

Lakeville Revisited: Spatial Assimilation Among Chicago Jews

Bruce A. Phillips

Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles

bphillips@huc.edu**Introduction**

Two models exist by which to understand the movement of ethnic minorities into the suburbs. The "spatial assimilation" mode draws on Gordon's (1964) concept of structural assimilation. Structural assimilation is the movement of an ethnic or racial minority into a more central position in the social structure. Occupational similarity to the majority is one aspect of structural assimilation; living amongst them is another. Massey and Denton (1985) explain spatial assimilation not as the desire to assimilate or even integrate per se, but rather as a way to consolidate socio-economic gains into a better quality of life:

A host of variables important to people's social and economic wellbeing are determined by residential location. As social status rises, therefore, minorities attempt to convert their socio-economic achievements into an improved spatial position, which usually implies assimilation with majority members.

A second model is the ethnic suburb in which one or more minority groups are numerically concentrated and highly visible. Instead of integrating with whites, the minority group comes to define the suburb. Monterey Park, California, "the first suburban Chinatown," is one such example (Fong, 1994; Horton, 1995). The predominantly Hispanic suburbs of Huntington Park, Maywood, Bell, and Cudahy in Southeast Los Angeles County are also "ethnic suburbs."

American Jews should conform to the spatial assimilation model. Anti-Semitism has declined and Jewish acceptance has increased steadily over the course of the 20th century (Smith, 1994; Chanes, 1999). Jews are among the best educated and wealthiest of all Americans (Kosmin, 2001; Smith, 2005), and thus are structurally assimilated in other dimensions. With the exception of recent migrants from the Former Soviet Union who were resettled between 1979 and 1992, American Jewry is not only predominantly native born, it is well into the third and even the fourth generation (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2003).

Jewish Residential Mobility in Chicago

Jewish residential mobility in the Chicago, which has been well documented for close to a century, only partially conforms to the spatial assimilation model. On the one hand, Jewish residential mobility was concurrent with Jewish socio-economic mobility. Greek, Polish, and Italian neighborhoods remained constant, but Jewish neighborhoods moved. But Jews were re-establishing Jewish neighborhoods in new parts of Chicago rather than dispersing as predicted by Massey and Denton (1985). Louis Wirth was the first to observe this phenomenon. (1928). In The Ghetto, he documented the movement of upwardly mobile Eastern European Jews out of the crowded, poor, and immigrant Maxwell Street neighborhood (Chicago's version of the Lower East Side) into Lawndale further to the west. German Jews had already established a Jewish presence in Lawndale, and the Russian Jews of Maxwell street referred to it as "Deutschland"(Cutler, 1981; Wirth, 1928). At the conclusion of The Ghetto, Wirth disapprovingly noted that Jews had left one ghetto on to settle in another (albeit more pleasant) ghetto of their own making. They had spurned the opportunity to integrate into the larger society. He reasoned that they did so because they retained a self-protective old country ghetto mentality. They remained fearful of and uncomfortable with Gentiles.

The movement to Lawndale observed by Wirth in the 1920s continued. By 1931, a study done by the Chicago Federation of Jewish Charities (Cutler, 1981) found that of the 275,000 Jews in Chicago, 110,000 were living in Lawndale. But Jews had already begun to settle in other residential enclaves on the North and Northwest Sides of Chicago in places like Uptown, Rogers Park, and Humboldt Park. By 1946 the most affluent Chicago Jews had firmly established themselves in these Northwest and North Side neighborhoods (Rosenthal, 1952). The process of consolidating socio-economic gains with residential mobility that brought Russian Jews to Lawndale in the 1920s had brought them to the North Side by the 1940s.

The Uncertain Meaning of Suburbanization

When Jewish suburbanization began in earnest following the Second World War, contemporary observers were struck by two paradoxes. The first was the composition of Jewish social networks. Although provided with ample opportunities for social integration in the suburbs, Jews continued to associate almost exclusively with other Jews. Gans (1958) studied the newly emergent suburb of Park Forest, south of Chicago in the late 1940s. Quoting an informant, Gans referred to Jewish socializing patterns as “five o’clock social shadow,” meaning that when they got home from work, Jews socialized only with each other. Sklare (1968) similarly found that Jews in Highland Park, north of Chicago who had non-Jewish friends in college and the Army had established almost exclusively Jewish friendship networks in their new suburban residence.

