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INTERCLASS SEGREGATION, POVERTY, AND POVERTY CONCENTRATION: COMMENT ON MASSEY AND EGGERS[1]

In a recent article (*AJS* 95 [March 1990]: 1153–88), Douglas Massey and Mitchell Eggers provide a test of William Julius Wilson's (1987) thesis that the rising concentration of minority poverty in inner cities results largely from nonpoor minority families moving away from poor minority families. They reason that if Wilson's thesis is correct then there should be observable increases in minority interclass segregation over time and these increases in interclass segregation should explain increases in minority poverty concentration.

In this article, Massey and Eggers base their analysis on 1970 and 1980 data for 60 metropolitan areas. They measure interclass segregation with the index of dissimilarity (D_{xy}), and they measure poverty concentration with an index of intraclass contact ($_xP_x^*$) computed for the poor (class isolation); D_{xy} measures the degree of spatial separation of social groups. It is a symmetrical index that gives the proportion of X and Y members

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that would have to exchange residential locations to achieve an even distribution. Among members of the same social group ${}_xP_x^*$ measures the likelihood of residential contact. It gives the probability that a member of group X will encounter another member of group X by virtue of sharing the same residential location. In this comment I focus on Massey and Eggers's analysis for blacks.

From examining the 1970–80 change in interclass segregation for blacks, Massey and Eggers conclude that increases in interclass segregation among blacks in the 1970s were not large enough to account for significant increases in black poverty concentration during the decade. This judgment is confirmed in a multivariate analysis in which, for the period 1970–80, change in the isolation of poor blacks is regressed on change in interclass segregation among blacks, change in black residential segregation from whites, and change in the black poverty rate. In this regression, change in interclass segregation does not have a statistically significant effect on change in class isolation. Massey and Eggers interpret these results as evidence that Wilson's thesis is incorrect. Further, these results are important for an additional *AJS* article (Massey 1990) and a book (Massey and Denton 1993) in which it is argued that racial residential segregation, not the selective out-migration of nonpoor blacks, is responsible for making the underclass

Wilson (1991) has criticized the results of this study on two grounds. First, he argues that using an index of class isolation provides for a description of the overall level of concentrated poverty in a metropolitan area, but neither identifies specific neighborhoods that are ghettos nor measures increases in the concentration of poor blacks living in such neighborhoods. Second, he argues that change in the interclass segregation index is a poor measure of the extent to which the minority nonpoor have moved away from the minority poor, because it does not detect much of this movement. As many of the nonpoor move away from the poor, they end up in new neighborhoods with smaller but substantial poor populations. This movement does not necessarily contribute to an increase in interclass segregation, because, as the poor in the old neighborhoods have become more segregated from the nonpoor, those in the new neighborhoods have become less segregated.

In this comment I argue that there are two additional reasons why change in the interclass segregation index does not detect the movement of nonpoor blacks away from poor blacks. The first concerns the way Massey and Eggers calculate the interclass segregation index. They divide the black population into four classes: the poor (P), the lower middle class (LM), the upper middle class (UM), and the affluent (A). They compute interclass segregation by averaging the six segregation indexes calculated for the six combinations of these classes taken two at a time

