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The Spatial Characteristics of Latino Employment Opportunity for Further Inquiry

Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

THE SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LATINO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

Peter A. Creticos

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The Chicago metropolitan area is comprised of a patchwork of homogenous neighborhoods. Some are natural occurring, i.e., they are the result of people self-organizing around a common set of racial, social or economic identities. Others are the result of deliberate policies, such as Chicago's Pullman community, or are due to more insidious reasons, such as discriminatory practices and policies that force people into ghettos. As the region has grown, so has the distribution of industries and jobs resulting in a mix of overlapping labor market areas and mismatches between where people live and where they may reasonably find work.

Chicago area Latinos are no different than other groups in that they, too, have come together in neighborhoods that are defined by language, culture, country or region of origin (in the case of immigrants), and economic standing. While these enclaves may provide comfort by sustaining a common identity, there is disagreement as to the role they play in growing (or retarding) economic opportunity for those who comprise these communities. Some believe that enclaves are able to aggregate and organize information about job opportunities through word of mouth among families and friends who fan out to workplaces throughout the region. They may also be conducive to the formation of informal job supports, such as car pools and shared childcare that make it possible for groups of workers to travel substantial distances to places of work.

There are many disadvantages as well. Work opportunities may become highly concentrated in a few industries due to the self-reinforcing nature of word of mouth information and limitations on the perceptions of other opportunities (e.g., people who work in construction tell others about the opportunities in construction and may know very little about opportunities in other industries). In addition, the dispersion of where people work may also become somewhat lumpy - in part because of where industries are concentrated, but also due to the dependencies created by the informal job supports.

A recent study published by the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame on the employment characteristics and experiences of Latinos showed that they are highly concentrated in a handful of industries, although there are gender differences in terms of which industries. Several questions arise as to the factors that drive these patterns and whether these factors apply to all Latinos or whether there are differences between Latino groups.

One possible differentiator is place of residence: i.e., whether the composition and structure of different Latino enclaves can be correlated to different employment outcomes. This issue is especially important since many social, family, workforce training and educational services are now place-based and highly customized to each community area. If it turns out that each enclave can be correlated with specific employment outcomes, then some interventions aimed at improving the economic wellbeing of residences within each community may need to be somewhat customized to each community. On the other hand, if it appears that there are few internal differences between enclaves that can be correlated with employment outcomes, then the public policy options may be more generic to Latinos, or even to all workers possessing other common characteristics.

There is some evidence that there may be differences that go beyond the more obvious reasons of proximity to jobs and access to public transportation and good highways. We can illustrate this by comparing the spatial distribution of jobs for the residents of adjacent communities with high concentrations of Latinos: the town of Cicero and the Little Village community of Chicago. According to city-data.com, the communities cover approximately the same geographic area. Little Village is more populated at an estimated 90,326 for 2008 (RW Ventures) and Cicero at 84,812 (American Community Survey, 2008). Each community is majority Latino: Little Village is estimated to be 84 percent Latino in 2008 (RW Ventures) and Cicero is also estimated to be 84 Latino (ACS, 2008). Mean household income in Little Village is \$48,947 (RW Ventures) and is \$49,929 in Cicero (ACS, 2008). In Little Village, 29.5 percent of the households have incomes of less than \$25,000; in Cicero, that percentage is 26.4 percent. But, approximately one third of the Little Village and Cicero households earn between \$25,000 and \$50,000. And, 17.3 percent of all individuals in Cicero fall below the poverty level while the poverty rate in Little Village is estimated to be 26.5 percent. Both communities are proximate to Interstate 55 and are served by the Pink Line of the Chicago Transit Authority. They also are well served by public bus transportation and many of the same east-west arterial roads. Therefore, both communities share many characteristics along several dimensions.

In light of these similarities and especially given the fact that the two communities are only separated by a rail corridor, it is reasonable to expect that the spatial distribution of where community and town residents are employed would be about the same except with two exceptions, both in relation to proximity between residence and job: residents may be concentrated in their

JOB DISTRIBUTION OF CICERO RESIDENTS
2008, 2006, 2004

own community and not the other, and the areas immediately surrounding each community (except where they share a boundary), experience a “spillover” of residents from either of the two communities (e.g., workers who residents of Cicero are more concentrated in Berwyn to the west of Cicero and workers who are residents of Little Village are more concentrated in the Pilsen neighborhood to the east of Little Village).

