

Chapter 13: Conclusion

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The purpose of this study was not to engage in an academic exercise and neatly classify diverse communities into appropriate categories. The two models of stable diversity outlined in chapter 1—diversity by direction and diversity by design—are helpful for understanding the different origins and different characteristics of stable and diverse communities in American cities. The important task ahead is to understand what has produced this stable diversity and make clear that segregation and resegregation need not be the norm in American urban communities. Alternatives exist if we are willing to examine and learn from them. Before detailing our recommendations, it is helpful to provide a summary of the characteristics that are common to all of the diverse communities studied and the ways in which the community characteristics varied.

Similarities Among All Diverse Communities

Attractive Physical Characteristics

All of the communities studied contain distinctive physical characteristics or environmental assets that make them desirable to outsiders. Although hard to quantify, these characteristics make the communities more attractive than the average city neighborhood and include good location (proximity to the city's central business district and/or ease of access to other parts of the city by roads or public transportation), architecturally interesting homes (for example, older historic homes with a history of being a planned community), and an attractive environment (for example, on the lakefront in Chicago or with a view of Mount Rainier in Seattle).

A Mixture of Two Diversity Types

We found a mixture of two types of diversity in the communities studied: racial/ethnic diversity within blocks and small pockets—two or three blocks—of racial homogeneity within a larger diverse community.

The Presence of Social Seams

Social seams are points in the community where interaction between different ethnic and racial groups is sewn together in some way—a concept used by Jane Jacobs (1961) in *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. The most common seam is a grocery store or strip of stores. Even where people of different races and different ethnicities live within small clusters of blocks, seams can bring them together. In some cases the seams are schools where children of different races and ethnicities come together on a daily basis and where parents interact in the course of parent-teacher association activities and regular school events. Parks, special communitywide events, and neighborhood festivals also can serve as seams.

Residents' Awareness of the Community's Stable Diversity

A consciousness exists among the residents of the communities studied that the racial and ethnic diversity within the community is relatively stable compared with other urban neighborhoods.

Community-Based Organizations and Social Institutions Contribute to Maintaining Diversity

Maintaining diversity directly. In some communities, local organizations have emerged specifically to promote diversity or integration.

Maintaining diversity indirectly by addressing communitywide service issues. In the course of addressing some community need—for example, through developing recreational programs for youth, revitalizing a local business district, enhancing community safety, or developing a focus for a magnet school within the community—organizations serve to bring various parts of the community together. Although these efforts and these organizations are inclusive and effectively encourage diversity, they do not always see diversity as a primary goal.

Maintaining diversity indirectly by developing ethnic or racial interest groups that engage in debate and dialogue to resolve differences. Organizations representing specific groups—for example, religious congregations with memberships from a particular class/ethnic/racial group, Asian business people, Latino youth, low-income tenants, and owners of historic homes—advance their interests in communitywide debates in the press, at zoning board hearings, or at less formal gatherings. Where there typically is no dominant racial, ethnic, or class group in the communities studied, a pluralism and accommodation process develops that is not commonly seen in urban communities.

The Moral- or Value-Oriented Component to Community Organizations' Involvement

While economic self-interest (for example, the value of residents' homes) permeates discussions of diversity promotion, explicit debate on values—what helps to create a “good” community—occurs more in the communities studied than in most communities. Religious congregations also perform a crucial role. Because churches tend to be segregated at the same time that they promote brotherhood and sisterhood, they often become involved in ecumenical efforts to bridge racial boundaries. Although religious organizations are involved in both types of diverse neighborhoods, their functions vary.

Efforts To Spur Economic Development

The need for investment in a neighborhood shopping infrastructure emerged during the study as a key issue for many neighborhoods. Although some communities have successfully attracted malls and superstores, most find ways to carve out a distinctive niche through development of small shopping districts, craft shops, ethnic restaurants, or antique stores.

