The Dynamics of Multiracial Integration:

A Case Study of the Pico Neighborhood in Santa Monica, CA

<u>Introduction</u>

As immigration from Latin America and Asia continues to shape U.S. cities in the following decades, it will become increasingly more important to document and learn from the experiences of historically multiracial communities. Why do people of different backgrounds choose to move into the same area and stay there over time? Past research imparts surprisingly little insight into this issue. Although academics across disciplines have debated the factors that contribute to residential segregation and gentrification, relatively little literature exists on the factors that enable and sustain residential integration.

A growing literature in the U.S. debates the factors that are present in neighborhoods integrated over relatively short periods of time, usually between 10-30 years. These case and multi-sited studies identify a set of locational factors and conditions that contribute to mixed-race residency (Molotch 1972; Taub et al. 1984; Helper 1986; Saltman 1990; Galster and Keeney 1993; Ellen 1997; 2000; Nyden et al. 1997; 1998; Allen and Turner 2002; Banerjee and Verma 2005; Talen 2006). Multiple issues arise from past research. First, researchers' reliance on quantitative methodologies and their tendency to gather data from community leaders, rather than residents of varying levels of civic engagement, may lead to oversimplified theories on factors contributing to long-term integration. Second, these studies examine neighborhood

integration over relatively short-periods and thus not only construct inadequate theories of neighborhood stability, but also fail to document it. Last, past research overwhelmingly focuses on black and white integration in the American Midwest and Northeast, which limits its applicability to multiracial regions such as California. New theories that explain residency decisions and experiences in historically multiracial neighborhoods are needed to guide planners in enabling diversity at multiple scales in cities across the country.

The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics that contribute to long-term multiracial integration in one Los Angeles area neighborhood. As a historically mixed community, the Pico Neighborhood in the City of Santa Monica, California is an ideal case study for this project. Since 1950, neither the white nor the non-white population[1] has fallen below 30% of the total population of the area, and for decades, residents have represented most income groups. This diversity is reflected in the area's housing stock, which includes single family homes, duplexes, large apartment buildings, and mobile homes, as well as in a grassroots neighborhood organization, which over time had members of different race and tenure groups as leaders. Even though the city's commitment to rent control has contributed to this diversity, newcomers continue to span different races and classes, from African American Section 8 recipients to first-time Latino homeowners, even after rent control has effectively ended.

Drawing from 68 structured interviews with African American, Caucasian, and Latino residents, this research study underlines the importance of housing, services, and

---

[1] In this study, Latinos (also called Hispanics) are defined as a non-white racial group rather than a white ethnic group.

social factors in influencing residency decisions in the Pico Neighborhood from 1950 to the present. Particularly, housing cost and type,[2] access to housing based on race or Section 8 status, public and commercial services, proximity to loved ones and personal attachment to the neighborhood have served to attract and keep residents in the area over time. The significance of this research is twofold. First, by using qualitative methodologies, this study expands upon the findings of predominantly quantitative studies of racial integration. Second, by identifying and examining a historically integrated area, it adds to a growing body of literature on racial integration in multiracial regions such as California and develops theories of neighborhood stability. These findings will not only contribute to theoretical knowledge about factors enabling long-term racial integration, but also may help policymakers, public officials and community members in gentrifying areas to act in ways that prevent resident displacement and enable long-term diversity.

This study unfolds in three parts. The first part identifies insights and gaps in past neighborhood integration research and outlines a research agenda that examines historically multiracial areas through resident experiences and city policies. This section also establishes the methodology and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the case study approach. The second part presents the history of the Pico neighborhood, from the clay excavations that defined its early landscape to current trends such as municipal neglect, crime, vacancy decontrol, and luxury housing development. It also describes the socio-physical context of the four sub-areas that comprise the Pico Neighborhood: East

_____

[2] Housing type refers to the presence of a diverse housing stock in the Pico neighborhood, including single family homes, large apartment buildings, duplexes, and a trailer park.

occupy more than 75% of the population, a rule that must be maintained for at least a decade. Ellen (1998) develops a complex typology that defines integration by absolute proportions, which also is used by Fasenfest et al. (2004). However, following in the footsteps of other researchers, they incorrectly identify Los Angeles as a "homogenous" metropolis by focusing on black and white integration and lumping Latino and Asian ethnicities into an all encompassing "other" category.

