

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

"Sharing America's Neighborhoods: The Prospects for Stable Racial Integration."

Harvard Univ. Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138-1499. 228 pp. \$39.95

Author: *Ingrid Gould Ellen*

Many people believe that racially integrated neighborhoods in the United States are rare and likely to "tip," thanks to "white flight." Census data from recent decades contradict these stereotypes, reports Ellen, a professor of planning and public administration at New York University.

Nearly one-fifth of all U.S. census tracts (typically with 2,500 to 8,000 people) were between 10 percent and 50 percent black in 1990, Ellen says. About 15 percent of all non-Hispanic whites and 32 percent of all blacks lived in such communities. And the neighborhoods, by and large, did not appear to be on the way to becoming mostly black. Of 2,773 tracts that were integrated in 1980, more than three-fourths remained so a decade later.

Even so, the 2,773 integrated neighborhoods experienced a 46 percent loss of whites over the decade. The chief reason, Ellen says,

was not "white flight"; it exists, but our highly mobile society generates much more natural turnover. Far more important is "white avoidance," that is, decisions by whites moving out of virtually all-white neighborhoods *not* to move into integrated ones. Racial preference surveys and other studies suggest that fears about the quality of largely black neighborhoods play a much bigger role than simple race prejudice. Indeed, black parents also worry about growing black populations.

Despite the negative stereotyping of largely black neighborhoods, concludes Ellen, both whites and blacks are now much less concerned about their neighborhood's racial mix than in the past. It's *changes* in that racial mix that they find worrisome. "Modest" government efforts to improve neighborhoods and to dispel negative stereotypes about them, she believes, could bring about more integration.

"The Crime Drop in America."

Cambridge Univ. Press, 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011-4211. 317 pp. \$54.95; paper, \$19.95

Editors: *Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman*

Between 1985 and 1991, the United States experienced a sharp rise in violent crimes by young men, especially young black men. Arrest rates for homicide doubled for males under 20. Then, starting in 1992, the violence steadily subsided. The homicide rate fell to a level not seen since the 1960s. Political leaders, police chiefs, and advocates of handgun control, incarceration, and "community policing" claimed credit. But the big falloff in violent crime has no one cause, say Blumstein, director of the National Consortium on Violence Research, and Wallman, a program officer at the Guggenheim Foundation.

The earlier rise in violence resulted from a "crack" cocaine epidemic, they note. As more and more older drug dealers were put behind bars, younger men, particularly inner-city African Americans, stepped in to meet the

mounting demand, and handgun violence grew. Thanks to "some combination" of police tactics, growing fear of violence, and a new generation's rejection of crack (in favor of marijuana "blunts"), the crack markets decayed, while a booming economy offered legitimate alternative employment.

Homicides involving handguns, which surged 71 percent between 1985 and 1993, fell nearly 37 percent over the next five years. Garen Wintemute of the University of California, Davis, finds that the 1993 Brady law and other efforts to prohibit convicted felons from buying guns apparently helped. A recent California study compared felons facing such restrictions with a group that bought guns after being charged with a felony but not convicted. The latter were 21 percent more likely to be charged with a new gun offense.

Research Reports

The radical expansion of the prison population—to about 1.3 million, four times the total in 1980—also apparently helped. William

Spelman of the University of Texas calculates that it resulted in perhaps a fourth of the overall drop in violent crime.

“The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially.”

Doubleday, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. 260 pp. \$24.95

Authors: Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher

Once, just a few generations ago, the folk wisdom was that women “trapped” men into getting married. Today, the oft-expressed view in educated circles is that it’s the females who get caught. While men gain the multiple services of a wife, a wedding ring supposedly brings women stress, discontent, and loss of a sense of self. Manifestly unfair! But also untrue, report Waite, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, and Gallagher, a syndicated columnist, in this synthesis of recent research findings. “Both men and women gain a great deal from marriage.”

A longer life, for one thing. A study that began in 1968 with more than 6,000 families found that almost nine out of 10 married men alive at age 48 could expect to live to age 65—but that only six out of 10 never-married men could be. Married women have a similar but smaller advantage (nine out of 10, compared with eight out of 10). Why smaller? Mainly because single women typically do not engage in the risky behavior (e.g., drinking, speeding, and fighting) that single men often do.

Husbands, on average, earn at least 10 percent more—and perhaps up to 40 percent more—than single men, according to extensive studies by labor economists. Married men, who lead more settled lives, make better workers, and with their wives’ support are able to concentrate on making money. Though wives “get only a small marriage [wage] premium at most,” say Waite and Gallagher, overall they “gain even more financially from marriage than men do.”

The increased burden of housework that marriage imposes on women is not as great as most people assume. It adds only about six and a half hours to the 25 hours a week of housework done by single women living independently (which is far more than bachelors bother to do). Motherhood, however, boosts the total to 37 hours a week. “When married

women cut back on [outside] work to care for children,” Waite and Gallagher note, “the family may benefit, but the women themselves are taking a risk—gambling that their marriage will last.” Fifty-one percent of mothers worked full-time in 1997, but only 30 percent agreed that this was “ideal.” Fear of being cast off without a full-fledged career, say the authors, keeps many women from spending more time with their kids.

Parental divorce has lasting adverse effects on the mental health of one out of five children, sociologist Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins University and his colleagues have concluded. Moreover, a study by other researchers indicates that more than two-thirds of parental divorces do *not* involve “highly conflicted” marriages. Unhappy marriages of this kind often can be turned around, Waite concludes from national survey data. Of couples who said they were unhappily wed in the late 1980s, 86 percent of those who stuck it out for five more years reported being happier, and 60 percent said they were “very happy” or “quite happy.”

The appeal of marriage remains strong. Husbands and wives in recent surveys seem about equally satisfied: Some 60 percent say their marriage is “very happy,” and 36 percent “pretty happy.” In a 1997 survey of college freshmen, 94 percent said they hoped to wed. But marriage, unlike cohabitation, is a social institution as well as a private relationship—and the “social prestige” of marriage has been declining, say the authors. “We [Americans] want marriage, but we are afraid to discourage divorce or unwed childbearing. The marriage vow thus receives less support from families, society, experts, government, and the law.” They favor reforming no-fault divorce, particularly for couples with children, and oppose giving cohabiting couples the same legal and other benefits that married couples enjoy.