

The Residential Preferences of Blacks and Whites: A Four-Metropolis Analysis

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Abstract

Three hypotheses seek to explain the persistence of residential segregation between blacks and whites in the United States: economic differentials, discrimination in housing and lending markets, and neighborhood preferences. The preferences hypothesis posits that both races wish to live in racially homogeneous neighborhoods. This article examines the preferences hypothesis by using recent interview data from metropolitan Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles.

Race continues to be significant in the residential decision-making process. Whites' willingness to move into a neighborhood is inversely related to the density of blacks living there. Blacks prefer integrated neighborhoods, but ones with a substantial representation of blacks. Preferences differ significantly from one metropolis to another, with Detroit representing the extreme. In the other three metropolises, the preferences of blacks and whites do overlap sufficiently to offer hope for a decline in segregation, provided that the influence of other forces, particularly discrimination, also declines.

Keywords: Minorities; Housing; Neighborhood

Introduction

In *American Apartheid*, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) describe the persistence of black-white residential segregation and its many negative consequences for equal racial opportunities. They report that it is a deliberate creation of this century and that blacks have been and continue to be much more segregated from whites than Asians, Hispanics, or other ethnic minorities are. They believe, as do Lawrence Bobo and Camille Zubrinsky (1996), that residential segregation is the "structural linchpin" of the nation's racial hierarchy. The concentration of

blacks in largely black urban neighborhoods limits their acquisition of financial capital, narrows employment opportunities, maintains the Jim Crow system of public schools, and may diminish the political power of African Americans by concentrating them into largely black districts (Cutler and Glaeser 1997; Swain 1993). Massey and Denton (1993, 183) contend that the constellation of social and economic problems afflicting many blacks, now often referred to as the “urban underclass issue,” is the inevitable outcome of residential segregation:

Once a group’s segregation in society has been ensured, the next step in building an underclass is to drive up its rate of poverty. Segregation thus makes it politically easy to limit the number of governmental jobs within the ghetto, to reduce public services, to keep its schools understaffed and underfunded, to lower the transfer payments on which its poor depend, and to close its hospitals, clinics, employment offices, and other social support institutions.

Why does residential segregation persist 28 years after Congress enacted the Fair Housing Act and after the Supreme Court’s 1968 *Jones v. Mayer* decision (392 U.S. 409) proscribed racial discrimination in the housing market? Why does it persist at a time when the views of whites have shifted overwhelmingly so that they now almost universally endorse the right of blacks to live wherever they can afford? For example, in the early 1960s, 60 percent of national samples of whites agreed with the proposition that white people had a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods if they wished to and that blacks should respect that right, but only 13 percent of whites agreed with that principle of segregation 36 years later (Bobo, Schuman, and Steeh 1986; Farley 1993; Schuman et al. 1997).

While there were declines in residential segregation in the 1970s and 1980s, they were modest, and they left blacks and whites highly segregated in our major population centers (Farley and Frey 1994). Three theories explaining persistent black-white segregation have been investigated since they were first stated by Myrdal (1944) half a century ago.

Economic differentials

The economic hypothesis contends that segregation results from the economic differentials between blacks and whites: Segregation came about and persists because people live where they can

afford. While there is strong theoretical support for this view (Becker 1957), empirical investigations unambiguously reject it. Numerous studies report that high-income black households are just about as segregated from high-income whites as low-income blacks are segregated from low-income whites (Denton and Massey 1988; Erbe 1975; Farley 1977; Fielding and Taeuber 1992; Massey 1979; Simkus 1978; Taeuber 1965). If residential patterns were based solely on social or economic factors, such as income, educational attainment, or occupational prestige, racial segregation would be much lower than currently observed. Two corollaries support this assertion. One is that economic segregation is not complete; most neighborhoods are relatively heterogeneous in their social and economic composition. The other is that current economic differentials between blacks and whites are not great enough to explain existing levels of residential segregation.

Discrimination in lending and housing markets

The racial discrimination hypothesis argues that segregation persists because of the differential treatment of whites and blacks in the housing market. Many studies report discrimination in the rental, sale, and financing of housing. In the late 1970s, two investigations (one private and one government sponsored) uncovered apparent violations of the Fair Housing Act by using matched pairs of home seekers to determine whether real estate brokers treated blacks and whites identically (Pearce 1979; Wienk et al. 1979). A recent governmental study documents continued discrimination against blacks in the housing market. While blacks were generally shown homes or apartments, treated politely, and given information, there was clear evidence of differential treatment by race. For example, blacks were less likely than whites to be encouraged to return for further information about available homes (Turner 1992, 1993; Yinger 1986, 1991, 1995). (For a description of how pervasive discrimination isolates blacks and whites in the housing market, see Social Science Panel 1972, chap. 3.)

Other investigations analyzed racial discrimination in the financing of home buying, using data that the 1975 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) and its revisions required lenders to report. In 1993, 34 percent of blacks, 25 percent of Hispanics, and only 15 percent of whites seeking mortgages from federally funded chartered institutions were turned down (Goering and Wienk 1996; Tootell 1996; Yinger 1995). Newspaper reporters and university investigators consistently report that banks make loans in middle-income white neighborhoods more often than in

similar middle-income black neighborhoods (Blossom, Everett, and Gallagher 1988; Dedman 1988; Feins and Bratt 1983; Leahy 1985; Pol, Guy, and Bush 1982; Shlay 1988; Taggart and Smith 1981). One of the most frequently cited recent studies, conducted by the Boston Federal Reserve Bank, found that applications for conventional mortgages in the early 1990s were rejected for 10 percent of white applicants and for 18 percent of blacks and Hispanics with similar financial and demographic characteristics (Carr and Megbolugbe 1993; Munnell et al. 1992; Yinger 1995). Other proponents of the racial discrimination hypothesis have argued that marketing practices, which differ dramatically for homes in black, white, and integrated neighborhoods, are an important source of residential segregation (Turner and Wienk 1993). Thus, the discrimination hypothesis posits that the key causes of continued segregation are a web of institutionalized practices that ultimately steer whites and blacks in different directions when they seek housing and the lending practices that give whites greater access to mortgage money (Galster and Keeney 1988; Yinger 1995).

Neighborhood preferences

The preferences hypothesis argues that segregation results not so much from discriminatory practices as from the different preferences of blacks and whites (Clark 1986, 1988, 1989, 1992; Muth 1969, 1986). According to this hypothesis, both races desire to live in neighborhoods where they are numerically dominant. Thus, even if blacks and whites had similar incomes and assets and if there were no racial discrimination in the marketing of housing, blacks and whites would live in different neighborhoods because segregation reflects differing tastes, not discrimination.

Among scholars who investigate racial residential preferences, there are key differences in assumptions about what underlies preferences. Some argue that racial preferences are derived from "neutral ethnocentrism" (e.g., Clark 1988; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Others argue that racial prejudice and conflict underlie preferences of whites and that blacks' preferences are largely a function of their concerns about the hostility they might face in a white neighborhood (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Farley et al. 1994). Preferences, then, are both a cause and an effect of racial discrimination, and they can thus be seen as a part of the web of simultaneous forces generating and sustaining residential segregation.

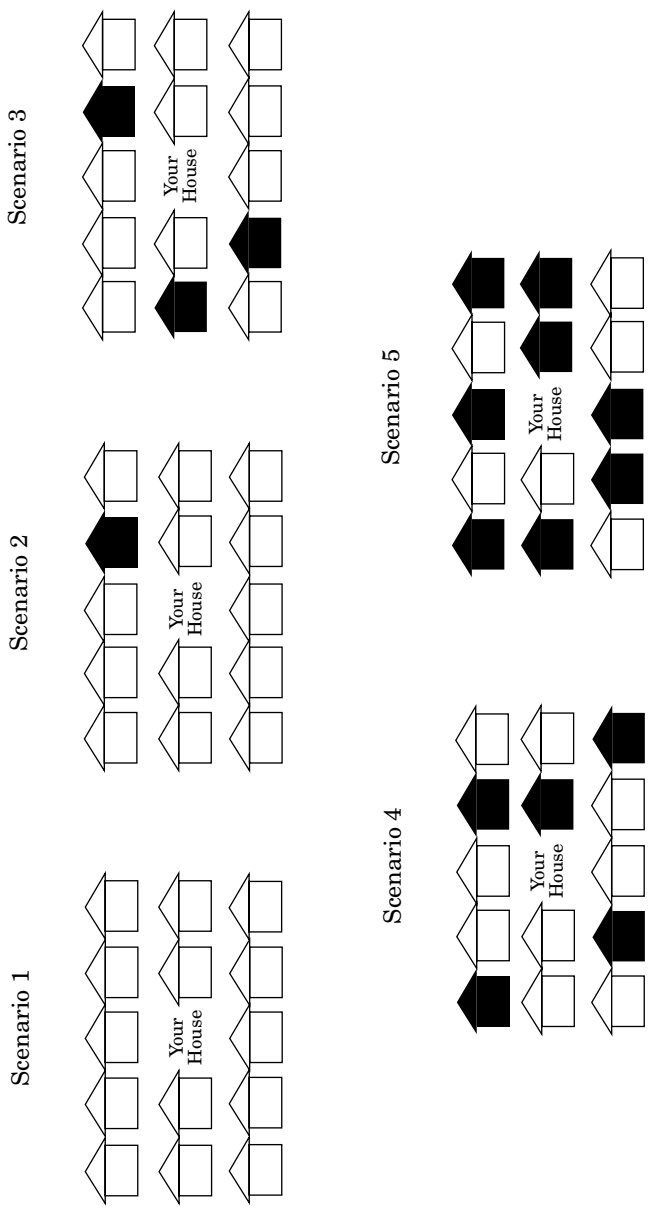
What we know about residential preferences: Scope of this article

How strongly do blacks and whites prefer to live with others of their own race? Do both races have an aversion to living with the other race? Is the future for residential integration bleak—as Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1997) contend—because the preferences of blacks and whites do not overlap?