The second paradox was the suburban synagogue. Suburban Jews rapidly built synagogues, even though they were highly secular and minimally observant themselves. These synagogues served as the social center of the Jewish suburb. Gans observed that in Park Forest “...the religious-cultural functions of the synagogue ran a poor second to the social functions.” Albert I. Gordon, a suburban rabbi with a Ph.D. in social anthropology, studied a cross section of new Jewish suburbs in the 1950s (including his own Jewish suburb in Newton Massachusetts) and came to the same conclusions as Gans. Gordon (1959) observed that the suburban synagogue “...helps Jews ‘feel’ Jewish even where there is very little religious symbolism within the home.” The second function of the suburban synagogue was Jewish education for the children. Gans reported that more than half of the Jewish parents in Park Forest who had enrolled their children in the newly created synagogue religious school had not themselves attended synagogue for several years. Glazer (1957) described suburban Judaism as “child-centered.” A third aspect of the synagogue paradox was fitting in while being different. Because religion in American life was ascendant during the period of post-War suburbanization (Hudnut-Beumler, 1994), joining a synagogue was a way to fit in. As an informant explained to Gans, “we need to have a synagogue so they’ll [non-Jews] have more respect for us.” Rosenthal (1960) characterized this

phenomenon as “acculturation without assimilation.” Heilman (1995) has argued that this kind of acculturation was perhaps not all that different from assimilation: “If Christians had their churches, the Jews could have their suburban temples to prove that they had arrived and that they belonged in this new place.” If the suburban Jews’ buildings of worship were outwardly distinctive, their interior Jewish lives were as empty as their synagogues: “Suburban Jews might still be building synagogues, but they were not filling them.”

In 1958, Marshal Sklare studied the Jewish suburb of Highland Park, on the North Shore of Lake Michigan (Sklare, 1968). In the same way that the Lynds hid the identity of Muncie, Indiana by calling it “Middletown,” Sklare referred to Highland Park as “Lakeville.” He also adhered to the methodological tradition of the community study movement by living in Highland Park for a year in 1958. Conscious of the interrelationship between assimilation, upward mobility, and residential choice, Sklare chose the ultimate suburb. In the late 1950s, when Sklare conducted the research, Lakeville was at the farthest edge of Jewish suburban settlement and the most affluent of the Chicago suburbs. Highland Park was originally established in the 1870s as resort center for the Protestant upper class. During the 1920’s it developed into a true residential suburb from which the majority of its men commuted to work in Chicago. It was during this period that affluent German Jews moved into the community, though they were not socially accepted by the upper class Protestants. Jews of Eastern European descent moved into Highland Park in large numbers during the 1950. As a result, the Protestant elite moved out to farther suburbs and exurbs. Although it lost its upper class *éclat*, Lakeville remained an affluent high status suburb.

Sklare combined ethnographic interviewing with random sample survey of Lakeville Jews. Both the survey and the ethnographic research left Sklare wondering about the long-range viability of “Jewish identity on the suburban frontier.” In a chapter on “The Image of the Good Jew,” Sklare asked whether certain behaviors were understood to be “essential” or “desirable” to be “a good Jew,” or whether they “made no difference.” Jewish behaviors were found to be desirable but not essential. For example, 67% of respondents thought giving to all humanitarian causes was

essential to being a good Jew, but only 39% put supporting Jewish causes in this category. Fully 44% thought that to “work for equality for Negroes” was essential to being a good Jew, but only 17% thought belonging to Jewish organizations was essential. If the content of Jewish identity in Lakeville was weak, this was potentially offset by the Jewish social structure evident in Lakeville.

Sklare was impressed by the strength and extent of the “friendship ties of the Lakeville Jew, ” and cautiously predicted that “ ...such [social] relationships are already well structured, the rate of Jews leaving for less dense Jewish areas is small, and Lakeville itself gives every promise of becoming more-not less-Jewish in composition.” He nonetheless wondered whether social ties would prove sufficient to withstand “the press of the general environment [which] is so compelling...” He predicted that “the pressure to change should increase in the next generation,” especially among “highly acculturated Lakeville youngsters-raised in a cultural of equalitarianism.” Would their relatively weak “socialization to traditional models and attachment to Jewish identity,” he asked, “...help to overcome the threat of assimilation?” In other words, might not Jewish acculturation eventually lead to assimilation? This was most likely to happen, reasoned Sklare, in an affluent suburb such as Highland Park. The question posed by Lakeville/Highland Park is what has happened to Jewish life there a half century after Sklare began his research project. Were Jewish social networks a transitory phenomenon, or did they provide a foundation for sustained Jewish life in the most affluent of Chicago suburbs?

