. As well as a substantially lower median family income, Griffin is below the state average for the percentage of population with a bachelor's degree and for median house value. Atlanta's suburban expansion now encompasses poor as well as rich places.

Figure 3 provides a visual expression of this income diversity for 1980 and 2000. Some suburbs have been left behind as the central city has experienced an increase in median family income and the gap between rich and poor suburbs is widening.

A similar pattern can be noted for Chicago (see Figure 4). Again, the expansion of the metro area now includes places of modest income on the metropolitan periphery. For instance, Morris, once a small village in rural Illinois, is now part of Chicago's suburban diversity: its median family income of \$54 987 has consistently lagged \$15 000 behind the rest of Chicago's suburbs from 1980 to 2000. Like Atlanta, Chicago's suburban landscape now encompasses both rich and poor places scattered across the metropolitan area.

We suggest a more general trend that metropolitan areas are now expanding to incorporate places with modest economic opportunities. Poor places outside the central city are now becoming part of the metro

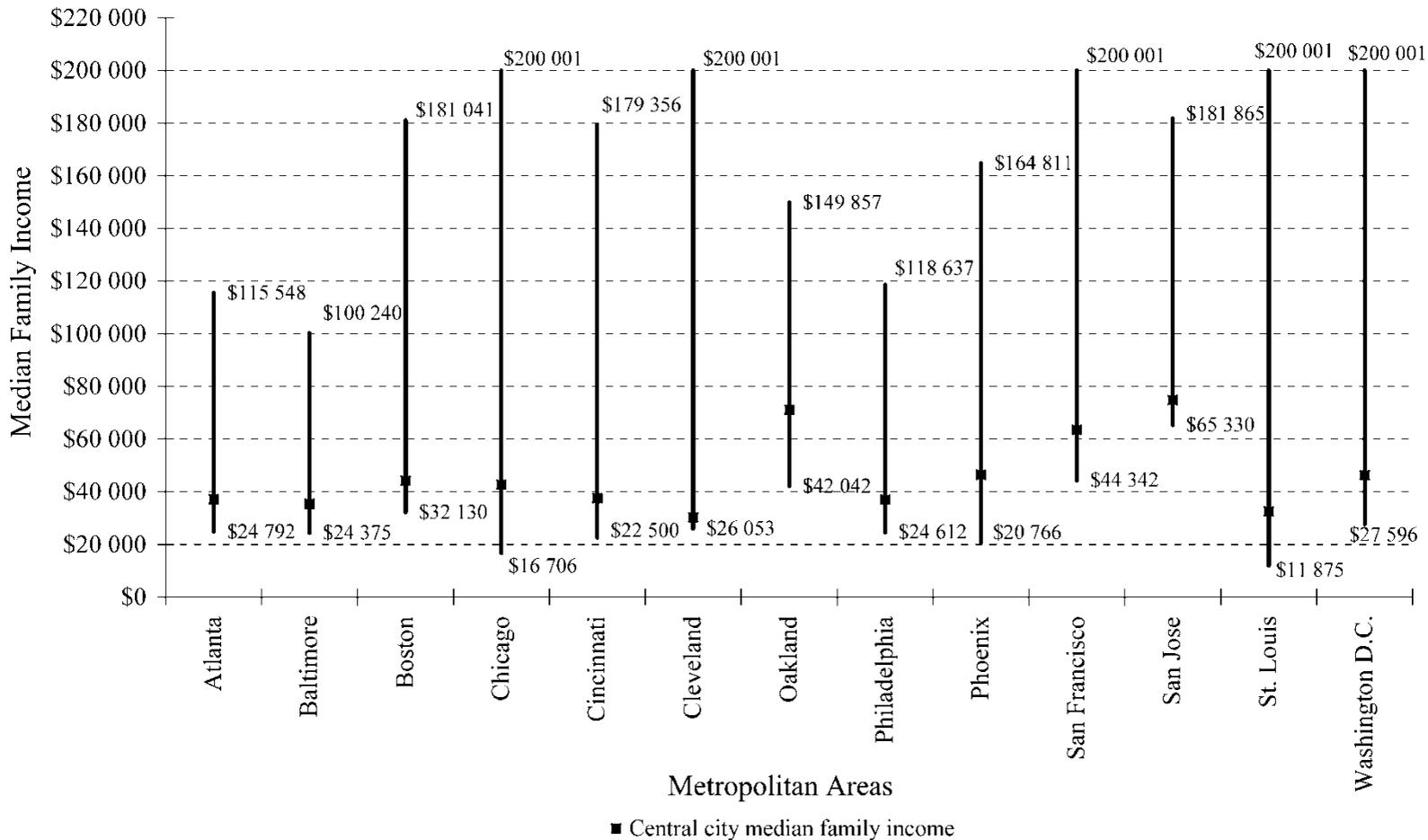


Figure 1. Income variation in selected metropolitan areas, 2000.