While there is a long history of national surveys asking whites about their support for the principle of residential integration, only a few explicitly ask respondents about their preferred neighborhood racial composition. Beginning in the early 1940s, national samples of whites were asked whether it would make a difference to them if a black family with income and education similar to theirs moved into their block. In 1942, 65 percent said it would make a difference, but by the 1970s, just 15 percent of whites said it would make a difference (Farley 1993). Another question posed to whites asked whether they would try to move away if black people came to live next door. In the 1950s, about one-quarter of whites said they would definitely move away; when the question was asked most recently, in 1997, only 2 percent said they would or might move. This substantial change over time reflects the pervasive trend toward more liberal racial attitudes among whites (Schuman et al. 1997, table 3.3). While informative, these questions provide only limited information about the neighborhood preferences of whites. There is a much shorter history of questions seeking to determine the preferences of blacks.

One early effort was the 1976 Detroit Area Study, which used an innovative approach to assess the preferences of blacks and whites. All interviewing was done face to face in the respondent's home or apartment, with interviewers and respondents matched by race. For white respondents, a series of five cards was prepared showing a range from an all-white neighborhood to a neighborhood with eight homes occupied by black families and six occupied by white families (see figure 1). White respondents were first shown the all-white card (scenario 1) and then were presented with cards showing progressively greater densities of blacks (scenarios 2 through 5). With each card, they were asked to express how comfortable they would feel with living in such a racially mixed neighborhood, using a four-point scale ranging from "very comfortable" to "very uncomfortable." If white respondents said they would feel somewhat or very uncomfortable, they were asked whether they would try to move out if their own neighborhood came to have a racial composition similar to the

Figure 1. Cards Used with White Respondents

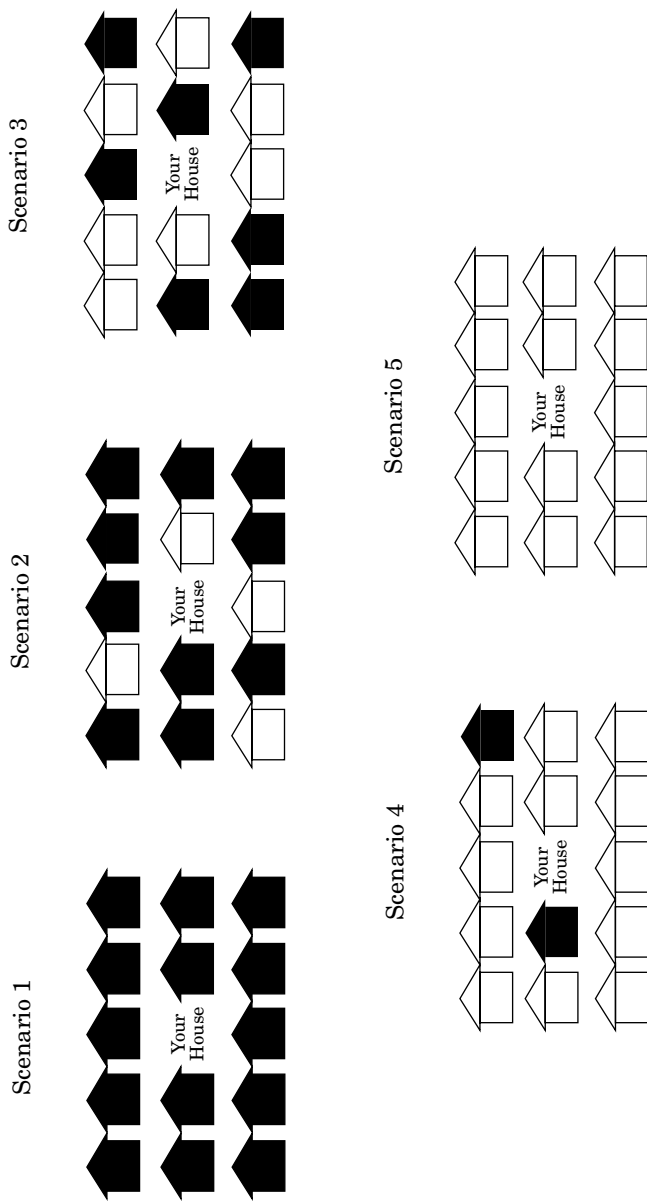


one depicted on that card. If they said they would not try to move out, they were shown cards with higher densities of blacks until they said they would try to move out or until they reached the fifth card, showing a majority-black neighborhood. Subsequently, whites were given the same five cards, told they had found an attractive, affordable home in each area, and asked which neighborhoods they would be willing to move into. The study thereby determined what degree of residential integration—if any—made a white respondent feel uncomfortable, what degree provoked the respondent to consider moving away, and what degree was acceptable when the respondent sought an attractive new home (Farley et al. 1978).

At the outset, the researchers planned to use identical cards and identical questions for whites and blacks, but pretests demonstrated that this would be a waste of interview time. Black respondents had no objection to whites moving into their neighborhoods, and that type of demographic change was extremely rare in Detroit. Furthermore, asking whites about neighborhoods with more than 11 black families out of 14 provided no new information because few whites were comfortable with this density of blacks or willing to consider moving into such an area. For those reasons, black respondents were shown a different array of five cards, ranging from an all-black neighborhood to an all-white neighborhood (see figure 2). They were given these cards and asked to arrange them so that their most preferred neighborhood was at the top and their least preferred neighborhood at the bottom. Later, black respondents were given the same five cards and told that they had found an attractive, affordable home in each area. They were asked which, if any, of the neighborhoods they would *not* be willing to move into because of its racial composition.

Findings from this 1976 study of Detroit have frequently been cited as supporting the hypothesis that the residential preferences of whites and blacks do not overlap. Whites in the Detroit area reported that they were quite uncomfortable when more than token numbers of blacks moved into their neighborhood. For example, 42 percent of whites said they would be uncomfortable if blacks constituted one-fifth of their neighborhood, and one-quarter said they would try to move away in such a circumstance. Whites had an aversion to moving into integrated neighborhoods; 27 percent said they would not consider an attractive, affordable home if it were located in a neighborhood where only 1 home in 15 was occupied by a black family (Farley et al. 1978, figure 7).

Figure 2. Cards Used with Black Respondents



Detroit-area blacks overwhelmingly preferred integrated neighborhoods, specifically those in which there were roughly equal numbers of blacks and whites. That is, 82 percent said their first or second choice was the neighborhood containing 7 black and 7 white families or the one containing 10 black and 4 white families. Blacks favored racially integrated neighborhoods, but with a representation of blacks so great that most whites would feel uncomfortable and try to move away; thus, the prospects for residential integration in Detroit seemed dim. These results have entered the mainstream and are sometimes assumed to apply to the entire United States. Writing for a unanimous Supreme Court in 1992, Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy helped justify the minimization of school integration programs in De Kalb County, GA—suburban Atlanta—on the basis that “whites prefer a racial mix of 80 percent white and 20 percent black, while blacks prefer a 50 percent mix” (*Freeman v. Pitts* [1992] 112 S. Ct. 1430).

Results from a second Detroit Area Study, conducted in 1992, show a considerable moderation of whites’ preferences relative to 1976. Whites in 1992 were more willing to move into integrated neighborhoods and less likely to move away when blacks arrived (Farley et al. 1993). These results are also referred to as if they apply to the country as a whole. For example, in their recent book, Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1997) argue that the preferences of blacks for evenly mixed neighborhoods drive continued segregation nationwide.

Is it appropriate to generalize the results from Detroit to other sites in the United States? We investigate this question by using data based on a replication of the methods of the 1976 Detroit Area Study and focusing on three interrelated analyses:

1. A comparison of the neighborhood preferences of blacks and whites across four metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles
2. An investigation of the key demographic determinants (educational attainment, birth cohort, gender, and family income) of neighborhood preferences of blacks and whites
3. An assessment of the extent to which the key determinants of neighborhood preferences differ from one city to another

Study sites: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles

Our first aim in this article is to compare the racial residential preferences of blacks and whites in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Each of these metropolises has a unique economic, social, and racial history. By looking at these varying contexts, we gain an improved understanding of beliefs and preferences related to residential segregation (see table 1 for characteristics of the four metropolises). That is, much of our knowledge of neighborhood preferences is based on Detroit, which is a classic rust-belt metropolis. For decades, blue-collar jobs offered Detroit-area blacks good employment opportunities, but since the 1970s the number of such jobs and their pay levels have fallen, leading to higher poverty rates and a much increased black-white gap on economic indicators. This gap is higher in Detroit than in any of the other areas. For instance, the ratio of black to white unemployment rates in 1990 was 3.6 in Detroit, and the next highest among the four areas was 2.7 for Atlanta. Detroit, where the index of dissimilarity measuring the segregation of blacks from whites at the block-group level was a very high 89 in 1990, represents the quintessential "Chocolate City, Vanilla Suburbs" pattern (Darden et al. 1987; Everett 1992; Farley and Frey 1994, table 1). Blacks are heavily concentrated in the city (83 percent of blacks in the metropolitan area live in Detroit itself), while nearly all area whites (93 percent) live outside the city (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992, table 5). The other three metropolises had lower levels of black-white segregation in 1990, with indices of 73 for Atlanta, 75 for Los Angeles, and 71 for Boston. Many other differences among these metropolises make them interesting comparisons with both Detroit and each other.