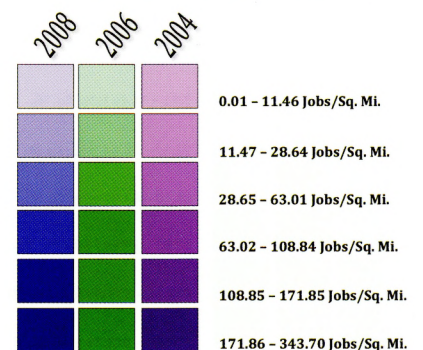
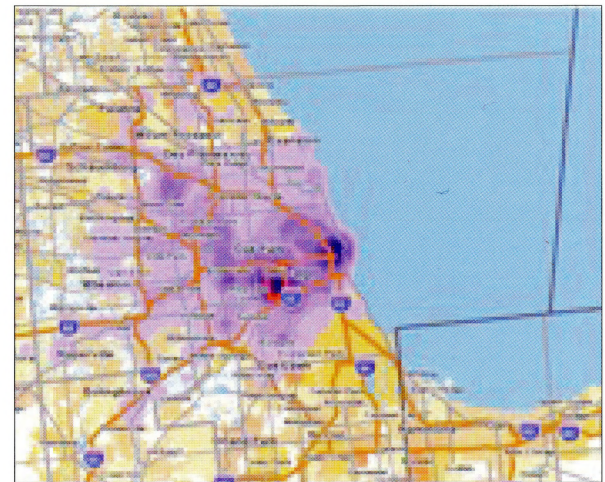
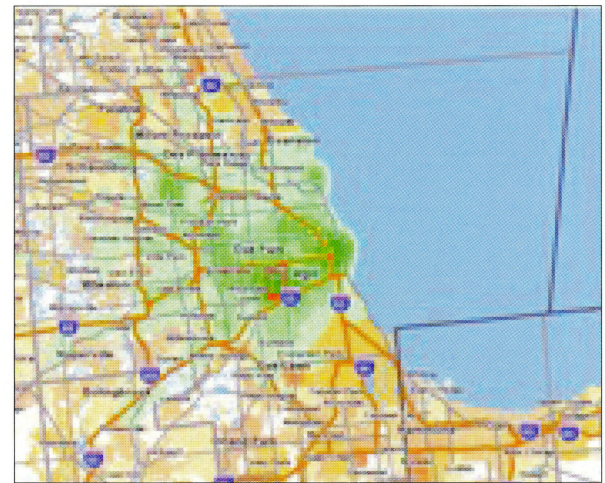
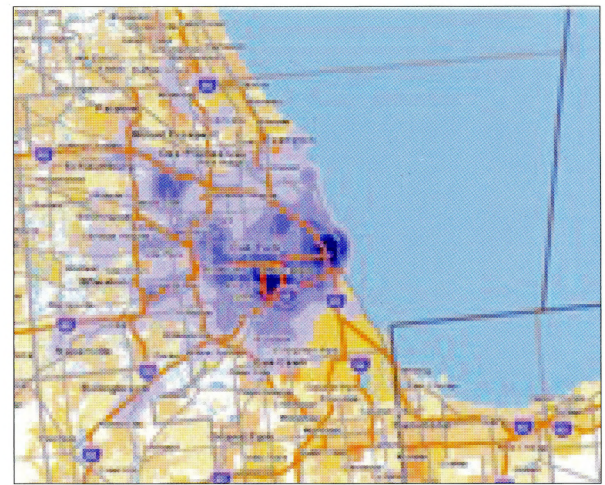
One method for determining the differences or similarities between communities is to map the locations of where workers of each community are employed. The Local Economic Dynamics database of the U.S. Census enables researchers to generate both point and density maps in two ways: by specifying the employment location and determining the commuting area for workers who travel to that location, or by specifying the residence of workers and determining where they travel to for their jobs. Since we are interested in where workers work in relation to their residence, the point map will show job locations and, by varying the size of the point, provide an indication of the number of jobs held by residents of a given community at each location. The density map breaks that information down into employment per square mile, effectively smoothing the data in spatial terms. This is especially useful at the scale of a metropolitan area since the point maps are too cluttered to discern a clear pattern. The chief drawback is that it loses the finer detail that may tie employment to specific transit or highway corridors. That said, the density maps are adequate in gaining a general appreciation as to whether further study is warranted.

GENERAL EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

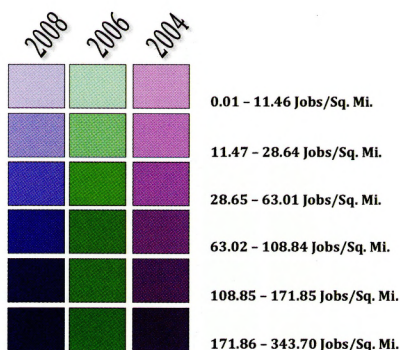
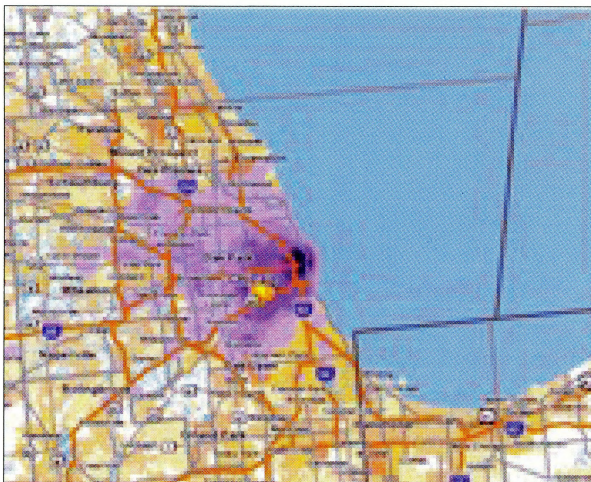
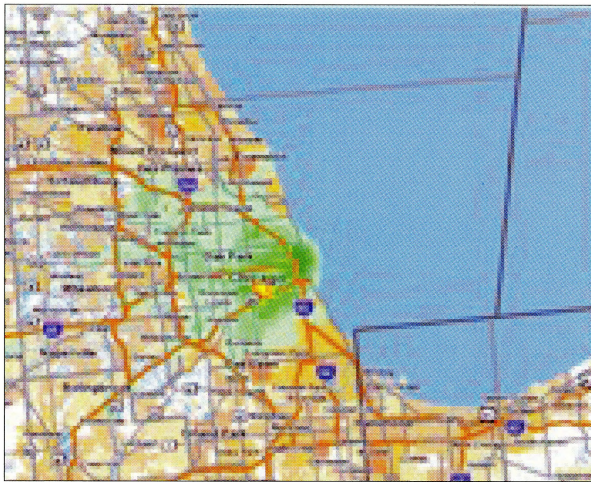
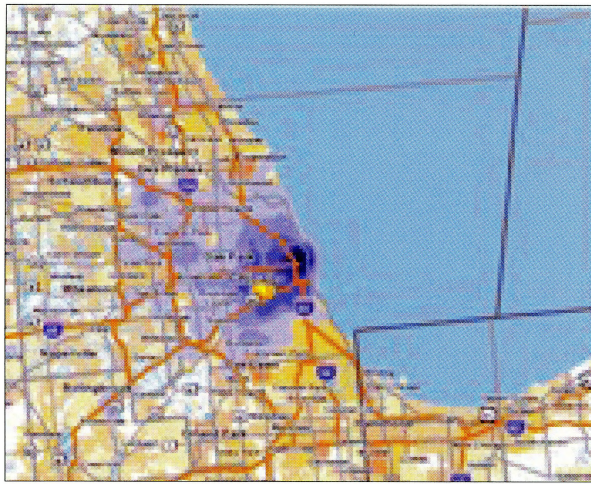
We examined the spatial distribution of employment in 2008, 2006, and 2004 for Cicero and Little Village residents. We chose those years to see if there was any apparent difference in spatial distribution during the ramp-up to the peak for the last period of economic growth and in the first full year of the current recession. In addition, while the database is able to specify Cicero as a single unit of analysis, we had to approximate the Little Village area by selecting the census tracts that best comprised the neighborhood. The zip code area associated with Little Village also includes the North Lawndale community that is predominately African American and would therefore introduce a separate neighborhood into the analysis. We therefore had to divide the zip code area into its two component neighborhoods, leaving us little choice but to use census tracts.