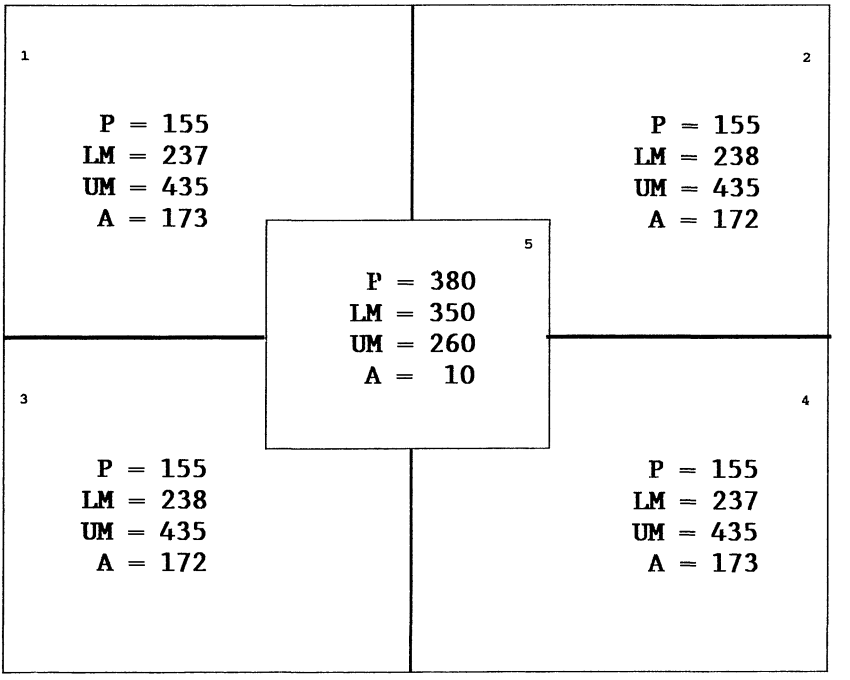

FIG. 1.—Simulation for average interclass segregation index, baseline condition: $D_{P,LM} = .11$, $D_{P,UM} = .25$, $D_{P,A} = .37$, $D_{LM,UM} = .14$, $D_{LM,A} = .26$, $D_{UM,A} = .12$, average $D = .21$, ${}_{P}P_{P}^{*} = .24$.

($D_{P,LM}$, $D_{P,UM}$, $D_{P,A}$, $D_{LM,UM}$, $D_{LM,A}$, and $D_{UM,A}$). If lower-middle-class, upper-middle-class, and affluent blacks move away from poor blacks, as Wilson argues they have, then the three segregation indexes involving poor blacks and other blacks ($D_{P,LM}$, $D_{P,UM}$, and $D_{P,A}$) will increase, increasing the average segregation index. Simultaneously, the three segregation indexes not involving poor blacks ($D_{LM,UM}$, $D_{LM,A}$, and $D_{UM,A}$) are likely to decrease, decreasing the average segregation index. To the extent these countervailing effects cancel each other out, it is possible for poor blacks to become more segregated from nonpoor blacks, as the latter move away from the former, while there is no change in average interclass segregation.

This situation is illustrated in the simulation presented in figures 1 and 2. Consider the city in figure 1 with five neighborhoods and 5,000 people. Of these, 1,000 are poor, 1,300 are lower middle class, 2,000 are upper middle class, and 700 are affluent. This distribution approximates the distribution Massey and Eggers report for blacks in the Chicago standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA) for 1970. These people are distrib-

