

The Roots of Racial Tensions: Urban Ethnic Neighbourhoods

Date: Tuesday 24th June 2003

Time: 6.30pm

Speaker: William Julius Wilson

Chair: Professor Anne Power

Anne Power

Good evening everybody thank you very, very much for coming to the London School of Economics after the students have good and when most of the academics are marking exams. We're very pleased to welcome you tonight to what we regard as a very important lecture by William Julius Wilson. To his left is John Hills the Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, this even is part of the Economic and Social Research Council's special social science week and we would like to thank the ESRC for their continuing support for our work on both understanding and combating social exclusion.

William Julius Wilson is an old friend of the London School of Economics, he's been visiting us for about eight years now I think, known to most of us as Bill, but best known for his seminal work which really turned around thinking on racial disadvantage called *The Truly Disadvantaged* showing the much wider economic and social changes that explained the cumulative disadvantage suffered by African Americans in United States cities. He was also able to explain by looking at the wider trends in American society the intensification of American ghettos and the impact on concentrated poverty on people's lives. In all of this he's always stressed the overriding importance of wider economic trends, which he bore out in his recent article in the *New York Times* showing that the changes and the dilution of concentrated poverty in the United States which have particularly helped African Americans although other groups too are much better explained by wider trends in society rather than looking at race specific explanations only. There are many lessons in this for the United Kingdom, for example regarding the neighbourhood as a basic building block for our urban societies, an idea which people like myself have long supported; looking favourably on wider rather than narrower, more targeted programmes; supporting all attempts at equalising conditions and telling us that we ignore cities at our peril.

So, we're hoping tonight to draw many rich lessons from what Bill has to tell us, he is justifiably proud of having predicted the Supreme Court landmark decision yesterday on affirmative action in his 1999 book *Bridge over the Racial Divide* which he sent me and which I read. He foresaw the Michigan Law School ruling which allows the use of flexible criteria in advancing the cause of affirmative action, which is very much a philosophy endorsed by the Race Relations Amendment Act and the McPherson report in this country.

On the basis of all of those ideas he stresses the importance of the collaborative power of addressing common problems across seemingly unbridgeable racial divides which makes him I think a very unique voice in a very distressed United States of today. In this position he enjoys considerable scientific and academic eminence. He's university professor at Harvard University, one of only 16 to enjoy this particularly high professorial rank. He has honorary degrees at no less than 39 widely recognised universities such as Princeton, Columbia, Pennsylvania, John Hopkins as well as European universities. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He's probably most proud of being awarded in 1998 the National Medal of Science, the highest scientific

honour in the United States. The significance of this award is that as a social thinker of really radical ideas he is actually widely recognised in the scientific community of the United States as worthy of the very highest honours and for those reasons as well as what you're about to hear we're truly delighted that he's come to share his thoughts on the racial divide and hopes for a different kind of society.

Thank you very much, Bill.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

William Julius Wilson

Thank you very much, Anne.

I'm pleased to return to the LSE to address this august body on the subject of my forthcoming book, which has the same title as my lecture, *The Roots of Racial Tension: Urban Ethnic Neighbourhoods in the United States*.

At the opening of the 21st century and for the first time in America's history, whites constitute a minority of the total population in the United States' 100 largest cities. The significant influx of Latinos to urban areas and the steady out-migration of whites, have changed the complexion of cities, and in the words of one observer, fuelled "a renaissance in some urban centres and [forced] civic leaders to confront wrenching decisions on how to cope with a new and fast-changing citizenry."

Chicago is among the large cities that have experienced a steep drop in its white population and a sharp rise in the number of its Latino residents. As shown in figure 1, the Latino population increased by nearly 41 percent between 1990 and 2000, while the white population declined by almost 15 percent. Accordingly, whites as a proportion of the total population dipped to 26 percent in 2000, down from 38 percent in 1990. African Americans remain Chicago's largest single group at 36 percent, but even the black population registered a slight decrease (-2.1% from 1990 to 2000) after a steady but substantial rise throughout most of the twentieth century.

In the eyes of many, the decline of the central city is associated with the steady out-migration of whites and the growing presence of Latinos on top of an already large African-American population. This perception, influenced by beliefs that the cultural traits of Latinos and blacks contribute to urban decay, hardly captures the complex structural factors that transformed American cities in the past several decades.

During the very period when metropolises are undergoing ethnic change, economic and residential life in the urban United States has featured a relentless decentralization. Outer-edge suburbs have become the regions of population growth, employment growth, and wealth creation. The older areas—central cities and inner-ring suburbs—are left behind with growing concentrations of poverty, particularly minority poverty, and, in the words of one author, "without the fiscal capacity to grapple with the consequences: joblessness, family fragmentation, and failing schools."

