

The Development of Ethnic Diversity of American Suburbs and Its Effects Since 1970s

Qinghong Ma

College of Humanities

College of Foreign Languages and Cultures

Xiamen University

Xiamen, China 361005

Abstract—As the world's first suburbanized country, American suburbs have distinctive class and racial characteristics of the white middle class. Since the 1970s, however, America's suburbs have housed an influx of minorities who are changing the class identity and homogeneity of the white middle class in suburban America. The suburban class and ethnic diversity results from the increase of minority population and socioeconomic status, the suburbanization of industry, commerce and real estate, and the improvement of transportation technology. The suburban migration of ethnic minorities started in 1970s and entered the stage of rapid development in 1990s. The paths differ in ethnic minorities, and with the obvious regional differences. The ethnic diversity in suburbs alleviates the situation of racial segregation and increases the opportunities for ethnic minorities to participate in politics and affects the political pattern of the United States.

Keywords—American suburbs; ethnic diversity; ethnic minorities; suburbanization

I. INTRODUCTION

As a section of urban space, American suburbs not only perfectly combine urban convenience with rural natural environment, but also symbolize economic and social status, deeply stamped with the distinctive characteristics of class and race. Traditionally, American suburbs are characterized by white middle-class and racial homogeneity. [1] [2] [3] [4] However, since the 1970s, with the improvement of the socioeconomic status of ethnic minorities and the suburbanization of industry, commerce and real estate, the American suburbs have welcomed a large number of ethnic minority residents. In 1970, ethnic minorities made up just 5.2% of the suburban population; in 2010, they made up 31.3%. [5] [6] It can be seen that from 1970 to 2010, the minorities in suburbs increased rapidly, which changed the situation that the white middle class monopolized the suburbs, and the class and racial diversity in the suburbs of the United States increased continuously. Logan and Alba verify the spatial assimilation theory and the stratification theory, and believe that the former can fully explain the suburbanization of Asians and Hispanics, while the later can explain the suburbanization of blacks. [7] Zhou Min analyzed the formation and influence of Chinese and Korean suburban communities. [8] Frey explains that white flight

from the suburbs is driven by the growth of suburban minorities, while the pull of exurbs is driven by superior living conditions and racial and class homogenization. [9] Wang Xu and Yu Yue analyzed the reasons for the suburbanization of black people, including the improvement of social and economic status, the concentration of black people in suburban areas, and the slight decrease of the segregation index from white people. [10] Sun Qunlang believes that black suburbanization has the characteristics of low density and high isolation. [11] The research plans to reveal the characteristics and effects of ethnic structure by analyzing the causes and processes of ethnic structure changes in suburbs. This is bound to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the ethnic structure changes in American suburbs and its economic, social and political effects.

II. THE MOTIVATIONS OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SUBURBS

The migration of ethnic minorities to the suburbs began in the 1970s and continued on a larger scale. By 2010, more than half of the minority population lived in suburban areas. The motivations are complex.

First of all, the increase of minority population and the diversification of immigrants in the United States have become the prerequisite for the migration of ethnic minorities. This stems from the abolition of national quotas and the principle of family reunification and the introduction of skilled workers in the Immigration Act of 1965. Immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries rose sharply, while the proportion of European immigrants gradually declined which means that the ethnic composition of immigrants becomes mainly dominated by ethnic minorities. Coupled with the high fertility rate of immigrants, the population growth of ethnic minorities is an inevitable conclusion. In 2000, the minority population was 86 million, accounting for 30.9% of the total U.S. population. In 2010, it increased to 111 million, accounting for 36.3 percent. [12]

Secondly, the social and economic status of ethnic minorities has been promoted, which has become the fundamental condition for the migration of ethnic minorities. After World War II (WWII), in the struggle against racial discrimination and segregation, especially through the Civil

Rights Movement, ethnic minorities gained broader social and political rights (the right to vote, to education and work). In the case of blacks, access to higher education rose significantly after WWII, and in 1989, 15 percent of 25-to 29-year-old blacks graduated from college. [13] This was unbelievable before.

