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Still Separate, Still Unequal, But Not Always So "Suburban": The Changing Nature of Suburban School Districts in the New York Metropolitan Area

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Still Separate, Still Unequal, But Not Always So “Suburban”

The Changing Nature of Suburban School Districts in the New York Metropolitan Area

Amy Stuart Wells, Douglas Ready, Jacquelyn Duran, Courtney Grzesikowski, Kathryn Hill, Allison Roda, Miya Warner, and Terrenda White

Woven throughout the history of the United States is a narrative of human movement. The story of this country, we argue, is a tale of the constant flow of people across geographic spaces—both voluntary and forced immigrations, migrations, and the settlements of villages, city neighborhoods, and suburban communities. Beginning with Native Americans’ ancestors who traversed the Bering Straight, “movement” has been a central, identifying theme of this nation.

The flow of several waves of European immigrants onto colonial shores and across the plains and the haulage of millions of Africans via the slave trade redefined the United States demographically and geopolitically, as did the mass migration of freed African Americans from the South to the North and from the farms to the cities in the 20th century. The post-World War II construction of suburbia enabled the European immigrants and their descendants to migrate from the cities to the suburbs en masse, changing not only the character of suburbia but also the cities and ethnic enclaves they left behind. As if choreographed by the federal government, local zoning laws and real estate markets, this flow of whites to the suburbs was synchronized with the arrival of African American migrants into specific and highly contained city neighborhoods.

But even the resulting racially segregated pattern of “vanilla suburbs” and “chocolate cities” that seemed fairly stable by the late 1970s across most metro areas was subject to change. Beginning in the late 1960s, new waves of immigrants, primarily from Latin America and Asia, entered the urban neighborhoods abandoned by their European immigrant predecessors. By the 1980s, growing numbers of African Americans had begun migrating to the suburbs. And, in the last decade, more Latino and Asian immigrants have chosen suburban communities as their port of entry to the United States. At the same time, whites—particularly affluent and well-educated professionals—are migrating back into cosmopolitan and gentrified city neighborhoods, opting out of increasingly diverse suburbs.

Within these patterns of movement and change, human agency—manifested in the desire or need to leave one place and seek another—has been shaped, contorted, and compromised by social structures and powerful norms that create, maintain, and legitimize deep-seated inequalities in our society. This intersection between migration patterns and their spatial outcomes—for example, the dispersal of people across separate and often unequal places according to variables such as race/ethnicity, class, and social status—is central to

our work. The complicated intermingling of "coercion" and "choice"—and the distinction between them in terms of who has real, meaningful choices and who does not—shape these migration patterns and the consequences of those moves (or lack thereof) for them and for the rest of society. Furthermore, the divergent habits of people moving into and out of suburbia—their schemes of perception about where they "fit" within a status hierarchy created by racially and socioeconomically stratified society—foster a clear understanding of the "multiple markets" for homes that are in some cases dictated more strongly by school district boundaries than by the characteristics of available housing units.

Our "Metro Migration" research project focuses on the most recent iterations of this long history of human movement, namely increasingly racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse suburbs and gentrifying urban neighborhoods within four distinct metropolitan areas. These current migration patterns intersect with physical and symbolic boundary lines that divide space and opportunities. Although some of these boundaries and their symbolic meanings change over time—often because of the movement of people within and between them—they remain powerful dividing lines that circumscribe mobility and chance. Exactly how such boundaries have become so powerful in hording and denying opportunities in a society dedicated to an ethos of freedom, liberty, and individual choice is what we have set out to learn. When boundaries divide people not just in terms of which public utilities they use or the value of the property they own, but also the quality and reputation of the public schools their children attend, they have long-term implications for the health and well-being of the society as a whole. Thus, they must be more thoroughly interrogated and understood.

In this chapter, we present the framework and overview of our five-year study designed to examine these issues, followed by a discussion of the emerging themes and findings thus far, in this early stage of data collection and analysis on Long Island, New York.

21ST-CENTURY METRO MIGRATIONS AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Within the context of our national history of human movement, recent migration patterns are more demographically and spatially complex, with growing income inequality and large numbers of immigrants—both affluent and poor—adding several layers of diversity to the mix. Thus, our increasingly diverse and divided population is both shaped by and shapes local contexts, particularly the physical and legal boundary lines that define associations, resources, and life chances in both urban and suburban settings.

The interaction between the movement of people with different degrees of power and status across metropolitan spaces and the boundary lines that divide them and their access to opportunities is the central focus of this study. Place matters, we know, because where people live relates to so many of their life chances (Drier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004). Public schools, with their physical grounding within communities and boundary lines, are an increasingly important place-based resource that transmits differential opportunities across geographies and generations. We argue, therefore, that understanding the role that public schools, as geographically grounded institutions with strict boundaries, play within recent metro migration patterns is central to explaining ongoing racial/ethnic and social-class segregation.

Thus, we are conducting a study of both suburban and urban public school boundaries in four metropolitan areas. As families migrate to new communities across urban and suburban lines, our research project is designed to examine the relationship between migration

patterns, school district boundaries, and patterns of segregation by race/ethnicity and social class. In other words, we want to understand the role of school district boundaries—their prevalence or scarcity—in the process of sorting people in terms of status and privilege. In what ways, then, are status and privilege maintained and reproduced as a result of this sorting and its consequences?

Postwar Metro Migrations

Since the end of World War II, U.S. metropolitan areas have changed dramatically as millions of residents have traversed urban and suburban boundaries. These post-war periods of movement resulted in considerable shifts in the demographic compositions of both cities and suburbs. The first phase was characterized by the rise of suburbia with much assistance from supportive federal policies. This post-World War II phase is characterized by the rapid development of suburban neighborhoods comprised of multiple single-family homes and occupied by mostly white residents fleeing urban centers. Whites' abandonment of cities was both a cause and effect of a common understanding that had developed by the 1960s—cities were undesirable and suburbs were places where those with resources and options fled. These images had strong racial overtones, as the skin color of those who lived across these separate and often unequal spaces became a central distinction.

Indeed, by 1980 many cities had become predominantly African American and/or Latino, with 67 percent of blacks and 50 percent of Latinos, but only 24 percent of whites, living in central cities (Harrigan & Vogel, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 1980).¹ At that time, only 23 percent of blacks lived in the suburbs. Furthermore, the black suburbanization rates were even lower—12–15 percent—in the Northeast (Harrigan & Vogel, 1993).²

After 1980, however, metro migrations included increasing minority suburbanization. During this time, growing numbers of middle-class black, Latino, and Asian families left urban communities for the suburbs, seeking the lifestyle advantages whites had sought decades earlier—larger homes with yards, lower crime rates, less noise and dirt, and, the perception of better public schools. By 2000, nearly 40 percent of blacks were living in the suburbs. Suburbanization has also increased among immigrant families—mostly Latino and Asian—and by 2000, 48 percent of immigrants were residing in suburban areas (Frey, 2001).

At the same time that blacks and Latinos were migrating to suburbs, a trickle of upper-middle-class and more affluent whites began moving back into select urban communities (Lees, Slayter, & Wyly, 2008). Much like the postwar era when whites left cities as more blacks poured in from the farms, we conceptualize the current era as a new "trading spaces" phase. Lured by the convenience, excitement, and culture of city living, increasing numbers of highly skilled whites in so-called "global cities" such as New York and San Francisco have opted out of long daily commutes by living in nearby urban, and often gentrified, neighborhoods (Sassen, 2006). City life, once considered by most whites as dangerous, dirty, and crowded, is now increasingly associated with excitement, fun, and convenience (see Leinberger, 2008). This 21st-century urban aristocracy—or "gentry"—is driving up home prices in select city neighborhoods, sometimes pushing lower-income residents—mostly black and Latino—into outlying urban and inner-ring suburban communities (Freeman, 2006). And so the cycle of segregation and resegregation continues, even as the occupied spaces change.

While whites began moving back into so-called gentrified areas of cities as early as the late 1970s, the pace of gentrification accelerated in the early 2000s (Lees et al., 2008). The New York City metropolitan area represents a good example: the percentage of whites in Manhattan increased 28 percent between 2000 and 2006, while it declined in nearby

suburban Nassau County. During the same six-year period, the Hispanic population declined by 2 percent in Manhattan, but increased 20 percent in Nassau.