The result is the following six maps showing the spatial distribution of employment for each community. These maps are organized so that the left column shows the job distribution of Cicero residents in 2008, 2006 and 2004 (working down). The maps on the right show the same distribution for Little Village residents. The last row of each column demonstrates the difference in the density scales. Note that the density scales for Cicero residents are much higher than those for Little Village residents, meaning that there are many more Cicero residents per square mile in each sextile. Therefore, the juxtaposition of the Cicero and Little Village maps should be understood as showing the differences in relative concentrations only.

The patterns for each community are remarkably consistent over time. Little Village residents are employed in a more tightly defined geographic area, whereas Cicero residents extend out much farther into the suburbs. In addition, Little Village residents are



**JOB DISTRIBUTION OF LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS
2008, 2006, 2004**



concentrated somewhat towards the near south side and downtown Chicago. While there is a high concentration of Cicero residents working downtown and on the near south side, they are also highly concentrated in their hometown as well as along the I-290 corridor towards Schaumburg.

TABLE 1. WHERE CICERO RESIDENTS WORK

YEAR	2008		2006		2004	
	COUNT	SHARE	COUNT	SHARE	COUNT	SHARE
TOTAL PRIMARY JOBS	25,989	100.0%	27,313	100.0%	27,856	100.0%
JOBS IN PLACES (CITIES, CDPS, ETC.) WHERE WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED						
CHICAGO CITY	8,645	33.35	9,031	33.1	9,104	32.7
CICERO TOWN	2,411	9.3	2,872	10.5	3,117	11.2
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, IL	654	2.5	681	2.5	628	2.3
BERWYN, IL	586	2.3	630	2.3	671	2.4
FRANKLIN PARK, IL	378	1.5	429	1.6	566	2.0
SCHAUMBURG, IL	326	1.3	342	1.3	331	1.2
MELROSE PARK, IL	319	1.2	357	1.3	360	1.3
ADDISON, IL	302	1.2	283	1.0	317	1.1
BROADVIEW, IL	301	1.2	362	1.3	386	1.4
BENSENVILLE, IL	290	1.1	359	1.3	344	1.2
ALL OTHER LOCATIONS	11,777	45.3	11,967	43.8	12,032	43.2

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics

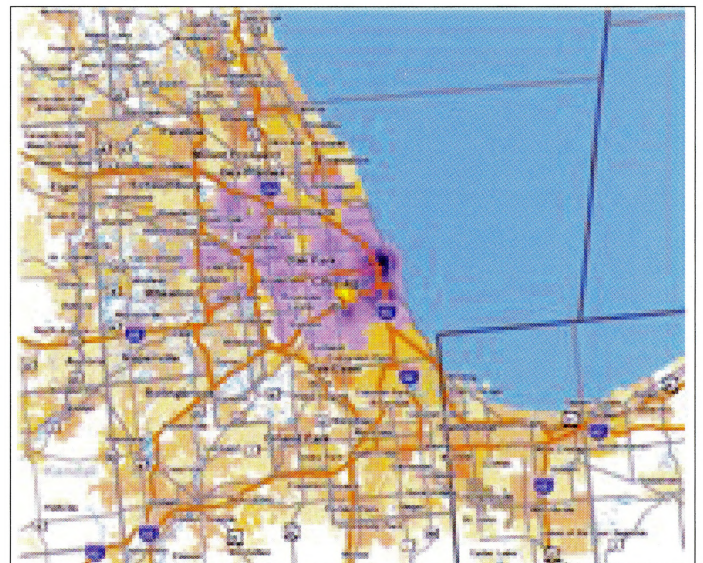
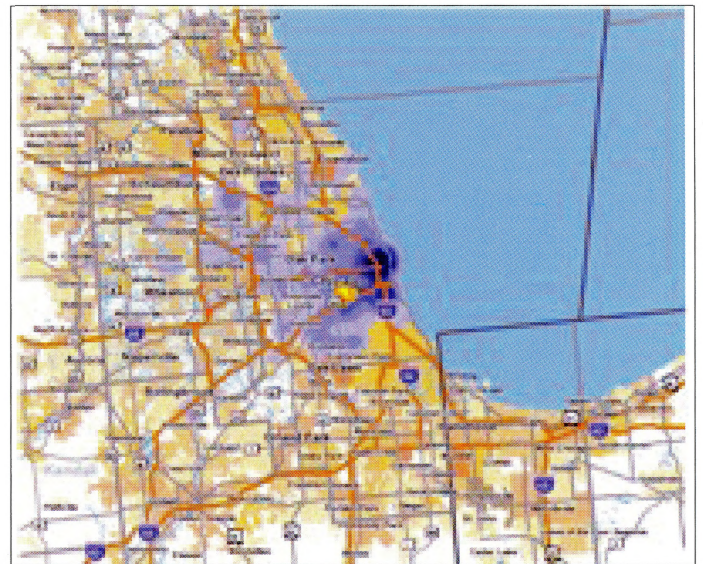
TABLE 2. WHERE LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS WORK

