

## Churning in the Great Recession

It's widely appreciated that geographic mobility slowed dramatically with the Great Recession. This slowdown arose, so it's argued, because too often owners were trapped in houses that were underwater or otherwise difficult to sell. Because they couldn't move, they couldn't take advantage of jobs that might be available in less depressed regions, and our labor market problems accordingly worsened.

This conventional wisdom rests on analyses showing that interstate moves have slowed. In a new study funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, Michael Stoll has examined the changing pattern of local moves, defined as moves that occur within a county. The key question: If interstate moving has declined with the Great Recession, has local moving declined as well?

Using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS), Stoll finds that, contrary to the results for interstate moves, the amount of local moving has in fact increased. In some metropolitan areas, nearly one in five residents moved in one year.

What accounts for all this local churning? Not surprisingly, the moves were overwhelmingly fueled by economic duress. The areas with high unemployment rates had especially high mobility as out-of-work people scrambled to find housing they could afford. Whereas pre-recession moving was often motivated by an interest in "moving up," that precipitant became less common with the economic downturn. Before the recession, 41.3 percent of local movers sought to own a home or to move to a better neighborhood, compared to only 30.4 percent who moved for those reasons during the recession.

The simple conclusion: The economic downturn is not entirely a hunker-down affair. To the contrary, we're still a mobile society, although the type of mobility in which we engage is increasingly short-distance and motivated by duress and the search for cheap housing.

Stoll, Michael. 2013. "Research Brief: Great Recession Spurs a Shift to Local Moves." New York: The Russell Sage Foundation.

## Why is Racial Segregation Declining?

It's well known that black-white residential segregation has been declining in recent decades. But *why* is it declining? Although some scholars have suggested that fundamental institutional changes (e.g., weakening discrimination) are driving the decline, another possibility is that the population is simply moving from high-segregation regions (e.g., the Northeast) to low-segregation regions (e.g., the South). It's plausible, in other words, that segregation has declined just because people have moved to regions in which there isn't much of it.

Using the 1970-2000 decennial censuses and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS), John Iceland and his coauthors (Gregory Sharp and Jeffrey Timberlake) show that the redistribution hypothesis is only partly on the mark. Although it's true that the population is flowing away from high-segregation regions (e.g., the Northeast) and toward low-segregation ones (e.g., the South), Iceland and his coauthors find that other forces are more important. Under their decompositions, regional population shifts account for only a small percentage of the decline in segregation, a result that holds for both black-white and black-nonblack dissimilarity.

It follows that much of the decline in segregation has been driven by within-region reductions in segregation. These reductions are sometimes substantial. In the West, for example, blacks once lived in neighborhoods that, on average, were 57 percent black (1970 census), whereas now they're living in neighborhoods that, on average, are 19 percent black (2005-2009 ACS). Even in long-standing hypersegregated cities, like Chicago and New York, segregation has edged downward. There appear, then, to be deep forces at work *within* cities that are making for declines in segregation.

Although it's clear that something fundamental is afoot, we don't yet know what types of institutional factors are causing this within-region drop in segregation. Is the decline attributable, for example, to lessening discrimination? On the basis of these new results, that's a possibility that can't be ruled out.

Iceland, John, Gregory Sharp and Jeffrey M. Timberlake. 2013. "Sun Belt Rising: Regional Population Change and the Decline in Black Residential Segregation, 1970-2009." *Demography* 50(1), 97-123.

## Lost Generations?

Until recently, each successive birth cohort had a higher median family income than the birth cohort that preceded it, a continuous improvement in living standards that was the hallmark of the American Dream. This relentless growth in family income came to a halt, however, among the late baby-boom birth cohorts.

Does the same story of stagnation hold when wealth instead of income is analyzed? In a new Urban Institute report, Eugene Steuerle and his colleagues (Signe-Mary McKernan, Caroline Ratcliffe, and Sisi Zhang) show that, just as with income, recent birth cohorts have less wealth than their predecessors.

This new study, based on data from the Survey of Consumer Finances, begins with the familiar story of generational improvement. When adults between 56 and 64 years of age are compared, one finds a successive increase in wealth from the 1925 to 1951 birth cohorts. But it all changes with the 1952 birth cohort: The average net worth for those born after 1952 was less than that of their predecessors.

The upshot: The American Dream, if interpreted as a story about relentless generational improvement, is not faring well of late. Although we've long known that recent cohorts were bringing home less income, we now know that their net worth, relative to that of prior generations, is declining too.

Steuerle, Eugene, Signe-Mary McKernan, Caroline Ratcliffe, and Sisi Zhang. 2013. "Lost Generations? Wealth Building among Young Americans." Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.