Common Challenges

Community leaders in all of the diverse communities noted challenges to the future stability of their diverse communities. Although these can be seen as threats to stable diversity, they are usually seen as issues that need to be addressed and that unify the community to sustain diversity.

Transition from older residents to younger residents. Typically, the Anglo population in the communities consists of empty nesters, while the African-American, Latino, Asian, and immigrant populations are younger people with families. This finding raises two issues:

- Can the community attract younger Anglo families to maintain that dimension of the diversity?
- Is the young/old diversity producing other social divisions in the community (for example, regarding support for public school expenditures, money for youth recreation programs, or support for senior services)?

The need to address blight within the community or on its boundaries. A common concern voiced by all of the racial and ethnic groups in all of the communities was the need for more community reinvestment, especially reinvestment to eliminate pockets of blight (residential and retail) and poorly maintained rental properties. Implicit in this concern is an ongoing debate in some settings over how much gentrification is good for the community and whether wholesale gentrification could eliminate neighborhood diversity.

Community safety. As in most urban and many suburban neighborhoods, community safety has become a central issue in diverse communities. However, because of the commonly held perceptions throughout society (fed by longstanding racism) that the presence of minorities translates into crime, diverse communities are particularly sensitive to this issue.

Schools. The quality of urban school systems is important to diverse urban neighborhoods. The challenge of attracting a new diverse population relates to the challenge of attracting young families to specific neighborhoods. Without high-quality schools, marketing the community to target populations can be difficult. The presence of magnet, private, and parochial schools frequently serves as an anchor in diverse communities.

Differences in the Nature of Diversity in the Communities Studied

Although the diverse neighborhoods studied have some common traits and concerns, there is some variation in the mix of what they see as pressing problems and intervention strategies.

Differences in Economic Homogeneity/Heterogeneity

Most of the communities studied are economically diverse. They include middle-class homeowners with college educations and professional jobs as well as low-income families with wage earners in entry-level, service-sector jobs. This economic diversity is typically a product of diverse housing opportunities. A mix of single-family homes, market-rate rental units, and subsidized housing units is present. The economically diverse neighborhoods include: Rogers Park, Edgewater, Uptown, and Chicago Lawn (Chicago); Southeast Seattle; Houston Heights; Jackson Heights and Fort Greene (New York City); and San Antonio and Fruitvale (Oakland). Communities with a larger portion of middle-class residents include West Mount Airy (Philadelphia), Sherman Park (Milwaukee), Park Hill (Denver), and Vollintine-Evergreen (Memphis). This is not to say that there is no economic diversity in these communities, but, relative to the other communities studied, these areas are more middle class.

The extent of economic diversity also relates to how diversity in a neighborhood is experienced and/or sustained. For example, in Mount Airy, the high proportion of professionals and academics settling in the area has been a positive factor for promoting social interaction among racially diverse residents. Conversely, neighborhoods such as Jackson Heights (New York City) and Uptown (Chicago) form pockets of higher income residents four or five blocks away from low-income blocks. The bonds that hold these various types of diverse communities together differ. The common class bonds are more likely to be cited in middle-income neighborhoods. Location, access to public transportation and jobs, affordable housing, and diversity of stores and restaurants are more likely to be the attraction in economically diverse communities.

Immigrant/Nonimmigrant Composition: Traditional Diversity and New Diversity

The neighborhoods in this study vary in terms of the presence of immigrants. In several neighborhoods, diversity has developed in large part because the community acted as a port of entry for new immigrant groups. In these communities representing the new diversity, statistical diversity has been a constant, but the particular pattern of ethnic groups producing the diversity may have varied over time. In some cases, the ethnic groups represented (that is, the recent immigrant groups) changed completely in as little as 10 years. The newness of the populations in the port-of-entry communities and their lack of any longstanding history of relations with other ethnic groups has left the door open to innovative accommodations among groups. The marketing of Jackson Heights' many ethnic restaurants and stores through the offering of subway tours on the line that has become known as the International Express is an example.