With a declining tax base and simultaneous loss of federal funds, municipalities have experienced difficulty in raising sufficient revenue to cover basic services. In some, basic services were cut to avoid bankruptcy court.

As political and social forces turned against the cities through the 1980s, businesses became more reluctant to invest in urban areas, and the quality of urban life declined, as evidenced by the spread of pollution and diminishing services. Although fiscal conditions in many cities, including Chicago, improved significantly as a result of the prolonged economic recovery in the latter half of the 1990s and into 2000, by early 2002 the economy had begun to slow, which threatens this brief period of economic progress.

In America's largest cities, many urban residents move, if they have the choice, to outlying sections of metropolitan areas. Many of those who remain in or migrate to the city compete, often along racial and ethnic lines, for decent housing, safe neighbourhoods, and good schools, thereby aggravating inter-group relations and elevating racial and ethnic tensions.

Accordingly, to comprehend fully the dynamics of urban racial and ethnic tensions across the United States it is important to understand that patterns of inter-group competition for these scarce resources mainly takes place in neighbourhoods. Indeed, the roots of much of the racial tension in America are found in neighbourhood social dynamics. And racial tensions originating in neighbourhoods are often aggravated by and become inextricably linked to the direction and dynamics of national racial politics.

Given the growing ethnic diversity of urban areas in America, we approached this study with the belief that it would be useful to compare neighbourhoods representing different racial and ethnic groups for two reasons: first, to capture the full range of neighbourhood inter-group tensions and, second, to explain variations and changes in neighbourhood racial antagonisms. We also felt that the most representative neighbourhoods would be those that are neither poor nor affluent. We chose neighbourhoods that represent mainly the working- and lower-middle classes-- neighbourhoods, in short, that best stand for ordinary Americans.

In 1992, after devoting a good deal of time to gathering and examining census-type data on working and lower-middle-class Chicago neighbourhoods, we selected four--Groveland, Beltway, Archer Park, and Dover. For purposes of confidentiality, these names are pseudonyms for neighbourhoods in the city's south and west sides.

We chose Groveland, a community of close to 12,000 residents and located in the southeastern corner of Chicago, as our African-American community. Lined with neat houses featuring trim yards, this neighbourhood's housing stock was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. Single-family dwellings account for almost 70 percent of all the housing units in Groveland. Although the total population of Groveland has declined slightly since 1990, it remains overwhelmingly African American (95%--see figure 2). The residents of Groveland work mainly in the government and not-for-profit sectors of the Chicago economy, although a fair number depend on manufacturing for their jobs.

We selected Beltway, a neighbourhood of slightly more than 22,000 residents located on the southwest side of the city, featuring carefully manicured lawns and gardens dotted with statuary, as our white neighbourhood. Beltway's white population is a mixture of persons of Polish, Lithuanian, and Irish extraction. As shown in figure 3, Beltway was 95 percent non-Latino white in 1980. However, by 2000 the white population of Beltway had declined to 76

percent and the Latino population had risen to 21 percent. Similar to Groveland, Beltway's housing stock was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, and a sizable number of its residents are government (mainly city) employees.

We choose Archer Park, situated on the west side of Chicago as our Latino community. As shown in figure 4, the total population of Archer Park is on the rise: the neighbourhood grew from 75,204 in 1980 to 81,155 in 1990 to 91,071 in 2000. Currently, seventy-nine percent of Archer Park's residents are Mexican, and just 3 percent are Puerto Rican. African Americans, who reside in the northeast and north central edges of the neighbourhood adjacent to a nearly all black neighbourhood, comprise 13 percent of Archer Park's populace. Only 3.5 percent of Archer Park is white, down from 6 percent in 1990 and 24 percent in 1980. Most of the remaining whites are elderly descendants of Eastern immigrants. Because its Spanish-speaking population has a very high number of recent immigrants, Archer Park is poorer than the other three neighbourhoods. The long-term Mexican residents are mainly industrial and service-sector workers whereas the new immigrants work in multiple jobs in the low-wage service sector of the economy.

In order to understand the dynamics of ethnic tension and neighbourhood change, we selected Dover, a near west side neighbourhood of almost 45,000 residents and located near Archer Park as our white neighbourhood in transition. Over the last decade, Dover has experienced a remarkable ethnic transformation. In 1980, 83 percent of the population was white. In 1990, two years before we began our research, 60 percent of the residents were white. However, as shown in figure 5, by the year 2000, the non-Latino white population had plummeted to 18 percent. Seventy-seven percent of the population in Dover is now Latino.