For example, Atlanta's residential patterns have changed in recent years but still reflect southern Jim Crow practices (Keating, Brazen, and Fitterman 1992). Like Detroit, Atlanta has a population that is one-quarter black, but in Atlanta, unlike Detroit, the majority of blacks (65 percent) live outside the city. Atlanta has grown rapidly since World War II and is now seen as the dynamic financial capital of a new, more prosperous and less racist South. It appears poised for continued growth and further economic transformation. Indeed, of the four metropolises, Atlanta had the lowest unemployment rate in 1990. The relatively low unemployment rate for blacks (7.5 percent) in Atlanta is especially notable.

Boston, despite its substantially smaller black population of just 6 percent, has a long history of bitter black-white strife (Campen

Table 1. Characteristics of Four Metropolises in the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality

	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles
Population in 1990 (in thousands)	2,834	3,784	4,382	8,863
Percent of metropolitan population living within central city in 1990 ^a				
Total	13	26	24	39
White	6	13	7	36
Black	35	69	83	49
Hispanic	13	45	34	42
Asian	7	31	15	36
Indexes of racial residential segregation in 1990 ^{a,b}				
Black v. white	73	71	89	75
Hispanic v. white	41	63	44	64
Asian v. white	47	50	51	49
Composition of population in 1990 (in percent) ^a				
Total	100	100	100	100
White	70	86	75	41
Black	26	6	22	11
Hispanic	2	5	2	38
Asian	2	3	1	10
Population change in the 1980s (in percent) ^a				
Total	+33	+3	-2	+19
White	+25	-4	-6	-8
Black	+39	+23	+5	+1
Hispanic	+138	+108	+16	+62
Asian	+325	+178	+68	+109
Social and economic characteristics in 1990				
Percent foreign-born	4	11	6	33
Percent with college degree or higher ^c				
White	45	52	32	46
Black	27	29	19	28
Median household income in 1989				
White	\$42,000	\$42,000	\$38,300	\$41,500
Black	\$24,700	\$26,000	\$20,000	\$26,000

Table 1. Characteristics of Four Metropolises in the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (continued)

	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles
Unemployment rate in 1990 (in percent) ^d				
White	2.8	4.8	5	4.1
Black	7.5	10.9	18.1	10.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1992).

^a Data refer to non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic Asians.

^b Indices of dissimilarity computed from block group data.

^c Persons aged 25 to 54 with college degrees, including two-year degrees.

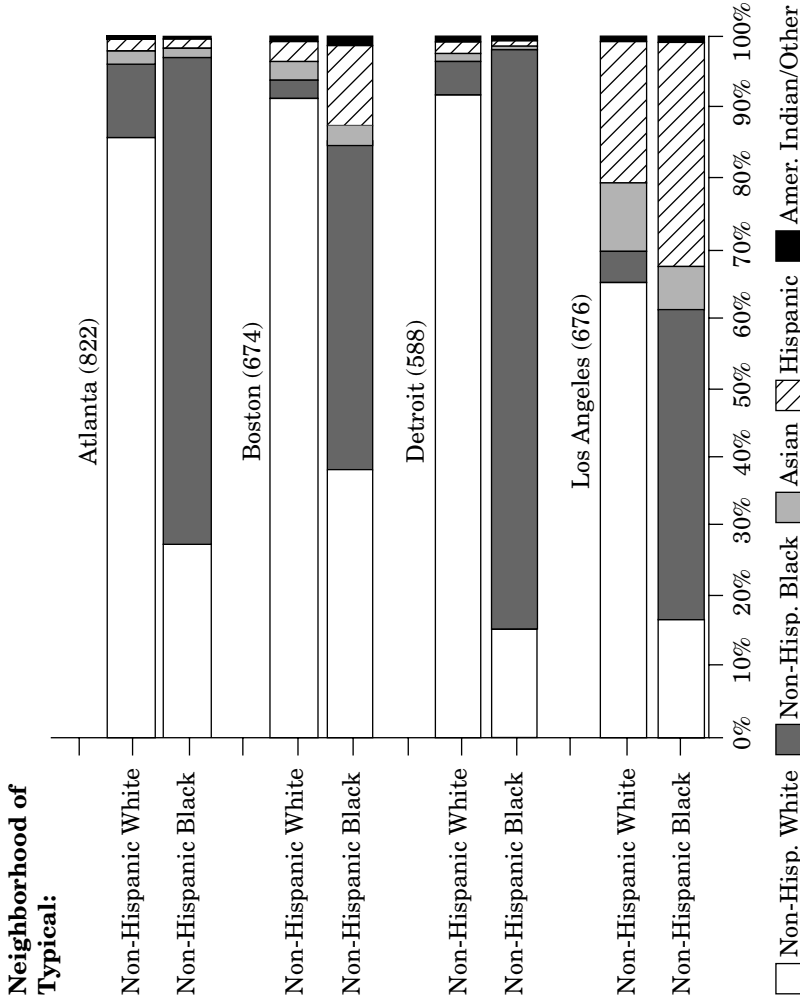
^d Persons aged 25 to 54.

1992; Lukas 1985). As with Detroit, Boston-area blacks are concentrated in the central city (69 percent). Whereas Atlanta and Detroit are primarily black-white cities with little recent immigration, Boston has become a metropolis of entry for Caribbean immigrants. Recently, its economy rose and fell with the Massachusetts miracle—the economic boom that briefly benefited that state during the 1980s.

Finally, Los Angeles epitomizes the multiethnic metropolis. Its burgeoning economy in the 1970s and 1980s attracted a million or more new residents from Asia and Latin America, as well as from all corners of the United States (Grigsby 1994). Indeed, in 1990, 48 percent of Los Angeles residents were either Hispanic or Asian, 11 percent (which is about the national average) were black, and the remaining 41 percent were white. Los Angeles is emerging as the leading financial center for the Pacific Rim, and if current domestic and international migration trends continue, Los Angeles may be a template for what other large metropolises may become by the middle of the next century (Zubrinisky and Bobo 1996). It is another place on the growing list of metropolises in which the majority of black residents (in this case, 51 percent) live in the suburban ring. As in Boston, the black-white gap on economic indicators (as of 1990) was smaller in Los Angeles than in Detroit and Atlanta.

Further evidence of differences in residential segregation among the four metropolises can be seen in figure 3, which shows the racial makeup of the block group of residence of the typical member of each race. Block groups contain an average of about 690 residents. In Detroit, the most segregated of the four sites, blacks live in block groups where, on average, 83 percent of the residents are black. Atlanta is the next most segregated by this measure; blacks there live in neighborhoods that average 69 percent black. There is noticeably more residential exposure of

Figure 3. Racial Composition of Block Group of Typical Resident of Four Metropolises, 1990



Note: This figure shows the racial composition of the block group of residents of a randomly selected person of a designated group. The underlying computations are often referred to as P^* indices of exposure and isolation. Numbers in parentheses report average population for block groups in that metropolis.

blacks to whites in Boston and Los Angeles, where fewer than half (about 45 percent) of the residents in the typical black person's neighborhood are also black. Across all four cities, whites tend to be isolated from blacks. In Boston and Detroit, whites live in block groups that are, on average, 92 percent white, and the figure for Atlanta is just slightly lower, about 80 percent white. The multiethnic character of Los Angeles is reflected by the fact that the typical white lives in a block group with a much lower white percentage—65 percent.

With respect to our second and third aims, there is much empirical and theoretical evidence that the racial attitudes of whites are strongly influenced by two variables: their educational attainment and their birth cohort. In addition to assessing the role of these and other demographic characteristics in racial preferences, we will explore whether site differences in racial residential preferences hold after we control for such characteristics.

With respect to educational attainment, whites who have spent many years in school typically endorse more egalitarian racial views than those who have completed just a few years. Presumably, our educational system encourages students to think about the nature of racial differences, leading them to reject hypotheses that group differences are innate. Indeed, a major emphasis in many educational programs has been the equality of the races and the virtues of racial and ethnic diversity.

The civil rights revolution marks a key turning point in the nation's racial history. Before the 1960s, the nation's leading institutions—schools, federal and local governments, and the military—explicitly and emphatically upheld the Jim Crow policies that were justified by the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (163 U.S. 537). As a result, a system of racial stratification with white dominance was widely endorsed and supported by most Americans. This changed as a growing emphasis on equal racial opportunity led to new and different views about the nature of race relations. As indicated previously, the modal response of whites in the 1960s to a question about residential integration was that whites had a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods and that blacks should respect that right. By the 1990s, the modal response was that blacks should not be denied the opportunity to live where they wish on the basis of their skin color. Older persons, who went through their adolescence and completed their educations when Jim Crow practices were the norm, typically give less egalitarian answers to questions about equal racial opportunities than

younger persons, who came of age during and after the civil rights revolution (Schuman et al. 1997, chap. 4).