Yet, some of the communities studied are best described as examples of traditional diversity. In such cases, neighborhoods are characterized by White/African-American diversity—a diversity that has a deep history in American society. The more established Black/White race relations have resulted in developing ways to resolve intergroup tensions or find institutions that can mediate between the different racial groups. For example, religious congregations and ecumenical groups have been able to draw from decades of race dialogue by playing a lead role in mapping and sustaining stable diversity in these communities. Not surprisingly, the civil rights movement of the 1960s was a watershed for these communities. Community groups in Denver, Memphis, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia could trace their pro-diversity work back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The political struggles of that era had laid the foundation for these stable diverse communities.

Where diversity is characterized by a more traditional Black/White dimension, community organizing efforts are more likely to explicitly address issues of discrimination and broad issues of racism (for example, redlining, racial overtones in investment or disinvestment practices by businesses, and even social interactions among residents themselves). In communities characterized by the more multiracial or multiethnic new diversity, less time is spent on the specific issues of intergroup relations and more time is spent on practical issues such as improving community safety, city services, or business investment. Although those communities' diverse characters are seen as important components of the outside world's perception of them, the complexity of the multidimensional or criss-crossing aspects of many racial and ethnic groups makes discussing intergroup relations more complex than in one-dimensional Black/White communities. This is not to say that racism and ethnocentrism are not discussed in those communities; it is rather that practical issues are more commonly discussed.

Differences in the Racial and Ethnic Mix of Communities

Some community diversity is split evenly among Asian, Latino, White, and Black residents. Others are primarily White and Black communities. Still others are Latino/White or Asian/White. The social dynamics of a multiethnic/multiracial community differ from a two-race or two-ethnicity community. Two-race or two-ethnicity communities tend to address more specifically bridging traditional tensions between the two groups, whereas multiethnic communities are more likely to refer to the general mixture without discussion of any overarching need to address specific tensions between two groups. As a Chicago resident observed, "What we have in common are our differences."

The Extent to Which Housing Stock Varies

The availability of a variety of housing types contributes to diversity in the majority of communities studied. We refer to variety on a number of dimensions: owners/renters, housing costs, and rent levels. Although some communities studied retain higher homeownership rates than others, in no community did rental housing account for less than 25 percent of the occupied housing units, and in 9 of the 14 neighborhoods studied, rental housing represents more than 50 percent. Community leaders typically reported a broad range of costs for rental housing.

Recommendations

What are the implications of our research for the future of stable, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the United States? First, stable diverse communities are not a figment of a progressive policy researcher's imagination—they do exist. More than 600,000 people live in this sample of stable, diverse urban communities. Scores of other urban communities have similar characteristics.¹ With the proper supportive policies, forward-looking leadership, and strong community-based organizational networks, American cities can see these communities grow and multiply. They are tangible alternatives to the residential segregation that has plagued our Nation.

Even for the communities studied there are challenges ahead. As residents of the diversity-by-direction communities established in the 1960s grow older, new younger residents are moving into these neighborhoods. The ability to sustain the pro-diversity vision will be influenced by both the strength of the established community organizations in these neighborhoods and the support that these communities receive from government and other influential institutions. Similarly, the likelihood that diversity-by-circumstance communities will become more consciously diverse and fit into our diversity-by-design category

depends on their recognizing that diversity can open up opportunities for improved quality of life in areas of housing, education, and economic development for *all* residents.

Victories of multiracial and multiethnic coalitions go a long way in moving diversity-by-circumstance communities toward directed diversity. In many of the diversity-by-circumstance communities we studied, diverse schools are held up as badges of honor. The communities' ability to attract retail development and sustain viable commercial strips is celebrated by business leaders. Neighborhood ethnic festivals become regularly scheduled celebrations and serve as public announcements of the community's commitment to diversity. As these communities become regularly associated with their diversity, new consciously diverse communities are developing. Although these are more multiracial, multiethnic, and multiclass than the diversity-by-direction communities created in the 1960s, they are nevertheless becoming increasingly common and are moving forward in maintaining the diversity they have found.