In addition to data collected on behaviour that relates explicitly to racial and ethnic concerns in a given neighbourhood, including data on the residents' relationships with and perceptions of other racial and ethnic groups in the city, we also observed and documented the manner in which the residents of each neighbourhood shared an outlook or worldview, defined and handled their collective problems and maintained social order.

Data on the social and cultural organization of the neighbourhood cannot be readily obtained by survey research, but by detailed ethnographic research conducted by researchers trained to observe and record the subtle aspects of social and institutional behaviour. The ethnographic method enables the researcher to capture the contextual aspects of social behaviour—that is, data on the broader social environment in which the behaviour occurs, including background information relevant to the behaviour.

Our ethnographic team consisted of 9 University of Chicago graduate student research assistants who immerse themselves in these neighbourhoods for almost three years-- from January 1993 to September 1995--and provided the research field notes and observations for which this study is primarily based.

In Beltway, Dover, and Archer Park, fears, antagonisms, and anger toward African Americans were widespread. However, blacks in Groveland tended not to exhibit such racial hostility toward whites or Latinos. Whereas our fieldworkers in the three non-black neighbourhoods recorded expressions of anti-black sentiment in numerous settings, the fieldworkers in Groveland heard remarkably few negative comments about whites and other

ethnic groups. To understand these differences in the expression of racial antagonisms requires a consideration of the different social contexts in each neighbourhood.

With the looming threat of desegregation, many whites fled ethnic working-class neighbourhoods in the South of Chicago in the 1970s. Although most migrated to the suburbs, some relocated to predominantly white working-class neighbourhoods in the Northwest and Southwest sides of the city. Beltway was one of these neighbourhoods.

Many of the residents moved to Beltway in response to black encroachment in their former neighbourhoods on the south side of Chicago. Since employees of the city of Chicago have to live in the city, and since Beltway is on the western edge of the city, the residents there have gone as far as they can go and yet remain in Chicago. Tucked behind Midway Airport, Beltway residents feel somewhat protected from the penetration of minorities.

High rates of residential stability and class and racial homogeneity have, over the years, provided the residents and community leaders with a commonly held foundation for social organization and the maintenance for social control. However, residents worry about the future makeup of the community and feel, living at the city boundary, that their “backs are against the wall.”

There is a general feeling among the residents of Beltway that African Americans are “taking over the city” and are receiving a disproportionate share of the city’s resources. Moreover, they perceive blacks as bearers of substandard values and perpetrators of crime and other social problems that they view as contributing to the decline of American society.

The potential arrival of African Americans and other minorities, including Latinos and Asians, was viewed by many residents as a threat to Beltway’s way of life. The residents of Beltway had seen other neighbourhoods transformed from white strongholds into racially diverse neighbourhoods with increasing rates of social disorganization, declining social institutions and falling property values. They dreaded the possibility that these circumstances could befall their community.

Heightened concerns about race are reflected in the social organization of the neighbourhood. Residents are called upon to resist gangs, beautify their own property, support and encourage local businesses, and clean up graffiti. For Beltwayites signs that the neighbourhood “is going down” include poorly maintained lawns, graffiti, the appearance of empty lots, large numbers of For Sale signs, and an overt lack of adult supervision of youth. In the eyes of Beltwayites as the neighbourhood fabric weakens, the threat of penetration by outside groups increases. For all these reasons, community pressure to maintain a high level of social organization is intense.

The ability of the residents of Beltway to reach and sustain a relatively high level of social organization is enhanced by several factors, including a network of dense acquaintanceships, the presence of extended families, a high level of residential stability, vibrant community organizations, powerful institutional ties, and common ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds. Consequently, common goals, such as maintaining stability in the racial and ethnic mix of the neighbourhood, are more easily achieved.

However, the social organization of Beltway also benefits from a “common belief system,” widely shared by the residents, that integrates social conservatism, patriotism, and sentiments

concerning the adherence to neighbourhood standards. This belief system generates a clear set of specific behavioural norms: parents must supervise their children, residents are obligated to the community for the care and appearance of their property, and community members must stand together to resist graffiti, gangbangers, and other bad influences usually attributed to minorities and other outsiders. As emphasized previously, they feel that if the neighbourhood is allowed to deteriorate, some residents will be encouraged to leave. Blacks and Latinos from neighbourhoods that border Beltway could then fill the vacancies.

Given the concerns about keeping the neighbourhood stable to prevent the penetration of minorities, the supervision of young people is a growing concern. Many Beltwayites, particularly the older residents, believe that youngsters pose a major threat to the social organization of the neighbourhood. Accordingly, the hostility toward young people is palpable.