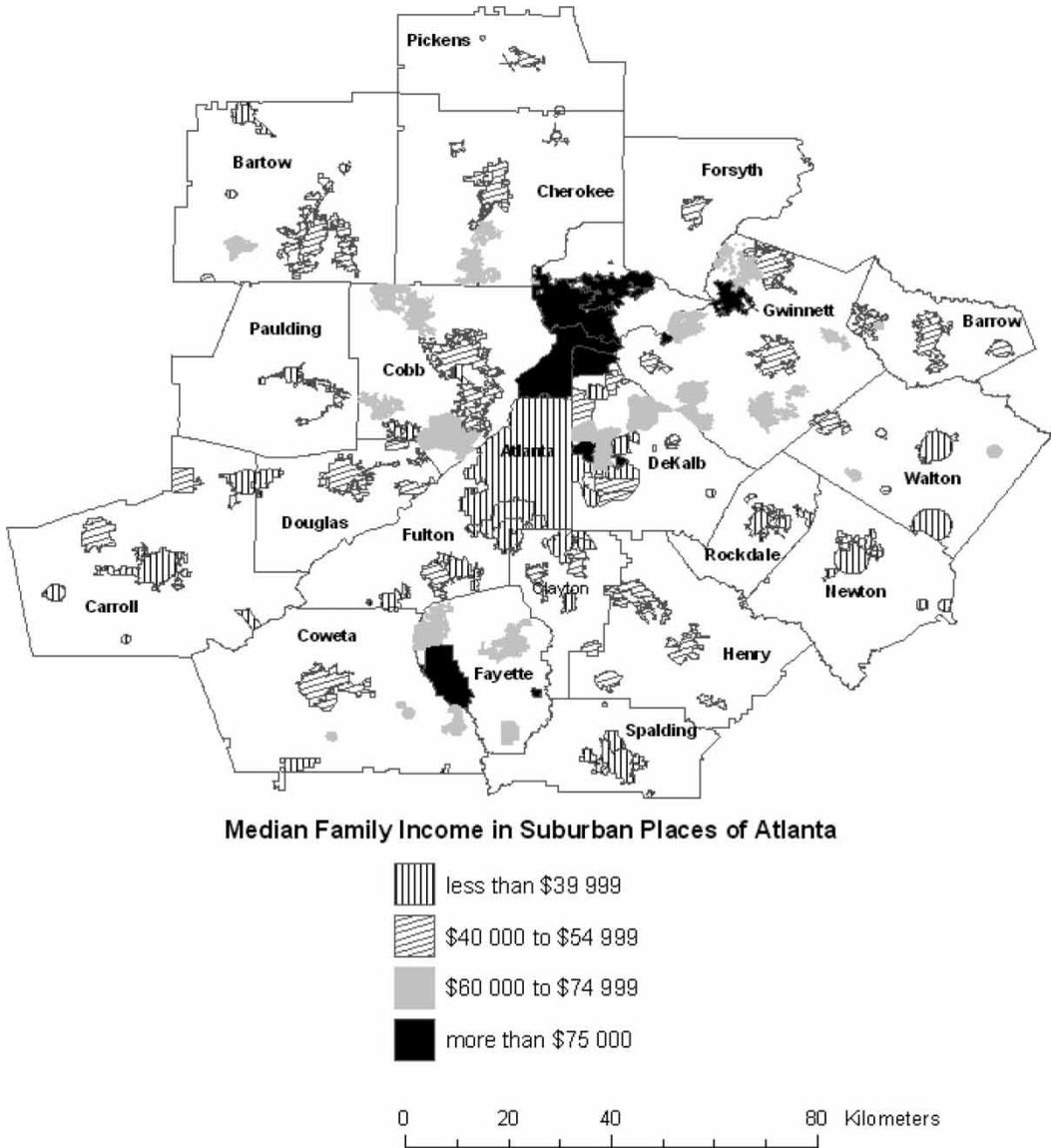


Figure 2. Income distribution in Atlanta MSA, 2000.

landscape. Meanwhile, there are low-income as well as high-income suburbs and we need now to include the presence of poor suburban places in our models of metropolitan America.