As our Nation's population becomes more diverse, these communities represent positive alternatives to segregated communities. However, stable diverse neighborhoods will not develop on their own; they require active intervention to counter misconceptions about diversity and a lack of institutional support for diversity. If more support for diverse neighborhoods is forthcoming—from government as well as the private sector—we can create communities that accommodate or embrace the increased diversity that will exist in the future. Conversely, if more support is not provided, we may see a society that increasingly hides behind walled communities in the city or in exclusive communities outside the city. Based on our study, we make the following recommendations for strengthening diverse communities in all cities in our country. Our recommendations recognize the need for elected officials and other government leaders to take a more proactive role in promoting diversity. At the same time, we recognize that leaders in already diverse communities need to continue to pressure elected officials and hold them accountable for enforcing existing laws and promoting improved racial and ethnic relations in their city neighborhoods.

Hold government agencies and government leaders accountable for specific diversity goals, and be more proactive in promoting the idea that diverse neighborhoods are viable. Elected officials need to provide leadership promoting stable, diverse communities to meet the demand for such neighborhoods. Similarly urban planners need to carefully examine the consequences of their actions (involving zoning, retail development, school districting, and other policies) that may destabilize already diverse neighborhoods or thwart the development of new diverse neighborhoods.

Maintain or strengthen existing fair housing laws, Federal antidiscrimination laws, the Community Reinvestment Act, and State and local laws supporting equal housing opportunities. These laws are tools that can be used by local groups to sustain diversity. The laws alone cannot create diversity—the hands of local activists are required.

Assign public and private resources to programs that encourage neighborhood diversity, particularly in mixed-income diverse communities. Our study indicates that middle-class diverse communities are more stable, in part because of the financial and political resources available to residents. This finding indicates that devoting more resources to diverse communities is likely to produce stability.

Develop and disseminate information on strategies to strengthen community-based organizations and their networks in diverse communities. Community-based organizations play an important role in stabilizing diverse communities. In some cases,

community organizations are formed to promote diversity, as in the case of conscious diversity; in other cases, community organizations develop to represent different interests that recognize the utility of coming together to determine common interests, as in the case of laissez-faire diversity. Without this proactive local resource, diverse communities are more likely to be threatened by outside forces that have not supported diversity.

Establish citywide and regional organizations or networks of diverse community organizations. These networks can provide technical assistance for communities seeking to maintain stable diversity and increase the visibility of stable, diverse communities in metropolitan areas and in the Nation. Public and private support for such networks can contribute to the strength of existing diverse communities and to the number of future diverse communities. Key to the success of such assistance is the ability to enlist the broad range of existing agencies and organizations—such as schools, churches, businesses, block clubs, and youth groups—in these efforts.

Develop leadership training institutes for residents of diverse communities. Stable, diverse communities do not just happen; they are usually sustained by a small number of local leaders. Efforts to provide training to residents in other communities—particularly in the communities that are composed of new and complex multiracial and multi-ethnic relationships—would increase the country’s capacity to develop and sustain these communities.

Encourage public and private programs to support mixed-income developments. Diversity—particularly in the new diverse urban communities—is related to the presence of a broad range of housing options: affordable housing and middle-income housing as well as rental opportunities and home-purchase opportunities. Some of the newer stable, diverse communities have been created by community economic development corporations improving or developing affordable housing prior to, or in the early stages of, neighborhood gentrification. This has helped to guarantee quality housing for low-income individuals as reinvestment dollars flow into the community at a more rapid pace.

Emphasize that public and private schools are important to the health of diverse communities. Education and community safety are the two indicators of community vitality most frequently mentioned by residents, community leaders, and business leaders during interviews. Good schools help to attract residents from all income groups to a community. Schools are visible symbols of a community and its quality of life; community names and school names are frequently the same. Schools are also used as a measure of investment in the future of a community.