This analysis of the residential preferences of whites takes into account the educational attainment of the respondent and his or her age or birth cohort. A smaller number of studies suggest that, among whites, there are some gender differences in racial attitudes, with women typically endorsing equal opportunity more than men (Schuman et al. 1997, chap. 4). Thus, we include gender as an explanatory variable. Finally, we consider the effects of family income (or personal income, for those who live alone) in this analysis.

Less is known about the determinants of blacks' residential preferences. We begin by testing the same five demographic factors used in the analysis for whites. We expect site to be significantly associated with blacks' residential preferences. Based on previous work (Farley et al. 1993), we expect a positive relationship for blacks between education and preference for integrated neighborhoods or willingness to enter all-white neighborhoods. Blacks may gain more exposure to whites during the education process and thus feel more comfortable in exclusively white neighborhoods. Arguments for the effects of age and gender parallel those for whites. Blacks with higher family incomes may have access to a wider spectrum of the housing market than those with lower incomes. The perception of more options may influence the residential preferences of these blacks: They may be more willing to pioneer in an all-white neighborhood.

Finally, we will consider whether the determinants of preferences differ among the four sites, given their different social, economic, and racial compositions and histories.

Source of data: The Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality

This analysis of site differences in residential preferences draws on the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI), which investigated the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of large samples of adults in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. The survey consisted of a two-stage area probability sample of adult household residents in each metropolis, with block data from the 1990 census used as the sampling frame. In all locations, blacks were oversampled. Interviewing was conducted in the spring and summer of 1992 in Detroit, in 1993 in Atlanta, and in 1994 in Boston and Los Angeles. Sample sizes are as

follows (all exclude Hispanics): Atlanta—white 641, black 821; Boston—white 585, black 440; Detroit—white 721, black 728; Los Angeles—white 863, black 1,119. Not included in this analysis, but appearing in the MCSUI sample, are oversamples of Hispanics in Boston and Los Angeles and Asians in Los Angeles.

Questions assessing racial residential preferences asked in the 1976 Detroit Area Study—those involving the manipulation of cards shown in figures 1 and 2—were repeated at each site in the MCSUI. This analysis is limited to those respondents in the MCSUI who identified themselves as white or black by race, excluding those who went on to identify themselves as Hispanics.

In Boston and Los Angeles, a split-ballot technique was used, in which some respondents were asked to rank neighborhoods with blacks or whites while others were asked to consider integration with Hispanics or Asians. Because the focus of this article is on black and white preferences for living with black or white neighbors, our sample sizes are reduced from those reported above. (Sample sizes for all variables used in this analysis are reported in table 2.) Thus, the effective sample sizes for Boston and Los Angeles are much smaller than those for Detroit and Atlanta. To prevent this from biasing the results, we weighted the cases to produce equal sample sizes across sites. Additional weights are used in the descriptive analyses. These weights reflect poststratification adjustments to achieve a sample with age, sex, and race distributions similar to those of the sampled area's total population in the 1990 census.

Residential preferences of whites

Our inquiry about the residential preferences of whites replicates the 1976 neighborhood cards procedure described earlier. Panel 1 of figure 4 shows the basic site comparisons in the responses of whites to varying degrees of hypothetical residential integration. The bottom portion of each bar indicates the percentage of whites who said they would be comfortable if their neighborhood came to be majority black. This proportion was lowest in Detroit (35 percent) and highest in Boston (42 percent). Note that in all places, the majority of whites would be uncomfortable if their neighborhood became majority black. Moving up each bar, we indicate the proportion of whites who would be comfortable with smaller representations of blacks. The most striking pattern in figure 4 is that Detroit becomes increasingly different from the other three cities as lower levels of integration are considered, such that minimal integration is objected to by

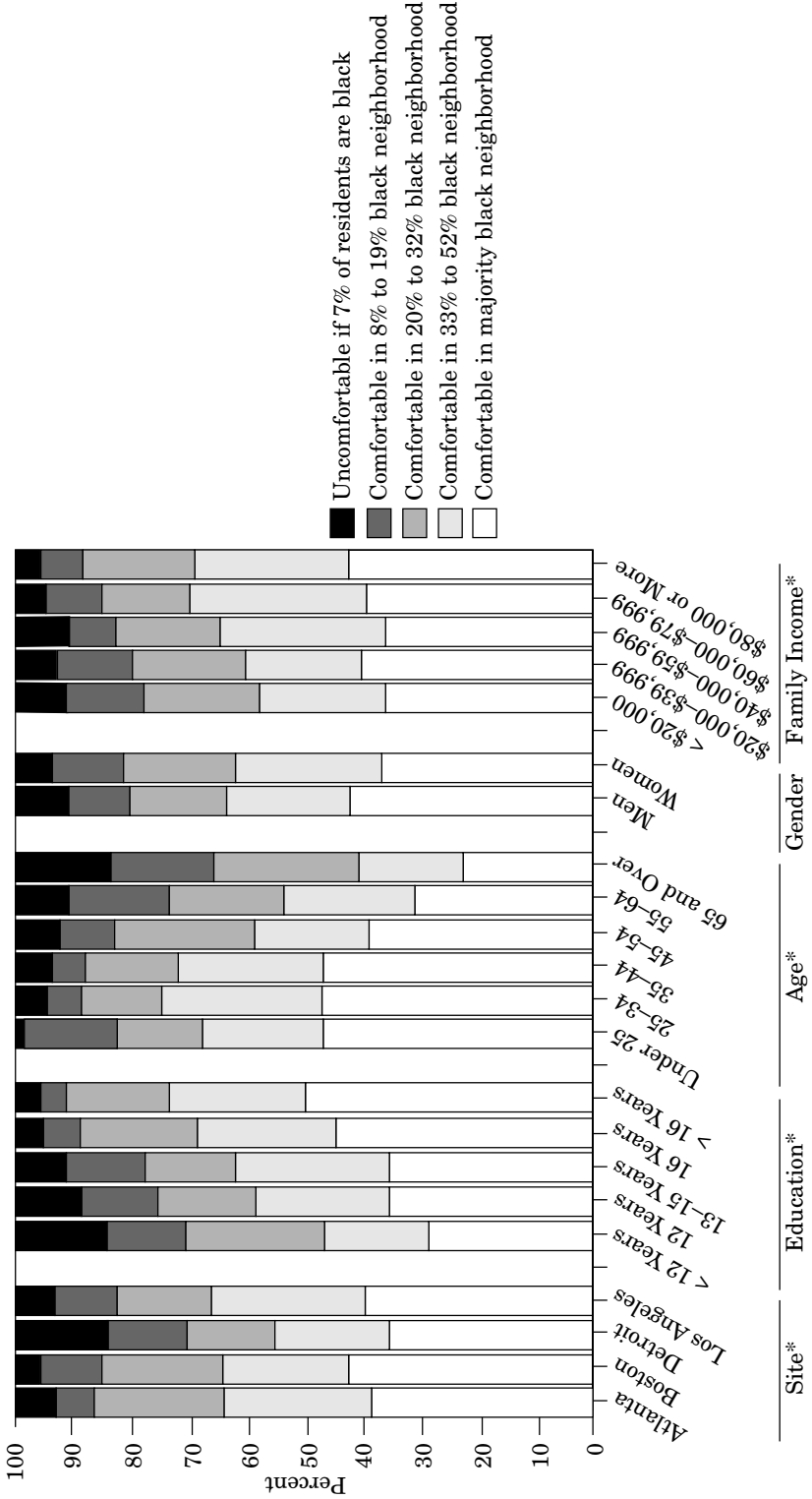
Table 2. Sample Sizes for Study of Residential Preferences

	White Respondents Shown Black/White Neighborhood Cards				Black Respondents Shown Black/White Neighborhood Cards			
	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles
Total sample	683	284	758	261	817	245	725	358
Education								
< 12 years	97	55	108	24	217	63	219	72
12 years	168	84	242	57	279	77	248	119
13 to 15 years	194	55	231	87	180	67	194	118
16 years	133	54	97	60	84	22	34	42
> 16 years	87	36	78	33	49	13	24	7
Not reported	4	0	2	0	8	3	6	0
Age								
Under 25	53	19	32	17	56	22	48	29
25 to 34	151	71	187	49	226	60	148	89
35 to 44	162	59	191	63	197	75	189	90
45 to 54	105	40	113	40	129	36	92	61
55 to 64	68	34	77	45	91	19	73	41
65 and over	131	61	156	47	106	33	170	48
Not reported	13	0	2	0	12	0	5	0
Gender								
Male	303	131	353	127	256	85	256	121
Female	379	153	425	134	560	160	469	237
Not reported	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Table 2. Sample Sizes for Study of Residential Preferences (continued)

	White Respondents Shown Black/White Neighborhood Cards				Black Respondents Shown Black/White Neighborhood Cards			
	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles
Annual family income								
Under \$20,000	142	98	143	60	325	117	314	184
\$20,000 to \$39,999	172	68	218	69	196	66	138	74
\$40,000 to \$59,999	116	48	165	53	60	31	66	32
\$60,000 to \$79,999	63	24	86	17	23	10	21	13
\$80,000 or more	58	26	75	32	15	6	16	14
Not reported	132	20	71	30	198	15	170	41

Figure 4. Comfort of Whites If Their Neighborhoods Came to Have Indicated Densities of Black Residents



* χ^2 test indicates this variable is significantly linked to comfort of whites with integration.

twice as many whites in Detroit as in the other three sites. In Detroit, 16 percent of whites would be uncomfortable in a neighborhood with one black family, compared with 7 percent in both Atlanta and Los Angeles and 4 percent in Boston. Thus, reliance on findings in Detroit alone yields more opposition to integration among whites than is the case in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles.

