

PRELIMINARY AND PARTIAL DRAFT ONLY

Racial Blind Spots: Black-White-Latino Differences in Community Knowledge\*

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## INTRODUCTION

As an explanation for the persistence of racial residential segregation, residential preferences have received a great deal of attention by scholars, policymakers, and the general public (Schelling 1971; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; Clark 1986, 1991, 1992; Charles 2001; Fossett 2006; Farley et al. 1994). Whites and African Americans, it is argued, live apart because they hold incompatible preferences about the racial composition of the communities in which they want to live. This view is based on the assumption that, by and large, people live where they want to live and with whom they want to live. To oversimplify—if people do not live in integrated neighborhoods, it is because they don't want to. The use of preferences to explain persistent segregation is often critiqued by those who note that this perspective assumes little or no discrimination in the housing market (Turner et al. 2002; Yinger 1995). Pointing to the persistence of racial discrimination by various players in the real estate industry (agents, mortgage brokers, landlords and the like), these researchers highlight barriers to free choice in housing.

Yet, residents must have at least a minimal level of familiarity with a community to either form a preference about it or to attempt to purchase or rent a home, during the process of which they might face discrimination. In this paper, we examine the possibility that racial/ethnic differences in the familiarity with communities might also contribute to racial segregation. Specifically, we

investigate the degree to which differences in community racial composition might contribute to racial differences in knowledge about communities in the metropolitan area.

## BACKGROUND

Most studies of the causes of persistent racial residential segregation focus on one of three main explanations: preferences, discrimination, and economics (Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Fischer 1999; Yinger 1995; Emerson et al. 2001; Charles 2006; Darden and Kamel 2000). In this paper, we move away from these core explanations, not because they are unimportant or because they do not contribute to segregation, but because identifying the mechanisms through which these factors operate is also important to understanding the persistence of residential segregation (Reskin 2003).

Segregation is either perpetuated or attenuated through the aggregation of many individual-level decisions about where to move.<sup>1</sup> Based on a considerable amount of past research, we know quite a lot about what kind of places people say they would like to live, vis a vis racial composition (Farley et al. 1978; 1994; Charles 2006). But our conclusions about these preferences tend to be based on ideal choices and hypothetical neighborhoods. Seldom are racial residential preferences measured in a way that grounds them in real urban contexts. An

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that structural factors are unimportant in maintaining or breaking down segregated living patterns. The causes of segregation and the mechanisms through which it is perpetuated are complex and multi-faceted. A single investigation cannot assess all of them. In this paper we grapple with this individual level factor which has received little scholarly attention among the vast number of studies seeking to understand housing segregation.

exception is a recent study using the Detroit Area Study, that asked individuals about their opinions—both good and bad—of 33 actual communities in the Detroit metropolitan area (Krysan and Bader 2007). In this paper we extend the prior analysis to include a fundamental question about community perceptions: whether or not a person knows anything about a community.

There is a generally unstated assumption in existing preferences research that the hypothetical communities respondents would most like to live in are available in their metropolitan areas and, perhaps even more importantly, that the respondents are familiar with them. While the characteristics of hypothetical neighborhoods can be compared to real communities in the metropolitan areas, seldom has the latter assumption about familiarity been tested. In other words, if there are substantial racial differences in the communities that people know about, and if the racial composition of a community importantly shapes whether a person knows about a community, this may be an important mechanism through which housing segregation is perpetuated. This mechanism is also important because it provides a juncture for relatively unobtrusive policies that might be enacted to break down these patterns. This paper explores whether there are racial blind spots in community knowledge that help to perpetuate racial residential segregation.

## DATA AND METHODS

### *The Data*

Our analysis is based on data from face-to-face surveys conducted in the Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas. The Detroit Area Study (DAS) and the

Chicago Area Study (CAS) were multi-stage area probability samples of adults 21 years and older living in households in the Detroit Tri-County Area (Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties), and Cook County, Illinois. The two areas (the Detroit Tri-County area and Cook County) were first stratified by racial/ethnic composition, based on counts from the 2000 Census, and over-samples were drawn of African Americans, Latinos (in Chicago), and those living in racially mixed neighborhoods. A total of 734 completed interviews were obtained in Detroit, for an overall unweighted response rate of 56%; in Chicago, there were 789 completed interviews with a 45% overall unweighted response rate.<sup>2</sup> Interviews were conducted from April through October 2004 in Detroit, and from August 2004 through August 2005 in Chicago. The survey was identical in the two cities, save for minor changes to questions that were specific to each of the two metropolitan areas, including the maps used to measure community knowledge that we draw on in this analysis.