Develop and strengthen community safety programs. Safety is a particularly important issue in diverse communities because of the myth that a higher percentage of minority residents leads to an increase in crime. Diverse communities have to demonstrate that they can be safe communities; in doing so they can help to dispel this myth.

Urge local chambers of commerce, business schools, and other business associations to consider diverse communities as potentially strong markets—areas where business investments will produce strong returns. Diverse neighborhoods are often markets overlooked by businesses. Opportunities for new retail development in diverse communities are significant and can produce attractive returns on investment. In some of the cities studied, retailers—including large chains—have discovered that diverse communities can be very profitable locations. Although some of this development may be related to the newly discovered markets in inner-city neighborhoods (Porter, 1995), the overlay of diversity

suggests that new tools may be needed to develop the two-pronged marketing plan targeting a specific ethnic market and customers from the general market who are often needed for sustained profitability.

Encourage the media to tell the positive stories of diverse communities' successes.

City newspapers, particularly, have a good track record in printing feature stories on such neighborhoods. This exposure needs to be reinforced.

Encourage local community organizations, existing institutions, and local governments to be receptive to new groups and to work with them on common community issues. It is unclear at this point how much ownership new immigrants will take for their current communities. Are their present homes seen as stepping stones to other homes, or is there a desire to invest—financially and socially—in their present community? If there is to be investment, new immigrants need avenues for participation in the future of their new communities.

Establish job-creation programs and improved access to employment in nearby communities. As in other communities, access to jobs is important for survival in diverse communities.

Invite public discussion on the extent to which the practice of maintaining ethnic and race-based political constituencies undermines efforts to create and sustain diverse communities. Are there alternatives to residentially based political constituencies as a way of ensuring that ethnic and/or racial voices are heard in local political decisionmaking?

Both our country and our urban communities are at a crossroads. Whether the path we take is one of continued segregation or one of greater accommodation and understanding of differences has yet to be decided. The fears of community transition, racial change, gentrification, and economic decline can be effectively addressed by creating and promoting communities that embrace diversity rather than build the inevitable fragile wall of racial, ethnic, or economic exclusion. The challenge to these fears already exists in the form of a few diverse communities that are present in our cities today. This is not an issue that can be solved exclusively by government legislation, but government attentiveness to this issue and allocation of additional resources to strengthen diverse communities can go a long way toward making these communities model urban communities instead of anomalies. Residents, business leaders, and other community leaders in these diverse communities are facing formidable challenges to diversity from forces outside their boundaries, but the study described herein has shown that national and global forces need not be seen as overwhelming influences that have stolen local communities' ability to influence their futures.

The models presented in this discussion can be used by other urban communities and city planners to end the wasteful cycle of investment/disinvestment/reinvestment that has exacted a heavy toll on urban communities. By demonstrating that diversity works, we can confront the fears of all residents—residents of different races, ethnicities, and social classes—that they will be displaced by others—whether the others are gentrifiers pricing low-income immigrants out of the neighborhood or middle-income African-American homebuyers moving next door to White middle-income homeowners.

By endorsing the models of diversity described in this issue of *Cityscape*, we demonstrate that the commonly held all-of-one-race model of neighborhood racial composition is not an immutable social law. Racism and ethnocentrism are no small hurdles to be overcome in building stable diverse communities, but governments, leading financial institutions, religious institutions, and community organizations must make the substantial commitments needed to strengthen the foundation of stable urban diversity that already exists in many urban communities. These working models of stable racial and ethnic diversity stand ready to serve as guides into the next century as America's population becomes more diverse.

Note

1. We conservatively estimate that more than 10 million Americans are living in relatively stable diverse communities. This estimate is based on the initial census tract analysis and followup phone calls that we made at the initial stages of this research. Without the indepth analysis similar to that which we completed on these 14 neighborhoods, we cannot say how stable the diversity in these communities is. However, it is clear that the lessons learned from this study are of great value in keeping these other communities stable, not to mention of value in promoting more diverse communities in our Nation's cities.

Reference

Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books.