Methodology

Over the past three decades, the Chicago Federation conducted three high quality Jewish demographic studies in 1982, 1990, and 2000. These three Chicago Jewish Population Surveys are used to examine Jewish suburban growth in Metropolitan Chicago in general and to examine whether Jewish life weakened in Lakeville as Sklare speculated it might.

All three surveys have generally comparable sample designs. The 1982 sample employed only Random Digit Dialing exclusively. The 1991 and 2001 surveys combined an RDD sample with a Federation list sample (Table 1). The total number of

interviews was greater in the 1991 and 2001 surveys than in the 1982 survey, but the number of RDD interviews is larger in the 1982 survey. Because the total number of interviews in 1982 is lower than in 1990 and 2000, there were not sufficient cases to represent two of the seven geographical areas, and these are omitted from comparisons across studies (Table 2).

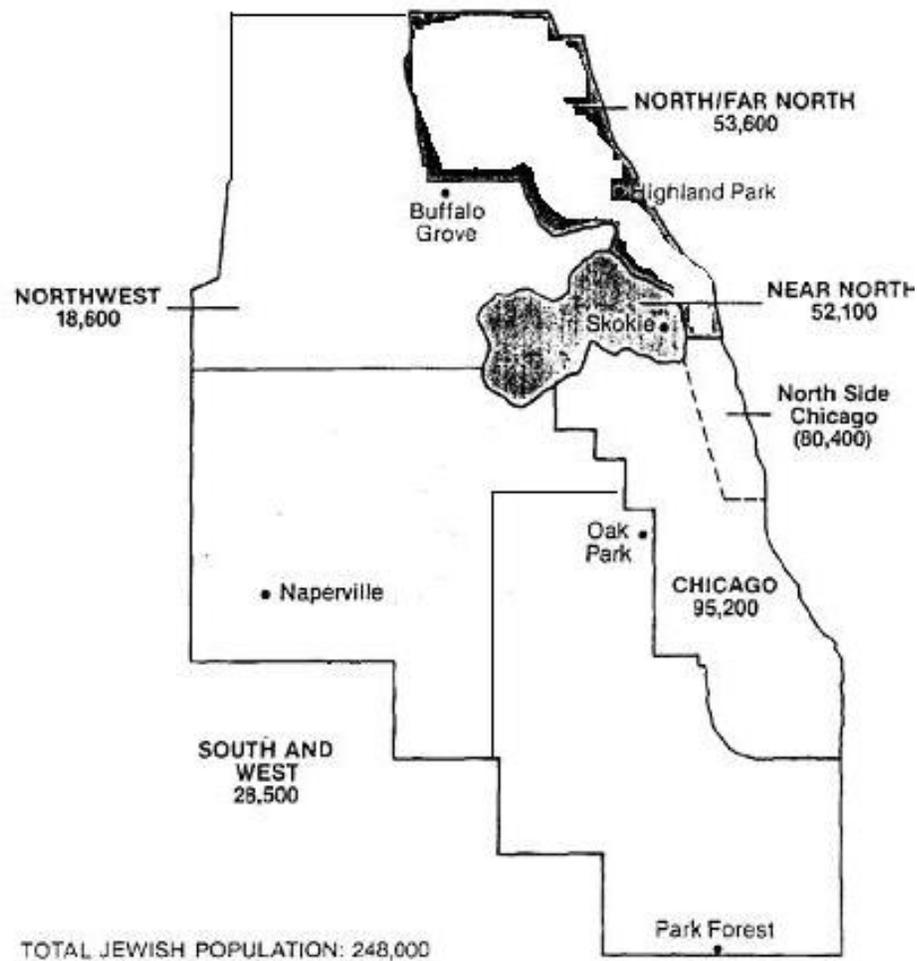
Table 1: Sample Size by Type of Sample and Survey Year

Type of Sample	Year of Survey		
	1982	1990	2000
Federation List	0	1,623	1,344
Random Digit Dialing	1,247	625	776
Total	1,247	2,248	2,120

The Chicago Jewish Federation categorizes the Jewish geography of metro Chicago into seven areas. The “City North” is comprised of North Side neighborhoods such as Albany Park, Uptown, and Rogers Park. It is referred to as the “North Side” in the map presented in Exhibit A. The “Near North Suburbs” is centered on Skokie. Although a suburb, Skokie has developed a distinctly urban and Jewish character. Skokie is adjacent to the heavily Jewish neighborhoods of the North Side, and has the largest concentration of Holocaust survivors in United States. For this reason, the American Nazi Party chose to march through Skokie in the 1970s, thereby instigating a Free Speech case that would make its way to the Supreme Court. In 1975, the Chicago Jewish Federation estimated that more than half of the Skokie population was Jewish (Cutler, 1981).