The survey was conducted primarily as a computer assisted personal interview; however, for one portion of the survey, respondents were given a booklet of maps showing major roads and 33 communities for the DAS (See Figure 1) and 41 communities for the CAS (See Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> Next to each of the areas labeled on the map, there were “checkboxes” that allowed a respondent to mark any community/neighborhood that that they “don’t know anything about”.

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<sup>2</sup> This response rate is calculated based on AAPOR standards and we report RR2, the calculation of which is described at [http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs\\_4.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs_4.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the example maps provided in Figures 1 and 2 are for a different question in the map series. The map analyzed in this paper is identical to that shown in Figures 1 and 2, but the question at the top of the map used in this analysis said, “Please mark any communities that you don’t know anything about.”

## FIGURES ONE AND TWO ABOUT HERE

### *The Detroit Context and the Map Communities*

The Detroit metropolitan area has experienced a great deal of change and out-migration since the end of World War II (Farley et al. 2000; Sugrue 1996). The primary demographic change has involved large numbers of whites leaving the city and moving to the suburbs. The contrast in the population's racial composition between the city of Detroit and its suburbs is stark. In 2005, the overall racial composition of the Detroit metropolitan area<sup>4</sup> was 67 percent white, 26 percent African American, and 3 percent Hispanic. But 97 percent of the white population lived outside the city of Detroit while 68 percent of the African American population lived within the city of Detroit. Based on 2000 census data, the index of dissimilarity for the Detroit metropolitan area is the highest in the nation (Mumford Center).

Not unexpectedly, suburban growth began adjacent to Detroit, and has most extensively (though not exclusively) expanded to the north and west. Today, there is an inner-ring of older suburbs that are primarily white, but they include a handful of racially integrated areas such as the middle-to-upper-class suburb of Southfield and the predominately black working class enclave of Inkster, a town originally established for black workers laboring in Ford's factories. The metropolitan area then expanded beyond these "inner-ring" suburbs to new areas to the north and west of the city of Detroit—which we refer to as middle-ring suburbs—and which are generally affluent compared to other suburbs. Beyond the middle-ring suburbs are the "ex-urbs," or suburban communities that are quite distant from the city of Detroit. These, just as the

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<sup>4</sup> We define the "Detroit metropolitan area" as the three counties of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb. The Census bureau now includes three additional outlying counties in its definition of the Detroit Metropolitan Area but we do not use their definition because it is not customarily the one used by residents in the area.

communities before them had done, are continuing to expand toward the north and west of Detroit and are overwhelmingly white. South of Detroit, along the Detroit River, are the “Downriver suburbs,” which are close to the main manufacturing plants of the Ford Motor Company. These are a mixture of industrial and residential land use and the housing stock is comprised of the modest working class homes of industrial laborers.

The 33 communities we include on the Detroit area map have examples of each of these different types of communities—as well as five distinct neighborhoods within the city of Detroit itself. All the communities were selected to be recognizable within the Tri-County area and to include different socio-economic and racial compositions, histories of racial animosities, and geographical proximity to the city of Detroit.

Because the map identified only a subset of all possible places, it is useful to characterize the kinds of communities included on the map as compared to the overall Tri-County Area. Treating the city of Detroit as a single Census Designated Place (CDP), and treating the multiple Grosse Pointes as one community, our map identifies 29 distinct places. Of these 29 places, the vast majority—76 percent—are predominately white (80 percent or more), 3 percent are predominately black (80 percent or more), and 21 percent are racially mixed (20 percent or more of at least two racial groups). Considering all CDPs in the three counties, about 88 percent are predominately white, 2 percent are predominately black, and just 9 percent are racially mixed; another 2 percent are some “other” racial mix. Thus, our 29 places somewhat “over-represent” racially mixed places and “under-represent” predominately white communities.