YEAR	2008		2006		2004	
	COUNT	SHARE	COUNT	SHARE	COUNT	SHARE
TOTAL PRIMARY JOBS	14,866	100.0%	14,928	100.0%	16,288	100.0%
JOBS IN PLACES (CITIES, CDPS, ETC.) WHERE WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED						
CHICAGO CITY	8,001	53.8	7,732	51.8	8,773	54.1
CICERO TOWN	355	2.4	452	3.0	450	2.8
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, IL	190	1.3	253	1.7	222	1.4
FRANKLIN PARK, IL	170	1.1	236	1.6	304	1.9
BEDFORD PARK, IL	164	1.1	220	1.5	293	1.8
MELROSE PARK, IL	133	0.9	177	1.2	199	1.2
AURORA, IL	126	0.8	135	0.9	141	0.9
ADDISON, IL	124	0.8	124	0.8	153	0.9
SPRINGFIELD, IL	111	0.7	133	0.9	122	0.8
BROADVIEW, IL	103	0.7	121	0.8	176	1.1
ALL OTHER LOCATIONS	5,389	36.3	5,345	35.8	5,395	33.2

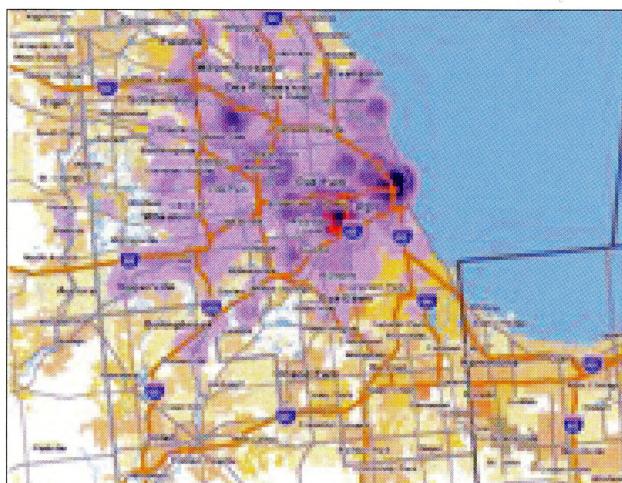
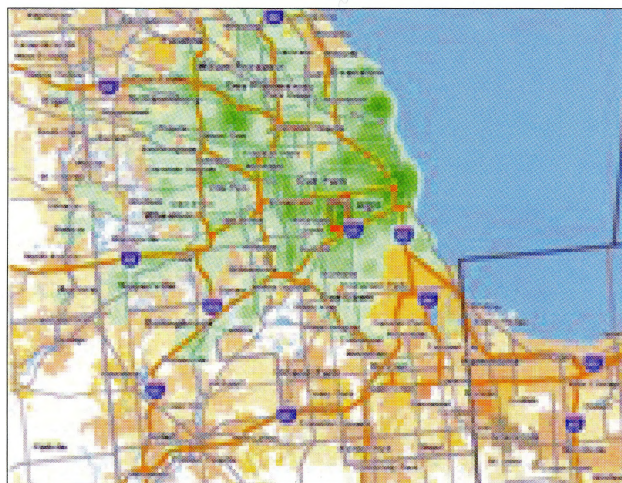
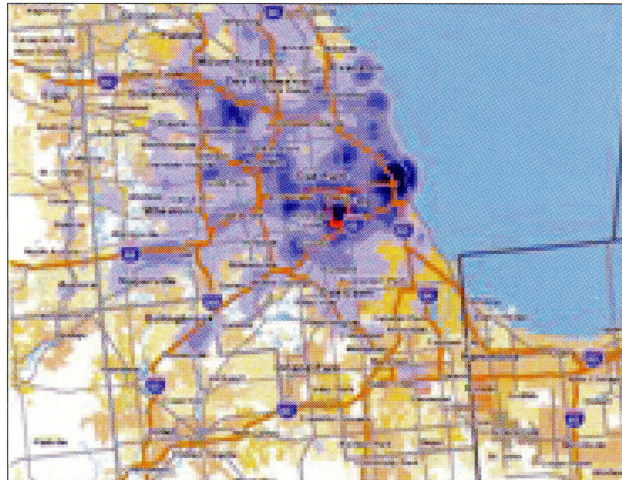
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics

The following set of maps show the distribution of workers earning over \$3,333 per month by place of residence. The general distribution patterns as before are even more pronounced, with higher-earning Cicero residents more broadly distributed across the Chicago metropolitan area while higher-earning Little Village residents more concentrated in the City of Chicago, especially towards the lakefront and downtown Chicago. Keep in mind that the population density values for each sextile is much greater for Cicero residents than for Little Village residents: the main point is the relative distribution and not the values themselves. Similar patterns are evident in for middle and lower income earners.