The improvement of social status directly promotes the economic status of ethnic minorities. The middle class has grown as ethnic minorities have greater access to higher education. Massey and Mullen argue that rising incomes, higher education and increased homeownership are key factors affecting the growth of suburbanites. [14] After WWII, the United States became one of the richest countries in the world, and the wealth of minority families increased accordingly. As a result, some ethnic minorities living in central cities have the ability to move to the suburbs to enjoy single-family housing, lawn, good and safe community environment, high-quality educational resources, etc., and integrate into the mainstream society of the United States spatially. Settling in the suburbs, in turn, cemented minority middle-class status.

Thirdly, the rapid development of American suburbs after the WWII has been driven by the post-war economic reconstruction, technological progress and the expansion of metropolitan areas. As the suburbs are characterized by low land price, vast space, convenient transportation, beautiful natural environment and increasingly perfect infrastructure, enterprises and companies were attracted to buy land and build factories in the suburbs. In the early 1950s, about half of the new factories, enterprises and commercial companies were built outside the city, which increased the employment opportunities in the suburbs. Minorities followed the job opportunities to the suburbs to work, live and buy homes in the suburbs. Between 1965 and 1971, Chicago alone saw more than 1, 000 companies relocate from downtown to the suburbs, creating 50, 000 jobs. [15] In 1980, half of America's employment was in the suburbs. [16]

After the war, the "explosive" development of the suburbs promoted the formation and development of the metropolitan areas, which were the main carriers of the American population. According to Census, the population growth in the United States mainly happens in the metropolitan areas, while the population growth in the metropolitan areas does mainly in the suburbs. In 1940, the population of the metropolitan area accounted for 52.6 percent of the national population, [17] and in 1980 it was 74.8 percent. In 1990, it rose to 79.7%. [18] [19]

Fourthly, the rapid development of suburban real estate industry has attracted a large number of ethnic minorities to move in.

Due to the shortage of housing after WWII, the federal government launched a number of policies for the development of real estate, such as the encouragement policy of housing mortgage loan, the residential mortgage insurance system and the tax reduction policy for loan interest tax and private residential property tax. The pace of suburbanization was accelerated by a large increase in the supply of suburban housing, which made it possible for ethnic minorities to

move to the suburbs, either directly into new homes in the suburbs or by taking over white residents.

In a word, the migration of ethnic minorities to the suburbs is mainly motivated by the population growth of ethnic minorities and the rise of their socioeconomic status. After WWII, the explosive development of suburbs provided them with sufficient material space.

III. STAGES OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SUBURBS

The minority living in the suburbs has always existed, but only a small number of wealthy minority families or upper middle class live in the suburbs sporadically. The increase of ethnic diversity initiated in 1970s and then stepped into the rapid development stage in 1990s.

A. Initial Stage (1970-1990)

Ethnic structure changes started in the 1970s, mainly due to the rising socioeconomic status, the growth of the middle class and the socioeconomic foundation for the migration to the suburbs. Central cities, by contrast, were almost synonymous with social problems: overcrowding, housing shortage, chaos, race riots. Affluent minorities have moved from inner-city ethnic enclaves to new homes in the suburbs or houses taking over from whites. In 1980, the suburban minority population reached 13.1 percent, and in 1990 it grew to 17.6 percent. [9]

In 1970, there were 5.79 million black suburbanites, or 5.8% of the population. In 1980, black suburbanites made up 21.2 percent of the population. [9] In the 1980s, a wave of Hispanic and Asian immigrants strongly promoted the suburbanization of ethnic minorities because they were more likely than blacks to live in the suburbs.

B. Rapid Development Stage (1990-2010)

The suburbanization of the ethnic minorities has accelerated and ethnic diversity has increased significantly. According to the 1990 U.S. census, 265 metropolitan areas saw large increases in minority suburbs, especially in the western and southern states. Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and many metropolitan areas in the south and north are experiencing rapid black suburbanization.