Overall, these fluctuating metropolitan characteristics suggest that traditional paradigms of "cities" versus "suburbs" are rapidly evolving in ways we cannot yet completely comprehend. The advent of the trading places phenomenon, in particular, complicates our 50-year-old notions of clearly delineated urban-suburban boundaries—in terms of not only demographics but also economic transformations. Thus, common categorizations of cities versus suburbs—one poor, with high-rise housing projects and dire need, and the other middle-class (or better) with single-family homes and peaceful neighborhoods—may have outlived its usefulness. Indeed, it is increasingly clear that contemporary urban and suburban communities *each* contain pockets of poverty and affluence, often functioning as racially and ethnically distinct spaces. In fact, by 2005, one million more poor people lived in suburban compared to urban areas (Berube & Kneebone, 2006).

Journalists and researchers now report on the growing number of distressed suburbs that are coming to resemble poor inner-city communities. For instance, Lucy and Phillips (2003) write that from 1990 to 2000, while some newly developing suburbs experienced rapid growth in people and jobs, "many older suburbs experienced central-city-like challenges, including an aging infrastructure, inadequate housing stock, deteriorating schools and commercial corridors—and population decline" (p. 117). Leinberger's 2008 article highlighted the impact of the subprime mortgage crisis on suburban communities experiencing high rates of foreclosures. But the author is quick to note that declining suburban neighborhoods did not begin with the mortgage crisis, and will not end with it as more people with high incomes move into the cities.

Thus, while much has changed in both urban and suburban communities since World War II, much has also stayed the same. In fact, the most consistent finding to emerge from research across these three phases of metropolitan change is that segregation along racial/ethnic lines has remained fairly constant in both urban and suburban contexts. In fact, there is strong evidence that African Americans, in particular, remain highly segregated in both urban and suburban contexts. Numerous authors have noted that black suburbanization is rarely accompanied by racial integration, and that even middle-class African Americans remain highly segregated (Adelman, 2005).

It is true that in the midst of migrations within local sites, segregation usually lessens to some degree when blacks or Latinos first move into predominantly white suburbs or whites begin to inhabit mostly black or Latino gentrifying urban neighborhoods. But over time, these neighborhoods, more often than not, become reseggregated as whites depart economically declining suburbs and minorities become priced out of gentrified urban spaces (Farley & Squires, 2005; Freeman, 2006; Sethi & Somanathan, 2004).

Meanwhile, the rapid increase in income inequality in the United States appears to be accompanied by a related increase in residential segregation by class. According to Reardon and Bischoff (2009), both income inequality and income segregation grew substantially in the decades from 1970 to 2000, the result of spatial concentration of the most affluent residents.

The Role of Public Schools

Thus, migration patterns have changed and even reversed while patterns of segregation continue and worsen in some instances. A critical question remains unanswered by the existing research on these population shifts: *What role do public schools play in movers' decisions about ongoing segregation and stratification across space and boundaries?*

While a growing number of social scientists are attempting to explain these urban-suburban changes in terms of demographics, segregation patterns, housing, and labor markets, there has been little systematic study of the impact of public schools—their reputations, resources, and enrollments in particular—on the movement of families across urban and suburban school district boundary lines. Nor do we really understand how racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and political shifts across urban-suburban lines are impacting educators and their ability and/or willingness to serve rapidly changing student populations. If, as Leinberger (2008) suggests, the impact of these recent migration patterns on cities and suburbs is likely to be profound, no less can be said of their potential impact on public schools.

Furthermore, we do know that, as with residential segregation, segregation in public schools appears to persist across urban and suburban contexts. For instance, Reardon and Yun's (2001, 2008) work demonstrates that suburban public schools tend to become more racially diverse initially as African Americans or Latinos move into formerly white suburban enclaves. But over time, whites flee these public schools, as they did in urban school districts in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, leaving pockets of separate and unequal black and brown schools and whole school districts in suburbia. We also know that racial segregation in public schools overall is on the rise (Orfield & Lee, 2007), suggesting that the movement of people over city-suburban boundaries is not leading to more integrated educational experiences for most students.

We also know that suburban school districts tend to be smaller because suburban counties—especially in the North and Midwest—are far more fragmented or divided into tiny jurisdictions (Bischoff, 2008). This means that school segregation in suburbia is, on average, more insidious than it was in the large urban school districts in the 1950s and 1960s because any effort to "desegregate" students would require crossing legal, impenetrable, and highly symbolic school district boundaries (see Bischoff, 2008).

Research also strongly suggests that race/ethnicity continues to play a central role in how parents choose schools for their children—whether they are purchasing or renting a new home in a new school district or choosing among schools of choice where they already live—and that school choice or housing policies that do not take race/ethnicity into account within and across schools may exacerbate segregation and stratification (see Mickelson, Bottia, & Southworth, 2008; Ready & Lee, 2008; Wells & Roda, 2008, for reviews).

Furthermore, we know from recent research on adult graduates of desegregated schools that many parents believe the educational stakes are much higher today than they were in public schools 30 to 40 years ago, which, in turn, influences the school choices they make for their own children (see Wells, Holme, Revilla, & Atanda, 2009). In fact, Wells et al. (2009) learned that the school accountability measures put in place since these adults graduated from high school in 1980, along with the increasing inequality in the U.S. society since that time, had made these alumni of desegregated schools far more anxious about what to do with their own children. In other words, the broader societal changes and educational policy development since they were in school in the 1960s and 1970s led many of the graduates to focus on narrow measures of school quality, namely average standardized test scores by school or district, and to weigh these achievement indicators against school diversity (also see Wells & Holme, 2006).

In addition, there is a growing body of work documenting the rising anxiety levels of middle- and upper-middle-class white parents in particular when it comes to their children's education. Middle- and upper-middle-class white families are increasingly stressed about how competitive their children are in the race to the top of the increasingly stratified social hierarchy (see Demerath, 2009; Lareau, 2003; Wells and Roda, 2008). Such anxiety, we argue, must contribute to the parents' need to have their children enrolled in schools—public

or private—with the most competitive advantage. This larger context of schooling in the early 21st century surely shapes the residential choices of these more affluent, high-status parents as they move or stay put within or between metropolitan areas. To better explain this relationship between parental anxiety and family migration patterns by race and income across school district boundary lines, we look to the literature on the symbolic and tangible meanings of space, place, and boundaries.

Space and Bounded Migration Patterns

We know that the outcome of metro migrations is an ongoing *cycle of segregation and inequality* by race/ethnicity, class, and status. We also know that there is a strong relationship between this segregation and the degree of fragmentation in a given context (Bishoff, 2008). The next logical empirical step, therefore, is to better understand the relationship between the local municipal boundaries that define fragmentation and a deeper understanding of how people of different racial/ethnic and social class backgrounds end up where they do in relation to these boundaries, as well as the consequences of those patterns. Such an analysis is particularly important in the field of education where the consequences of the boundaries are both tangible and intangible.

The perceived “quality” of public schools—at least as measured by test score data and, too often, the race and class of the students who attend—can strongly influence “place,” especially who chooses to live there, the value of the property, and the degree of public and private investment in the community. As Tickamyer (2000) notes, “Relations of power, structures of inequality, and practices of domination and subordination are embedded in spatial design and relations” (p. 806).

In this way, the meaning that people ascribe to a school and its local community affects both in a complicated and iterative way. Understandings of the places where schools are located and how those places are changing certainly guide parents’ behavior about where to live and thus where to send their children to school (Gotham, 2003), but we know little about how this process works or the role that schools themselves can or cannot play.

The cycle begins with the separate and unequal tangible, material conditions across existing boundary lines. These tangible factors, which include everything from facilities to supplies and equipment to teacher credentials—become the “proof” or the “evidence” that legitimizes several critical intangible factors—for example, the reputations, status, and prestige of the districts. In this way, the physical, legal, or social boundaries become the “symbolic boundaries”—symbols of “good” communities, schools, and residents (people who work hard, pay high taxes, and have the right values and priorities). At the same time that both the physical and symbolic boundaries create deep racial divides, they are talked about in a race-neutral, “color-blind” manner that explains away the stark racial/ethnic segregation across them (Lamont, 2007; Lewis, 2003).

We argue, however, that not only were the physical legal boundaries of municipalities and school districts in highly fragmented suburban counties constructed in a racialized manner, but they are maintained in a racialized manner through policies, meanings, and discourses that are on the surface color-blind or post-racial (powell, 2007). But the symbolic boundaries, embedded within and supported by the physical boundaries, are actually manifestations of the intricate relationship between race, class, and social status in the United States. And, in an era of increasing inequality, maintaining high social status is of utmost importance to anxious white, middle- and upper-middle-class parents. Boundaries—both physical and symbolic—shape and protect their association with each other and their disassociation with people of color and the poor. These associations are critical to

status maintenance—in terms of their symbolic values of "who they are" and the tangible resources/factors they accumulate and maintain in separate spaces. The significance of these associations/disassociations shape the processes of boundary maintenance despite expressions of dismay and longing related to the lack of "diversity" in their all-white communities and schools, sometimes referred to as their "bubbles" (Gutmann, 1998; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Wells & Roda, 2008).