**WHERE LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS WORK
EARNING > \$3,333/MO 2008, 2006, 2004**

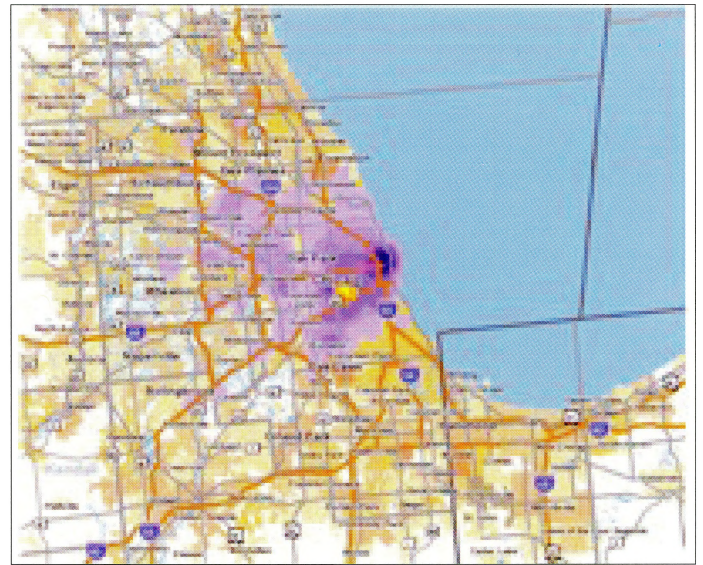
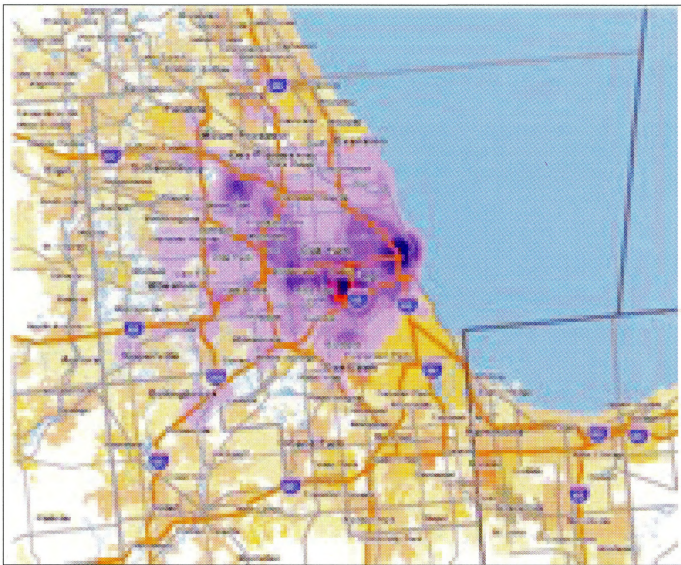
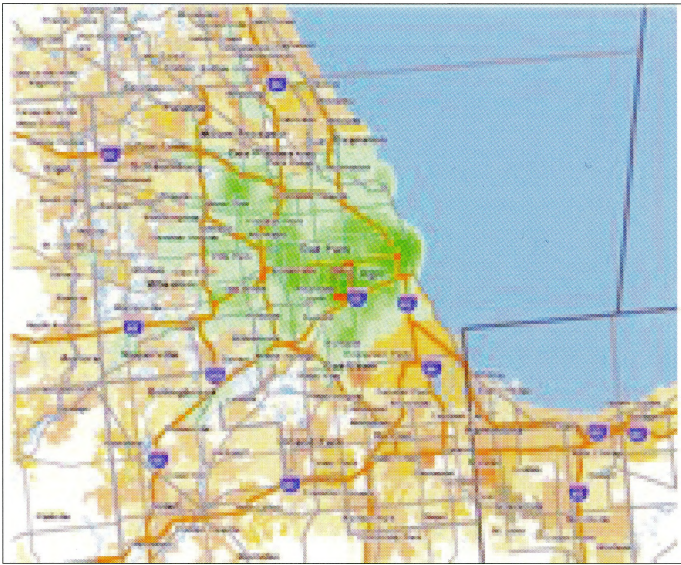
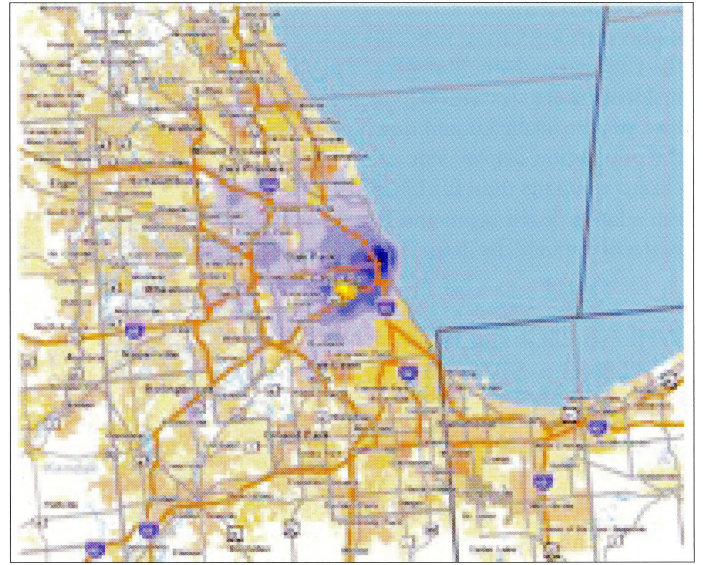
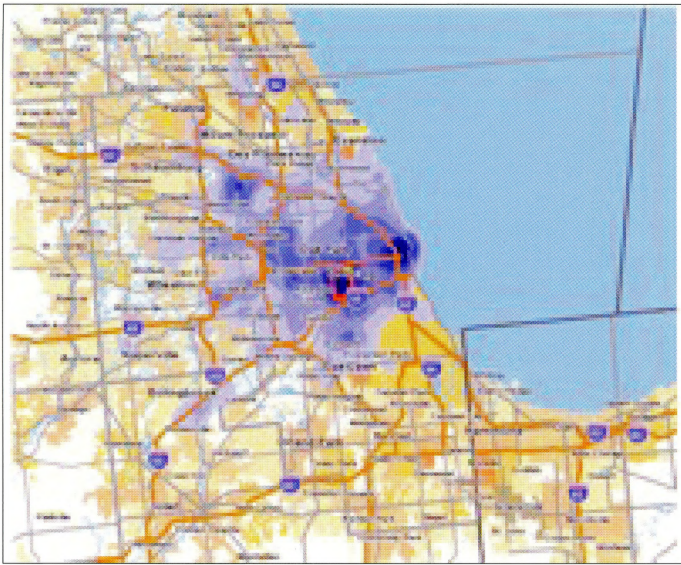