In 2000, nearly half (47%) of the minority population lived in the suburbs of metropolitan areas, and most of the growth occurred in melting pot metropolitan areas. In 2000 the largest increase was among suburban Asians, at 84%, Hispanics 72% and African-Americans 38%. [22] In 2010, the racial structure of the U.S. population changed dramatically, with the number of "majority-minority" metropolitan areas increasing from 43 in 2000 to 58. More than half of the minority population lives in the suburbs of metropolitan areas. Hispanics are the largest minority group, with 49 percent living in suburban areas and 25 percent of the suburban population, mainly in California, Texas and Florida. Nearly half (49%) of the suburban population growth was attributed to Hispanics, compared with just 9% for whites. [21]

Thus, the ethnic minorities are dramatically changing the appearance of the suburban areas of the metropolitan areas, and the racial diversity of the suburban population in the United States is overwhelming and growing.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SUBURBS

A. *Mainly Happening in the Inner-ring Suburbs*

As usual, when minority immigrants arrive in the United States, they mostly settle down in the ethnic communities in central cities, and then move to the suburbs to live an ideal life after the economic situation improves and they are familiar with American life. Because of economic power and neighborhood ties, ethnic minorities typically settle in second homes in suburban neighborhoods abandoned by the wealthy white middle class.

In the 1970s, a considerable number of ethnic minorities had been flowing to the suburbs with predominantly white population, and broke the situation of exclusive white suburbs, which has led to a mass exodus of whites from the inner-ring suburbs to more homogeneous exurbs farther from the city. Whites generally live in neighborhoods where 80% of the population is white or only 7% is black; Blacks live mainly in neighborhoods where whites make up only 33 percent or more than 51 percent of the population. [22]

B. *Obvious Differences in the Regional Distribution of Ethnic Minorities in Suburban Areas*

Regional differences in metropolitan development determine the geographic distribution of minority suburban populations in suburbs, which is related to the economic status and geographical location of cities and suburbs. For example, the suburbanization of metropolitan areas varies greatly in Northeast, North-central America, South and West of the United States. [7] Since the living style in the early development of the Northeast and the Midwest metropolitan has long been formed, and there are strict restrictions on the use of land rights of the law and history, the supply of housing in the suburbs is not large, finally resulting in the low rate of housing replacement and the slow growth in the suburban minority population. In the 1970s and 1980s, by contrast, new metro areas in the South and West, such as Phoenix, Denver and Las Vegas, had larger and faster housing supply in the suburbs, thus the minority population suburbs increased remarkably. In the 1990s, the suburban minority population in the Western and Southern metropolitan areas continues to grow, forming the second echelon of suburban minority growth. In the case of blacks, the Southern suburbs gained the highest proportion of blacks, at 11.8 percent in 1980, 13.3 percent in 1990 and 13.6 percent in 1994, while in the North and West, the gains was much lower than that in the South, at 4.3 per cent in 1980, 4.2 per cent in 1990 and 4.6 per cent in 1994. [10] A higher proportion of Asians live in suburbs of the Northeast and the West. [22]

C. *Different Ethnic Minorities Have Different Settlement Patterns*

According to the theory of spatial assimilation, the migration of residence is caused by the change of immigrants' acculturation and social mobility. [21] In the spatial structure of American metropolitan areas, the socioeconomic status of suburbs is higher than that of central cities. Therefore, it is generally believed that "living in the suburbs is a key step in the assimilation process of immigrants." [14] The migration of ethnic minorities to the suburbs is seen as one of the major manifestations of integration into American society. In fact, the degree of suburbanization of Hispanics and Asians in metropolitan areas was consistent with their income level, and the degree of racial segregation in the suburbs was relatively low, which is verified by Richard Alba and John Logan. [7]

The path of black suburbanization differs from that of Hispanics and Asians. The study found that fewer blacks with higher socioeconomic status moved into suburban communities with a low proportion of blacks to achieve spatial assimilation and ethnic integration. However, most of the blacks moved into the suburban communities with a high proportion of blacks, which not only made it difficult to achieve ethnic integration, but even led to "segregation", which again resulted in a high degree of segregation and the flooding of social problems in the black communities. Therefore, the phenomenon of black suburbanization is better explained by stratification theory, which derives from the unequal conditions in the real estate market for ethnic minorities, such as the guidance of real estate developers, the unequal terms of residential loans, residential zoning system and the hostility of white neighbors, all of which hinder the rights of ethnic minorities to freely choose where to live. The result is that members of certain ethnic groups do not enjoy good living conditions as a result of their rising economic status and cultural assimilation. [11]

V. THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SUBURBS

A. *Little Improvement in Racial Segregation in the Suburbs*

Theoretically, ethnic minorities living in suburbs is an important indicator of integration into mainstream American society, that is, only moving into and mixing with whites can help improve racial segregation. Statistics show that the segregation index dropped significantly from 60.7 to 43.4 in the suburbs making up less than 3% blacks between 1990 and 2000. In the suburbs, where blacks make up more than 10% of the population, the segregation index fell slightly by 0.8 between 1990 and 2000, little changed. [32]