By studying the meso level of school segregation, namely municipal and school district boundary lines, we seek to understand the multiple ways in which the structures—that is, the physical legal boundaries between districts and students' educational opportunities—are cyclically created, re-created, and legitimized. In a mixed-methods study such as ours, we can more carefully examine the places where the quantitative and qualitative data meet—at the meso level. Thus, we rely on the quantitative data—census data, school demographic and outcome data, and so on—to illustrate *what* the between-district segregation looks like. We also rely upon qualitative data, which explore *how* the boundaries circumscribe resources and access as well as the reputation, status, prestige, and symbols of the different school districts. If we are to truly understand the relationship between separateness and inequality, we need to more fully understand and interrogate the dividing lines—how they are created, codified, maintained, legitimized, and re-created.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC, THE TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE

The data we are collecting for our study of metro migrations at the county and school-district level illustrate both the "symbolic" and "social or physical" meanings of school boundaries. As Lamont and Molnár (2002) note, *symbolic* boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors: "They are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources" (p. 2). *Social* boundaries—or what we often refer to as physical or legal boundaries, on the other hand, are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and distribution of material and nonmaterial resources. They also mold stable "patterns of association" (p. 2).

One underlying but often unexamined theme that runs throughout the literature on segregation and inequality is the role of symbolic resources (e.g., conceptual distinctions, interpretive strategies, cultural traditions) in creating, maintaining, or even contesting institutionalized social differences (e.g., class, gender, race, territorial inequality). In order to capture this process, we think it is useful to introduce a distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. *Symbolic boundaries* are conceptual distinctions, social constructions used to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon in definitions of reality. Documenting how people make sense of them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership (Epstein, 1992, p. 232). They are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources.

Social boundaries—or physical/legal boundaries—are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities. They are also revealed in stable behavioral patterns of association, as manifested in connubiality and commensality. Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern

social interaction in important ways. Moreover, only then can they become social boundaries: that is, translate, for instance, into identifiable patterns of social exclusion or class and racial segregation (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Massey & Denton, 1993; Stinchcombe, 1995; Logan, Alba, McNulty, & Fisher, 1996).

In this way, social boundaries are synonymous with "borders," which "provide most individuals with a concrete, local, and powerful experience of the state" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 183). Whether state-imposed segregation or state-supported school district boundary lines that divide students by race, class, and opportunities, *social boundaries have legal, physical realities that shape not only opportunities but the very meaning of schooling and education.*

Thus, symbolic and social boundaries should be viewed as equally real: the former exist at the intersubjective level, whereas the latter manifest themselves as groupings of individuals. At the causal level, symbolic boundaries can be thought of as a necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of social boundaries (Lamont & Fournier, 1992).

We argue that social boundaries serve to perpetuate unequal material conditions across district lines and thus help to legitimize the symbolic boundaries woven into the identities of "place" within the field of education. These symbolic boundaries formulate many *intangible* factors, including the reputation and status of an institution, which in turn shape and constrain the distribution of *tangible* factors such as material resources, teacher quality, and curricular offerings. In an iterative manner, therefore, these symbolic boundaries also legitimize and become social boundaries, as those with power and status in the society have the means to disassociate with people who lack status and honor (Lamont & Fournier, 1992).

In the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case and several pre-*Brown* cases addressing racial segregation in higher education, the justices noted that the harms of school segregation by race were not merely related to the "tangible" factors such as facilities, resources, supplies, and so on. The Court noted that "intangible" factors—for example, the reputation and status of an institution in society—matter a great deal as well. The *tangible* or material factors that are constrained by a school district's social boundaries have been highlighted in school finance literature in particular. They separate those districts that have a strong tax base with affluent residents and/or commercial property from the districts that are property poor and have low-income residents. The consequences of these boundaries are measured primarily in terms of each school district's ability to generate local funding and the disparities across districts in their ability to do so. For instance, they include discussions of local property values; property taxes; per-pupil funding; and specific resources such as books, buildings, technology, teachers' salaries, or athletic equipment.

But school district boundaries also constrain and shape *associations* between people. Thus, they constrain student access to certain schools, resources, opportunities, and peers, but they also constrain student access to school reputations and status—or intangible factors. According to Lamont and Molnár (2002), "it is often posited that identification generally proceeds through exclusion and that boundaries are salient and mostly have to do with demarcation" (p. 186).

These issues of association relate to differently valued cultural capital, such as lifestyle, language, education, race or religion—cultural indicators we use to identify those within our status group and thus those with whom we wish to associate (Lamont, 2007). As a result, such characteristics become the mechanisms that produce boundaries—both legal and symbolic—between status groups of race, class, gender, and so forth. These associations and their relationships to intangible factors in the field of education are part of the process by which schools serving students of color from poor families become labeled "bad" schools despite the teaching and learning taking place within them.

In the case of school district boundaries, these distinctions are clearest on the tail ends of the distribution of privileged versus nonprivileged districts, with the highly affluent, predominantly white districts on one end and the impoverished, mostly black and Latino school districts on the other. The contrast between such districts and their stability over time make them important sites to study in our effort to understand the significance of boundaries and how they are maintained.

Meanwhile the districts in the middle—those that are more diverse, whether they are stable or not—are the sites where symbolic and social boundaries are contested and often recreated on a smaller scale across schools and classrooms. These racially and ethnically diverse school districts are the places where the racial boundaries are both more vulnerable and where they are actively being sustained or remade, reinforced or legitimized.

Our research examines those districts in the middle-to-higher-end of the distribution in terms of test scores and other educational outcomes as well as the social class of their residents. Several of these districts are in a state of flux, as older white residents move out and younger families of varied racial/ethnic and country-of-origin backgrounds move in to take their places. What is most interesting about these districts is that "on paper" (or actually "online"), their outcome data are not that disparate, but their reputations and social status are strikingly different—a factor that appears thus far to have far more to do with the race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the families who live there. By designing a study that "controls" on the easy-to-access outcome data of schools, we are able to look more closely at the role that race and class play in the school and district choice process amid rapid migrations across school district boundaries.

METRO MIGRATIONS RESEARCH DESIGN AND OVERVIEW

Using the framework described above, we have designed a multisite, mixed-methods study of school district boundaries within four metropolitan areas that are experiencing some degree of migration and change across urban-suburban contexts. In sampling these metro areas, we sought cities and suburbs that differ fundamentally in terms of their (1) degree of fragmentation, (2) racial/ethnic composition and complexity, (3) geographic/regional and political orientation, and (4) economic positioning in a global economy. Thus, the four metro areas we are planning to study are New York, San Francisco, Detroit, and Louisville.

Our unit of analysis and thus focal point for this large-scale research project is *the relationship between metro migration patterns, racial/ethnic and socioeconomic segregation, school district boundaries, and movers' understandings of what those boundaries mean.*

Research Questions to Frame Our Work

We are further guided in our work by a set of research questions that speak to both the quantitative and qualitative nature of our research:

1. Within each of the four metropolitan areas in our study, what are the historic and current urban/suburban migration patterns and their relationship to physical/legal boundary lines—municipal or school district boundaries—and the degree of fragmentation? What factors shape the relationship between migration patterns, segregation—both racial/ethnic and socioeconomic—and boundary lines? Has that relationship changed over time? How does residential change or stability relate to race, class, school district boundary lines, and housing prices?

2. What role do public schools—the construction of their boundary lines, their tangible resources, public perception of their quality (or intangible factors), their racial and social-class makeup, and so on—play in the demographic shifts occurring across urban-suburban contexts in many metropolitan areas today? Why are some school districts experiencing more demographic changes than others?
 - A. How do public school educators and district officials respond (or not) to demographic changes within their district?
 - B. How do parents of preschool and school-age children make choices about where they live in relationship to public school district boundaries?

In order to answer these unasked questions, we are looking across urban and suburban counties within four U.S. metro areas, examining the political, social, and demographic context of public schools and the role their boundaries play in these changes. This larger context of change, explored through the first question, therefore, leads us to the second research question and its two critical sub-questions noted above about the role and decisions of educators and families within the metro migration process.