The North Shore Suburbs include Highland Park and adjacent communities such as Evanston. The North Shore suburbs include and represent Sklare’s Lakeville and are the test case for spatial assimilation. The Northwest suburbs are of particular interest here because of their rapid growth in recent decades. They are the new suburban frontier in metropolitan Chicago. The Western and Southern suburbs, by contrast, have remained steadfastly “un-Jewish,” as will be shown.

Exhibit A: Jewish Geography of Metro Chicago



Using zip codes and community names (for the 1982 survey¹, the geographic areas were made exactly comparable. The 1982 study had only 11 cases in the “rest of Chicago,” and only 2 cases in the Western suburbs (Table 2). These areas are omitted from the 1982 study in making area comparisons over time.

¹ The 1982 did not ask zip code but did ask for the name of the neighborhood and suburb. Because these have remained stable the names could be matched to zip codes in the 1990 and 2000 studies and thus aggregated into the same regional geographies.

Table 2: Sample Size by Chicago Region and Survey Year

Region	1982	1991	2000
City North	492	567	618
Rest of Chicago	11	124	98
Near North Suburb	304	394	463
North Shore Suburb	204	532	428
Northwest Suburbs	156	279	351
West	2	80	92
South	79	153	70
Total	1,247	2,129 ²	2,120

Jewish Suburbanization in Metro Chicago

Jewish suburban growth increased most sharply in the 1950s, leveling off after 1982. By 1971, the Jewish population was evenly divided between city and suburbs. By 2000 two out of three Chicago Jews were suburban residents (Exhibit B). Turning to actual population increase by area reveals three trends. The population in the city decreased from 1982 to 1990, but then increased between 1990 and 2000. The Jewish population of the Near North Suburbs remained stable and grew slightly in the Near North Suburbs. Population growth was most dramatic in the Northwest suburbs between 1982 and 2000 (Exhibit C). As result, the share of Jewish population living in the Northwest suburbs increased from 7% in 1982 to 19% in 2000 (Exhibit D).

² The total number of interviews shown for 1991 is less than in Table 1 because some of the interviews fell outside the areas under consideration here.