### *The Chicago Context and the Map Communities*

TO BE ADDED

### *Measures of Independent Variables*

We use a self-reported measure of respondent race permitting individuals to select more than one category, though very few did. Respondents were also asked to self-report on Hispanic origin. Combining the responses to these two questions, we classified individuals as non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white. Respondents were regarded as white only if they did not identify as being of Hispanic origin or report that they were of Arab, Chaldean or Persian descent.<sup>5</sup> In addition, where respondents reported an “other” category, and also provided a description which had recognizable racial signifiers, we assigned appropriate codes (e.g., Italian or Irish were coded as white). Only non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites (in Detroit and Chicago) and Hispanics (in Chicago) are used in this analysis because there were insufficient cases to allow for analyses of other racial/ethnic groups. For the multivariate models, respondent education is measured as a four-category variable with one year of college or less as the reference category. Income was also measured as a four category variable (with a reference category of \$80,000 or more annual family income). Stata’s IMPUTE procedure was used to impute missing data on income since it was the only variable with substantial missing data (10%).<sup>6</sup> Life course and demographic controls include respondent’s age and gender, the presence of children under 18 years of age<sup>7</sup> and a dichotomous variable identifying whether the respondent is currently married. We also included a measure of the number of years the respondent has lived in the Detroit metro area.

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<sup>5</sup> In Detroit, the third largest racial/ethnic group (behind whites and African Americans) is Arab Americans.

<sup>6</sup> The imputation model included measures of race/ethnicity, housing tenure, education, median family income of the block group in which the respondent resided, gender, marital status, presence of children under 18, welfare receipt, employment status, and age. The resulting continuous income variable was collapsed into the four categories used in the analysis.

<sup>7</sup> No distinction is made for whether the children are the respondent’s or simply children in the home.

For the community level variables used in the multi-level models, we draw on the 2000 Census to identify the percentage of the population that is non-Hispanic white, as well as controls for the total population, percentage of owner-occupied homes, median housing value,<sup>8</sup> distance from the centroid of the respondent's block-group to the centroid of the community being rated, and the distance from Detroit's city hall to the centroid of the community being rated. Similar measures will be calculated for Chicago.

*NOTE TO REVIEWER: The remainder of this paper draft focuses exclusively on results from Detroit; our final paper will include parallel analyses of the Chicago data. If accepted, our PAA presentation would be based on both Chicago and Detroit data. We provide the preliminary Detroit results to give a sense of where we are headed in this analysis and the types of findings we are getting.*

### *The Analytic Methods*

In order to address our first research question about whether blacks and whites have similar knowledge of the various communities in the Detroit metropolitan area, we calculate the percentage of respondents (separately for blacks and whites) who identified a particular community as one they “don't know anything about” and then assess racial differences in these levels. We also conduct logistic regression analyses to determine whether these racial differences disappear after controlling for the individual level characteristics described above. Then, as a summary measure, we rank order the communities from the community that is most often selected (in the aggregate) to the community that is least often selected. This ranking is done separately for black

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<sup>8</sup> Because the communities in the city of Detroit were created by aggregating Census tracts into the larger geographic (neighborhood) unit, median housing value was not available. But using publicly released Census data about the distribution of housing values allows us to calculate the median *category* of housing values. We use the midpoint of that category. We do the same thing for the Grosse Pointe Communities.

and white respondents. We use these rankings to calculate a Spearman's rank order correlation allowing us to assess whether the relative aggregate rankings of the communities on the dimension of knowledge are the same or different for blacks and whites.

In order to test whether respondent knowledge of communities is based on racial composition—net of a community's social class characteristics—we specified multi-level models where responses to communities are nested within individuals. Thus, the dependent variable is comprised of the set of answers a respondent gave for all 33 communities. For example, there are 33 repeated independent observations of a given respondent's yes or no answer to whether they “don't know anything about” a community. Because each of these 33 measures is a response to a specific community, we can then include in the first level, as predictor variables, the community characteristics described above. The second level of the model then includes controls for the individual level characteristics (age, sex, homeownership, education, presence of children under age 18 in the household, marital status, number of years lived in the metropolitan area and family income).<sup>9</sup>