Four Distinct Metro Areas

1. New York City and Nassau County
2. San Francisco and San Mateo County
3. Detroit and Wayne County
4. Louisville and Jefferson County

The four metro areas—New York, San Francisco, Detroit, and Louisville—we have chosen to study differ in terms of key characteristics that relate to our research questions and unit of analysis. Most importantly for this study, these metro areas differ in terms of their degree of suburban *fragmentation*—with New York and its adjacent Nassau County on the highly fragmented end of the spectrum and Louisville, with its single, urban-suburban school district on the other. Nassau County is home to 56 school districts; San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco, has a total of 25. Meanwhile, Wayne County outside of Detroit houses 34 school districts, and Louisville has one large urban-suburban school system. As is illustrated in Table 7.1, each of these four metro areas differs in important ways on these measures of fragmentation, particularly when it comes to public school districts.

These four metro areas also differ demographically—for example, in their racial/ethnic composition, their income distribution, and their immigrant populations. New York and

Table 7.1. Fragmentation Sampling Characteristics of Four Metro Areas

<i>Suburban County</i>	<i># of School Districts</i>	<i>Land Area</i>	<i>Average Land Area of District</i>	<i>Public School Enrollment 2000</i>	<i>Average Enrollment per District (2000)</i>
Nassau County	56	287 sq mi	5.1 sq mi	218,725	3,905
San Mateo County	23	449 sq mi	19.5 sq mi	99,220	4,314
Wayne County*	33	475 sq mi	14.4 sq mi	190,700	5,779
Jefferson County/ Louisville	1	385 sq mi	385 sq mi	100,005	100,005

*Does not include Detroit

San Francisco are much more racially/ethnically complex than Detroit and Louisville, but they also differ from each in terms of the number of African Americans and the ethnic mix and percentage of their Asian and Latino residents. For instance, within these two global cities, nearly 32 percent of San Franciscans are Asian, but only about 10 percent of New Yorkers are. Meanwhile, nearly 30 percent of New Yorkers are African American, compared to less than 7 percent of San Franciscans. New York also has a higher percentage of Latinos—about 30 percent compared to about 14 percent of San Franciscans—most of whom are Puerto Rican or Dominican and not Mexican.

The suburban counties we chose to study within each of these metro areas also differ in terms of their overall demographics, but each shares a border with their nearby city. And, with the exception of Jefferson County, which is part of the city-suburban school district, they all house an array of public school districts that vary in terms of their racial/ethnic makeup and student outcome data.

Furthermore, these four metro areas are also distinct geographically, regionally, and politically. Even though Detroit and Louisville are both in the middle of the country, they have distinct north-south histories and legacies, particularly when it comes to school desegregation. These distinctions in school desegregation histories are underscored by the divergent local responses to the U.S. Supreme Court rulings related to these two metro areas. For instance, the Detroit metro area is the site of the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* Supreme Court ruling that made interdistrict school desegregation all but impossible, whereas Louisville, with its less fragmented, countywide educational system, was the site of one of the within-district voluntary school desegregation cases involved in the U.S. Supreme Court's *Parents Involved in Community Schools (PICS)* decision of 2007. In this more recent PICS decision, the Supreme Court issued a complicated ruling that was more opposed to than supportive of school desegregation policies. Thus, both of these metro areas are sites of critical and problematic Supreme Court rulings regarding race and education, but their leaders' responses to these rulings differed radically. In Detroit, the *Milliken* decision marked the end of efforts to desegregate public schools in the city or the suburbs. In Louisville, on the other hand, local leaders accepted the legal setback embodied in the Court's *PICS* ruling and worked together to devise a legally acceptable plan that would avert the creation or perpetuation of racially isolated public schools.

Related to these geographic distinctions, therefore, are important economic/labor market distinctions that would affect the migration and immigration trends. For instance, at the center of two of these metro areas are "global cities"—New York and San Francisco—that are experiencing a rapid degree of gentrification and attracting white residents back into urban neighborhoods as growing numbers of blacks and Latinos move to the suburbs (Sassen, 2006).

Detroit, meanwhile, is a declining industrial Midwestern city surrounded by a mix of small, poor, and affluent suburban communities and school districts. The fourth metro area, Louisville, Kentucky, is centered on neither a global city nor a dying industrial city, although it has historically been a manufacturing hub. More recently, Louisville has attracted and retained major service economy corporations, allowing its economy to remain relatively strong compared to other Midwestern cities such as Detroit.

Each city, suburban county, district, and school within these metro areas will constitute an embedded case, with the districts embedded in the counties and the schools within the counties *and* districts. Such a design allows for us to examine themes of segregation, change, and inequality within and across contexts. Our data collection entails two levels of analysis—the metro and county level of data collection and analysis and the local district level data—that allow us to examine suburban and urban schools from the macro and micro

perspectives, embedded in different spaces within the same metro areas. Thus, much of our quantitative analysis is conducted at the county level examining demographic and outcome data across the school districts. We have also conducted county level interviews, but the bulk of our qualitative data collection will focus on how people make sense of school districts and their boundaries.

Thus far, aside from historical case reports we have written on each of the four metro areas, most of our data collection has focused on Nassau County, New York, where we have conducted more than 125 interviews. In 2008, we began to study five school districts in Nassau County for a report that a local foundation was publishing on public schools on Long Island. We considered that preliminary investigation to be a pilot study for the larger project. Since we published a policy report from the pilot study in fall 2009, we have refocused our efforts with a better sense of how to examine the issues we are trying to understand. By early in 2010 we had moved forward with our data collection of six Nassau County school districts (only one of which was part of our original pilot study). The remainder of this chapter discusses the themes to emerge from both the pilot study and our more recent data collection.

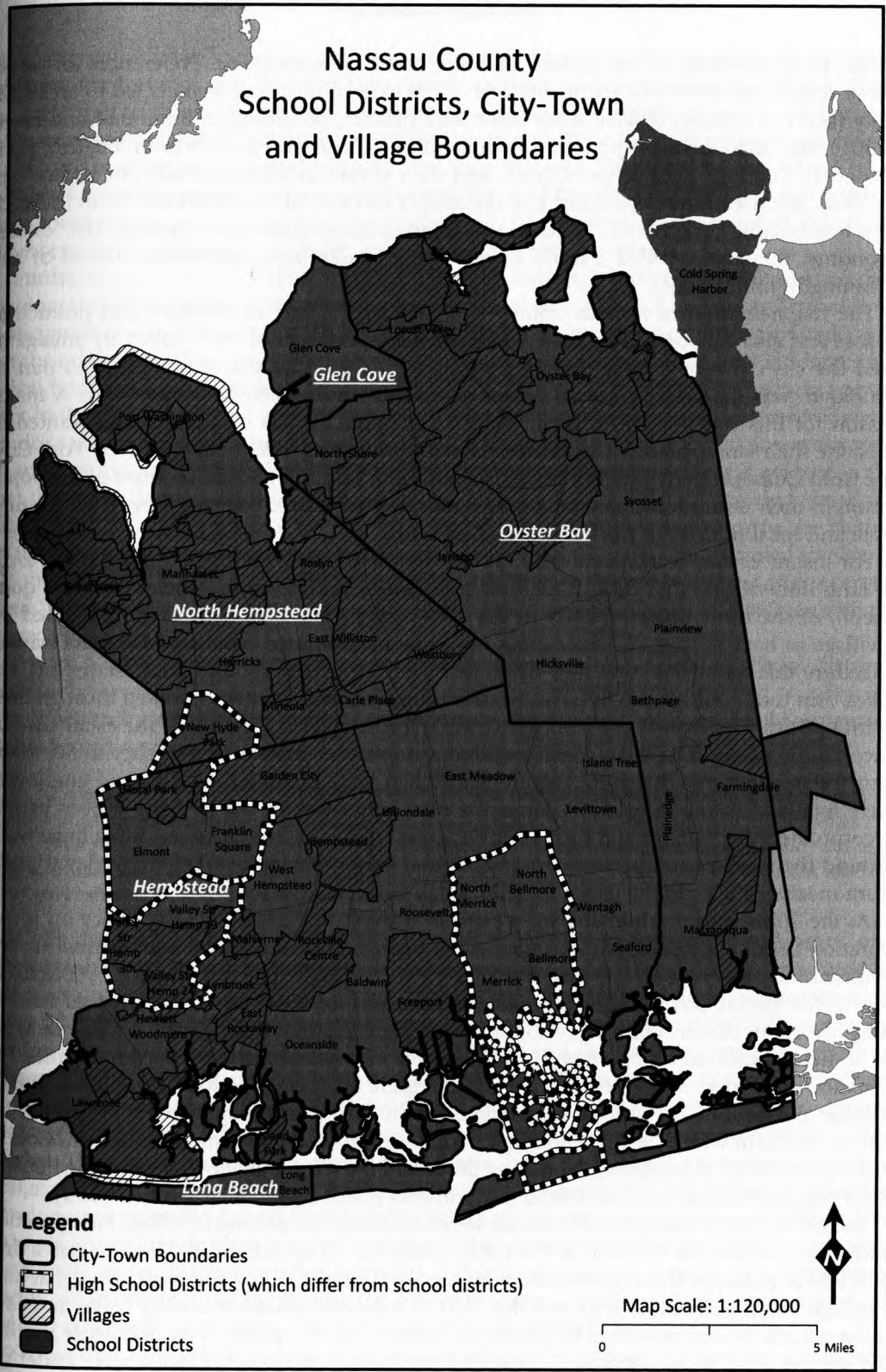
EMERGING THEMES/FINDINGS FROM NASSAU COUNTY, NEW YORK