**WHERE CICERO RESIDENTS WORK
EARNING > \$3,333/MO 2008, 2006, 2004**

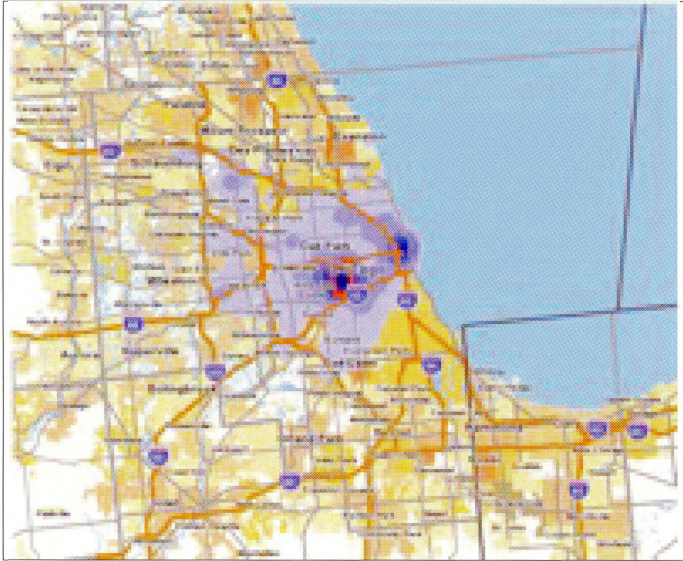


WHERE CICERO RESIDENTS WORK EARNING \$1,251-\$3,333/MO 2008, 2006, 2004

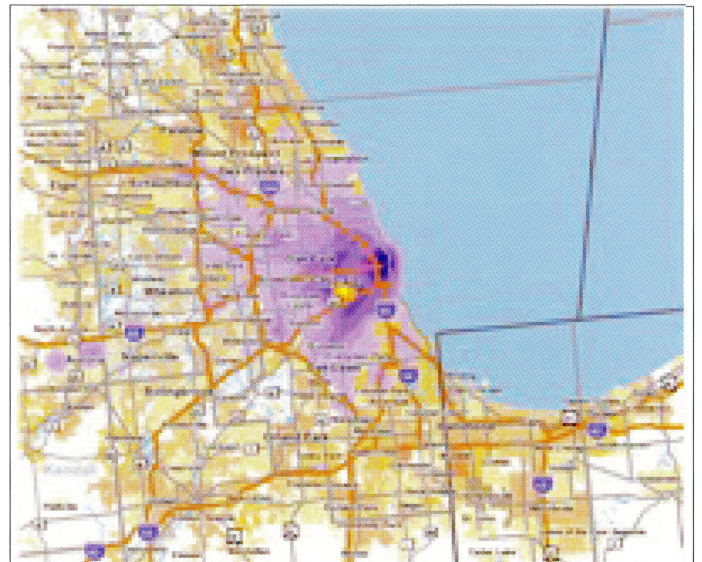
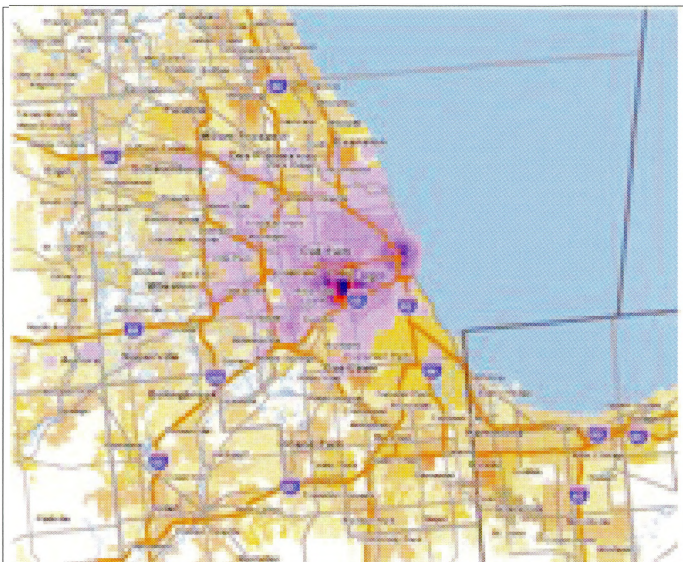
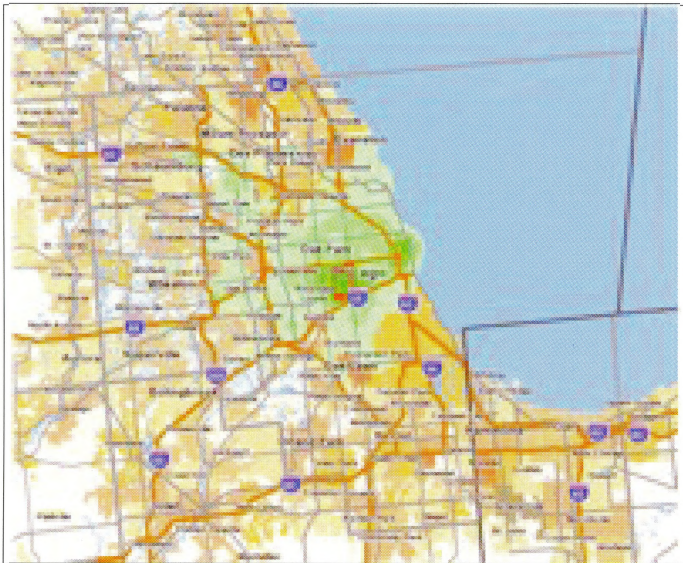
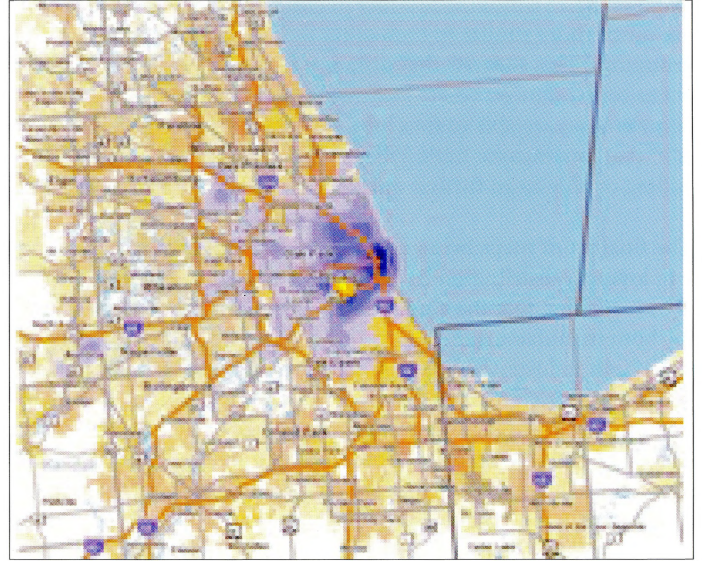
WHERE LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS WORK EARNING \$1,251-\$3,333/MO 2008, 2006, 2004