We estimate two models. In the first model, we assess the impact of community racial composition and community social class on whether respondents have ever heard of the community. Therefore, we model the log-odds of person  $j$  indicating that they endorse a question (the respondent doesn't know anything about the community) for community  $i$  as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Our approach is counter-intuitive to the way that multi-level analyses are often conducted in urban research, where respondents are nested within communities where they live. Our approach is similar to nesting repeated observations of individuals across waves of longitudinal studies and is, therefore, not without precedent (Singer and Willet 2003; Raudenbush and Byrk 2002).

$$\ln \left[ \frac{P_{preference}}{1 - P_{preference}} \right] = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0R} W_{0Rj} + \sum \gamma_{0C} W_{0Cj} + \sum \gamma_{0D} W_{0D} + \gamma_{r0} X_{rij} + \gamma_{c0} X_{cij} + \sum \gamma_{d0} X_{dij} + u_{0j} + u_{rj} + u_{cj}$$

where the respondent-level effects in the model are as follows:  $\gamma_{0R}$  is the effect of the race,  $W_{0Rj}$ , of respondent  $j$ ;  $\gamma_{0C}$  is the effect of the social class,  $W_{0Cj}$ , of respondent  $j$ <sup>10</sup>;  $\gamma_{0D}$  are the effects of other demographic characteristics,  $W_{0Dj}$ , of person,  $j$ , on selecting a community. The respondent-level effects (the  $\gamma$ s) in this model only control for the log-odds that a person with those characteristics (the  $W$ s) will select *any* community; in other words, we are controlling for the differential rate at which respondents with different demographic characteristics “don’t know anything about” a community. The community-level effects in the model are as follows:  $\gamma_{rj}$  is the effect of racial composition,  $X_{rij}$ , of community,  $i$  for person  $j$ ;  $\gamma_{cj}$  is the social class,  $X_{cij}$ , of community  $i$  for person  $j$  centered around the overall mean,  $X_{c..}$ , of community social class; and  $\gamma_{dj}$  are the other characteristics of community  $i$  for person  $j$ , described above. This model also allows for variation of the effect of community racial and social class composition across people by adding the random effects,  $u_{rj}$  and  $u_{cj}$ , respectively for person  $j$ . Additionally, we add a random term,  $u_{0j}$ , which is the residual for person  $j$ .

The second model tests the impact of the cross-level interaction between the respondent’s own race and the racial composition of the community as well as the respondents’ own social class and the social class of the community. We do this by modeling the slope of the community racial composition (measured as percent non-Hispanic white) by the respondent’s race (i.e. if the respondent is white). We similarly model the slope of community economic class (measured as median household income) by the different levels of respondent income. Specifically,

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<sup>10</sup> The terms  $\gamma_{0C}$  are summed because income,  $W_{0Cj}$ , is measured as a four-category variable and so  $\gamma_{0C}$  represent the unique effect of each income category *compared to* the reference category (less than \$20,000).

$$\ln\left[\frac{P_{preference}}{1-P_{preference}}\right] = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0R}W_{Rj} + \sum \gamma_{0C}W_{Cj} + \sum \gamma_{0D}W_D + \gamma_{r0}X_{rij} + \gamma_{rR}X_{rij}W_{Rj} + \gamma_{c0}X_{cij} + \sum \gamma_{cC}W_{Cj}X_{cij} + \sum \gamma_{d0}X_{dij} + u_{0j} + u_{rj} + u_{cj}$$

where  $\gamma_{rR}$  is the interaction of the racial composition of community  $i$ ,  $X_{rij}$ , and race of respondent  $j$ ,  $W_{Rj}$ , and  $\gamma_{cC}$  is the interaction of the economic class of community  $i$ ,  $X_{cij}$ , and the economic class of respondent  $j$ ,  $W_{Cj}$ .<sup>11</sup> These “cross-level interactions” allow us to test whether whites and blacks respond differently to the percentage of the population that is non-Hispanic white and to see if people with different incomes respond to the median household income differently. Again, we leave the random effects on the slopes for community racial composition,  $u_{rj}$ , and community social class,  $u_{cj}$ , and overall random effect,  $u_{0j}$ .