Exhibit B: Population Distribution Between City and Suburbs

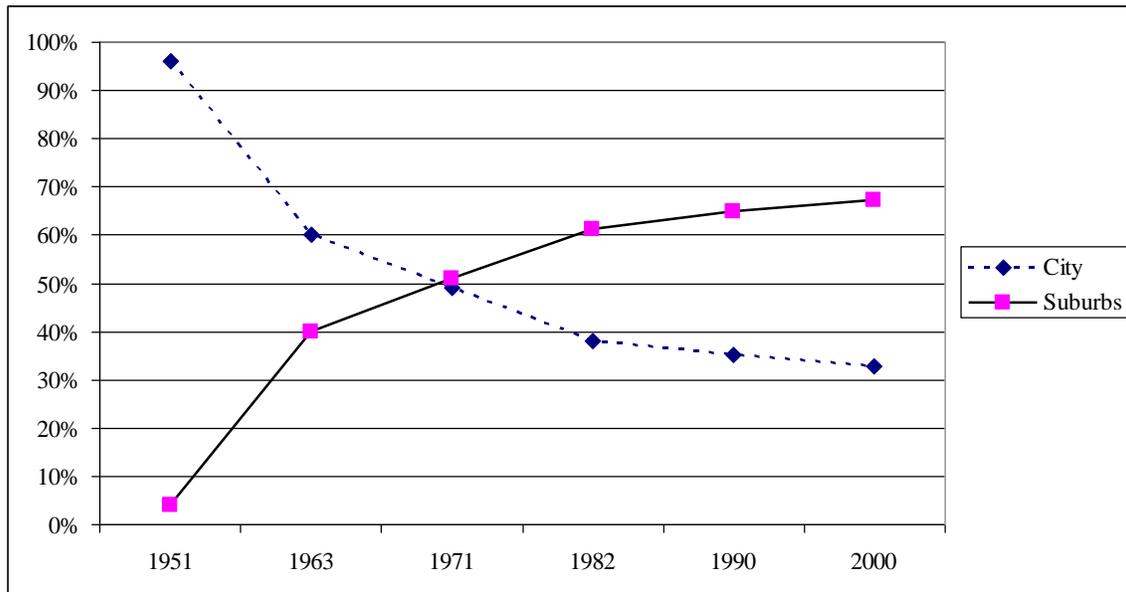


Exhibit C: Jewish Population by Area, 1982-2000

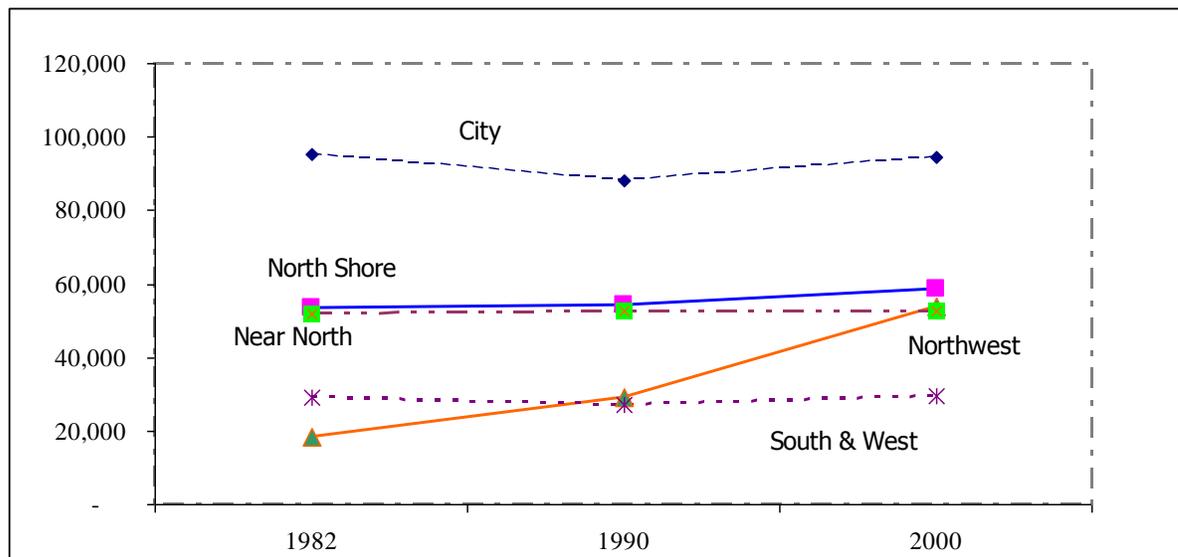
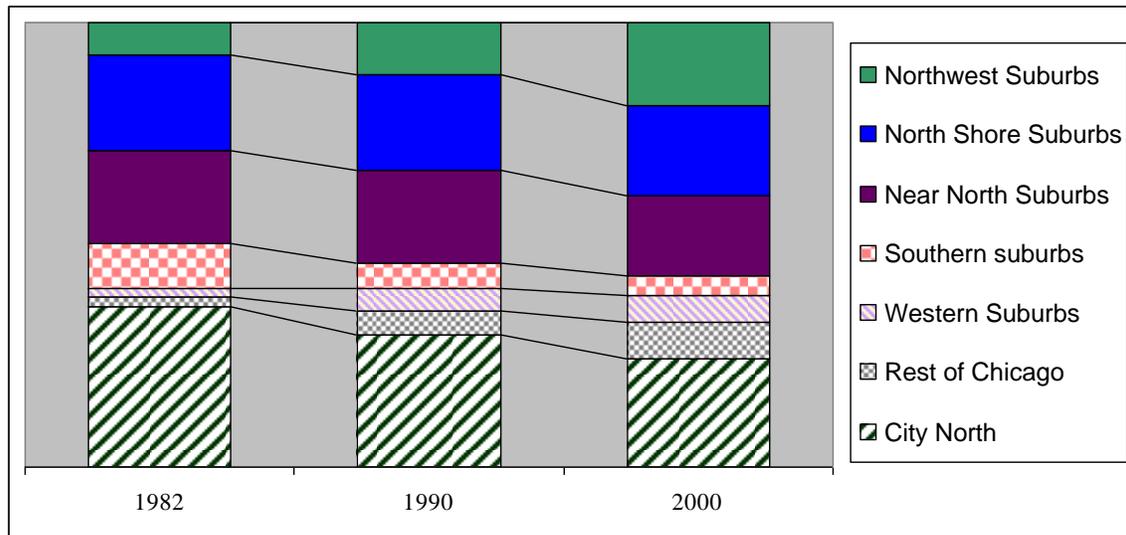


Exhibit D: Relative Share of Jewish Population



Socio-Economic Profile of Chicago Geographic Areas

The North Shore suburbs have remained the most affluent area of Chicago. Table 3 presents two measures of affluence: income and home ownership. Because income was measured in categories in all three studies, the only comparable cut-off was the top 28%. Coincidentally, the different income categories could be combined into the top 28% of households in all three studies. The North Shore (Lakeville) suburbs have remained by far the most affluent both in terms of income and home ownership. The rest of the areas, had comparable household income profiles over all three studies. Home ownership remains higher in the North Shore. Home ownership was consistently higher in suburbs than in the city, as would be expected.