Though racial segregation in the suburbs has improved certainly, it remains difficult for ethnic minorities to completely eliminate the segregation with white people and shorten the distance between them. Instead, the separation between the original "central city and the suburbs" has evolved into the separation between the "inner and outer suburbs". The reason is that when ethnic minorities accepted suburban properties abandoned by whites or move to

predominantly white suburbs, they encourage whites to move to exurbs that are farther from the city, have better natural conditions, and are more homogeneous in class and race. The study showed that when the non-white population in racially integrated communities reached the level of 20-30% or above, these communities experienced re-segregation. [33]

B. Race Relations in the Suburbs Turning out Complicated

Race relations are complicated by the growth of minority populations in the suburbs and the increase in ethnic diversity. In theory, competition and conflict between ethnic groups are inevitable. The root cause of conflict is the unequal distribution of interests and the competition for interests. The uneven socioeconomic development, the differences in regional distribution and the fierce economic and political competition will lead to all kinds of contradictions and animosities among different ethnic groups, further complicating ethnic relations. As the Hispanic and Asian populations have grown, the relationship between America's minorities has become more nuanced. For example, the surge of Hispanic population not only changed the population composition of traditional immigrant states such as California and New York, but also extended to Southern states such as North Carolina and Georgia, breaking the peaceful life of black people in the South. As the traditional residence of black people in the South, the arrival of Hispanic is bound to contact and collide with that of African Americans. Especially in terms of competing for scarce resources and political rights, African Americans face strong challenges from Hispanic people and feel threatened, which affects the relationship between the two ethnic groups.

C. The Migration Social Problems to the Suburbs

Along with the process of ethnic structure, the suburban class and ethnic diversity become more and more significant, and the social problems, such as poverty and crime, also "migrate" to the suburbs. Although ethnic minorities have migrated to the suburbs, their average poverty rate has remained stubbornly high, according to the Census. Nearly half of the poor in metropolitan (13.3 million) live in suburban areas, while 13.8 million live in the central cities in metropolitan, according to the 2002 Census. [34]

The suburbs were once considered a safe place to live and a haven for family life. However, in recent years, the rising crime rate in the suburbs has changed people's good impression of the suburbs. The crime rate in predominantly black suburban communities is significantly higher than that in white and other minority residential areas, and it is on a rising trend. It is relatively common to carry out personal assault, robbery and other crimes involving property in suburban communities. [35] [36]

D. The Transformation of the Political Power and the Increase in the Opportunities in Politics

According to the Constitution of the United States, the seats in the House of Representatives are determined by the population of the States. Therefore, the change of the racial composition of the population and the imbalance of

geographical distribution in the United States are bound to affect the trend of politics. In general, traditional suburbs tend to support the Republicans, and central cities are the main bases for the Democrats. Moreover, ethnic minorities tend to support the Democrats. African Americans have been a big part of the Democratic voters. About two-thirds of Hispanic votes went to the Democratic Party. This was a key reason why the Democratic candidates won the 1992 and 1996 elections. [37] In the middle and late 20th century, the increase of the minority population in suburbs and the diversity of the spatial distribution have led to the continuous strengthening of suburban political forces.

With the enhancement of social status and the political participation awareness, the opportunities of political participation for ethnic minorities increased greatly. In 2010, eight states won new House seats. In the 2010 midterm election, for example, Henry Reid, Nevada's Senate majority leader, won re-election, thanks to 68% Hispanic votes. [38] The suburban ballots became significantly important in the general election, and naturally became a new battleground for political parties.

VI. CONCLUSION

Since 1970, the population of ethnic minorities in suburbs increased dramatically, which has changed the situation that the white middle class monopolized the suburban communities. Although the white are predominant in the suburbs, they are growing much more slowly than ethnic minorities, especially in the large metropolitan areas in the North and South. American suburbs gradually evolved into multi-ethnic, multi-class, multi-lingual and multi-cultural communities. The industry and commerce of the contemporary suburb is increasingly active, which has gone beyond the simple living function, and shows a new look and vitality.[39] The ethnic diversity in suburbs is bound to have far-reaching effects on American society and politics.