But despite all the efforts to keep the neighbourhood stable, the latest census figures on the demographic makeup of Beltway suggest that they are gradually losing the battle. The white population of Beltway declined by 13.5 percent between 1990 and 2000 and the Latino population nearly tripled, reaching 21 percent. Likewise, the Asian population, although still very small, increased 31 percent during the decade and is now approaching one percent of the population. However, perhaps the clearest symbol of change is the fifteen-fold increase in the number African American residents from only 9 in 1990 to 137 (or 0.6% of the population) in 2000.

Our field researchers were in Beltway during the first half of the 1990s, when the residents themselves were cognizant of the signs that things were beginning to change. It was especially clear that there was a pending increase in the number and proportion of Latino homeowners. As a principal of a local elementary and middle school put it in 1994, "I see more homes up for sale. But part of it is that [whites leaving in response to perceived demographic changes in the neighbourhood], and part of it is that there are older families. Moms and Dads have stayed here but the kids are not moving back here. They are selling homes." Asked about the changing racial makeup of Beltway and what the older homeowners think, the Vice Principal of the local high school replied in February 1994, "Sure they fear it, as a practical issue they fear the loss of value to their property." And in 1994 one of the local aldermen had this comment on the influx of people of colour in Beltway:

Oh yeah, racially it's changed and I don't want to say the community is racist. I say the community is very conservative and they're very concerned about their homes, their schools and their property values and they want to be able to walk the streets safely, they want to improve on their homes if they're going to live here for the rest of their lives. They don't want their area to 'go under' so to speak like . . . certain areas in the other parts of the city.

On the changing face of the neighbourhood and the reactions of the residents concerned about diversity, 15-year old Tini Lupinski said, "They think that if one black family gets in, there goes the neighbourhood. But the neighbourhood has already been gone for a long time, but they don't even realize it."

Nonetheless, Beltway is one of the neighbourhoods where white municipal workers of the city of Chicago, required to live within the city limits, choose to live. Despite the notable

demographic changes in Beltway since 1990, the significant presence of these municipal workers combined with Beltway's relatively strong social organization, might prevent the kind of rapid mass exodus of whites that Dover has experienced.

Once an area of working class Eastern European immigrants, Dover has evolved into a haven for Mexican-Americans and therefore serves as an apt example of a Chicago neighbourhood undergoing ethnic transformation. In Dover, the white ethnics who "built" the neighbourhood fought long and hard to keep it racially exclusive. Whereas the city of Chicago is roughly 36 percent African American, less than one percent of the residents of Dover are African American. Many people encountered on the street use the word "nigger" openly, and explicitly described their efforts to keep African Americans out of the community as righteous.

Although white racial hostility in Dover is notable, there is greater white tolerance for co-residence with Latinos than there is for African Americans. Nonetheless, given the rapid increase in the Latino population of Dover, white hostility toward Latinos was on the rise during the time our researchers collected data in the neighbourhood in the first half of the 1990s.

Since 1990 whites have overwhelmingly chosen to exit the neighbourhood and are now represented by only 18 percent of the population. Before the Mexican-Americans began to move into the community in large numbers, Dover was struggling through economic decline. Industrial layoffs, coupled with the exodus of many who had acquired the means to purchase newer houses in the suburbs, softened the housing market and lowered property values. The arrival of a large number of Latinos beginning in the 1980s reversed this trend by increasing housing demand. Thus, unlike Beltway, Dover had neither the population stability nor the institutional strength to prevent a rapid ethnic turnover.

Rapid social change challenges institutional arrangements and patterns of behaviour. In Dover the recent Mexican arrivals are generally younger than the more established white residents, and language and cultural differences separate the groups. Indeed, for many long-time Doverites the arrival of newcomers parallels a decline in neighbourhood prosperity. One woman of Polish descent who had lived in the neighbourhood for 32 years reported, "They're a different nationality—strange people. They come and go. They don't care about the neighbourhood." In the eyes of some of the older white residents, not only are the Mexicans taking over the community, they are contributing to its deterioration.

When asked is this a nice neighbourhood, the first response of most white people on the street was that it was very much in decline and rapidly becoming more Mexican. They openly expressed resentment toward their Latino neighbours, and blamed them for the defacement of public property and with reducing public safety. Whites often complained that Latinos were lawless, dirty, unappreciative, and did not pay for their share of community services.

On the street one afternoon, our two fieldworkers met an older Lithuanian man who had lived in the neighbourhood for over two decades and worked in a local bar. He had recently moved to the suburbs but on this occasion he had returned to visit his son, who still lived in the community. Of Dover, he offered,

It's going down—the whole neighbourhood. The Mexicans are coming in, and they don't care. It's different now. They don't care. They just start moving in and they want your neighbourhood. They don't want you in it, they want it. Now it is all just Mexicans. They put up graffiti, mark up the garage doors...