WHERE CICERO RESIDENTS WORK
EARNING < \$1,251/MO 2008, 2006, 2004



WHERE LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS WORK
EARNING < \$1,251/MO 2008, 2006, 2004

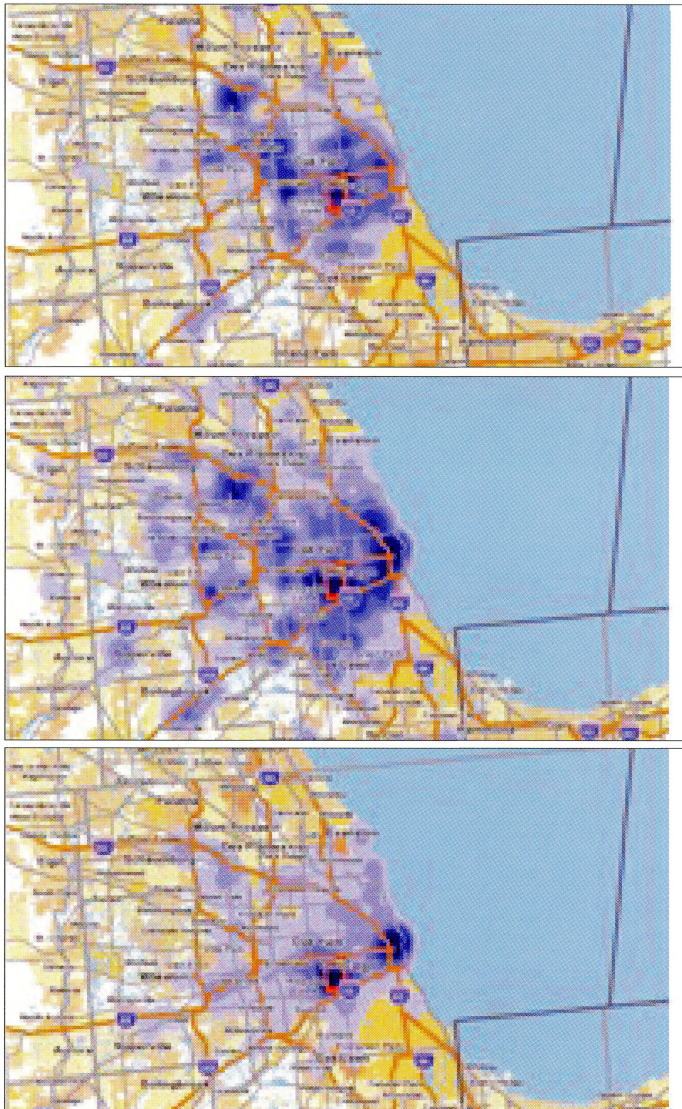


(see previous set of maps)

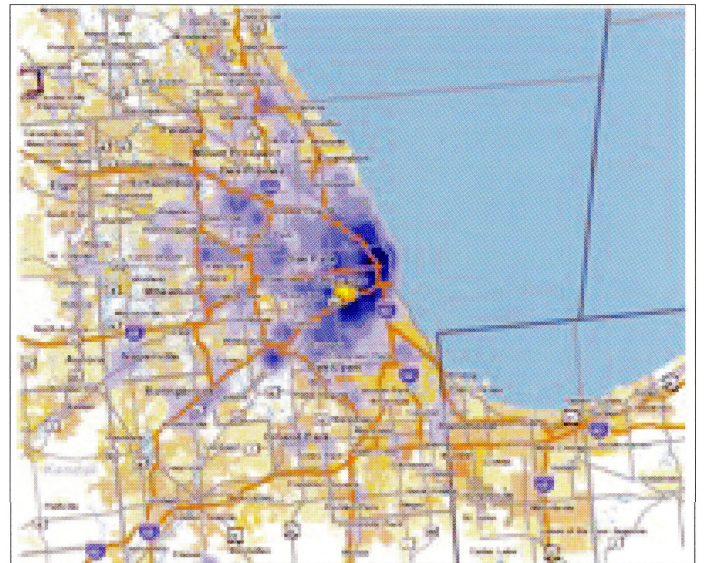
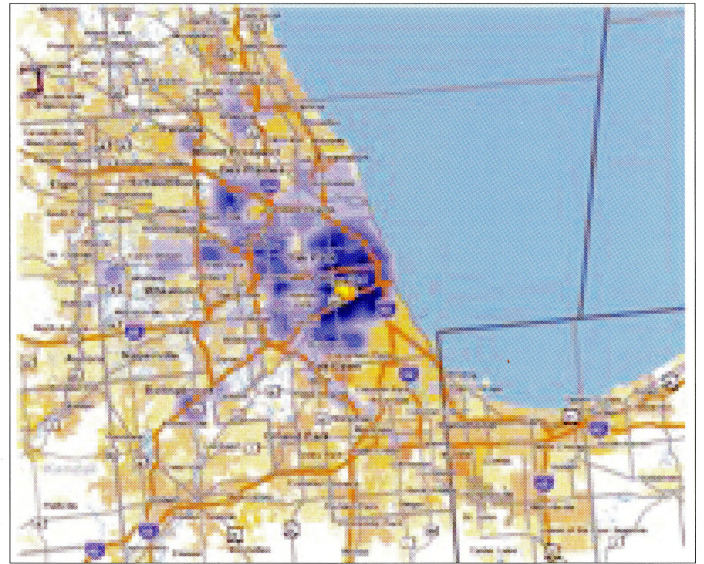
The employment density patterns for low-income workers (earning less than \$1,251/month) residing in either Cicero or Little Village are much more similar to each other than in higher income groupings. This suggests that distance and commuting convenience act as constraints on where low income workers from the adjacent communities are able to find jobs. If there is a subtle difference, it is in that low-income Little Village residents appear to be more willing or able to go further out to find jobs, even as far as Aurora.