Manufacturing Suburbs

Discussions of metropolitan-wide employment patterns that draw on the traditional model of metropolitan areas emphasise the geographical concentration of manufacturing

and industrial workers in the central city, a declining urban core and an expanding suburban periphery. Blue-collar metro centres are counterpoised against suburban service employment despite the existence of suburbs manufacturing employment in the suburbs (Cervero, 1989; Harris and Lewis, 1998; Lewis, 1999). In order to identify these areas, we analysed data on manufacturing employment. We identified a total of 748 suburban places that had at least 25 per cent of residents

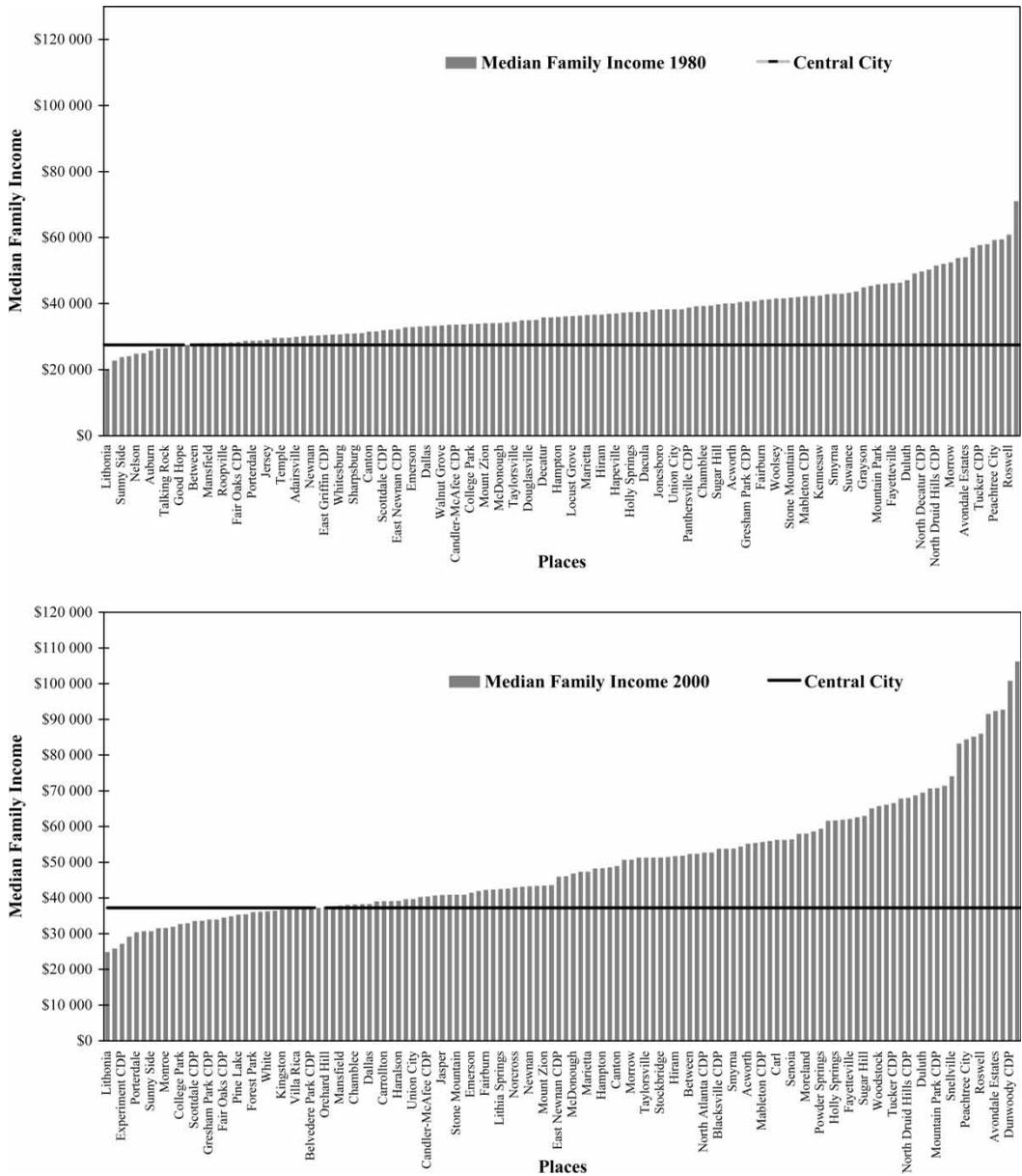


Figure 3. Income diversity in Atlanta MSA, 1980 and 2000.

employed in the manufacturing sector in 1980. In other words, 45 per cent of suburban places had considerable manufacturing employment in 1980. The finer place-level mesh allows us to see that the simple divide of the traditional model even in 1980 was inadequate for understanding metropolitan regions. We can follow the track of some of these manufacturing suburbs by identifying the subset of them that

experienced an increase in poverty levels. Table 2 lists those suburban places that had at least 25 per cent manufacturing employment in 1980 and had an increase in poverty level from 1980 to 2000. We term these poor and blue-collar suburbs.