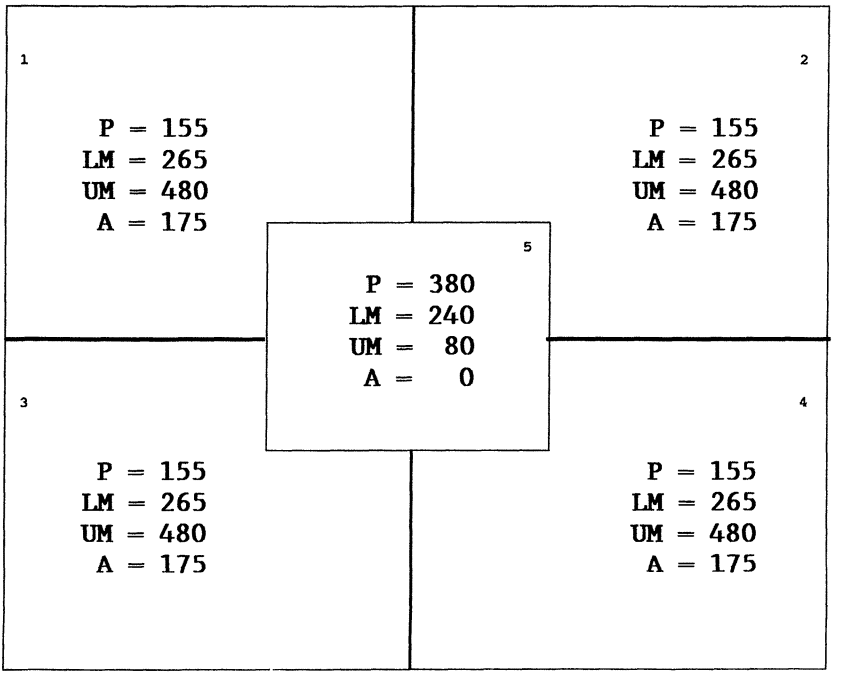

FIG. 2.—Simulation for average interclass segregation index, effect of out-migration of nonpoor: $D_{P,LM} = .20$, $D_{P,UM} = .34$, $D_{P,A} = .38$, $D_{LM,UM} = .14$, $D_{LM,A} = .18$, $D_{UM,A} = .04$, average $D = .21$, ${}_{P}P_{P}^{*} = .30$.

uted into the five neighborhoods such that there is one neighborhood approximating a ghetto with a poverty rate of 38% surrounded by four mixed-income neighborhoods with poverty rates of 16%. The index of class isolation of the poor is .24. The six interclass segregation indexes for the city are as shown and the average is .21. In figure 2, 110 lower-middle-class blacks, 180 upper-middle-class blacks, and 10 affluent blacks (300 total) have moved from neighborhood 5 evenly into neighborhoods 1–4. Neighborhood 5 now has a poverty rate of 54%, and the other neighborhoods now have poverty rates of 14%. The index of class isolation of the poor is now .30. The six new interclass segregation indexes are as shown. Poor blacks became more segregated from nonpoor blacks, but the levels of segregation among the nonpoor blacks decreased, canceling out the increased segregation of poor blacks. The average interclass segregation index for the city remains .21. Thus, in spite of the substantial selective out-migration from neighborhood 5 that significantly increased the isolation of the poor, the average interclass segregation index did not change at all.

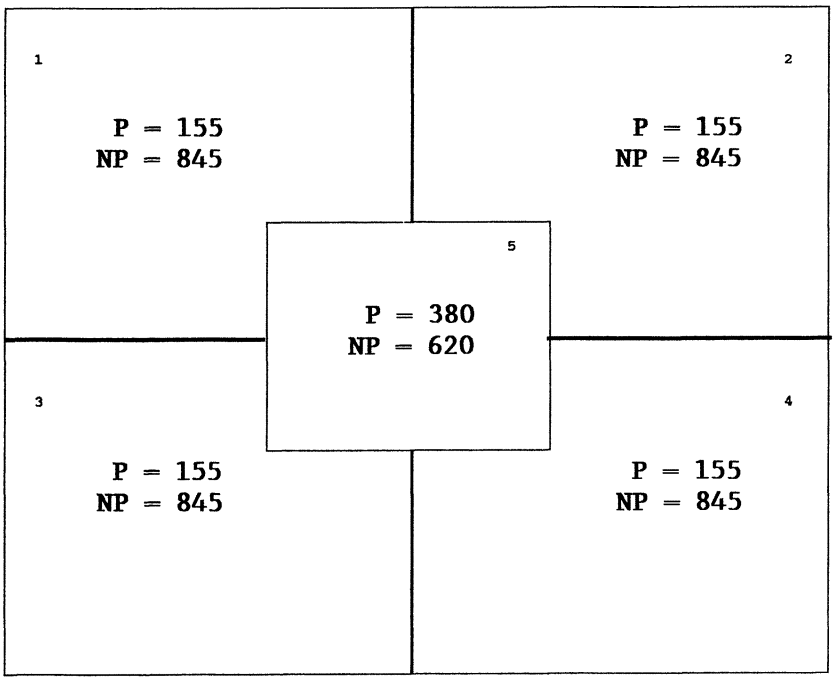

FIG. 3.—Simulation of out-migration of nonpoor and increasing poverty rate, baseline condition: $D_{P,NP} = .23$, ${}_{P}P^{*}_{NP} = .24$.