Turning to the next two panels in figure 4, we observe the expected effects of education and age on the residential preferences of whites. That is, as years spent in school increased, whites were more comfortable with higher levels of residential integration. Only 5 percent of whites with more than 16 years of schooling reported they would be uncomfortable when the first black family entered their neighborhood, whereas among those with less than a complete high school education, 16 percent would be uncomfortable. Thus, the continuing secular trend toward greater educational attainment implies a continued liberalization of the racial attitudes of whites and a growing acceptance of residential integration.

As expected, age of white respondents was also linked to comfort with residence in an integrated neighborhood. Only 22 percent of persons ages 65 and over would be comfortable if their own neighborhood came to be majority black, but nearly half (46 percent) of all those under age 45 would be comfortable in such a neighborhood.

Differences in comfort with integration by family income were statistically significant but cannot readily be summarized. Whites in the two highest income categories (over \$60,000 per year) are less likely to report discomfort with neighborhoods gaining their first black families. With respect to gender, there is an interesting pattern: Whereas men are more comfortable than women in a majority-black neighborhood, men are also more likely to report discomfort in a neighborhood with only 7 percent black residents. The finding that women report more discomfort with majority-black neighborhoods is consistent with the conclusions of Schuman et al. (1997, chap. 4) that women, while generally more liberal than men on racial attitudes pertaining to egalitarian treatment, were less liberal on questions of social distance, such as integrated schools and racial intermarriage.

A residential preference index for whites

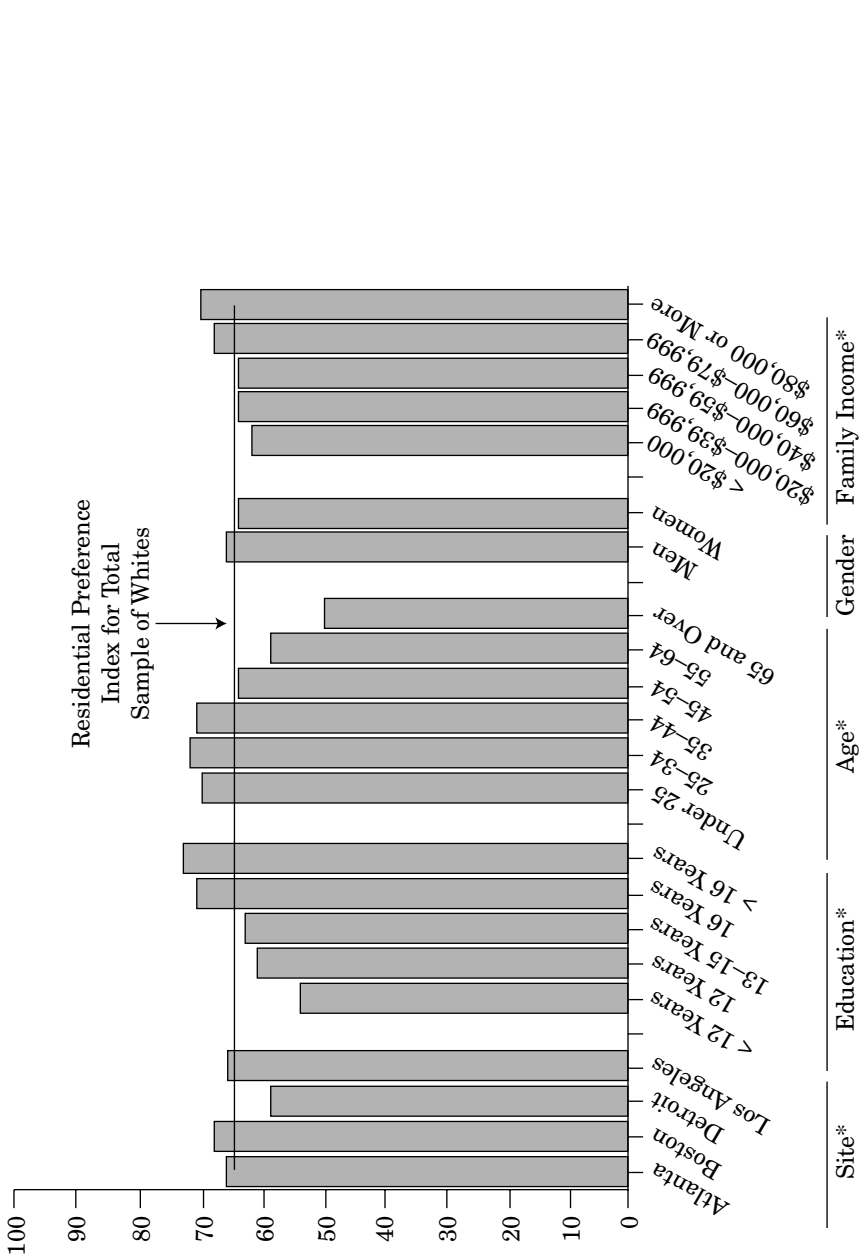
To draw on the full array of questions posed to whites about their preferences, we computed a residential preference index

(RPI). This index incorporates the entire series of questions focusing on the neighborhood preference cards (figure 1), including assessments of levels of comfort with and willingness to move into racially mixed areas, as well as views on moving out of a neighborhood with a particular racial composition. Respondents' scores on this index depended on their reactions to the four different integrated neighborhoods (scenarios 2 through 5 in figure 1). For example, respondents who said they would be very comfortable living in a neighborhood with a particular percentage of blacks got a score of 25 points for that neighborhood. Respondents who chose the "somewhat comfortable" response received a score of 20 points for that neighborhood. White respondents who would be uncomfortable in a neighborhood but would consider moving into an attractive, affordable home located there were given a score of 12.5 points for that neighborhood. Finally, there are many whites who reported they would be uncomfortable in an integrated neighborhood and would not consider moving there. They were given a score of 0 for that area. We assumed that a white person who would be uncomfortable with one black neighbor and would not move into such a minimally integrated area also would not tolerate a higher density of blacks, and thus assigned scores for more integrated areas accordingly. Scores for the four scenarios, computed in this manner, were then summed. The RPI ranges from a low of 0, indicating an unwillingness to live with blacks, to a maximum of 100, indicating an acceptance of majority-black areas and a willingness to move there (Zubrinisky and Bobo 1996). Over the whole white sample, this index has a mean value of 65 with a standard deviation of 30.

Figure 5 presents average values for the RPI for whites in the four sites (first panel) and for each category of the independent variables. Again, Detroit stands out. Whites in Detroit had significantly lower scores, indicating a lower level of acceptance of residential integration. The average RPI for metropolitan Detroit whites is 59, compared with 66 to 68 for those in the other three cities.

The results for the other characteristics parallel those previously identified in the comfort analysis. That is, education and age were strongly linked to this index, with increased schooling resulting in a greater acceptance of racial integration and increased age associated with lower index scores. Scores ranged from 73 for those with more than 16 years of education to 54 for those not achieving 12 years, and from about 70 for the youngest three age groups (under 45) to 50 for those ages 65 and over. Gender did not have a significant relationship to the residential

Figure 5. Residential Preference Index for White Respondents



*Analysis of variance test indicates this variable is related to residential preference index at 0.01 level.

preferences of whites, though this lack could be due to the differences at the two extremes of integration, which were apparent in figure 4. Income was significantly linked to RPI as before, with whites in the two highest income categories being more accepting of residential integration.

Next, we determined whether site had an independent effect upon the residential preferences of whites, after controlling for site differences in these demographic characteristics. That is, as table 1 indicates, Detroit-area whites were less educated and somewhat older than whites in the other locations. We tested whether the effect of site—and the uniqueness of Detroit—would disappear if we controlled for the impact of demographic characteristics on RPI. Table 3 reports parameters from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations in which a white respondent's RPI score is regressed on the five independent variables, with each treated as a series of dichotomous variables.

The results in table 3 imply that site has a strong independent effect and that whites in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles are more accepting of residential integration than whites in Detroit, even after controlling for demographic differences. Whites in the other three sites have residential preference scores 6 to 9 points higher than in Detroit. Beyond site, the two most important effects on whites' attitudes come from education and age. For these two variables, multivariate results are similar to bivariate results: Those with higher educational attainment and those who are young have the highest predicted RPI scores. For example, predicted RPI scores are 14 to 17 points lower for those 55 years of age or over than for those under 25. Income has a negative effect in the multivariate analysis, suggesting that the positive relationship observed at the bivariate level was primarily due to the correlation between education and income.