We know from existing research and our own analysis of data that Nassau County, New York (see Map 7.1 for a visual image), is one of the most fragmented and racially and socioeconomically segregated counties in the United States (Bischoff, 2008; Ready, Wells, Warner, & Grzesikowski, 2010). The question is, of course, what is the relationship between the educational and residential segregation that defines Nassau County and its political fragmentation into several local governments and school districts? A macro-analysis of fragmentation and segregation suggests that the relationship between the two is very strong (see Bischoff, 2008). Our early findings in Nassau suggest that fragmentation of Nassau County into many municipal and educational jurisdictions has been critical to the process of building and maintaining racial and, increasingly, socioeconomic segregation there.

The historical process by which this fragmentation occurred is still unfolding in our research and analysis. Still, the pieces of the story that we have suggest that, more often than not, the push to build multiple boundaries—boundaries between multiple towns, villages, hamlets, and school districts in this relatively small county (220 square miles)—was driven by the efforts of those with economic and political power to exclude themselves and disassociate from those who had less. Furthermore, the rationale for maintaining these dividing lines or boundaries is often grounded in the distinctions between people and property values across these spatial entities, especially school districts.

The seeds of fragmentation on Long Island were planted long before the first phase of postwar suburbanization began. By the late 1800s some of the wealthiest men in the United States, including J. P. Morgan, William Randolph Hearst, Russell Sage, and Vincent Astor, had erected large estates on Long Island's North Shore—also known as the "Gold Coast." According to one account, although these tycoons also built summer homes in places like Newport, Rhode Island, and Bar Harbor, Maine, their Long Island estates were ideal for the spring and fall seasons and many winter weekends because the rolling and wooded landscape of the island's North Shore was seen as ideal for "golf courses, polo grounds, boating, and bridal paths" (Baxandall & Ewen, 2001, p. 5). These palatial estates required a large labor force, including butlers, chauffeurs, gardeners, horse trainers, dog trainers,

Nassau County School Districts, City-Town and Village Boundaries



Map 7.1. School District Boundaries and Municipal Fragmentation in Nassau County

cooks, house servants, wood haulers, planters, and fireplace tenders. Preferences for workers of certain ethnicities for particular jobs on the part of the estate owners led to an ethnically (but not racially) diverse labor force. For instance, according to Baxandall and Ewen (2001), the estate owners "preferred their superintendents and butlers to be English; their gardeners, Scottish; their servants, Irish; and their common laborers, Polish or Italian" (p. 6). Thus, the rise of the Gold Coast and the robber baron estates brought with it an influx of new low-income Long Island residents, mostly recent immigrants from Europe. The "estate" economy, therefore, yielded a more divided labor market and population, devoid of any meaningful middle class.

The fragmentation of Nassau County into separate, clearly demarcated and politicized spaces was also encouraged in 1898 when the historic charter of New York City amalgamated the city's five boroughs. Nassau County, which up until that time had been part of Brooklyn, was deliberately carved out as a separate entity from New York City. A major reason for this was that the affluent Gold Coast estate owners on Long Island wanted to separate their land from the City. Once Nassau County was independent of New York City, the Gold Coast property holders, hostile toward both taxation and the increase of the population in their dominions, used whatever political or economic leverage they had to change state and local policies to work more in their favor.

For instance, they recognized early on that the mechanism of incorporating small areas of land into villages that controlled their own zoning and housing policies could be quite useful. At the time, however, early in the 20th century, the New York State law called for a village to have at least 250 residents to become incorporated. The Gold Coasters wanted to reduce this number so that they could incorporate the land around their estates into villages, and thus control who lived in, what was built in, and even who walked through their communities. The Republican politicians who represented the interests of the estate owners successfully passed a new law in Albany that changed the minimum residency to 50. Many large estates met this threshold requirement when large extended families and employees were included in the calculation. Once the new policy was in place, many robber barons incorporated their estates and then "went to great lengths to keep it so, building huge walls around their estates and posting armed guards at the borders to prevent errant day trippers from meandering onto the grounds" (Baxandall & Ewen, 2001, p. 9).

As the 20th-century suburbanization process evolved, this amended state policy on incorporation became increasingly important to the maintenance of separate and unequal spaces, communities, and schools. Up until the mid-1960s, when the law was amended yet again to restrict the zoning powers of incorporated villages, any areas of Nassau County that successfully incorporated were able to develop strict zoning regulations that severely limited the types of homes constructed and the types of homebuyers who had access to these communities. For instance, these local zoning regulations would require new homes to have a minimum square footage and/or lot size, which partly dictates home prices, and therefore which families are able to reside in which neighborhoods. Yet another regulation not unique to Nassau County is the prohibition of multifamily housing units, and the refusal to allow low-income housing units funded by local, state, or federal governments (Kirp, Dwyer, & Rosenthal, 1995).

According to one Long Island historian we interviewed, the process of village incorporation was rampant from the 1920s until the 1960s when the law was changed. This was also a time of severe population shifts in Nassau County, as we have noted. The historian noted that once a village was incorporated it gained the right to maintain whatever zoning codes and laws the residents desired as well as the ability to develop its own police force and other municipal services. The "unincorporated" areas of Long Island, on the other hand, were under the jurisdiction of one of the four "towns" that cover every square mile of Nassau County. These

unincorporated areas, known as "hamlets," are in fact more numerous than the incorporated villages. For instance, the Town of Hempstead includes 56 hamlets and 22 villages. There is, according to this historian and our analysis, a direct but imperfect correlation between affluence and incorporation on Long Island. He noted: "The incorporated villages in this town, and also the incorporated villages in the town of North Hempstead seem to have more wealth. I can only assume that the wealth came first and therefore that whole—again, this is my thought—that whole protectionism kinda thing. Like here we are, let's protect, let's build a fence around ourselves so to speak, and that fence is incorporation."

Furthermore, in terms of the "benefits" of incorporation, in addition to the control over zoning, the villages have more control over their local elections—of mayors and other local policymakers—and thus many more local decisions. Residents in the unincorporated areas, on the other hand, have to go to the town policymakers to effect change. This is a larger political body with other interests to answer to when decisions are made. The historian noted that in the unincorporated areas of the county, the town can decide to do whatever it wants to do. Still, the historian noted, zoning rights seemed to be one of the major motivating factors behind local citizens' efforts to incorporate their communities. This is evident in the fact that once the state law was changed in the 1960s to disempower any newly formed villages from having the control over their zoning (villages incorporated prior to the change in the law still maintain these zoning powers), no new villages were incorporated in Nassau County. Clearly the demand for incorporation died off once the state said that after a certain date "incorporated villages would have all the other rights of other incorporated villages with the exception of zoning matters."

Today, Nassau County is a patchwork of local governments, including school districts, each with their own sets of rules and regulations, some of which are designed to influence who lives and goes to school within each piece of the multicolored but highly segregated quilt. According to a key administrator in the former Nassau County Executive's Office:

In Nassau we have anywhere, depending on how you count, from two hundred to seven hundred [local governments]. . . . We've got one county, three towns, two cities, sixty-four villages. . . . Then you have fifty-six school districts, forty-five, give or take, water purveyors, seventy-seven give or take fire districts. Some of them are village fire districts. . . . These are all different levels of government.