The second reason why change in the interclass segregation index does not detect the movement of nonpoor blacks away from poor blacks involves the increasing poverty rates in the metropolitan areas in Massey and Eggers' study between 1970 and 1980. Increasing poverty in these metropolitan areas simultaneously served to decrease black interclass segregation and increase the isolation of poor blacks. Decreases in interclass segregation caused by increasing poverty offset increases in interclass segregation that might result from the nonpoor moving away from the poor. Thus, increasing poverty can make it appear as if the nonpoor have not moved away from the poor, even when they have, while also contributing to the increasing isolation of the poor.

This situation is illustrated in the simulation presented in figures 3–6. Consider the city in figure 3. This figure is the same as figure 1 except lower-middle-class, upper-middle-class, and affluent blacks are included in one class, the nonpoor, for ease of presentation. There are 1,000 poor people (P) and 4,000 nonpoor people (NP) in this city for an overall poverty rate of 20%. The index of interclass segregation ($D_{P,NP}$) is .23,

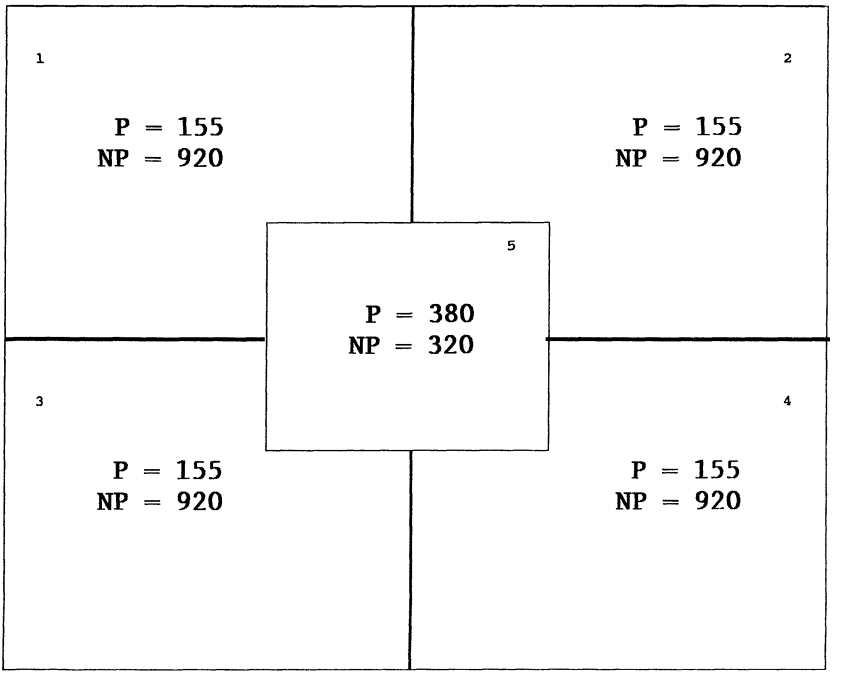

FIG. 4.—Simulation of out-migration of nonpoor and increasing poverty rate, effect of out-migration of nonpoor: $D_{P,NP} = .30$, ${}_{P}P^{*}_{NP} = .30$.

and the index of class isolation for the poor (${}_{P}P^{*}_{P}$) is .24. Now consider figure 4 after 300 of the nonpoor have moved from neighborhood 5 evenly into neighborhoods 1–4. The overall poverty rate is still 20% although the poverty rate has increased substantially in neighborhood 5 and decreased slightly in neighborhoods 1–4. The index of interclass segregation is .30, an increase of .07, and the index of class isolation for the poor is .30, an increase of .06. The increase in interclass segregation is a direct result of the movement of the nonpoor from neighborhood 5, and it corresponds almost exactly with the increase in the isolation of the poor. The comparison of figures 3 and 4 corresponds with Wilson's thesis.

