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Josie Ahrens  
*Macalester College*

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## Racial Segregation in Oakland, CA Metro Area

As the home of the Black Panther Movement in the 1970's and a prominent current-day Occupy Oakland Movement, Oakland, California is a city where its residents do not shy away from challenging inequities along racial or class lines. Indeed, for much of the city's history, this political expression played out in a city that was physically separated quite starkly by race and class. For most of the twentieth century, Oakland had been split geographically into the "flatlands" and the "hills." These two parts of the city were distinguished by class differences with wealthier residents living in the hills and poorer residents in the flatlands. In addition, most residents of the hills were white and most residents of the flatlands were non-white. The end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century though have seen a shift in these race and class lines. Oakland is now one of the most racially diverse cities in the United States with large Hispanic, Black, White, and Asian populations. The segregation patterns in this study show that the racial trend along the flatlands and the hills are somewhat still present, but are complicated by forces of immigration and gentrification that are changing the racial pattern of the city.

Overall, the Oakland MSA had fairly low indexes of dissimilarity. This is probably due to two factors. The first factor is that the MSA is racially diverse with Whites making up roughly 55%, Asians and Hispanics at 25%, Blacks and Other at 12%, and American Indians and Native Hawaiians at less than 2%. The second factor is that these racial groups are fairly integrated physically throughout the MSA. Both of these combine to make the following dissimilarity indexes: White 37.5%, Black or African American 44.06%, American Indian or Native Alaskan

17.84%, Asian 36.29%, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 29.18%, Other 39.74%, and Hispanic or Latino (of any race) 38.38%. These numbers were calculated using census tract information from both Alameda County (in which the cities of Oakland, Fremont and Hayward are located) and Contra Costa County (which is much more suburban and overall less racially diverse). It is important to keep this calculation scale in mind when examining the results because the racial percentages and dissimilarity indexes would probably be different if the calculations had just been of Oakland proper. This paper begins with an analysis of each dissimilarity index for each racial category and Hispanic/Latino, and will end explaining some of the limitations of the index of dissimilarity.

Blacks or African Americans have the highest index of dissimilarity in the Oakland MSA probably due to various historical and social factors. When blacks moved out of the South during the Great Migration in the mid-twentieth century, many moved to northern and western cities searching for greater opportunities in jobs and housing. In Oakland, and the Bay area in general, many blacks found employment in the shipyards and ports, and thus congregated residentially most closely to the coast. They also found employment at naval bases during WWII. This trend is reflected in the attached map of the Black or African American population appearing most densely along the coast. Although Jim Crow did not plague Oakland as blatantly as it did southern cities, the discrimination blacks faced was more subtle, but still harsh. This discrimination kept many blacks from gaining equal access to jobs and housing in the city. Blacks and other minorities lived in the flatlands while whites (who were usually more affluent) live up in the hills. Despite this racial segregation, Oakland's vibrant black community defined a black identity for not only Northern California, but also for the nation as a whole. According to the US Census, blacks made up 47% of the Oakland proper population in 1980, but now only

constitute 27.3% of the population.<sup>1</sup> Now the city is seeing its black population declining, which could be due to job flight from the city and population flight to the suburbs. Black ministers and politicians feel that “a lower cost of living, the lure of jobs, frustration with schools and the search for safer communities all played key roles” in pushing black residents out of Oakland.<sup>2</sup>

The White dissimilarity index was surprisingly quite low at 37.54% in comparison with other major metro areas in the United States where whites tend to live most closely to other whites. The pattern of white segregation in Oakland though does follow similar trends in other cities in that the white population in the center city has declined dramatically over the twentieth century. According to the US Census, whites made up 95.3% of the population of Oakland proper in 1940, but today only make up 25.9% of the population. Like in many other cities, this is the result of suburbanization, deindustrialization, and the urban crisis, which pushed whites out of the city center (see attached White population map). Within Oakland proper, while whites still occupy the land most densely in the “hills,” they are also increasingly populating the “flatlands” as well. This trend is probably due mostly to recent gentrification in the past ten years in Oakland that is drawing younger, and mostly white and affluent, populations to the historically minority portions of the city on flatter ground.<sup>3</sup> In addition, whites cluster more around the independent and wealthy city of Piedmont that is encompassed by Oakland.

