RACIAL INEQUALITIES IN LOW-INCOME CENTRAL CITY AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES: THE CASE OF POLICE SERVICES

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Many scholars condemn the presence of multiple units of local government in U.S. metropolitan areas. Fragmentation of political units is presumed to be an institutional arrangement favoring the wealthy by creating inequalities in the distribution of resources and essential services (Hill, 1974; Newton, 1975; Fainstein and Fainstein, 1979; Cox and Nartowitz, 1980; Long, 1967). The condemnation of metropolitan fragmentation is explicitly or implicitly based on an acceptance of propositions underlying a social stratification approach to complex urban structures. A key proposition in this view is that suburbs are predominantly inhabited by the rich (Neiman, 1982). Suburbs are viewed as enclaves that enable the rich to escape their responsibility of paying for essential services needed by lower income families.

Those who condemn metropolitan fragmentation for creating and allowing gross inequalities in essential urban services tend also to recommend the elimination of fragmentation through some form of metropolitan consolidation. By creating a single, large central city, proponents presume resources and services will be more equally distributed (Katzman, 1978; Campbell and Sacks, 1967). All too many scholars and observers of the U.S. urban landscape have presumed that allowing fragmentation to occur within metropolitan areas by establishing small, separately incorporated communities is only a benefit for wealthy, white families. They have not recognized the complex set of relationships that exist in the articulation of preferences, and in provision, production, and coproduction of urban public services that may lead to counter-intuitive results.
In a recent paper (E. Ostrom, 1983a), I reviewed the evidence related to propositions underlying the social stratification explanations of the effects of metropolitan organization. Empirical studies provide evidence that the stratification of the suburbs is less than expected by proponents of the social stratification view. Schneider and Logan (1981), for example, examine the segregation of income groups among suburbs in 31 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) for 1970. Of the 1,139 suburban cities in their sample, only one-fifth (201 cities) were judged to have an over-concentration of rich families. Thus, the remaining four-fifths of the suburban cities either had a "normal" mixture of all income classes (746 cities) or an over-concentration of poor families (192 cities). Similar patterns were found by Pack and Pack (1977) and Williams and Eklund (1978). Opposition to proposals for metropolitan consolidation has been widespread throughout suburban jurisdictions. Not only have residents living in wealthy suburbs opposed the elimination of their own municipality, but middle- and lower-income, suburban voters have also opposed consolidation. Living in an independent, smaller city appears to be of benefit for lower- and middle-income families as well as for wealthy families.

A further presumption made by those who see metropolitan fragmentation as a major generator of inequality is that services within large, center cities will be more equally allocated to black residents as compared to white residents than services will be allocated in suburban jurisdictions (Danielson, 1976). To my knowledge, no prior systematic research has examined the relative equalities of the distribution patterns to black families and white families in center cities as contrasted to suburban jurisdictions. Without examining the relative equalities in the allocation of services to blacks and whites in central cities as compared to the suburbs, scholars cannot make informed policy recommendations concerning appropriate institutional arrangements to improve levels and equalities of service delivery available to black families living in major urban areas.

In this paper, I wish to pursue the specific question of whether one type of urban service -- policing -- is allocated in a relatively more equal manner, as between low-income, black and white families, within central cities as compared to suburban jurisdictions. To do this several methodological questions must first be addressed:
1. What criteria will be used to evaluate the equality of different allocations of services?
2. What indicators of service delivery will be used?; and
3. What type of research design will be used to address this question?