Figure 5 is the result of taking the city shown in figure 3 and increasing the poverty rate by 10 percentage points in each neighborhood with no movement of the nonpoor away from neighborhood 5. Compared to figure 3, the economic composition in each neighborhood now more closely matches the economic composition of the city as a whole, and the poverty rate in each neighborhood in which poor people live is higher. Thus, the index of interclass segregation for the city in figure 5 is .17, a decrease of .06 from figure 3, and the index of class isolation for the poor is .33,

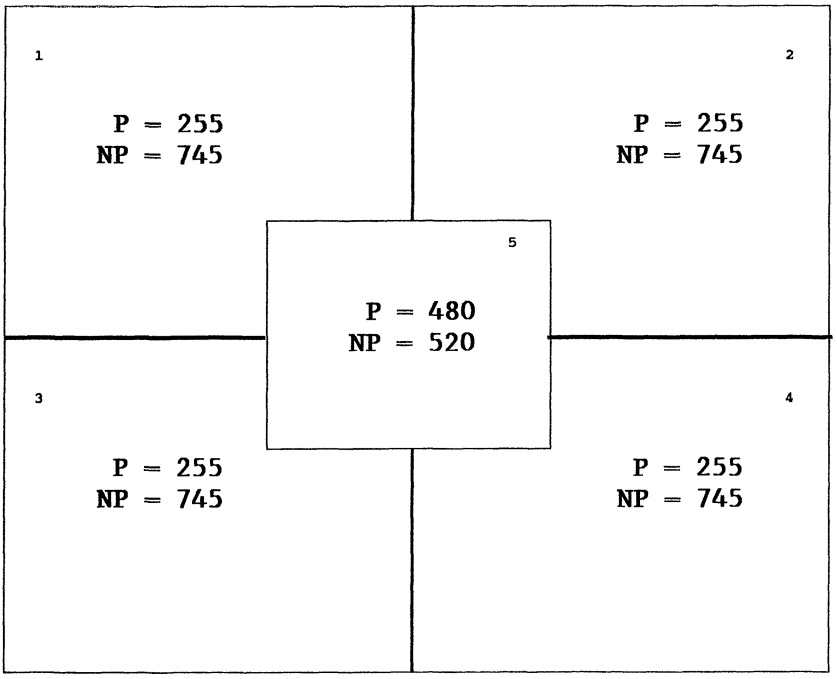

FIG. 5.—Simulation of out-migration of nonpoor and increasing poverty rate, effect of increasing poverty rate: $D_{P,NP} = .17$, ${}_{P}P^{*}_{NP} = .33$.

an increase of .09 from figure 3. Increasing poverty has both reduced interclass segregation and increased the isolation of the poor.

Figure 6 displays the combined effects of increasing poverty and movement of the nonpoor away from the poor. The distribution of the poor and the nonpoor into neighborhoods in this panel is the result of first increasing the poverty rate in every neighborhood of the city in figure 3 by 10 percentage points and then having 300 of the nonpoor move from neighborhood 5. The interclass segregation index is .26, an increase of only .03 compared to figure 3, and the index of class isolation for the poor is .38, an increase of .14 compared to figure 3. Because the positive effect of the movement of the nonpoor from neighborhood 5 on interclass segregation has been offset by the negative effect of increasing poverty, there has been little increase in interclass segregation. At the same time, both increasing poverty and the movement of the nonpoor from neighborhood 5 have contributed to the increase in the index of class isolation for the poor.