In addition to these dominant methodologies, other studies employ an entropy index, which measures evenness among groups, or a market approach, which compares housing demand by racial group to housing availability and resulting racial composition, a test most frequently applied by segregation scholars (Allen and Turner 2002; Moore and McKeown 1968; Bradburn et al. 1971; DeMarco and Galster 1993; Smith 1998). Methodologies used to measure racial integration over time are also far from consistent. For example, while Bradburn et al. (1971) used qualitative methodologies to define stably integrated areas as places where resident informants indicated that both whites and blacks would continue to locate over the next five years, Lee and Wood (1990) used quantitative methodologies to define these communities as a black percentage increase or decrease of less than 5% over a decade. More so than definitional variations, these methodological discrepancies frustrate comparative research and thus limit broad knowledge on the extent and nature of neighborhood racial integration, which is discussed in further detail below (Smith 1998).

There is general consensus among researchers that integration has increased within urban areas since 1970. However, overwhelmingly studies focus on black and

white integration in the Midwest and Northeast at the expense of multiracial integration in regions such as Southern California. Generally, these studies attribute recent increases to the trend of non-whites moving into white areas (particularly the suburbs) and increased mixing between non-white groups (Ellen 1997; Bobo et al. 2000; Myers and Park 2001; Glaeser and Vigdor 2001; Frey 2001; Suro and Singer 2002; Fasenfest et al. 2004). Not only have the number of racially integrated census tracts increased, but also their stability over time (Ellen 1997; 2000; Suro and Singer 2002). In an analysis of census tract data from 1970 to 1990, Ellen (1997) found that 20% of all tracts were integrated (or using her absolute definition, contained a black population of between 10-15%). Fifteen-percent of Latinos and 20% of African Americans lived in these tracts, while the proportion of whites living in segregated tracts fell from about 60% in 1970 to about 35% in 1990. Furthermore, she found that 75% of tracts integrated in 1980 were not only still integrated in 1990, but also contained a constant or growing proportion of whites.

Fasenfest et al. (2004) applied Ellen's (1997; 2000) methodology to measuring 2000 census tract integration in the ten largest U.S. metropolitan areas. He found that the number of predominately white neighborhoods decreased by 30%, whereas the number of mixed white and other (characterized as Latino and Asian) neighborhoods grew, making them the most common type. While these areas were likely to retain their mix over a decade, mixed white and black and mixed multiethnic (white, black and other) were unlikely to retain their mix. Specifically, about 90% of mixed black and other and 70% of mixed white and other remained integrated, while only about 45% of mixed black and

white and 40% of mixed multiethnic remained integrated. They qualified their findings by emphasizing that population change not only within urban areas, but also within regions, affected stability. In addition, they admit, "To be sure, the findings here offer only limited insights as to how and why neighborhoods changed the way they did. Predicting the nature of neighborhood change and assessing the factors that cause it, moreover, require additional research" (15).

A growing literature debates the factors that exist in neighborhoods integrated over relatively short periods of time, usually between 10-30 years. In the mid-1950s, a series of reports produced by the Commission on Race and Housing attributed racial change to housing and economic forces that shaped the relative wealth of incoming residents, institutional forces, such as realtors and lenders, school quality, and community groups and property managers, who had the ability to manage racial change (Caplan and Wolf 1960; Grier and Grier 1960; Mayer 1960; Rapkin and Grisby 1960). In a comparative study of segregated and integrated census tracts in the 1960s, Bradburn et al. (1971) found that integrated areas were defined by lower median incomes, higher proportions of renters (whites tended to be homeowners, whereas blacks tended to be renters), and greater religious, economic, and educational diversity. Subsequent research has used quantitative methodologies, participant observation, and interviews with community leaders in case and multi-sited studies to identify a set of neighborhood characteristics that enable integration over time. These include the presence of shopping centers and parks; military bases, factories and universities; integrated schools; religious institutions; the deconcentration of subsidized units and the presence of a mixed housing

stock; fewer specialized land uses; mixed-use zoning and proximity to public transit (Molotch 1972; Taub et al. 1984; Helper 1986; Saltman 1990; Galster and Keeney 1993; Ellen 1997; 2000; Nyden et al. 1997; 1998; Allen and Turner 2002; Banerjee and Verma 2005; Talen 2006).