Mexicans, unwilling to allow their cultural practices to dilute in the “American melting pot,” express resentment towards white residents. When asked what it was like living in Dover, one young Latino man who had just recently moved from Pilsen, a Latino enclave to the East, replied, “My neighbour is really grouchy. I say ‘Hi,’ to him and he just ignores me. But I think it's because our skin is a few shades too dark.”

Tensions between whites and Latinos bubble just below the surface, and occasionally erupt in public settings, usually in conflicts over language. An exchange between white and Latino audience members at a public meeting in 1995 illustrates the wall of resistance long-time residents have constructed against Latino efforts to include Spanish alongside English as a civic and commercial language. A Latino man in his thirties stood before the microphone in a room with at least 100 Dover residents and a handful of local politicians, and chastised the meeting organizers for not providing signs and community announcements in Spanish. Although there was an interpreter on hand responsible for translating throughout the meeting, posters with a community calendar were only written in English.

The man's criticism was met with a wave of audible disagreement in the crowd, which found expression in the comments of a white woman who yelled from the back of the crowded room, “This is America!” The man then reiterated his contention that more should be done to accommodate the Spanish-speaking residents who had not yet learned English, an opinion echoed by a Latino woman seated in the front row. Signs of commotion swept through the audience and the white woman fired back, “Well what about the Poles then?” This comment no doubt referred to the substantial Polish community in the neighbourhood many of whose members have made the painful transition from native tongue to English and have done so, in their recollection, without the kind of assistance being requested by the Latino community.

This instance vivifies one aspect of the underlying tension that separates the two groups. Latino community members felt as though they were not being allowed to participate in Dover community life because of language barriers, while the Eastern European immigrants and their American born descendants feel that the Mexicans are not putting forth any effort to learn the English language. In fact, some of the white residents consider calls by Latinos to provide public documents and signs in Spanish as arrogant and an affront to the American way of life.

If there is a commonality between Latinos and whites in Dover, it has to do with their response to African Americans. Latino residents of Dover, including the recent arrivals, are no more amenable to living with African Americans than those of Eastern European descent. Racism in Dover is exacerbated by the fact that many residents of the nearby black community are destitute, so knowledge about African Americans drawn from adjacent areas reinforces the stereotype of black poverty. And while Latino enclaves provide a buffer between Dover and the poor black neighbourhoods, it is a thin buffer at best.

Given the proximity to black ghetto neighbourhoods, efforts to prevent the bussing of students in overcrowded Dover schools to nearby black neighbourhood provide the only context and impetus for cooperation between whites and Latinos. Schools, in particular, have

been the venues for ethnic unification and integration as white and Latino parents, faced with the threat of an unappealing solution to over crowded schools joined forces in the battle against bussing.

Vigorously opposing bussing and stressing the need for the construction of new schools, white and Latino parents argued that the underutilized receiver schools were inferior and that their location in dangerous neighbourhoods place children in harm's way. Since the underutilized schools were predominantly black, statements made about the safety and quality of education cannot be separated from attitudes about race.

In conversations with our fieldworkers, both whites and Latinos frequently displayed hostile black sentiments. These sentiments are no doubt aggravated by the community's intense opposition to the bussing of Dover children to schools in the ghetto of Stockton. Hostile black sentiments are also displayed in the Mexican neighbourhood of Archer Park.

Over the latter decades of the 20th century, Archer Park transformed from a neighbourhood exclusively inhabited by whites, many Bohemian, to a haven for Mexican Americans. Henri Hernandez, the president of the local Chamber of Commerce, proudly describes the community as a well-known Mexican community, "Archer Park is truly unique. It has the largest concentration of Mexicans in the Midwest...If you live, let's say in Kansas, and you're a Mexican, you know about Archer Park."

In contrast to Beltway and Dover, Archer Park allows us to examine the dynamics of inter-group relations in a neighbourhood where ethnic control of the community and key institutions is firmly established. Unlike in previous years, when mainly whites inhabited Archer Park, racial and ethnic tensions are not related to neighbourhood preservation or control of major institutions. Moreover, unlike in Dover, and especially in Beltway, the social organization of the neighbourhood does not reflect concerns about ethnic and racial challenges to the prerogatives of the group currently in control of the neighbourhood.

Despite a slight numerical increase in the black population in outer fringe areas of the neighbourhood, Archer Park shows no signs of an ethnic turnover. The steady stream of foreign-born Mexicans into the neighbourhood counterbalances the sustained movement of upwardly mobile Mexicans out of Archer Park to Dover and other neighbourhoods in the Chicago metropolitan region. Given the absence of a challenge to Mexican control of the neighbourhood and its key institutions such as the schools, groups dedicated to specifically Mexican or Latino issues are notably absent and concerns about discrimination are muted.