The traditional manufacturing Rustbelt cities of St Louis, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Chicago had a significant proportion of their suburban

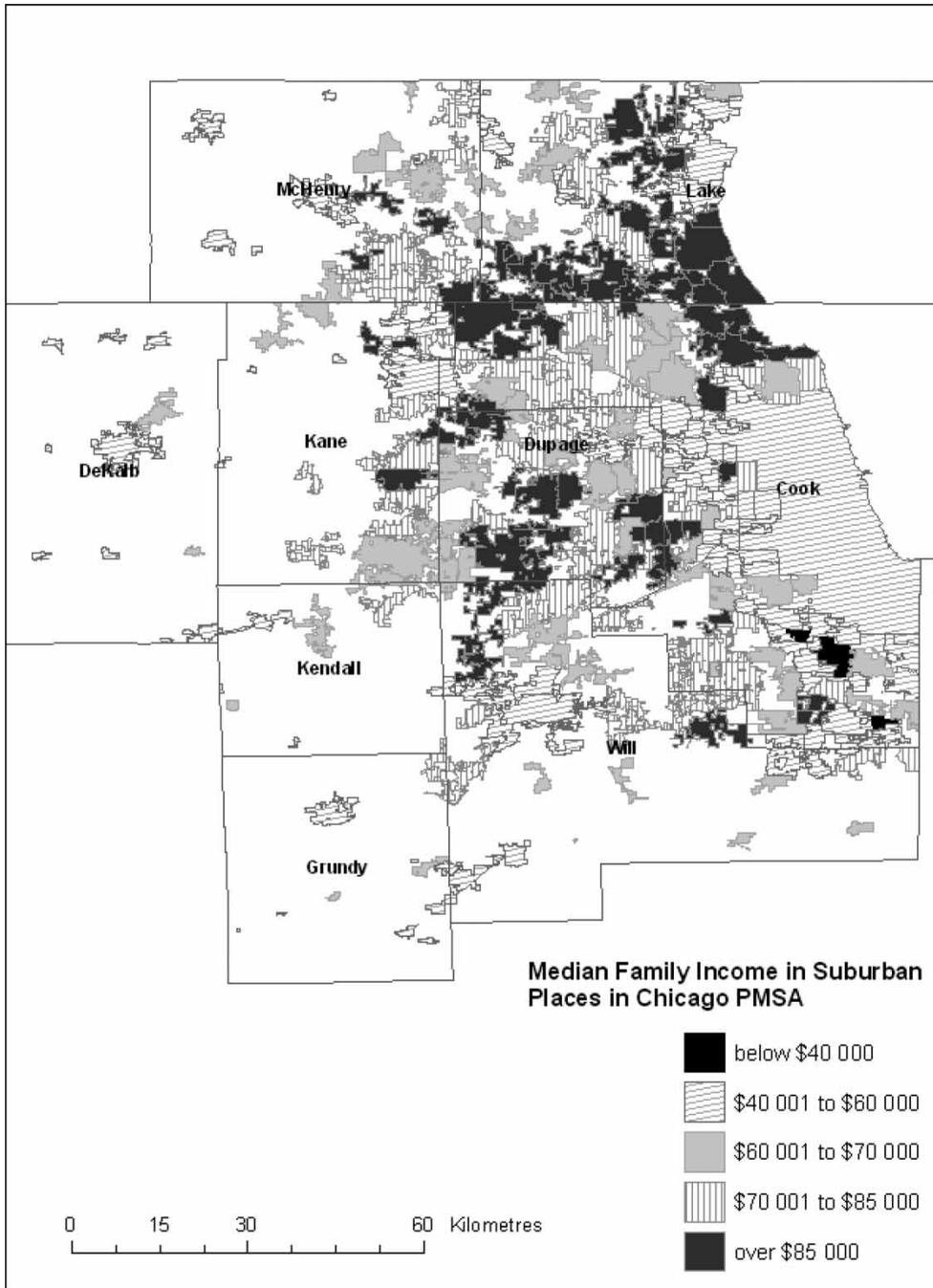


Figure 4. Income distribution in Chicago PMSA, 2000.

places in this category. Almost one in four of all suburban places in metro St Louis fit into this category, while for Cincinnati and Cleveland it is closer to one in five. In terms of

population, almost a quarter of the suburban population of Cleveland, Cincinnati and St Louis lives in poor, manufacturing suburbs, not the typical perception of suburbia.