Living in suburbs is one of the most important signs of integration into American society. For minority residents, the wave of suburbanization is also an effective way to integrate into American society on the social and cultural and political level. Therefore, the suburbanization of ethnic minorities is still regarded as a key link in breaking social segregation. This seems to be the first glimmer of social harmony by breaking the "two worlds" dilemma between white and minority groups in American society.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. Fisherman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, Basic Books, 1989.
- [2] K. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The suburbanization of the United States*, New York, Oxford University, 1985.
- [3] Wang Xu, *American urban development pattern: from urbanization to metropolitan areas*, Tsinghua university press, 2006, p.197.
- [4] Sun Q.L., *A study of suburbanization in American cities*, Commercial Press, 2005, p. 343.
- [5] U.S. Bureau of Census: *Statistical Abstract of United States: 1971*, (92nd Annal Edition), Washington D.C., 1971.

- [6] U.S. Bureau of Census, Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010, 2010 Census Bureau, March 2011, Download at <http://www.Census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>
- [7] Richard D. Alba and John R. Logan: "Variations on Two Themes: Racial and Ethnic Patterns in the Attainment of Suburban Residence," *Demography*, Vol.28, No.3, Aug 1991, pp.431-453. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2061466>.
- [8] Zhou Min, *Chinatown*, Translated by Bao AiBin, Beijing, Commercial Press, 1995.
- [9] W.H. Frey, "Minority Suburbanization and Continued 'White Flight' in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Assessing Findings from the 1990 Census", *Research in Community Sociology*, Vol.4, JAI Press Inc., 1994.
- [10] Wang Xu, Yu Yue, "The suburbanization and residential segregation of African Americans in recent years." *Journal of Xiamen University*, No.2, 2004, pp. 65-71.
- [11] Sun Qunlang, Black segregation in the process of suburbanization in America, *Historical Studies*, No.6, 2012, pp. 97-112.
- [12] U.S. Bureau of Census, Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010, 2010 Census Bureau, March 2011, Download at <http://www.Census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>
- [13] W. H. Frey, *Census Data: Blacks and Hispanic Take Different Segregation Paths*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 2010.
- [14] D.S.Massey and B.P.Mullan, "Processes of Hispanic and Black Spatial Assimilation", *American Journal of Sociology*, 1984, 89, pp.836-73.
- [15] Wang Xu, *American Urban Studies*, Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, April 2008, p.40, p.47.
- [16] R. Robertson, *Urban Settlement Patterns in the North American Metropolis, The Metropolis in Transition*, ed. Ervin Y. Galantay, New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987, p.288.
- [17] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: *Statistical Abstract of United States 1977*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977, p.15.
- [18] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: *Statistical Abstract of United States, 1998*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, p.39.
- [19] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: *Statistical Abstract of United States, 1982-1983*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982, p.15.
- [20] W.H. Frey, *Melting Pot Suburbs: A Census 2000 Study of Suburban Diversity*, June 2001, Washington, D.C, The Brookings Institution, Census 2000 Series.
- [21] W.H. Frey, *Census Data: Blacks and Hispanic Take Different Segregation Paths*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 2010.
- [22] The Mumford Center, *Ethnic Diversity Grows, Neighborhood Integration Is at a Standstill*, at www.albany.edu/mumford/census, April 3, 2001.
- [23] M.M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- [24] J. R. Logan, *The New Ethnic Enclaves in America's Suburbs: A report by the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research*.
- [25] M. Orfield and T. Luce, *Minority Suburbanization and Racial Change: Stable Integration, Neighborhood Transition, and the Need for Regional Approaches*, Institute on Race and Poverty.
- [26] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing office, 2002.
- [27] A.E.Liska, J.R. Logan and P.E. Bellair: "Race and Violent Crime in the Suburbs," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No.1, Feb.1998, pp. 27-38. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657475>.
- [28] W. W. Nicholas. Jr., "Community Safety and Criminal Activity in Black suburbs," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Mar., 1979), pp. 311-333. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784303>.
- [29] S. J. Wayne, George C. Edwards III, *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003.
- [30] J.R. Logan and R.M. Golden, "Suburbs and Satellites: Two Decades of Change," *American Sociological Review*, June 1986, Vol.51, pp.430-437.