The four right-hand columns of table 2 display the regression on RPI for each site separately. The relationships between demographic characteristics and RPI are quite similar across the four sites. Results for Atlanta, Boston, and Detroit mirror those shown in the first column for the total sample. The education effect is particularly strong for Detroit; whites with more than 16 years of schooling have predicted RPI scores 21 points higher than those with the least education. The age effect is especially strong in Boston and Detroit, with those over age 54 having scores from 16 to 28 points lower than those under age 25.

Table 3. Determinants of Residential Preference Index for Whites (OLS Regression Models)^a

	Total Sample	Atlanta	Boston	Detroit	Los Angeles
Intercept	67.4	67.3	83.6	72.1	86.6
Site					
Atlanta	6.3 ^{b,c}				
Boston	9.3 ^b				
Los Angeles	9.0 ^b				
Educational attainment					
12 years	-1.3 ^c	1.6 ^c	-4.9 ^c	2.7 ^c	-18.8
13 to 15 years	0.9	0.8	-0.2	4.3	-12.8
16 years	7.6 ^b	13.0 ^b	9.3	6.7	-10.1
> 16 years	12.6 ^b	12.8 ^b	15.0	20.9 ^b	-16.8
Age					
25 to 34	-2.1 ^c	-3.9	-5.8 ^c	-7.9 ^c	8.2
35 to 44	-2.8	-1.6	-3.7	-10.1	3.4
45 to 54	-6.1	-0.9	-12.7	-14.7	-2.1
55 to 64	-14.1 ^b	-9.1	-16.2	-23.8 ^b	-7.2
65 and over	-17.2 ^b	-6.8	-28.2 ^b	-27.0 ^b	-11.0
Gender					
Female	3.1	1.8	3.9	5.3	-1.8
Family income					
\$20,000 to \$39,999	-4.2	-0.2	-8.2	-5.6	-3.0
\$40,000 to \$59,999	-6.7 ^b	+2.7	-13.2 ^b	-8.1	-3.0
\$60,000 to \$79,999	-7.4 ^b	-1.4	-11.7	-12.8 ^b	1.7
\$80,000 or more	-7.1	-9.9	-2.4	-7.5	-5.8
Adjusted R^2	0.08	0.03	0.14	0.07	0.03
Dependent variable					
Mean	65.4	67.8	70.6	60.0	70.0
s	31.0	28.4	29.1	33.4	29.2
Sample size	1,700	532	261	677	230

^a Omitted categories for the independent variables are Detroit for site, < 12 years for educational attainment, under 25 for age, male for gender, and under \$20,000 for family income.

^b This particular regression coefficient is significant at 0.01 level.

^c *F* test indicates this variable is significant at 0.01 level.

Residential preferences of blacks

One of the major advantages of the MCSUI data set is the large sample size for blacks. The richness of the MCSUI data set also allows many different perspectives on the residential preferences of blacks. In this article, we discuss three aspects: the racial

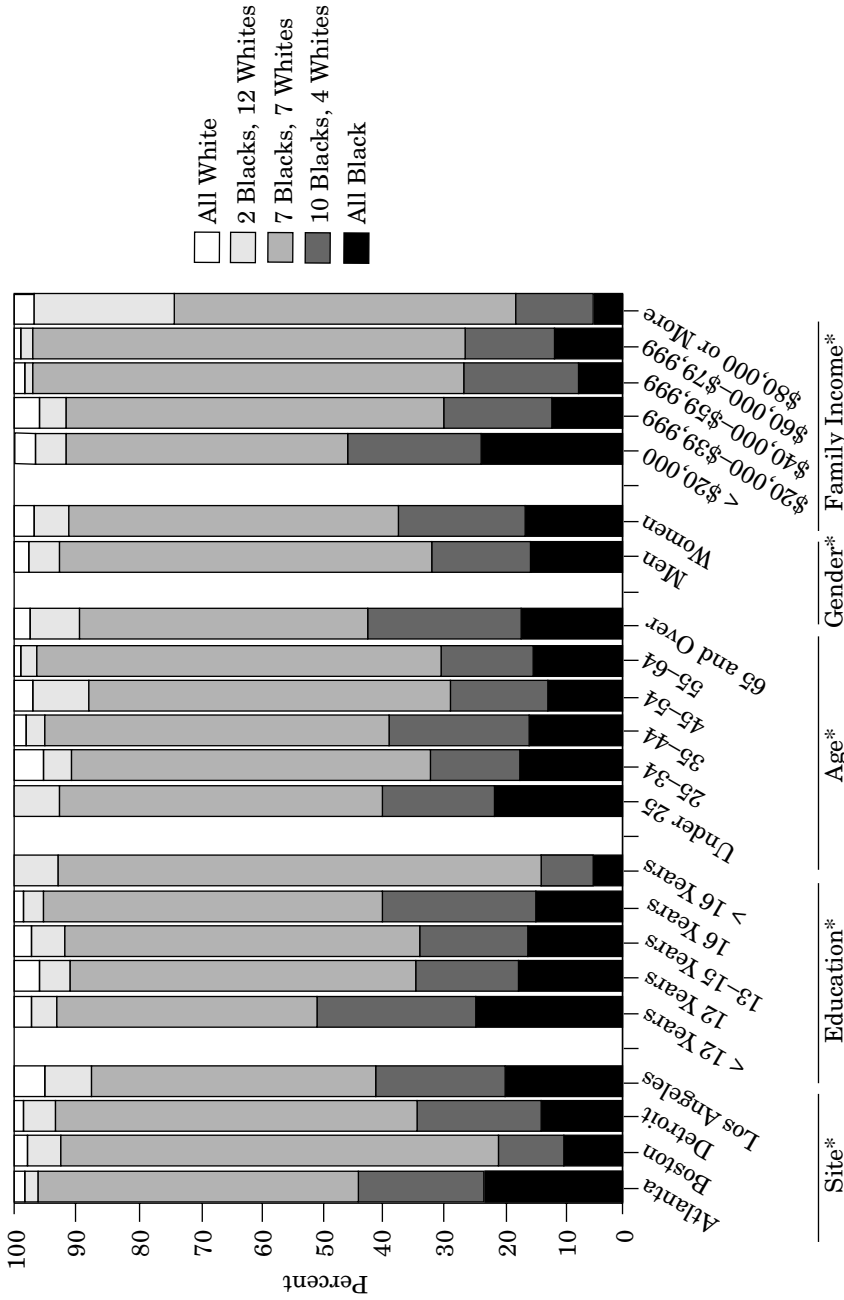
composition of the neighborhoods that black respondents found most attractive, the average number of whites in their two most preferred neighborhoods, and the willingness of blacks to move into all-white neighborhoods. We test hypotheses about the same five demographic factors used in the analysis of whites.

Blacks were presented with the cards shown in figure 2 and asked to rank those neighborhoods in terms of their personal preferences, ordering them from most attractive to least attractive as places to live. Blacks were highly likely to prefer integrated environments but ones with substantial black representation. More than half the blacks in the sample (57 percent) chose scenario 3 (7 black and 7 white households before they moved in) as the most attractive neighborhood, indicating the great popularity of 50-50 neighborhoods to blacks. The next most popular neighborhood, chosen by 19 percent, was scenario 2 (10 black and 4 white households before they entered). Following that, 16 percent ranked the all-black neighborhood first in attractiveness. The two neighborhoods dominated by whites (scenarios 4 and 5, containing 2 and no black households, respectively) were not highly preferred by blacks; just 8 percent chose one of these two as most attractive.

These conclusions about the distribution of black respondents by most preferred neighborhood are generally applicable across categories of site, education, age, gender, and family income (see figure 6). All variables are significantly associated with the neighborhood preferences of blacks, according to χ^2 tests. Results for Atlanta are distinctive; nearly one-quarter of Atlanta blacks ranked the all-black neighborhood as most attractive, and very few put the cards showing white-dominated neighborhoods toward the top of their preferences. Boston is distinctive in the other direction, with only 9 percent preferring the all-black neighborhood. In Boston and Los Angeles, relatively more blacks indicated a strong preference for living in the two predominantly or exclusively white neighborhoods. These site results are consistent with the population compositions of these metropolises; Atlanta has the highest proportion of blacks, and Los Angeles and especially Boston have relatively low proportions of blacks.

Education is negatively associated with preferring all-black neighborhoods and positively associated with preferring the equally split neighborhood (7 black and 7 white households). For example, preference for all-black neighborhoods is especially strong among blacks with less than 12 years of education (25 percent) and especially weak among those with graduate education (6 percent). Among blacks, age is not systematically

Figure 6. Distribution of Blacks by Racial Composition of Most Preferred Neighborhood



* χ^2 test indicates this variable is significantly linked to most preferred neighborhood at 0.01 level.