Table 2. Poor and blue-collar suburbs

Metropolitan area	Number of suburbs (percentage)	Population (percentage)
Atlanta MSA	14 (11.1)	38 450 (3.0)
Baltimore PMSA	8 (8.7)	144 678 (9.0)
Boston PMSA	2 (1.5)	96 337 (3.0)
Chicago PMSA	52 (17.3)	919 605 (19.0)
Cincinnati PMSA	30 (22.5)	144 781 (21.0)
Cleveland PMSA	23 (19.6)	353 582 (23.0)
Oakland PMSA	1 (2.2)	13 837 (0.0)
Philadelphia PMSA	24 (12.7)	143 850 (11.0)
Phoenix MSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
San Francisco PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
San Jose PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
St Louis PMSA	55 (24.6)	305 795 (21.0)
Washington, DC PMSA	1 (0.5)	13 589 (0.0)

Notes: We define these suburbs as places that had at least 25 per cent manufacturing employment in 1980 and had an increase in poverty levels from 1980 to 2000. Population refers to the total population of all poor and blue-collar suburbs.

In the traditional manufacturing regions, a significant proportion of the suburban places can be characterised as blue-collar suburbs experiencing increased levels of poverty from 1980 to 2000. Dundalk, a suburb of Baltimore City and home to Bethlehem Steel, is a prime example of a traditional blue-collar suburb where local industry, because of economic restructuring and advances in technology, is no longer employing local residents. In 1970, the percentage of employed residents of Dundalk working in manufacturing was almost 48 per cent compared with only 16 per cent in 2000. The loss of manufacturing employment was not offset by alternative employment opportunities. The poverty rate in this suburb increased from 5.5 per cent in 1980 to 9.1 per cent in 2000. The trends we normally associate with metro cores are also found in suburban places.

Black Suburbs

The traditional model assumes a racial divide of essentially White suburbs and central cities becoming more dominated by minority populations (Schnore *et al.*, 1976). Our use of more finely grained place-level data allows us to see a more complex picture. Out of the total of 1639 suburban places over the period 1980–2000, 1245 increased their Black population—in 227 places by more than 10 per cent

and in 114 places by more than 25 per cent. The absolute figures are also revealing. By 2000, there were 252 suburban places where the Black population was more than 25 per cent and 132 suburbs where it was over 50 per cent. Thirty-five of these suburbs are in the St Louis metro area and 33 of them are in the Washington metro area. In fact, almost 30 per cent of Washington, DC, suburban population lives in Black and middle-class suburbs. Furthermore, the Washington metro area is interesting because, while the central city's Black population declined from 70 per cent to 59 per cent, it increased in such suburban places as New Carrollton and Woodlawn from 21 per cent to 67 per cent, and from 27 per cent to 71 per cent respectively.

This trend is not simply the suburbanisation of poor Blacks. We also identified what we have termed Black and middle-class suburbs, which by 2000 had more than 25 per cent Black populations and median family incomes greater than the national average (see Table 3). In developing this suburban typology, we are mindful of the ecological fallacy of assuming that the Black population is also middle-class. However, what this trend does tell us is that Black people are not necessarily ghettoised into poor suburbs.

The truly outstanding metro area in this regard is Washington, DC, which has almost

Table 3. Black and middle-class suburbs

Metropolitan area	Number of suburbs (percentage)	Population (percentage)
Atlanta MSA	8 (6.3)	167 875 (13.0)
Baltimore PMSA	10 (10.9)	221 491 (15.0)
Boston PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Chicago PMSA	20 (6.6)	257 512 (5.0)
Cincinnati PMSA	3 (2.2)	32 842 (4.0)
Cleveland PMSA	3 (2.5)	83 030 (5.0)
Oakland PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Philadelphia PMSA	6 (3.1)	30 976 (2.0)
Phoenix MSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
San Francisco PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
San Jose PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
St Louis PMSA	10 (4.4)	53 624 (3.0)
Washington, DC, PMSA	59 (30.1)	837 166 (28.0)

Notes: We define these suburbs as places that had at least 25 per cent black population and an income of at least \$50 046 (US median family income). Population refers to the total population of all Black and middle-class suburbs.

a third of its suburbs classified as Black and middle-class. This is not the result of statistical aberration caused by small population size. Some of the suburbs have substantial population. Bowie, in 2000, for example, had a total population of 50 269 that was 30.3 per cent Black with a median family income of \$82 403. The federal government has led the way in affirmative action. And the growth of federal employment and the creation of a substantial middle class have gone hand-in-hand in the suburbs of Washington. The two suburbs of Washington noted earlier, New Carrollton and Woodlawn, for example, had median family incomes of \$56 000 and \$60 392 respectively.