But there is another factor that may be important in the diminished role of race and ethnicity in the social organization of Archer Park. Of the four neighbourhoods in this study, Archer Park is fairly distinct in its status as a "stepping stone community." For example, Dover, which ranks above Archer Park in terms of housing prices and class status, includes many residents who once lived in Archer Park.

Our field researchers observed signs of transience rather than permanence in Archer Park, a view confirmed by the remarks of most residents who aspire to move. Further, even long-time Archer Park residents exhibited feelings of longing for another community. Accordingly, aside from lack of a perceived threat to Mexican dominance in Archer Park, the relatively lower commitment to the neighbourhood as a permanent place of residence

decreases concerns about the future of the neighbourhood and its institutions, or about ethnic or racial changes in the neighbourhood.

What does concern the Mexican population of Archer Park is their relative status vis-à-vis African Americans. Unlike in Beltway and Dover where hostility toward blacks is associated with neighbourhood preservation and access to and control of local public schools, Mexican animus toward African Americans in Archer Park involves attempts to differentiate themselves from blacks in terms of social prestige. This is accomplished in two main ways. Mexicans explicitly describe the actions of African Americans as socially unacceptable in their desire to escape the stigmas of poverty and criminal activity routinely ascribed to minorities such as blacks and Latinos in the United States. And many Mexicans interviewed by our field workers more explicitly set themselves apart from African Americans by commenting on the undesirability of dark skin or of “looking black.”

A widespread feeling of racial competition in the larger city of Chicago also pervades Archer Park. The Mexicans believe that they are competing with African Americans for scarce resources in the city, and they furthermore conclude that blacks have already received an unfair share of these resources.

However, the residents in the African American neighbourhood of Groveland exhibited a different kind of racial sentiment that stands in sharp contrast not only to the residents of Beltway, Dover, and Archer Park, but also to the description of black racial antagonisms in recent literature depicting the “rage of the black middle class.” Although the residents of Groveland are not members of the privileged class of African Americans, there is little evidence of the kind of racial hostility toward whites or preoccupation with the racial issues highlighted in the literature on the racial views of the black middle class.

When whites, usually workers, appear in Groveland, their presence did not generate negative comments. Indeed, black interactions with the few whites that worked or lived there tended to be congenial. When the black residents of Groveland report experiences of racial discrimination, it is frequently accompanied by a sad shake of the head with expression such as “you know how white people are.” Indeed the racial discourse often describes how whites do numerous things better than blacks e.g., organizing political action or preparing catering trays in super markets. Conversations in the neighbourhood clearly reveal a preference for goods and services provided by and for whites.

Thus, whereas racial and ethnic hostilities are palpable in Beltway and Dover and evident, if not as intense, in Archer Park, in the African American neighbourhood of Groveland such antagonisms are hardly visible.

Groveland, a community of lower-middle class black residents, presents an interesting case study for evaluating racial dialogue. This neighbourhood openly expresses and negotiates the notion of what it means to be African American in today’s society. Although interracial contact within Groveland is minimal, race remains a frequent topic of discussion. However, unlike in Beltway, Dover, and Archer Park, the racial dialogue is not infused with hostile expressions about other groups. In fact, discussions pertaining to race overwhelmingly reflect concerns about forging a positive black identity.

As a lower middle-class community, the upkeep of the neighbourhood remains an important priority, and Groveland’s block clubs play a critical function in this regard. Moreover these

informal local networks help to ensure that newcomers observe the traditions established by the older members of the community. But, to repeat, when Groveland residents spoke to our fieldworkers about interracial matters, their words seldom reflected animus toward other ethnic groups, a sharp contrast to the racial perceptions our field workers observed in the three other neighbourhoods. Indeed, positive evaluations of white businesses and positive comments about white individuals and neighbourhoods were not infrequent.

In assessing the relatively congenial racial attitudes in Groveland, it is important to consider the following. In 2000, approximately one-third of the employed population in Groveland worked for the city, state, or federal government. This figure is almost five times the proportion of employed government workers in Archer Park, almost four times the proportion in Dover, and six percentage points higher than the proportion in Beltway. Civil service jobs, particularly those obtained through formal tests or examinations, not only significantly reduce competition along racial lines, they make it less likely that racially motivated actions will determine hiring, salary increases, and promotions. In addition, blue-collar workers in Groveland tend to hold unionized jobs in which supports for workers do not reflect racial differences. For all these reasons, Groveland adults are less likely than upper-middle class professional blacks to openly and directly compete for jobs with whites and other ethnic groups, to be in employment situations where they feel the slings and arrows of racial slights, and to encounter “glass ceilings”—the invisible but impenetrable barriers to more ideal job assignments. Moreover, the limited involvement of Groveland’s black residents with whites and other ethnic groups outside the sphere of employment minimizes the impact of prejudice and other racial indignities.