In this paper, we assess whether blacks and whites agree or disagree about which communities are known and unknown. Second, we use two techniques that allow us to shed light on the racial features of this knowledge. First, we describe the racial components of knowledge by summarizing the racial features of the communities that whites and blacks “don’t know anything about”. Second, we provide a systematic test of the hypothesis that racial composition of a community matters—above and beyond background characteristics like social class and geography. The latter are certainly likely to impact community knowledge.

Our goal in this paper is to understand if and how the knowledge of communities is shaped by race. The purpose is to expand our understanding about how preferences in the metropolitan area might be shaped by community knowledge in a real urban context. The central research questions that will

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<sup>11</sup> Again, the terms are summed because respondent’s social class is measured as a series of dummy variables for each income category.

motivate our analysis include: Which communities do whites and African Americans “know nothing about”? For which communities are there racial differences in this level of knowledge? Does controlling for social, demographic, and economic characteristics—both of the respondents and of the communities—influence the impact of a community’s racial composition on whether it is a well-known or lesser-known community?

## RESULTS

### *Do blacks and whites know about different communities?*

The percentage of respondents reporting that they “didn’t know anything about” any particular community ranged between 9% and 51% for whites and between 5% and 71% for blacks, revealing a greater range in the overall levels of awareness among African Americans than among whites. At one extreme, very few African Americans “didn’t know anything about” the neighborhoods in the city of Detroit (5%-12%); at the other end, well over one-half of African Americans “knew nothing about” many of the distant ex-urbs. None of the communities was as familiar to whites as the Detroit neighborhoods were among African Americans. And, by contrast, there was only one community that the majority of whites said they “didn’t know anything about” (50 percent responded this way to Richmond). Despite these quite different levels of knowledge for many of the communities (a point we return to in the next analysis), it is worth noting that the

*relative* ranking of community knowledge within each racial group shows considerable overlap. A Spearman's rank order correlation of the racial differences in the communities most known to least known is .55 ( $p < .001$ ). In short, blacks and whites have quite a fair amount of agreement on which communities, relatively speaking, they know more and less about.

#### TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

Despite the similarity in rankings, levels of knowledge differ by racial group for many of the communities. Column 3 in Table 1 shows the effect of race on whether a respondent "knows anything about" a community. Thirteen communities are equally well-known (or unknown) by whites and blacks. For the most part, these communities are predominately white, inner ring and middle ring suburbs. Of the remaining 20 communities, African Americans are more likely than whites to know something about ten: all five of the Detroit neighborhoods, the two majority African American inner ring suburbs (Southfield and Ecorse) and three Downriver suburbs (two of which, Ecorse and River Rouge, are about 40% African American and the third, Taylor, is 9% black). Whites, by contrast, are more likely than African Americans to be familiar with the northern and western ex-urbs and a handful of predominately white inner (St. Clair Shores) and middle-ring (Troy and Sterling Heights) suburbs.

If social class were the predominate factor in community knowledge (due to its relation to the kinds of housing one might afford), these observed racial

differences would disappear after taking into account background characteristics. But controlling for age, education, income, homeownership, family and marital status, and length of time in the metropolitan area, do rather little to change the results, as reported in Model 2 (Column 4) of Table 1. Those communities where African Americans were more knowledgeable than whites show no change. Among communities where whites were more knowledgeable than African Americans, race becomes non-significant in four of the ten communities (Sterling Heights, South Lyon, St. Clair Shores, and Northville). Consequently, the only communities about which whites continue to be more knowledgeable than African Americans are in the far reaches of the tri-county area (Holly, Oxford, Romeo, Richmond, New Baltimore) and one middle-ring suburb (Troy).

In summary, the results in Table 1 show that patterns of community knowledge are certainly shaped by race: whites are significantly less likely than blacks to be familiar with communities that are racially diverse or predominately African American. African Americans are generally equally familiar as whites with a range of communities, and several of the communities that were at the bivariate level more well-known among whites became equally well-known among blacks and whites once background characteristics were held constant. But nevertheless, it still holds that blacks are somewhat less familiar than whites with communities that are both distant and predominately white. But it also appears that race of the community shapes whites' knowledge about communities more so than it shapes African Americans' knowledge.