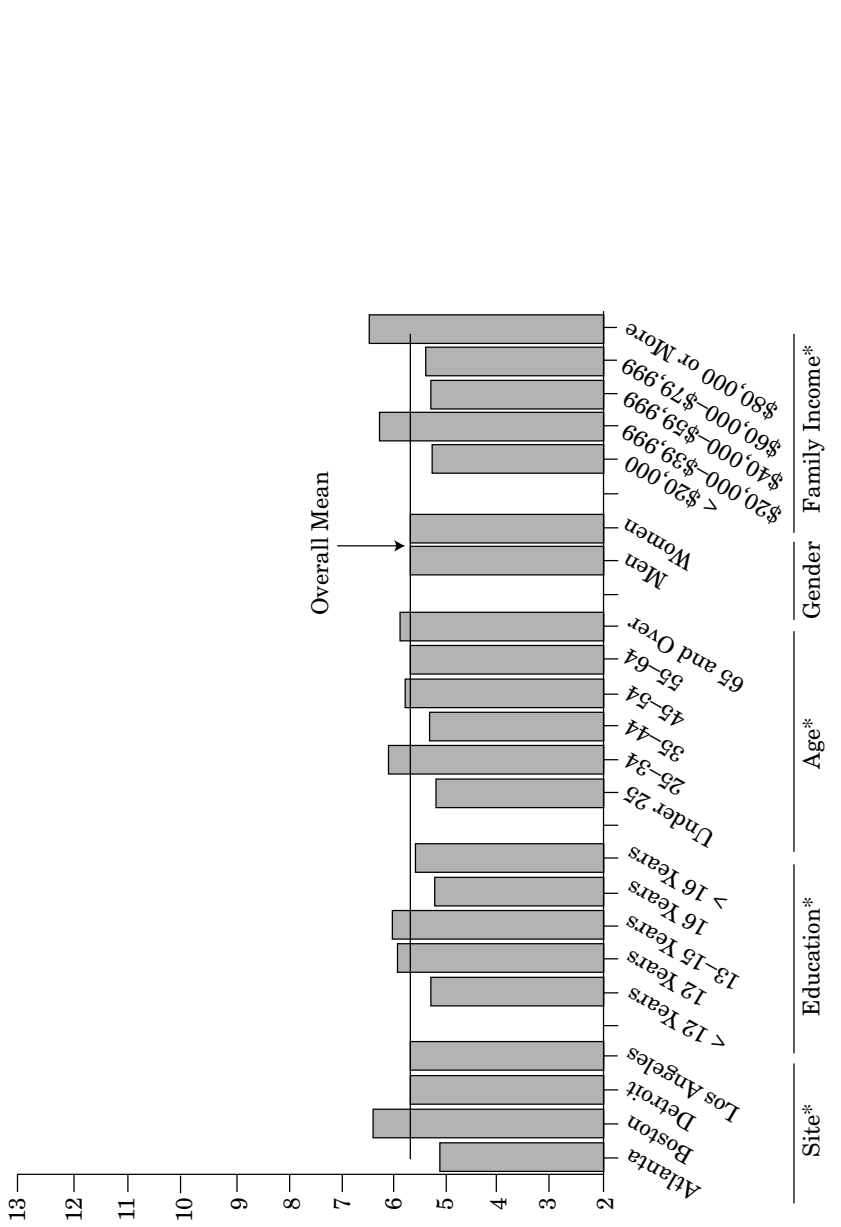
related to residential preferences, but the effects of income parallel those for education in the sense that the two extreme categories are distinctive. Nearly half (45 percent) of the blacks with very low incomes (less than \$20,000 per year) show strong preferences for the neighborhoods with the most black families, and among those with the highest incomes, a disproportionate percentage (26 percent) prefer the neighborhoods with the most *white* families.

We next computed an indicator of blacks' preference for integrated neighborhoods based on the neighborhoods that black respondents found most attractive. This indicator is simply the average of the number of whites in the most attractive neighborhood and the number in the second most attractive. It ranges from 2 for blacks who preferred to live in the neighborhoods with the most blacks to 13 for those preferring the neighborhoods with the most whites (figure 7). Results in figure 7 confirm those from the previous figure in that blacks show a preference for living in integrated neighborhoods; on average, black respondents would like to live in neighborhoods more than one-third white (the average over the whole sample is 5.7 out of 15). The number of whites in blacks' preferred neighborhoods was particularly low in Atlanta (average 5.1) but high in Boston (average 6.4). Again, this finding parallels the differences among the areas in racial composition.

Results of an OLS regression on this indicator mirror the bivariate results (data not shown). The strongest effect in the multivariate model is the negative one for Atlanta. Statistically significant effects also emerge for two income categories. As displayed in figure 7, blacks with moderate incomes (\$20,000 to \$40,000 per year) and those with very high incomes (over \$80,000) preferred neighborhoods with greater white representation.

Given the high levels of residential segregation in the MCSUI sites and the aversion many whites have to entering black or racially mixed neighborhoods, desegregation will occur only if blacks enter largely white neighborhoods. Are blacks willing to do so? A major focus in the residential segregation literature has been on those blacks who are or are not willing to pioneer in all-white areas. Recall that after black respondents ranked the five cards, we returned the cards to them and asked whether there were any neighborhoods they would *not* consider moving into. If they said yes, we asked them which ones they would not enter. From these responses, we constructed a dichotomous variable

Figure 7. Average Number of White Residents in Two Most Preferred Neighborhoods of Black Respondents



Note: This measure of residential preferences ranges from a low of 2.0 for blacks who preferred to live in the highest-density black neighborhoods to 13.0 for those preferring the highest-density white neighborhoods.

*Analysis of variance test indicates this variable is related to number of whites in two most preferred neighborhoods at 0.01 level.

indicating whether they would be willing to move into an all-white neighborhood in which they had found an attractive, affordable home.

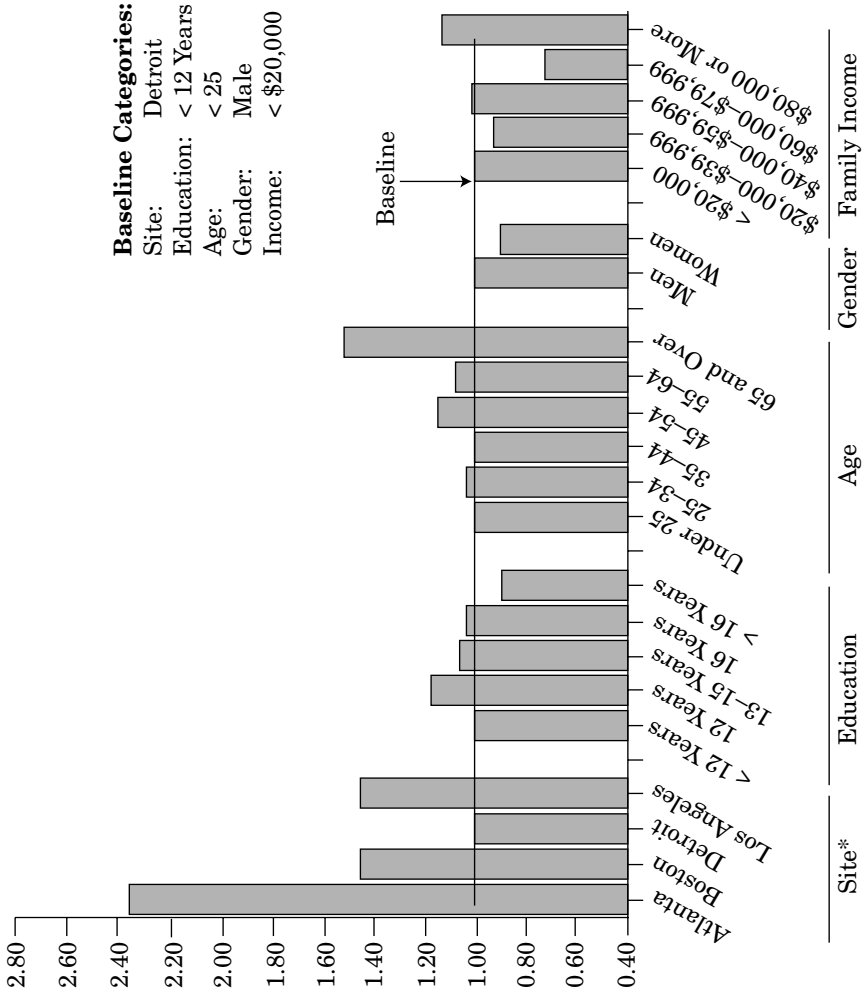
Overall, 35 percent of the black sample were willing to move into an all-white neighborhood, meaning that almost two-thirds would not pioneer. Bivariate and multivariate results for this variable are similar; thus, we show only the results of the logistic regression on willingness to pioneer. Displayed in figure 8 are the net relative odds of willingness to pioneer for each category of the independent variables (with omitted categories as in table 3). Site was the most important predictor of blacks' willingness to pioneer. For example, after controlling for education, age, gender, and income, we found blacks in Boston and Los Angeles were about 1.4 times as likely to be willing to move into an all-white neighborhood as blacks in Detroit. Atlanta blacks appear to be extraordinarily willing to pioneer, but this effect may have been biased upward by a methodological artifact.¹ None of the other variables in this model were significant, yet older blacks (especially those over 65) were more likely to report a willingness to pioneer.