While the specifics of the zoning laws of New York State and the politics, history, and demographics of Nassau County make some aspects of this story unique, the intricate relationship between fragmentation and racial/ethnic and socioeconomic segregation on Long Island is clearly not unique to Nassau County. Due in part to these village-specific zoning laws and in part to the practices of developers and real estate agents, the pattern of segregation began early and has been maintained and even reinvented as the decades have unfolded. For instance, the home-building industry was tightly tied to and coordinated with the local municipal zoning ordinances and the spatialized construction of the housing market. Thus, as in most parts of the United States, builders in Nassau County continue to design neighborhoods with finely grained differences in home price. For example, a housing development may offer homes for \$300,000, while an adjacent set of homes costs \$350,000. This obviously allows for economic segregation by quite minute strata of income, or what developers prefer to label "market segments." This is in contrast to many urban neighborhoods, which often provide housing for residents across a wide range of incomes, even on a single city block (see Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000).

Yet we find today that even in places where the quality and size of housing differs very little across school district boundaries, the prices do. At a recent real estate open house on

Long Island, we saw one spacious and well-built home of four bedrooms and 4.5 baths that was one block from the boundary of a predominantly white and well-reputed school district. This house was physically located within the boundaries of a less prestigious school district with above-average test scores, but a rapidly declining white population. The real estate agent showing the house noted that if this same house, with an asking price of approximately \$650,000, were located one block to the east in the more desired school district, the owners would be asking double that price for the house. The question for our project to answer is what role the school districts—their boundaries, their demographics, their reputations, and so on—play in the efficient sorting process that occurs on Long Island. The following five emerging themes from our research help illustrate our early understanding of how this process occurs.

Changing Demographics of Nassau County and the Simultaneous Segregation

The waves of residential and economic growth described above were accompanied by equally stark racial/ethnic and socio-demographic changes to Nassau's population. Mirroring the massive population growth of the first phase of metro migrations and the rise of suburbanization, school enrollments peaked at roughly 340,000 total in all 56 districts in 1968, but fell to roughly 170,000 only twenty years later—a dramatic decline of 50 percent. Enrollments rebounded somewhat from the late 1980s through 2000, where they have remained at about 210,000 students. An important demographic change that continues to influence these declines in school enrollments is the aging of Nassau County's population. The county's median age has been steadily increasing since 1970, when it was just under 31 years of age, to almost 42 today. This shift reflects the "empty nester" phenomenon, as well as a general increase in life expectancy.

These dramatic socio-demographic changes were accompanied by equally striking transformations of Nassau's racial/ethnic landscape. As indicated in Figure 7.1, the county was virtually all white throughout the first half of the 20th century. Residential growth during the 1950s was due overwhelmingly—indeed, almost exclusively—to expansions in the number of white residents. From 1950 to 1960 the proportion of white residents declined by less than 1 percent, while the overall population doubled. As late as 1970, roughly 19 out of every 20 residents in Nassau County were white. Soon thereafter, however, Nassau experienced sizeable increases in its nonwhite population. Recent estimates suggest that today almost one-third of the county's population is nonwhite. This represents an extraordinary departure from 50 years earlier, when barely 3 percent of Nassau's residents were nonwhite.

Figure 7.1 also highlights the historical parallels between decreases in the proportion of white residents and the proportion of white public school students. In 1970, the racial/ethnic composition of public school students essentially mirrored that of the general population. By 1990, however, white enrollment in Nassau County's public schools was 10 percent below the overall white enrollment. This reflects several economic and demographic forces. First, the rise in empty-nest households mentioned above was necessarily more common among white families, who were the overwhelming majority of families with children in schools during the peak enrollment years of the late 1960s. Second, as is true nationally, white families in Nassau County are somewhat more likely to enroll their children in private schools. Over the past two decades, however, the racial/ethnic makeup of Nassau's public schools is slowly coming to again reflect the overall population. Older white residents who pass away or retire to other states are replaced by new residents who are more likely to be nonwhite and to enroll their children in Nassau's public schools.

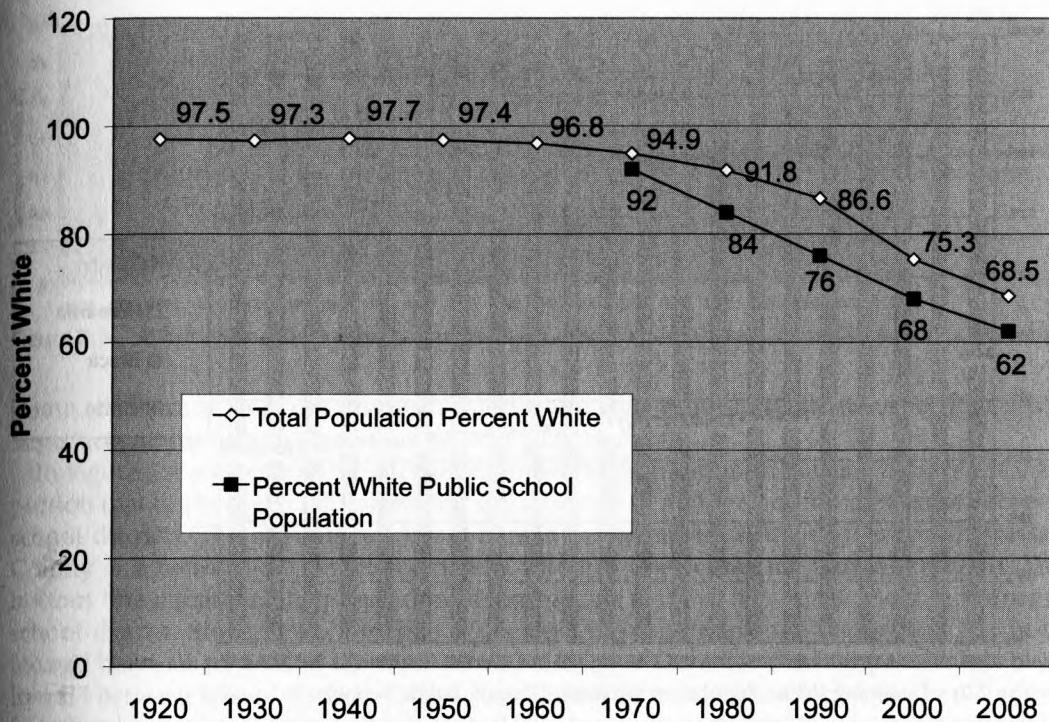


Figure 7.1. Declining White Population in Nassau County

Figure 7.2 provides a more nuanced picture of racial/ethnic changes across Nassau County's 56 public school districts. We find again the consistent theme of gradual declines in white student enrollments. Importantly, proportional declines in white students have been driven by increases in the proportion of Hispanic students rather than increases in black student enrollments. Between 1988 and 2007, the proportion of Hispanic students tripled, while the proportion of black students remained relatively stable. Note also the considerable increases among Asian students, whose proportional representation more than doubled over the past two decades. These patterns reflect national trends. Between 1993 and 2005, the proportion of white students declined by 8.5 percent, while the Hispanic student population increased from 12.1 to 18.9 percent (An & Gamoran, 2009). Decreases in the proportions of both white and black suburban residents, accompanied by increasing Hispanic populations, have also characterized suburban changes across many U.S. metropolitan areas. Analyses of the 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas indicate that from 1990 to 2000, both black and white suburban populations declined, while Hispanic populations increased (Katz & Lang, 2003).

RACIAL/ETHNIC SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN NASSAU COUNTY

In this section we dig deeper to determine the extent to which Nassau County's public school districts experienced these demographic transformations equally. The analyses presented here employ data from the Common Core of Data (CCD), which is collected through the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The CCD, an annual census of U.S. public schools, provides basic school-level socio-demographic