The Hispanic population (of any race) in Oakland proper makes up 25.4% of the city’s population and has a dissimilarity index for the whole MSA of 38.38%. As of this year, California State has more Latinos than non-Hispanic whites and many of these Latinos are living

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<sup>1</sup> Kuruvila, Matthai. “25% drop in African American Population in Oakland.” *SF Gate*. March 11, 2011. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/25-drop-in-African-American-population-in-Oakland-2471925.php>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Medina, Sarah. “Oakland’s Declining Diversity Makes National Headlines.” *The Bold Italic*. April 18, 2013. <http://www.thebolditalic.com/articles/3157-oaklands-declining-diversity-makes-national-headlines>

in urban centers.<sup>4</sup> The segregation Latinos face in Oakland plays out spatially with most Latinos living in the flatlands closer to the coast. The Latino community is especially concentrated southeast of Lake Merritt and the Fruitvale neighborhood, which is infamous for high rates of violent crime. While many Latino families in Oakland have lived in the city for generations, there are also many Latinos who just immigrated to the United States pulled by the promise of economic opportunities and pushed by disastrous effects of NAFTA on Mexican farmers and Latin American violent drug wars. The discrimination Latinos face not only limits them in terms of where they live in the city, but also the quality of education, jobs and decent housing they have access to.

Asians also make up a decent percentage of Oakland's population at 16.7% and have a 36.29% index of dissimilarity for the whole MSA. Historically, the Bay Area has been a central entry point for Asian immigrants coming to the United States. Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay was the Ellis Island of the West and welcomed especially large numbers of immigrants from China, Japan, and the Philippines. Many Asians in Oakland have settled in the southeastern section of the city like the Latino population, and are particularly concentrated in Chinatown (which is 92% Asian). In the MSA at large, Asians are concentrated in the city of Fremont. This is due to the large concentration of Afghans immigrants in Fremont, as well as Asian Indians employed in Silicon Valley's technology sector, which can be seen on the attached map.<sup>5</sup>

The remaining racial groups of Other, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Native Alaskan make up sizably less proportions of the overall MSA population. Other makes up the largest proportion of this group at 12.45% with an index of

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<sup>4</sup> Yu-Hsi Lee, Esther. "As of today, California No Longer Has a White Majority." *Think Progress*. July 1, 2013. <http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2013/07/01/2238421/california-latinos-equal-white-population/>

<sup>5</sup> "Fremont, California." Wikipedia. Accessed Nov 4, 2013 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fremont,\\_California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fremont,_California)

dissimilarity of 39.74%. This could be because the Bay Area is so racially diverse that people who are bi- or multi-racial checked “Other” rather than of multiple racial boxes. Native Hawaiians make up a very small percentage of the MSA at 1.27% and have an index of dissimilarity of 29.18%. American Indians also constitute a very small percentage of the population (1.70%) and are fairly well integrated with a dissimilarity index of 17.84%. Both Native Hawaiian and American Indian indexes are so low though because their overall populations are quite small and thus must be integrated well into the MSA. These numbers can be especially misleading because being well integrated does not mean that Native populations are necessarily free from facing discrimination and lack of access to quality jobs, housing and education.

This critique sheds light on some of the limitations of the dissimilarity index for examining segregation patterns and their implications. Firstly, the index can skew numbers when dealing with smaller populations, as seen with American Indians or Native Hawaiians in the Oakland MSA. Secondly, the index is unhelpful with understanding the spatial pattern of segregation without accompanying maps. Thirdly, the index relies on the notion that certain racial groups would have to move to achieve integration (and implied equity). Overall, the index is limited in how it can explain segregation and its impacts because just the index numbers are quite unhelpful without accompanying qualitative data. For example, segregation and inequality do not necessarily correlate, nor do integration and equality. Very well off neighborhoods could be spatially isolated from other areas. And similarly, a neighborhood that isn't labeled as hyper-segregated can still face high levels of discrimination and disinvestment. While helpful in presenting an overview of the intensity of segregation in an area, the index of dissimilarity is quite limited in explaining the experience of that segregation.