While this suggests that there is a growing segment of middle-class Black families in the suburbs, it is interesting to note that many live in majority Black areas (see Figure 5). Despite our assertion that the suburbs are becoming more varied, racial segregation still appears to be the reality in suburban American. This finding reinforces the work of Massey and Denton (1993), Cashin (2001) and Wiese (2004) that shows a continued pattern of residential racial segregation.

We noticed a similar trend for Hispanic populations. Out of a total of 1639 suburban places, there were 1410 places where the Hispanic population increased between 1980

and 2000. Moreover, there are 153 places where Hispanic population grew by more than 10 per cent, and 32 places where it grew by 25 per cent or more. In 2000, there were 81 suburban places with a Hispanic population of more than 25 per cent and 18 with a population of more than 50 per cent.

Since the 1970s, suburban areas have become more racially and ethnically diverse (Katz and Lang, 2003). Taken as a whole, the suburbs are largely White but with increasing population diversity; the suburbs are changing colour and taking on a more multicultural flavour. In 2000, racial and ethnic minorities comprised 27 per cent of suburban populations as compared with 19 per cent in 1990 (Frey, 2003).

Immigrant Suburbs

The traditional model assumed that the majority of foreign-born would be located in the metro centres, often depicted as the main receiving-point for immigrant streams. In large measure the traditional model still holds true. The central areas of growing metro regions such as Boston, San Francisco and San Jose still attract significant numbers of foreign-born persons. We were able to identify suburban places of significant foreign immigration, identified as those