Table 3: Two Measures of Affluence

Geographic Area	Income in top 28%			Home Ownership		
	1982	1991	2000	1981	1990	2000
City North	16%	19%	24%	46%	49%	56%
Rest of Chicago	**	13%	22%	69%	51%	55%
Near North Suburbs	28%	24%	26%	82%	84%	79%
North Shore Suburbs	58%	55%	52%	85%	89%	94%
Northwest Suburbs	28%	26%	23%	83%	85%	84%
Western Suburbs	**	16%	22%	64%	75%	86%
Southern suburbs	40%	46%	9%	96%	88%	75%

**Too few cases

The Jewish Character of the Suburbs

Although the Northwest suburbs now rival the Near North suburbs in terms of population, Jews are spread out over a larger geographic area in the former. As a result, Jewish density remains highest in the North Shore (Lakeville) suburbs, more than triple that in the Northwest suburbs. Jews in the suburbs of greatest density (Near North and North Shore) were the most likely to say that being near other Jews was an important consideration in their decision to move there (Table 4). Jews seeking Jewish community found their way to the areas of highest Jewish density.

Exhibit E: Jews as Percent of Total Population

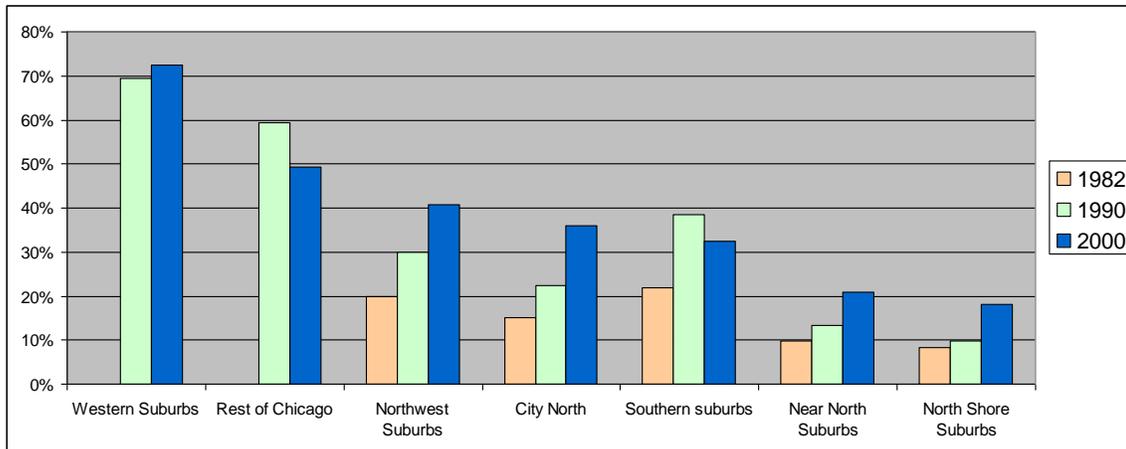
Geographic Area	Jewish Density	
	1990	2000
North Shore Suburbs	19%	17%
Near North Suburbs	16%	11%
City North	16%	8%
North West Suburbs	5%	5%
Southern Suburbs	5%	2%
West Suburbs	2%	1%
Rest of Chicago	2%	2%
TOTAL CHICAGO	7%	5%

Table 4: Importance of other Jews in decision to re-locate or remain in community

	How important to you was the availability or nearness of a Jewish community in deciding to move/stay to where you live now?				Total
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all	
North Shore Suburb	44%	26	11	19	100
Near North Suburb	38%	29	13	20	100
North West suburbs	28%	22	19	31	100
City North	22%	25	16	37	100
Southern suburbs	22%	14	18	46	100
Rest of Chicago	10%	14	17	58	100
Western suburbs	4%	20	12	65	100
All	27%	23	15	34	100

Intermarriage increased in every area of Chicago (except for the “rest of Chicago”), as did in the United States as a whole (Exhibit F). Looking across studies, intermarriage was consistently lowest in the North Shore suburbs, followed by the Near North suburbs. Intermarriage is considerably higher in the Northwest suburbs than in the neighboring North Shore suburbs, but by far the highest in the Western suburbs. Thus, intermarriage is generally consistent with Jewish density.