The final set of maps below is for 2008 only, but show the employment distribution by industry group for each community. It is unsurprising that the employment patterns are largely the same for both manufacturing and for trade, transportation and utilities since both industry groups tend to aggregate in fairly well-defined geographic areas (manufacturing in industrial parks, logistics along major highways and around multi-modal hubs). The primary difference is that Cicero residents employed in other services tend to range farther and wider in finding jobs. This may be the result of a larger Cicero-based workforce, but even the lowest density areas are more tightly centered around Little Village with respect to its residents employed in services than for their Cicero counterparts.

WHERE CICERO RESIDENTS WORK BY INDUSTRY (2008) PRODUCTION; TRADE, TRANSPORTATION & UTILITIES; OTHER SERVICES



WHERE LITTLE VILLAGE RESIDENTS WORK BY INDUSTRY (2008) PRODUCTION; TRADE, TRANSPORTATION & UTILITIES; OTHER SERVICES



DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The appearance of differences in the employment patterns of predominantly Latino communities that share major highway and public transportation services suggests that factors other than the most obvious commuting conveniences are influencing where workers work. Unfortunately, these maps alone do not provide good hints as to why residents of Cicero are more inclined or able to travel farther for their jobs. It may be a function of perceived opportunities: Little Village residents access publicly-funded workforce services through the City of Chicago and its postings of Chicago jobs; Cicero residences are served by the Cook County President's Office of Employment and Training which focuses on suburban jobs. It may also be a function of social networks that are closely linked to the immediate neighborhoods in which workers reside. Nothing in the data shed much of a light as to why we see the patterns that we do.

These apparent differences are not idle curiosities, however, since they may be the result of both formal and informal systems that essentially constrain opportunities because of asymmetries in the acquisition and distribution of information about job openings and because access to good jobs are limited to car pools and other supports. A better understanding of how these patterns occur can provide guidance on policies and programs that are aimed at expanding employment opportunities and improving worker mobility.

Such an understanding may be accomplished in the following way:

First, it is important to establish whether the Latinos in each of these communities behave in the same or different ways as their non-Latino counterparts. LED does not currently distinguish populations by race or ethnicity. That is expected to change towards the end of 2010, thereby permitting researchers to draw comparisons between Latinos and non-Latino groups. We then will be able to track same spatial distributions by each group (and by gender) and determine if there are differences in the patterns between each community and within each area. In addition, it will permit us to expand the number of communities that are studied by removing the limitation to those areas with very high concentrations of Latino residents. For example, do Latinos living in Aurora, or Elgin, or Waukegan, or Maywood and Melrose Park each exhibit distinctive patterns especially with respect to jobs that are far from their residences. If that is the case, then it reinforces the idea that social networks and other methods for learning about new opportunities are important factors in finding and securing work.

Another step is to link data on commuting practices drawn the American Community Survey with residents of each area and comparing this to the commuting practices of nearby non-Latino communities. For example, evidence of high rates of car pooling among Latinos may help to explain why residents of one community may also be working in the same community elsewhere.

Ultimately, the most reliable method for getting to the underlying reasons for the differences between communities is to conduct a survey of a representative sample of job-holders and job-seekers from each area and ask:

- About the location of their job and their residence
- How the worker learned about the job

- Whether the worker was assisted by a friend or relative, public workforce agency, school or training provider, or through a referral by a prior employer in securing the job
- Whether the worker commutes by public transportation, by walking, or by highway or road, and if the latter, whether in a car pool or by personal vehicle, and
- Determine certain demographic and economic facts: race, ethnicity, gender, individual and family income, whether they own or rent a vehicle, whether they have a driver's license, and whether they own or rent their residence, and place of birth (establishing who is an immigrant). Immigration status need not be determined, in part because active questioning may discourage workers from participating in the survey and because the answers cannot be assured confidentiality.

The results of the survey would then be tabulated and analyzed so as to determine whether and to what extent the factors identified in the survey have a bearing on where workers work and the consequence with respect to their economic mobility. Our working idea is that family and friendship-based networks have a great deal of influence on who gets work and what that work entails and that greater worker mobility and choice may be achieved by stepping up engagement with the public workforce system and by expanding the reach of the workforce system so as the residents of every community have every possible opportunity to learn about jobs outside of the jurisdiction of the workforce agency.

REFERENCES

U.S. Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics.

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