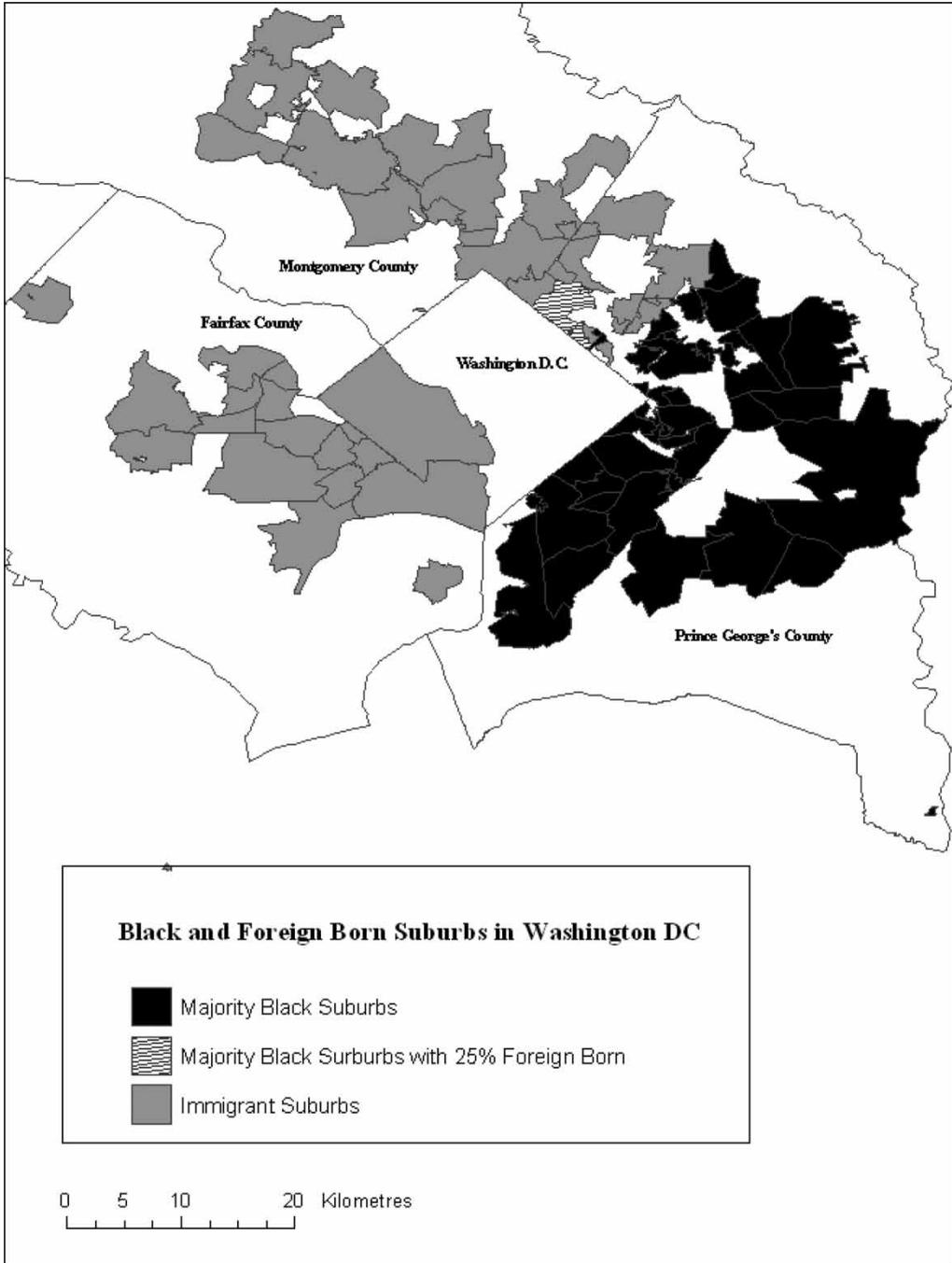


Figure 5. Black and immigrant suburbs in Washington, DC, 2000.

having more than 25 per cent of their population born overseas in 2000 with an increase from 1980 (see Table 4). There is a regional clustering of immigrant suburbs in the west

coast regions. In San Jose, almost three-quarters of the suburban population live in immigrant suburbs, followed by almost two-thirds of San Francisco suburban residents and

Table 4. Immigrant suburbs

Metropolitan area	Number of suburbs (percentage)	Population (percentage)
Atlanta MSA	7 (5.5)	84 792 (6.0)
Baltimore PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Boston PMSA	5 (3.9)	916 455 (11.0)
Chicago PMSA	29 (9.6)	774 212 (16.0)
Cincinnati PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Cleveland PMSA	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Oakland PMSA	14 (31.8)	834 374 (44.0)
Philadelphia PMSA	3 (1.5)	3 574 (0.0)
Phoenix MSA	1 (2.7)	10 307 (0.0)
San Francisco PMSA	11 (27.5)	523 937 (60.0)
San Jose PMSA	8 (44.4)	519 792 (72.0)
St Louis PMSA	1 (10.4)	2 425 (0.0)
Washington, DC, PMSA	42 (21.4)	1 217 926 (40.0)

Notes: We define these suburbs as places that had at least 25 per cent foreign-born population in 2000. Population refers to the total population of all immigrant suburbs in 2000.

almost 45 per cent of the Oakland suburban population.

Some of the suburban places had substantial foreign-born populations in 2000 such as Chamblee in Atlanta (64.1 per cent), Union City in Oakland (44 per cent), Daly City in San Francisco (52.3 per cent) and Langley Park in Washington (64.5 per cent).

Immigration is still directed towards the more economically dynamic metro areas; the Californian metro areas have significant amounts of immigrant suburbs, while the Rustbelt cities of Ohio have none. In some metropolitan areas, there is a distinct clustering of immigrant suburbs. Figure 5, for example, plots the distribution of Black suburbs and immigrant suburbs in the Washington metro area. Note how there is a distinct Black belt that stretches east from the city into Prince George's County, while the immigrant suburbs are clustered in Fairfax County in northern Virginia and Montgomery County in central Maryland. The Washington DC area is, in some respects, an east coast anomaly with 40 per cent of the suburban population living in immigrant suburbs.

If the early 20th-century immigration into the US was concentrated in the central areas, the early 21st-century foreign immigration has a distinctly more suburban flavour.

Conclusion

Our results suggest that the traditional 'city-suburb divide' no longer suffices as a standard measure of comparison. We have identified poor suburbs, manufacturing suburbs, Black suburbs and immigrant suburbs which undermine the simplicity of the traditional model. As Table 5 indicates, almost 40 per cent of all suburbs in our selected metropolitan areas do not fit into the traditional image of suburbia as majority-White, native-born, non-industrial with higher incomes than the central city. The suburbs of San Jose, Phoenix and Washington, DC, are more non-traditional than traditional. In the metropolitan areas of San Jose, Phoenix and Atlanta, the suburbs lag behind the central city—far from the traditional image of suburbia. Immigration to the suburbs of the west coast metropolitan areas accounts for suburban diversity in San Francisco and San Jose and, in many ways, Black suburbanisation defines the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. While the threshold figures that we used to define our suburban typology can be debated, the general point, we believe, holds firm. The new metropolitan reality is of heterogeneous suburbs.