Exhibit F: Intermarriage



Jewish social networks vary according to area in the same pattern as intermarriage (Exhibit G). Respondents in the North Shore suburbs were the most likely to report that half or more of their closest friends were Jews in all three studies, followed closely the Near North suburbs. The Northwest suburbs fall in the middle and Jews in the Western suburbs and the rest of Chicago were the least likely to have predominantly Jewish friendship networks. Synagogue membership follows the same pattern by area (Exhibit H).

Exhibit G: Half or More of Closest Friends are Jews

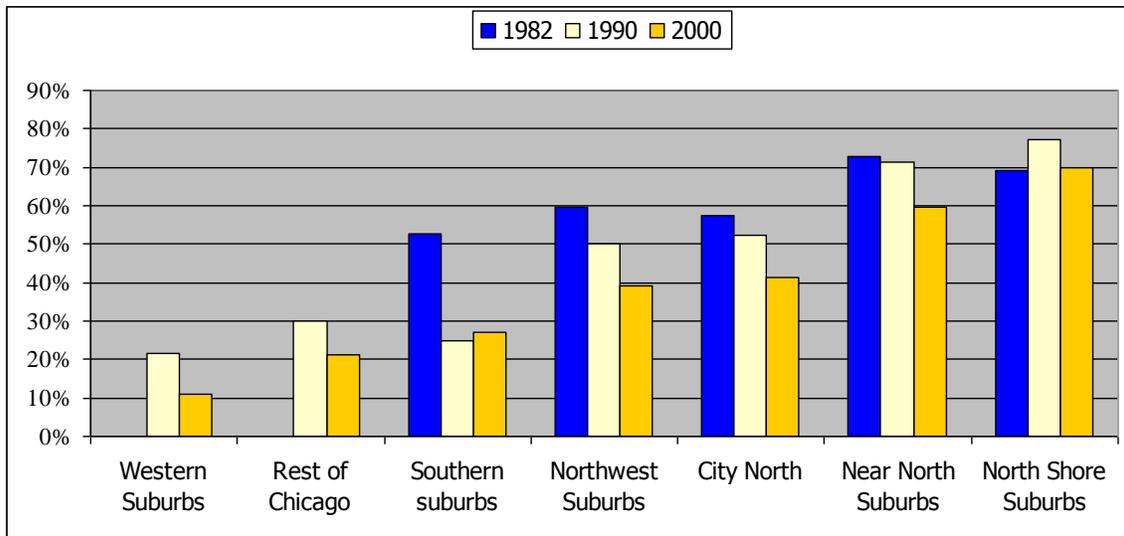
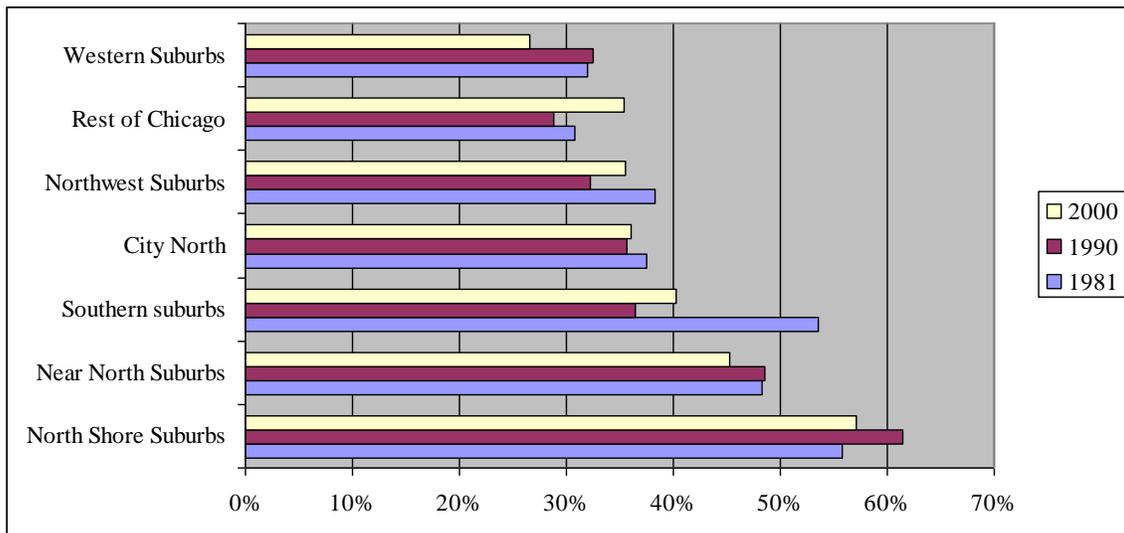


Exhibit H: Synagogue Membership



Suburban Patterns

Two consistent patterns are evident. First, the Jewish dimensions are interrelated and vary by area. Synagogue membership and Jewish friendship networks are both associated with the Jewish density of the suburb. The Jews who most desire Jewish community selected to live in the suburbs of highest Jewish density so they could find Jewish friends and have a wider choice of synagogues from which to choose. Intermarried Jews are less likely to join synagogues, and thus synagogue membership is lowest in areas with the highest rates of intermarriage.