Even more important, Groveland residents are not confronted with an influx of other ethnic groups into the neighbourhood, and so they do not face competition for the cultural and material resources of their community. The combined white, Latino, and Asian population is small and declining. Accordingly, African Americans firmly control the institutions in Groveland.

However, the diminished role of race in the social organization of the neighbourhood of Groveland does not remove the residents’ anxiety about neighbourhood change. The residents do express some concern about the pressures of living near inner-city ghetto neighbourhoods. Groveland is a black *lower-middle class* neighbourhood, so residents possess more economic and social resources to enhance the quality of community life than do those of the less economically advantaged neighbourhoods around them. And given the possibility that their neighbourhood could undergo a class transformation if significant segments of the ghetto poor penetrate, Groveland’s current residents closely scrutinize newcomers because newer residents often challenge the traditions established by the older neighbors, thereby increasing anxiety about the future of the neighbourhood.

Commenting on the newer residents to the neighbourhood, Mariane Johnson remarked,

In fact over the next 5 to 8 years...that’s going to be the time the houses are going to be available...And that’s when things are going to begin to turn. They’re turning now, but they’re going to be a real influx of people. I’m not sure [in what direction] because you know I haven’t been too impressed. You know, just on this street, we’ve had a couple people move in and they’re not, you know, they don’t understand about block clubs, you know. The block, you know, we have people they trying to work on they cars on the street. And this may sound really trivial, but however, if you don’t

maintain your standards. We have garages and alleys, that's where you do that stuff, back there, okay."

The findings of this research suggest several general principles that have profound implications for social policies in addressing the problems of racial and ethnic antagonisms in large American metropolises. In general, when the residents perceive that in-migration presents a real threat to the ethnic makeup of their neighbourhood, they will react by either exiting or by joining forces with other neighbors to resist the change. The stronger the social organization of the neighbourhood, the more likely that local residents will remain and take steps internally to keep the area stable. Residents are more likely to choose to depart a neighbourhood when they feel that its resources, including the social organization of the neighbourhood, are insufficient to stem the tide of ethnic change.

The greater this feeling among residents, the more quickly the neighbourhood reaches what social scientists call "the tipping point," that is, the beginning of a very rapid ethnic turnover. However, the literature on neighbourhood ethnic change does not provide a general set of arguments that relate the tipping point to neighbourhood social organization, arguments that would help explain more fully why some neighbourhoods reach the "tipping point" more rapidly than others, or why some neighbourhoods undergoing ethnic change never reach the tipping point.

The findings of our study suggest a positive relationship between the strength of neighbourhood social organization and the length of time it takes to reach the "tipping point" after an ethnic invasion occurs. In our comparisons of Beltway and Dover, we highlighted the fact that Dover, unlike Beltway, had neither the institutional strength nor the population stability to prevent a rapid ethnic turnover. Whereas Dover struggled through a period of economic decline prior to the en masse in-migration of Mexicans that resulted in significant out-migration of white residents, housing vacancies, and declining property values, Beltway, by contrast, had been a model of population and institutional stability until 1990. However, although Beltway experienced some population movements in the 1990s, it remains an overwhelmingly white community and continues to feature institutions and organizations that effectively resist unwanted neighbourhood changes.

Nonetheless, despite the high level of social organization, in the 1990s Beltway experienced a notable decline in its white population, a significant rise in its Latino population, as well as small but symbolic increases in its Asian and black populations. Although whites still constitute more than three-quarters of the residents, the community is not nearly as ethnically homogeneous as in previous years. The question remains: how long can the community prevent the neighbourhood from reaching the dreaded "tipping point?"

Although the immediate future of Beltway is in doubt, a few decades ago Groveland changed from white to African American and Archer Park shifted from white to Latino. In the 1990s, Dover was one of the latest Chicago neighbourhoods to undergo an ethnic turnover, from white to Latino. For the most part, these population transformations have generated incredible racial and ethnic tensions.