Our analysis of suburban places found pockets of poverty and decline, dispelling the myth of suburban uniformity. We found

Table 5. Traditional versus diverse suburbs in selected metropolitan areas

Metropolitan area	Total	Traditional (percentage)	Diverse (percentage)
Atlanta MSA	126	68 (53.0)	58 (47.0)
Baltimore PMSA	91	72 (79.0)	19 (11.0)
Boston PMSA	128	120 (93.0)	8 (7.0)
Chicago PMSA	299	185 (62.0)	114 (38.0)
Cincinnati PMSA	133	81 (60.0)	52 (40.0)
Cleveland PMSA	117	90 (77.0)	27 (23.0)
Oakland PMSA	44	28 (64.0)	16 (36.0)
Philadelphia PMSA	188	141 (75.0)	47 (35.0)
Phoenix MSA	36	8 (22.0)	28 (78.0)
San Francisco PMSA	40	22 (55.0)	18 (45.0)
San Jose PMSA	18	3 (16.0)	15 (84.0)
St Louis PMSA	223	134 (60.0)	89 (40.0)
Washington, DC, PMSA	196	69 (35.0)	127 (65.0)
Total	1639	1021 (62.0)	618 (38.0)

Note: Traditional suburbs are defined as majority-White, native-born, non-industrial, stereotypical suburbs that have higher incomes than their central city.

that 10 per cent of 1639 suburban places in 13 metropolitan areas had median family incomes less than their central city in 2000 (see Table 6). These findings are consistent with Lucy and Philips's (2000) examination of 554 suburbs in 24 states. They found that, from the 1960s to the 1990s, 20 per cent of suburbs declined faster in median family income ratios than their central cities.

Suburban decline is most prevalent in the first-tier or inner-ring suburbs (Jargowsky, 2003). In particular, the first-tier suburbs of

the Rustbelt cities in the Northeast and Midwest are ageing with a housing stock that is no longer marketable, infrastructure that is in need of repair and residents that are dying off without a younger generation to replace them (Downs, 1994; Hudnut, 2003). Furthermore, many of these suburbs experience economic and social problems normally associated with central cities such as rising crime rates and poor school performance (Orfield, 2002). And yet most public policies and revitalisation efforts focus on central

Table 6. Low income suburbs lagging behind the central city

Metropolitan area	Number of suburbs	Percentage income	Central city (\$)
Atlanta MSA	29	22.3	37 231
Baltimore PMSA	1	1.0	35 438
Boston PMSA	1	0.0	44 151
Chicago PMSA	13	4.1	42 724
Cincinnati PMSA	19	11.3	37 543
Cleveland PMSA	1	0.0	30 286
Oakland PMSA	1	1.6	44 384
Philadelphia PMSA	14	5.6	37 036
Phoenix MSA	28	54.9	46 467
San Francisco PMSA	7	12.5	63 545
San Jose PMSA	7	25.9	74 813
St Louis PMSA	23	9.2	32 585
Washington, DC, PMSA	25	10.2	46 283

Note: The number of suburbs within metropolitan areas represents how many places have median family incomes below their respective central city.

cities to the neglect of declining suburbs (Orfield, 2002; Hudnut, 2003). This is, in part, because the traditional model suggests that economic and social problems only exist in the urban core, declaring there cannot be 'trouble in paradise,' as suggested by Baldassare (1986). The 'suburbs in crisis' often have little voice, represented by many local governments caught up with concerns about growth rather than suburban decline.

Suburbs come in various shapes and sizes, with different demographics and economies. Our analysis reveals that the variation between suburban places is often more striking than the difference between the central city and its surrounding suburbs. This variation differs regionally (see Figure 1). For example, in the Baltimore PMSA, the difference between the suburbs with the highest and lowest median family income is \$75 865, while in the St Louis MSA, the income gap is \$188 126. It is time to develop alternative models that account for the differences between and within metro regions.

There is a great deal of suburban diversity (Fishman, 1987; Palen, 1995). A paradigm shift away from the traditional model might improve the data collection methods to incorporate suburban differences. In the meantime, HUD's *State of the Cities* dataset provides scholars with a unique method for analysing suburban places. The use of place-level census data allows for a more finely grained analysis of this diversity.

In short, the rich variety of suburbs is ill-served by the traditional model of metropolitan America. This model does not consider suburbs in crisis or the increasing diversity of the suburban population. Future research should focus on developing new models that offer insight into this new metropolitan reality.

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