The second pattern is the intermediate positioning of the Northwest suburbs. Relative to all the suburban choices, Jews are over-represented there, especially in comparison to the Southern and Western suburbs. The Northwest suburbs have an intermediate position both in terms of Jewish density and a desire to live in a Jewish community. Northwest suburbs respondents were less likely than respondents in the North Shore and Near North suburbs to say that “nearness or availability” of Jewish community was a factor in their residential choice, but they were far more likely to do so than respondents in the Western suburbs. It is probably not coincidental that the Northwest suburbs are adjacent to North Shore suburbs. The geographical position of the Northwest suburbs relative to “more Jewish” suburbs expresses their intermediate position in those same measures.

Conclusion

Choice of residential area (be it suburb or urban community) results from a combination of factors including both Jewish orientation and financial means. Contrary to assimilation theory in general and the expectations of spatial assimilation, the most affluent Jews are the most likely to live in a Jewish area. The Jews who could most easily assimilate have chosen to live in the most distinctively Jewish suburbs and are the most likely to maintain both formal and informal patterns of Jewish associations. Like Asians and Hispanics in Southern California, Chicago Jews have created “ethnic suburbs” in metropolitan Chicago. But the Jews in their own ethnic suburbs are more affluent, Americanized, and thus more easily assimilated than

Asians and Hispanics. Classic spatial assimilation theory does not encompass most Chicago Jews, nor are their ethnic suburbs similar to those of Asians or Hispanics. Instead, Jews present a third model in which residential choice and spatial pattern are expressive of Jewish identity.

REFERENCES

- Chanes, J. S. (1999). Anti-Semitism and Jewish Security in Contemporary America: Why Can't Jews Take yes for an Answer? Jews in America : A Contemporary Reader. R. R. Farber and C. I. Waxman. Hanover NH, Brandeis University Press
- Cutler, I. (1981). The Jews of Chicago from Shtetl to Suburb. Ethnic Chicago M. G. H. a. P. d. A. Jones. Grand Rapids, Michigan William B. Erdman's Publishing Company
- Fishman, J. (1963). "Moving to the suburbs: Its possible Impact on the role of the Jewish Minority in American Community life." **24**: 146-53.
- Fong, T. P. (1994). The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey. Gans, H. J. (1957). Progress of a Suburban Jewish community. Commentary. **23**: 113-122.[fc-259]
- Glazer, N. (1957). American Judaism. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Gordon, M. M. (1964). Assimilation in American life New York Oxford University Press.
- Park, California. Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
- Horton, J. and J. Calderon (1995). The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California. Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
- Heilman, S. (1995). Portrait of American Jews. Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- Hudnut-Beumler, J. D. (1994). Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965. New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press.
- Kosmin, B., A. Keysar, et al. (2001) American Religious Identification Survey 2001 CUNY .
- Kotler-Berowitz, L., S. M. Cohen, et al. (2003) The National Jewish Population Survey, 2000-2001: Strength Challenge, and Diversity. New York. United Jewish Communities.
- Massey, D. S. and N. A. Denton (1985). "Spatial Assimilation as a Socioeconomic Outcome." American Sociological Review **50**(1): 94-106. [ED-48] using individual level data rather than census tract, segregation found to persist for Hispanics and blacks
- Rosenthal, E. (1952). The Jewish Population of Chicago, III. The Chicago. Pinkas. S. Rawidowicz. Chicago, Chicago College of Jewish Studies
- Rosenthal, E. (1960). "Acculturation Without Assimilation? the Jewish Community of Chicago, Illinois." The American Journal of Sociology **66**(3): 275-288.
- Sklare, M. and J. Greenblum (1968). Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society. New York, Basic Books.
- Smith, T. (1994) Anti-Semitism in Contemporary America. New York. American Jewish Committee Institute of Human Relations
- Smith, T. W. (2005) Jewish Distinctiveness In America, A Statistical Portrait American Jewish Committee.
- Wirth, L. (1928). The Ghetto. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.