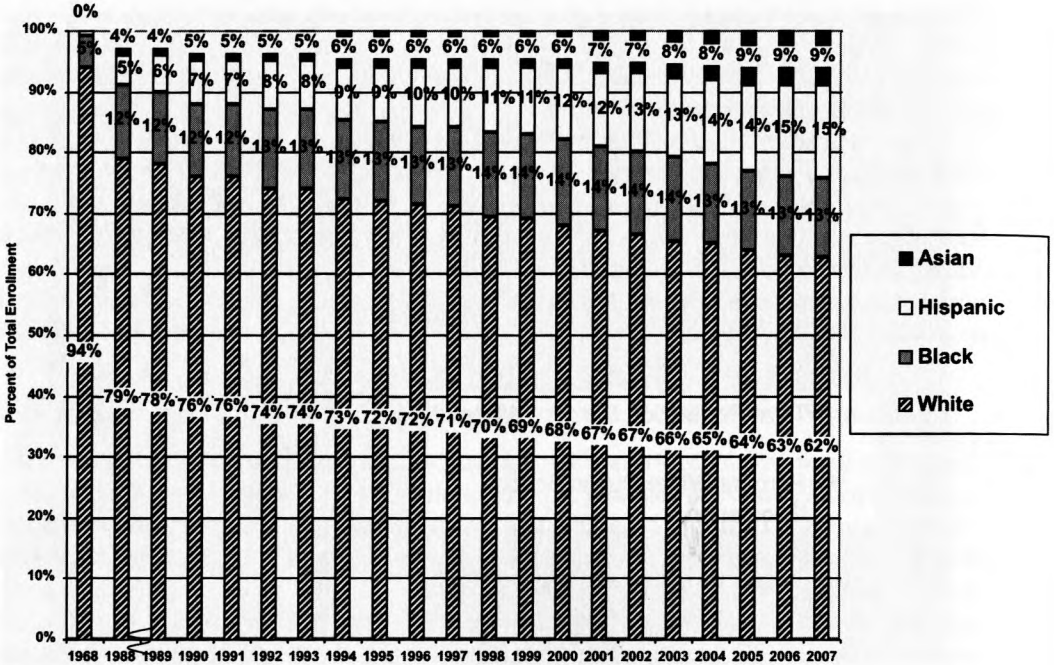


Figure 7.2. Declining White Population in Nassau County Public Schools

information. We used Theil's *H*, an entropy index of segregation, which indicates the extent to which racial/ethnic groups are equally distributed across schools (Theil, 1972; also Reardon & Yun, 2001; Reardon, Yun, & Eitle, 2000). *H* possesses two quite useful properties. First, the indicator is not dependent on the overall racial/ethnic composition of a given population. Because student enrollments in Nassau County have become increasingly nonwhite over the past four decades, simple indicators of the proportion of schools that are majority nonwhite do not provide useful information. For example, a finding that more schools are currently nonwhite compared to a decade ago tells us nothing about increases in segregation, as all schools may have experienced similar increases in their nonwhite populations (An & Gamoran, 2009). Rather, such contexts require a measure of segregation that is less sensitive to overall racial/ethnic changes within a given population, and that instead considers how the proportional representation of students both within and across districts changes over time.

Figure 7.3 displays the historical patterns of white/nonwhite segregation in Nassau County. We see a gradual increase in segregation from the late 1980s through the 1990s, but segregation has remained somewhat stable—at very high levels—since 1999. In looking across years, consider that a 0.05 change in *H* is considered to be substantively meaningful (see Reardon & Yun, 2001). Such a change is roughly the equivalent to transferring 10 percent of the minority population from schools in which they were overrepresented to schools where they were underrepresented. A much more dramatic increase in segregation occurred between 1968 and 1988, a period (not coincidentally) during which Nassau County witnessed its greatest nonwhite population growth. Specifically, from 1970 to 1990, the nonwhite population increased from 8 percent to 24 percent. Note also that segregation between elementary schools is greater than that between schools in general. This flows largely from the fact that elementary school attendance boundaries are more closely tied to

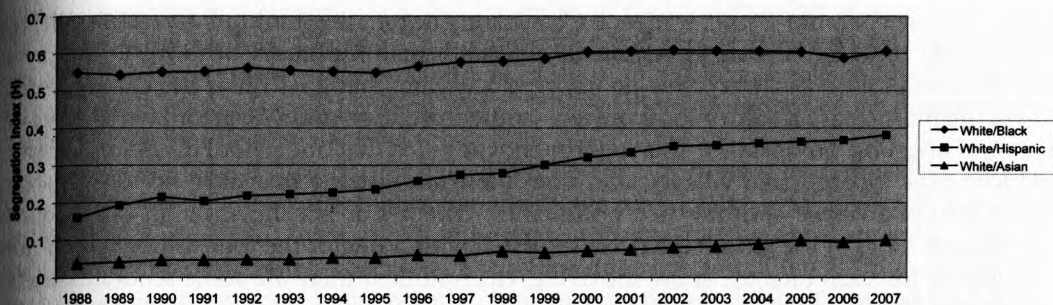


Figure 7.3. White-Non-White Segregation Indices Over Time in Nassau County's 56 School Districts

home residence than is the case with middle and high schools, which tend to draw from larger geographic areas, due to their generally larger sizes.³

In Figure 7.4 we decompose the white/nonwhite segregation in Nassau County into the portion that lies between schools within school districts, and the portion that exists between school districts. The obvious revelation here is the extent to which segregation in Nassau County is a between-district phenomenon. The top line represents total segregation. The bottom line represents the proportion of segregation that lies between schools in the same school district. Since 1988, less than 10 percent of white/nonwhite segregation has been located between schools in the same school district, while more than 90 percent has been located between school districts. Given the Milliken decision, this has obvious implications for efforts to create more racially and ethnically integrated schools. In a highly fragmented county with 56 school districts that are roughly, but far from perfectly, tied to local municipal jurisdictions such as villages and hamlets, the high level of racial segregation between school district boundary lines should not be surprising. The fact that this fragmentation intersects with an increasingly racially/ethnically diverse school-age population, however, makes the segregation all the more probable and all the more problematic.

Changing Significance of Public School Boundaries

As public school districts interact with this complex landscape of highly fragmented local governance systems, we have been trying to better understand what role the school districts and their boundaries play in the mosaic of segregation and separation. As a former president of the Nassau County Superintendents Association noted, school governance on Long Island

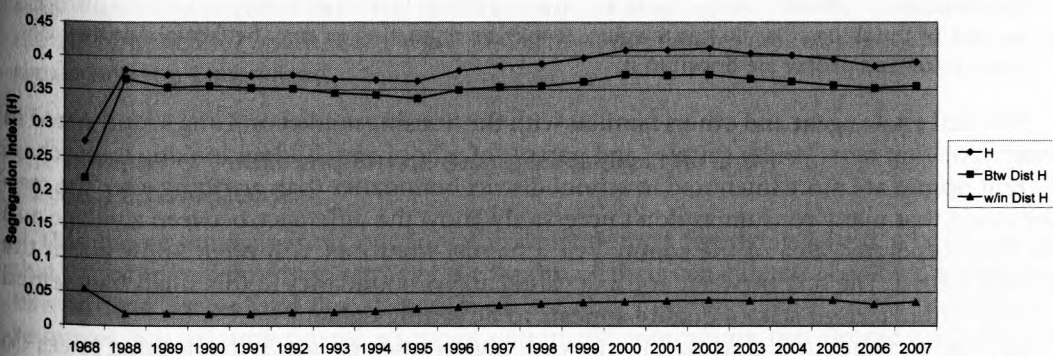


Figure 7.4. White-Non-White Segregation—Within Versus Between Districts—in Nassau County's 56 School Districts

is very complex because district leaders are constantly negotiating multiple layers of politics. These layers include the state government, especially state legislators, who make the laws that affect education but who have no say over anything that goes on at the county level, where the municipal mosaic of local power—at the town, city, and village or hamlet level—are mind boggling. For instance, this superintendent noted that one school district in Nassau includes nine incorporated villages, and then there are districts that have no villages—or even a part of a village—within their boundaries. Whether or not they overlap with any of the villages, most of the school districts are nested within one of the four towns, which are responsible for trash pick up, snow shoveling, etc. And then there are some school districts (see Map 7.1) that actually straddle more than one town.

What we learned from our county- and district-level interviews was that in a suburban county in which most residents are fiercely committed to the idea of local control—particularly for those who live in villages and thus *have* a great deal of local control—residents are extremely wedded to their local government, especially their school districts. According to the education advisor to the former Nassau County Executive, “the villages are really at the heart of what Nassau County is all about . . . you know local control and all of that. . . . You have some very, very passionate local leaders. You know mayors love their villages. People love them. Of everything people want to protect in Nassau County, villages are probably second only to schools.”

In fact, in part because of the multilayered configuration of local, municipal government structures in Nassau County, school districts, which collectively cover every square mile of the county and transcend all of the other uneven layers of local control, have become the focal points of local control and identity across the boundaries. While school districts have always been important to people migrating to Long Island, our data collection suggests that in this era of rampant income inequality, test score data overload, and high anxiety due to these factors on the part of many upper-middle-class parents, they matter more today than ever before (see Wells et al., 2009)

This is certainly true when it comes to buying and selling homes on Long Island. According to a local real estate agent who serves a wide range of clientele, from upper-middle-class to recent lower-income immigrant families, if someone asks him how “*the*” housing market on Long Island is doing, he replies that every zip code is different and that much of that difference is related to school districts:

I could give you a report within a minute that I’ll tell you what the zip code is doing. . . . I hate when someone gives me . . . well this is what’s happening in Nassau County. Nassau County? There’s hundreds and hundreds of towns. No. There’s lousy school districts going bankrupt. There’s excellent school districts. There are so many things that create value, and school districts are one of the things that do create value. It may be reputation or may be factual but they do create value and people are drawn to it.