Consequently, for the two reasons I have specified, finding that there is little change in interclass segregation while there are increases in class isolation does not mean that nonpoor blacks have not moved away from

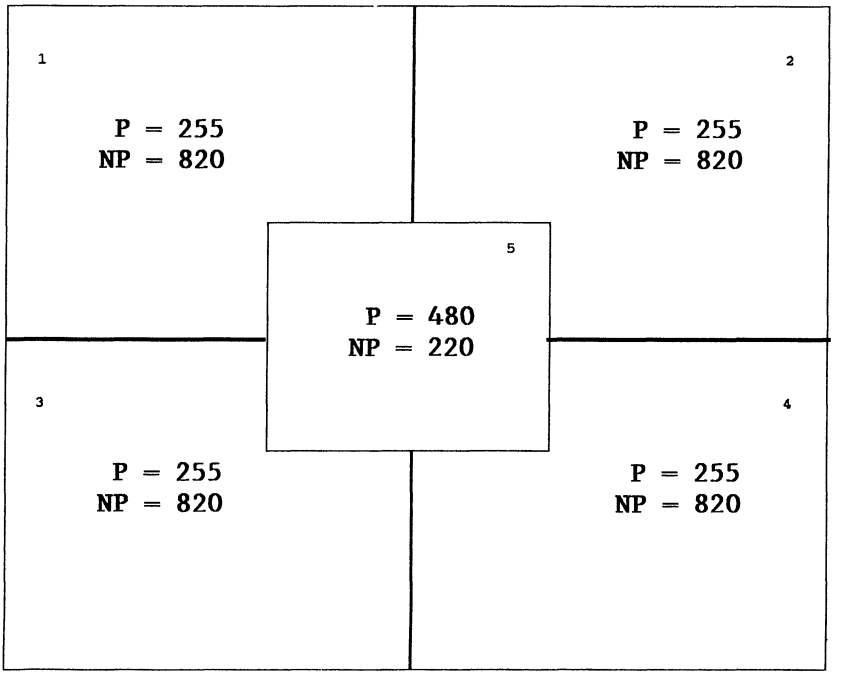

FIG. 6.—Simulation of out-migration of nonpoor and increasing poverty rate, combined effect of out-migration of nonpoor and increasing poverty rate: $D_{P,NP} = .26$, ${}_{P}P^{*}_{NP} = .38$.

poor blacks nor that this movement was inconsequential for the increasing isolation of poor blacks. On the contrary, it is almost certain that changes in measures of overall interclass segregation calculated for metropolitan areas obscure population dynamics at the neighborhood level. To understand the role of selective out-migration of nonpoor blacks in creating the underclass requires an examination of population gains and losses at the neighborhood level and the subsequent changes in neighborhood social class composition.

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BEYOND THE TECHNICAL DETAILS: REPLY TO ST. JOHN

In our article, we computed measures of black interclass segregation to examine Wilson's hypothesis that the geographic concentration of black poverty stemmed from the out-migration of nonpoor blacks from poor ghetto neighborhoods (Massey and Eggers 1990). We demonstrated that increases in income segregation among blacks were small during the 1970s and were unrelated to trends in the concentration of black poverty. For two reasons, St. John argues that this approach might not detect the movement of nonpoor blacks away from poor black neighborhoods.

First, he shows that under certain circumstances nonpoor out-migration can produce increases in some measures of interclass segregation and decreases in others, so that when average indexes are computed the changes offset one another to yield little change in the summary measure of class segregation that we used. We agree that this outcome is possible, depending on where nonpoor out-migrants from poor black neighborhoods are assumed to settle. This argument, however, does not explain why we find the same results using the affluent–poor segregation index, where there are no offsetting effects.

Second, St. John shows that under certain circumstances an increase in poverty among blacks can offset the effect of nonpoor blacks moving out, again leading to little change in our summary measure of interclass segregation. We also agree this scenario is possible, although it requires poverty rates to increase in neighborhoods where nonpoor blacks have relocated. This assumption is probably not realistic, since nonpoor movers tend to move toward higher status neighborhoods, which are less likely to bear the brunt of any increase in poverty.

In general, we concur with St. John's main point that the results we reported in "The Ecology of Inequality" cannot definitively reject Wilson's black middle-class migration hypothesis. Our findings simply add to a growing list of circumstantial evidence that is inconsistent with this view.