Conclusion and summary

Race continues to be significant in the residential decision-making process. If this were a color-blind society and if race had no salience, blacks would more or less randomly rank the neighborhood cards we presented, and thus about as many would put

¹Willingness to pioneer in an all-white neighborhood was assessed in two steps. The first was a filter question, in which black respondents were asked to look at all five neighborhood cards and indicate whether there were any neighborhoods they would not consider moving into. If respondents answered no to this question, it implied that there were no neighborhoods they would be unwilling to move into. They were thus considered willing to pioneer. If respondents answered yes to this question, they were then asked to identify which neighborhoods they would be unwilling to move into. When presented with the all-white neighborhood card for this second question, if respondents answered no, they were also considered willing to pioneer. This two-step process—and somewhat indirect assessment of willingness to pioneer—creates the possibility that the interviewer will affect the answer by wanting to rush through the interview. Closer inspection of the Atlanta responses by interviewer identified two Atlanta interviewers who were unusually likely to elicit a “no” response to the filter question. Specifically, “no” responses were elicited by these two interviewers in 85 percent of their interviews; the average for all other interviewers was closer to 34 percent. Moreover, taken together, these two interviewers conducted nearly one-fifth of the Atlanta interviews. Thus, we are cautious about making substantive interpretations about the Atlanta anomaly, given this strong evidence that it may be a methodological artifact.

Figure 8. Net Relative Odds of Willingness of Blacks to Pioneer in an All-White Neighborhood



* χ^2 test comparing logistic models indicates this variable is significant at 0.01 level.

the all-white neighborhood at the top as would put the all-black neighborhood there. And the proportion of whites who reported discomfort would not steadily increase with a rising density of black neighbors. These MCSUI results indicate that race is important when neighborhoods are chosen, although this importance varies in degree from one metropolis to another.

There are significant site differences in the racial residential preferences of blacks and whites. We conclude that it is not appropriate to generalize to the entire United States from the 1976 and 1992 Detroit Area Studies. Site was consistently the strongest predictor of residential preferences, and the Detroit results were the most distinctive. After controlling for their demographic characteristics, whites in metropolitan Detroit have an unusually strong preference for white neighborhoods and an unusual reluctance to move into racially integrated neighborhoods. Blacks in Detroit displayed less willingness to move into exclusively white neighborhoods. The Detroit metropolis has a long history of extreme segregation, and suburban whites there have a reputation for hostility toward the entry of blacks. Thus, Detroit provides a potentially strong example of the hypothesis that high levels of segregation, prejudice, and discrimination, and the residential preferences of blacks and whites, are all parts of a mutually reinforcing system. Prospects for residential integration may be much dimmer in Detroit than in the other sites.

Another notable site difference was the preference among blacks in Atlanta for all-black or majority-black neighborhoods. While this reflects in part the higher black proportion in Atlanta (compared with the other three metropolises), it also reflects the perceived availability of affluent black neighborhoods, as well as the long-established concentrations of blacks in the suburban ring. Findings for Boston and Los Angeles were also consistent with the demographic compositions of those metropolises. For example, blacks in Boston preferred living in neighborhoods with more whites than blacks in the other three areas did, reflecting the relatively small black population in the Boston area.

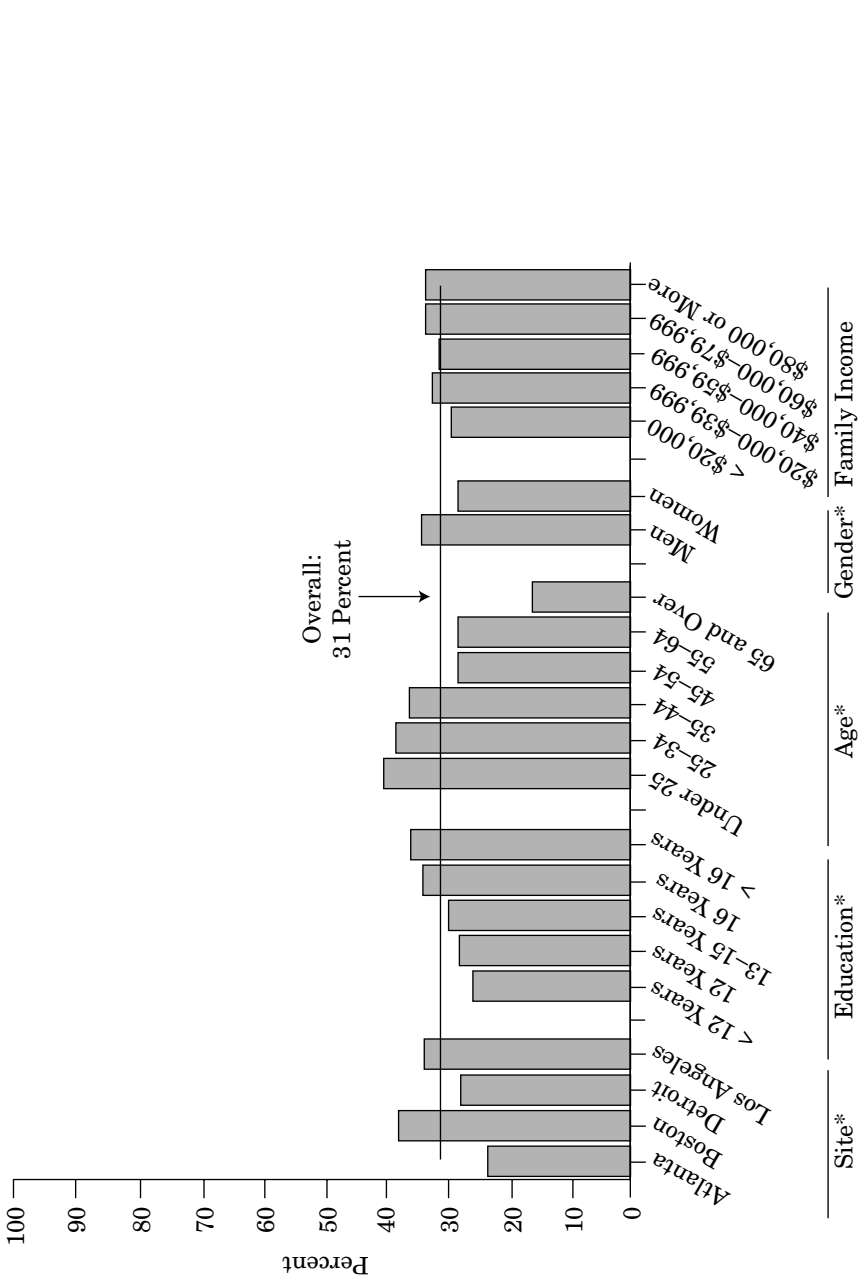
Educational attainment and age are related to the neighborhood preferences of whites but not to those of blacks. The secular trend toward a liberalization of whites' racial attitudes is encouraged, we believe, by the continuing rise in educational attainment and by the cohort replacement process, and this leads to the differences in preferences we describe. While younger whites are more willing to live in racially mixed neighborhoods than older whites, there is no evidence that younger blacks have a greater preference for residential integration than older blacks. Indeed, it is

the oldest blacks who were most willing to pioneer in white neighborhoods.

The racial residential preferences of blacks and whites overlap considerably, offering some hope for an eventual decline in segregation. Black respondents in all sites favored living in racially mixed neighborhoods, strongly preferring them to either all-black or all-white neighborhoods. In addition, more than one-third of the blacks were willing to be the first black family to move into an exclusively white neighborhood with attractive, affordable housing. As demonstrated by Schelling (1971) and confirmed by Fielding (1997), the tolerance of the numerically smaller group for living with members of the larger group is crucial to whether integration is possible or likely. The findings from this analysis as well as that of Fielding (1997) suggest that the majority of blacks would be comfortable living in and are willing to move into neighborhoods much more racially integrated than those now found in these metropolises. (For another analysis of how the relative size of two groups influences their social interaction and inequality, see Blau 1977.)

As noted by Bobo and Zubrinsky (1996), studies of racial attitudes often report high levels of tolerance for residential integration among whites, levels that are inconsistent with the extensive segregation indicated by census data. This analysis is no exception. For example, more than four-fifths of whites in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles and more than two-thirds of those in Detroit would be comfortable in a neighborhood that was 20 percent black. In the nation as a whole, only 13 percent of the metropolitan population was black in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992, table 3), and the highest percentage of blacks in the sampled sites was 26 percent in Atlanta. Therefore, our results for whites imply that if blacks and whites were evenly distributed in most U.S. metropolitan areas, the majority of whites would be comfortable with the racial composition of their neighborhood. Perhaps the most extreme test of whites' willingness to accept residential integration involves moving into a majority-black neighborhood. Approximately one-third of the white respondents said they would be willing to do so if they found an attractive, affordable home there (see figure 9). Two specific aspects of the results shown in figure 9 are worth noting. Whites with higher educational levels and those who are young are more accepting of integrated environments. Thus, as older, less educated cohorts are replaced, the distribution of preferences may change over time.

Figure 9. Percent of Whites Willing to Enter a Neighborhood with Eight Black and Six White Families



* χ^2 test indicates this variable is significantly linked to willingness to enter an eight black and six white neighborhood at 0.01 level.

Our findings challenge the hypothesis that levels of black-white residential segregation remain high solely because of the distinctly different preferences of blacks and whites. It is probable, however, that preferences interact with the other two factors—discrimination in the marketing of housing and economic differences—in reinforcing high segregation levels. Policy changes have the greatest potential impact on two specific aspects of the web of forces that sustain racial segregation in this country: the hostility that blacks anticipate receiving upon moving into predominantly white areas and the continued discrimination by race in the sale, rental, marketing, and financing of housing. Local educational efforts, as well as stricter punishment of hostile acts, could have an impact on the first of these. For the second, stricter, more effective enforcement of existing antidiscrimination laws is crucial.

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