This real estate agent and others familiar with the housing market on Long Island stated in interviews that most young couples and parents of school-age children looking to purchase or rent homes are more interested in school district boundaries than anything else. The realtor noted that many consumers don’t necessarily know the difference between a village and an unincorporated area of the county—or a hamlet—but they will often know about the school district. The link between housing values across boundaries in this small fragmented county and perceived school quality appears to be getting tighter.

As a superintendent of a school district with high test scores noted, the housing prices do change based on the school district outcome—the “school district is a big thing.” This superintendent and others like him in districts with high test scores conduct annual get-togethers

with the realtors in their area. He is also a member of the local chamber of commerce, which includes many realtors. "So there is a connection, and they're [the realtors] very aware of the status of our budget, our scores, and all of those things that people come and ask them about. I'll do a presentation for them and . . . I'll give them a handout which describes some of the things that people ask them."

As the Long Island historian noted, during the age of mass suburbanization—the first phase of white flight to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s—the quality of the public schools in a given area were not so important, nor was that "quality" so easily measured prior to the accountability movement. But today, he noted, is a different time. Parents have greater access to test score data and other information than in the past, and, he said, education is seen as being more critical to children's chances of success as adults: "I think [the] school district is probably one of the most important [factors] because no matter what, we do care about the education system. I'd say that people are probably most conscious of that."

We know, for instance, from our early data collection with real estate agents on Long Island that there are school district boundaries that can double the asking price of structurally similar houses. As one real estate agent told us, a large four-bedroom home we visited with a large yard and a huge back porch would be double its asking price of \$650,000 if it were located one block to the east, in a highly reputable and 98 percent white school district, as opposed to the more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse district in which it is located.

Similarly, a parent in a nearby district with declining test scores and white flight noted, "Our district's being judged, and then our housing prices, the prices of our homes and the values of our homes go down, because who wants to go to a district where the kids aren't getting good grades?"

Another important finding related to the increasing significance of school district boundaries on Long Island is the growth of the school district "border patrol" industry there. Previously all-white school districts receiving a growing number of students from New York City and Central America have now hired residency officers (a.k.a. border patrollers) to monitor legal versus illegal enrollments. These are growing operations in at least 6 of the 56 school districts' budgets. One of these 6 districts, after sending border patrollers into homes on "home visits," which can entail searches of students' bedrooms and closets to make sure they live there, also contracts out to private investigators for more in-depth surveillance, which can include videotaping a house for a 24-hour period. As one of these officials explained, border patrol is a booming industry on Long Island, as school districts must ensure there are no illegitimate students in their schools. He and others in this now 70 percent "minority" school district noted that the idea, funding, and ongoing support for this effort come from the all-white school board. Race, class, and school boundaries are, we argue, of increasing significance on Long Island.

The Interplay of Public and Private Resources in Separate and Unequal School Districts

This theme emerges from our initial examination of five Long Island school districts that varied tremendously in terms of the wealth of their constituents. Looking across these five districts, we realized that they differed not only in terms of their public funding and resources, but also the private resources within the community that flowed—directly and indirectly—into the schools. In other words, we learned the multiple ways in which public resources and private wealth are often discretely comingled to give students who attend

schools of concentrated privilege even greater resource advantage. In other words, a public education system in which those with more resources are able to generate higher levels of public funding creates inequality in and of itself. But when that system is supplemented and reinforced by private resources—both tangible and intangible—from parents, community members, and other donors who are connected to the district through social networks, the mounting inequities are even more appalling.

We saw these private resources pour into the most affluent school district both through major donations and through the support systems that parents were able to give their children to enhance their achievement and school success. These affluent parents made sure their children had what they needed to succeed—everything from \$200-an-hour private tutors to \$300-an-hour therapies of all kinds—for example, psychological, physical, or occupational. A high school social worker in this affluent district, who used to work in a poor community, explained that while many problems adolescents face, including drug or alcohol use or divorcing parents, transcend the poor-affluent boundaries, it is the students in the affluent district whose parents can buy them a safety net that keeps them from failing:

What I think is different . . . here, the families have the money to help them get through it. . . . The issues are the same. . . . They've got the students who are socially awkward, they've got students who need special ed. services, they've got parents who are divorcing. . . . But here, if your parents are divorcing, you may have the financial means to go to a therapist outside of school, you know. If you're autistic, your family has gone to the best specialists and they have you with the best medications, and you're going to special camps over the summer to really develop your social skills, and I think that's what separates the districts. It's really the resources.

While most people know about this comingling of public and private resources at an intuitive level, if not from systematic research, it is important to document the extent to which such layered inequality defines the separate and unequal educational opportunities across school boundaries. *Indeed, what we learned is that this understanding becomes a mechanism through which the system is legitimized and maintained by those with the power to change it.*

Perceptions of Good Schools and Their Tangible and Intangible Consequences

Related to the theme about the dramatically different educational opportunities available to students across these separate school districts, this theme examines the ways in which those who live and work in these distinct spaces understand the reputations of their school districts on Long Island. Documenting how people articulate their school districts' reputations may not seem empirically or scientifically important—nothing more than people's perceptions, which may or may not be "valid" in some more concrete sense. But we argue that "intangible" factors such as districts' or schools' reputations—for example, the way in which people make sense of particular public schools versus others, whether they know much about them or not—matter a great deal in terms of people's willingness to move into or out of a particular school district as well as their resistance to changing existing boundaries. *In some ways, therefore, perceptions are more powerful than "reality."*

Related to this theme and the larger body of research on race and education, we found in our study of Long Island that the reputations of schools and school districts are highly correlated with the status of the students who attend them and thus the families associated with them. It is the case that these reputations are also correlated with some objective measures of "school quality" as measured in terms of mostly tangible factors, since mostly poor, black, and Latino schools continually lack resources, well-prepared teachers, high-status curriculum, and so forth. But such bad reputations are, we suggest, more strongly correlated with

the race/ethnicity and poverty rates of the students served than with an objective measure of school or district quality per se. In this way, school and district reputations can become self-fulfilling prophecies—with poorer districts unable to attract more affluent residents or more prepared educators. As a result, these ways of "knowing" school districts through their reputations helps to legitimize the separation and inequality across districts that so many people on Long Island say is morally wrong. It is in fact a vicious cycle of bad reputations begetting bad schools and vice versa. One thing that these data on public school districts' reputations clearly underscore is the harms of racial/ethnic segregation across the disparate villages and hamlets of Long Island.

CONCLUSION

We have begun on a five-year journey to figure out how and why school district boundaries matter amid massive metro migration patterns and ongoing racial/ethnic and increasing socioeconomic segregation. We know intuitively, if not empirically, that they surely do. What has been missing in the social science and education research literature for too long is a careful, systematic examination of *why* they matter so much. Our study is designed to answer that very question through a vast array of mixed methods applied to four different contexts.

This chapter represents our first leg of that journey—our evolving framework and methods—as well as early quantitative and qualitative findings from Nassau County—the most fragmented county in the United States. We hope our description of our study and these early findings both pique interest in such work in other contexts and inspire education researchers in particular to ask hard questions and collect data on issues that are not the most salient to policymakers in Washington, D.C., and the state houses right now, but which are critically important to the future of our increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society.

NOTES

1. We use the term "white" to describe "whites not of Hispanic origin" unless otherwise noted. We also use the terms "black" and "African American" interchangeably, as we do with "Latino" and "Hispanic," knowing that people who identify with these racial/ethnic groups are not uniform in their preference for one term or the other.

2. It is important to bear in mind, however, that many "black suburbs" are simply smaller, high-poverty cities located near large cities (e.g., Camden, New Jersey, and East St. Louis, Illinois; Massey & Denton, 1993). Areas that experienced substantial growth in black populations during this second phase of metropolitan change also tended to be older, "inner-ring" suburbs that were poor, experiencing social and economic decline, and rarely called to mind the "suburban ideal."

3. We are currently conducting analyses that incorporate Nassau County's private schools and that specifically explore white/black, white/Hispanic, and white/Asian segregation. In most instances, these analyses suggest more severe segregation—for example, higher values of H —as Asian students in Nassau County are far more likely than black or Hispanic students to attend school with whites.

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