There is also evidence that community groups in racially integrated areas may contribute to their stability over time. Saltman (1990) embeds the proliferation of these groups in what she calls a "neighborhood stabilization" movement that arose in the 1960s and culminated in the establishment of National Neighbors, a community organizing institution that supported groups in integrated areas. In her study, she used participant observation, group leader interviews, and archival and census data analysis to gauge the effect and success of five of these organizations operating in integrated Midwestern and Northeastern neighborhoods. She found that these organizations contributed to long-term integration (in her study this amounted to at most 30 years) by curbing discriminatory real estate practices, advocating for fair housing, advertising to potential white residents, promoting integrated education, improving the physical environment, and developing a sense of community. The following factors increased the probability of a community organization's success in maintaining integration: presence of public amenities, city support for integration efforts, school desegregation, citywide public housing deconcentration, enforced regional fair housing laws and adequate supply for all income groups, and the establishment of the community organization before the area was racially labeled. She stresses, "The maintenance of integration—the preservation of diversity or

Methodology

To deepen theories of long-term racial integration in urban neighborhoods, this research uses a case study approach to answer the following questions: What factors have influenced residency decisions in the Pico neighborhood in the City of Santa Monica, CA, an area that has housed African Americans, Caucasians, Latinos, and Japanese Americans for over 50 years? What role do city officials, community groups, and residents play in enabling and sustaining diversity?
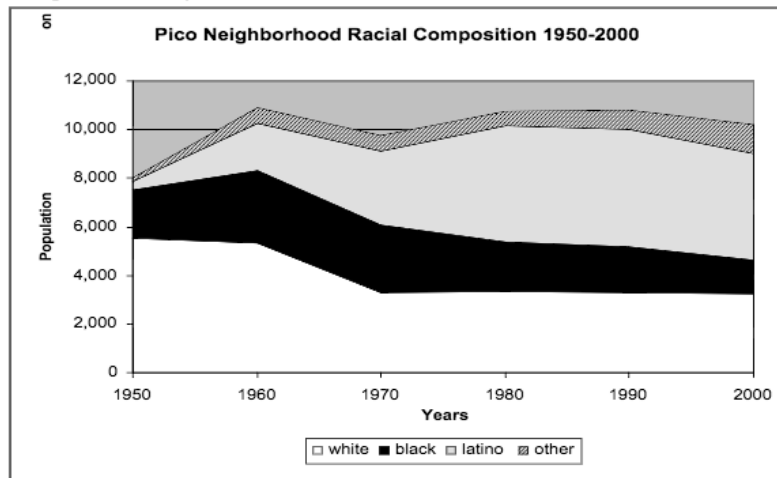
As Robert Yin (1994) argues in *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, case study methodologies are appropriate when the researcher is asking "how" or "why" questions to study a present-day phenomenon that cannot be manipulated. Although critics complain that case studies limit broader generalizations, Yin compares them to experiments and suggests that they "are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (21). Single-case studies are especially dismissed for their limited application. However, Yin outlines three conditions that justify the use of a single-case methodology: when the studied phenomenon represents a "critical case," an "extreme or unique case," or a "revelatory case" (47-48). Yin describes a "revelatory case" as a "situation that exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation" (48). Since census data limitations have frustrated researchers' attempts to identify and study neighborhoods that have been integrated for longer than 30 years, the choice to use a single-case study approach to analyze how integration is historically sustained and experienced by residents is justified under this criteria. Furthermore, as the following

17

section will show, this case is "extreme" and "unique" since very few census tracts in the

Los Angeles County region have been integrated long-term, in this analysis defined as 50

years.[4]

Reviewing Los Angeles County census tracts, I identified ten that had remained at

least 20 percent white and non-white between 1950 and 2000. I considered census tracts

7018.01 and 7018.02, which encompass the Pico Neighborhood in the City of Santa

Monica, as an ideal case study for this project. Since 1950, neither the white population

nor the non-white population has fallen below 30% of the total population of the area,

and for decades, residents have represented most income groups.

Graph 1: Created by author 2007.

Pico Neighborhood Racial Composition 1950-2000

(chart: Population vs. Years, 1950–2000; legend: white, black, latino, other)

_____

[4] Los Angeles County census boundaries fluctuated significantly before 1950. Although boundary changes occurred after 1950, especially between 1950 and 1960, the majority retained the same boundaries into the present.

Seeking to understand some of the issues affecting residents, I began attending

neighborhood group meetings, public hearings and cultural events starting in May 2006.

To document the experiences of longtime residents, I developed a one-hour structured

interview that addressed their reasons for moving into the area, choice to stay in the area,

relationships with neighbors, involvement in the community, and perceptions of the role

of residents and city officials in enabling and sustaining diversity, among other issues

(see appendix for interview questions). In July 2006, I distributed bilingual interview

solicitation fliers to every third residence in the city-designated boundaries of the Pico

neighborhood: Lincoln Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard up to 20th Street, Colorado

Boulevard after 20th Street, Centinela Avenue, and Pico Boulevard.

Figure 1: Map of the Pico Neighborhood Boundaries. The boundaries are Centinela Avenue (on right), Pico Boulevard (on bottom), Lincoln Boulevard (on left), Colorado Boulevard to 20th Street and Santa Monica Boulevard after 20th street (on top). Created by author with Yahoo! Maps 2007.