## *Do Racial Differences Persist After Controlling for Background and Community Characteristics?*

In our analysis to this point, we have investigated the specific communities that blacks and whites know little about. We have described the basic racial characteristics of these communities but we are also interested in simultaneously modeling characteristics of both the respondents and the 33 communities so that we can ask, and systematically test, two things. First, does racial composition of a community shape whether a respondent does not know anything about a community? While we suspect it does given the patterns we have described by looking at the city by city results, particularly for whites, a formal test is in order. Second, and more importantly, can these racial differences be explained, as some might argue, by the community's social class characteristics (Harris 1999, 2001; Ellen 2000)? That is, we saw that at the individual level, respondents' background characteristics did not eliminate the influence of respondent's race on their knowledge of communities. However, the question still remains: once we control for social class characteristics of the communities themselves, does the racial composition of the community cease to influence respondent knowledge? Table 2 reports the results of multi-level models where this question is addressed.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that size and location matter: communities with greater populations are less likely to be "unknown," and inner- and middle-ring suburbs are most well known.

## TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

But our central question is whether community race and social class matter. And they do. First, the whiter a community, and the more expensive the homes, the more likely respondents are to be familiar with it. Model 2 includes the cross-level interaction that allows us to answer our central questions: does community racial composition matter the same for black and white respondents and do housing values matter in the same way for those with more and less income? With respect to the influence of median home values, we see that knowledge of a community among individuals with higher incomes is more likely to be influenced by a community's social class characteristics. That is, those with higher incomes are more likely to know more about more expensive communities. Yet even after controlling for individual- and community-level economic characteristics, there is still a significant racial effect on community knowledge. For African Americans, the greater the percentage of whites in the community, the greater the likelihood they were to say that they "didn't know" the community. For whites, the effect of community racial composition is in the opposite direction and it is also statistically significant: the greater the percentage of whites in the community, the greater the level of knowledge among whites. This confirms the impression from the community-by-community logistic regression analyses reported in Table 1.

## CONCLUSIONS

NOTE TO REVIEWER: These are preliminary conclusions that will be modified upon completion of the Chicago analysis

Knowledge of a community likely has an important impact on where people end up living. If one does not know anything about a community, one is probably unlikely to search there; or the costs associated with acquiring information about those communities is much higher than those communities with which residents are already familiar. Those who consult with real estate agents in the process of a search may be introduced to communities they never considered. But for many individuals, we suspect they approach an agent with a particular geography in mind. And, given evidence that there are racial differences in housing search strategies and experiences (Farley 1996; Krysan 2007) and racial steering among real estate agents (Turner et al. 2002), a racialized community knowledge gap might contribute importantly to the perpetuation of residential segregation.

What do our maps tell us about the racial features of community knowledge? First, we find that there are large swaths of the Detroit area where whites and blacks are equally knowledgeable; these are the geographically “central” areas that constitute the inner- and middle-ring suburbs. The exception is the inner-ring suburbs that are predominately African American where African Americans are more knowledgeable. Conversely, whites are more familiar than African Americans with the distant ex-urbs. Finally, the city of Detroit itself is far less likely to be known among whites than among blacks. Given that whites are

more likely to live in the ex-urbs and blacks are more likely to live in the city itself, this pattern is not altogether surprising. However, the finding especially that a suburb such as Southfield, which is racially integrated and economically prosperous, is a place that fewer whites know about, demonstrates a barrier to integration. If whites are not familiar with a community, the possibility of searching there is reduced.

The policy implications of these findings are compelling. At a most basic level, racial integration requires that individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds move to similar places. But if there are substantial racial blind spots about the kinds of communities to which one might move, then such moves are less likely. An important component of Fair Housing legislation is the furthering of affirmative residential moves. That is, getting people of all races/ethnicities to consider—and ultimately make moves—that further the goal of racial integration in housing. Our results suggest that this kind of affirmative marketing—educating residents about the variety of housing options available—is a critical first step in this process. Furthermore, affirmative marketing policies are less intrusive than other forms of racial integration policies which have recently come under constitutional review and political attack. Overcoming these racial blind spots may help contribute to more racially integrative moves by people of all races and ethnicities.

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