However, once a neighbourhood has been transformed ethnically and the prospects for further ethnic change are nil, racial and ethnic tensions within the neighbourhood subside. Groveland, and to a lesser extent Archer Park, are cases in point. Nonetheless, since urban neighbourhoods are divided racially, ethnically, and culturally, the potential for ethnic

conflict in the larger city is always present because groups are far more likely to focus on their differences rather than on their commonalities. Although they may be comfortable in their own ethnic neighbourhoods, these groups are likely to view themselves as competitors in terms of political, social and cultural resources in the city

America is often described as a melting pot constantly featuring an ever-changing blend of races and cultures. Indeed, many citizens still cling to the notion that the residential desegregation of neighbourhoods is achievable. However, the research we conducted strongly suggests that neighbourhoods in urban America, especially in large metropolises like Chicago, will remain divided, racially and culturally for the foreseeable future.

As I see it, the challenge facing American metropolises is how to minimize racial and ethnic antagonisms given this inevitable diversity. Some clues on how to confront this challenge arise from our study. I have in mind those situations that create a sense of interdependence between the ethnic groups. For example, white and Latino parents in Dover set aside their ethnic antagonisms when they saw the need to join forces to prevent the bussing of their children to black inner-city neighbourhoods.

A more positive example is a situation in Beltway that I did not discuss because of time constraints, but that deserves brief mention in this context. White and Latino parents of children in the Beltway public schools joined with the parents of the black children who were bussed into the Beltway schools to address the problem of an autocratic Local School Council. The positive interaction of the younger white and Latino parents with the African American parents in confronting the Local School Council was not the result of greater ethnic tolerance. Rather, the situation was conducive to uniting the races because all shared a common concern—the education of their children.

Social psychological research on interdependence reveals that when people believe that they need each other, they tend to relinquish their initial prejudices and stereotypes and join in programs that foster mutual interaction and cooperation. The implication is that urban leaders, especially political leaders, should work to create situations that foster feelings of interdependence, situations that enhance cooperation, not competition.

Unfortunately, as long as groups in the United States are sorted into ethnically and racially monolithic neighbourhood, they are more likely to highlight racial differences rather than commonalities and therefore less likely to see the need and appreciate the potential for mutual political support across racial and ethnic lines. That is why it is so important to create an atmosphere of coalition building, an atmosphere that would bring together the leaders of these diverse communities to identify goals and concerns shared by the various groups. I believe that goals specifying the improvement of public schools, expanded libraries, better parks, cleaner playgrounds, more efficient public transportation, and more reliable community services ranging from street cleaning to garbage collection could provide the common ground on which many diverse groups could meet. Such a coalition might also provide the political muscle to pressure for greater federal support for cities.

Indeed, racial and ethnic tensions in urban areas can also be reduced if the nation commits itself to an urban policy designed to enhance the quality of life of all residents. I indicated previously that when the political and social forces turned against the cities, the quality of urban life declined, including diminishing services. Many financially secure residents are therefore encouraged to move to the suburbs, and those who remain find themselves

competing along racial and ethnic lines for limited resources, including housing, neighbourhoods, schools, parks and playgrounds.

In short, Americans residing in large metropolises will continue to be separated in neighbourhoods along racial and cultural lines. And given this incredible and growing diversity, it is imperative that urban leaders work to fashion situations of interdependence whereby individual racial and ethnic groups come to realize that they cannot achieve desirable common goals without the help of other groups. Creating a sense of group interdependence in a divided city would clear the path for inter-group cooperation and greatly diminish the potential for racial and ethnic conflict.

Thank you.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

John Hills

Bill, would you like to stay there or...

William Julius Wilson

Yeah, take some questions.

John Hills

Okay, Professor Wilson has very kindly agreed to take questions for a few minutes, I think we've got ten to 15 minutes while those who have to escape at this moment escape. I think it might be best if there are a number of questions, if I take them in batches. There are roving microphones, I think there's a roving microphone up in the balcony so you're not excluded up there. So let me take a couple of questions.

Question 1

Just a question of clarification. How do you define what you mean by a neighbourhood.

William Julius Wilson

By what?

Question 1

By a neighbourhood.

William Julius Wilson

In Chicago we have what we call, unlike other cities, community areas, these are clearly marked neighbourhood areas that were originally outlined by the University of Chicago sociologist and are now widely recognised as Chicago neighbourhoods. When I taught, for example, at the University of Chicago I lived in Hyde Park, which was a neighbourhood that surrounds the University of Chicago. This is a community area that's clearly defined and the residents of that area identify themselves as living in Hyde Park. So unlike other cities where census tracts would be used to represent neighbourhoods, here we had a ready made solution, clearly identified areas that were originally identified by the University of Chicago sociologists.

Question 2

[PROBLEM WITH MICROPHONE?] You talked about a link between economic decline and a transition in Dover...

[END OF SIDE]

... my experience also in growing up in the Washington DC area we see that large parts of Washington DC are transforming and basically you see an improvement in material wealth and the transition is from a black neighbourhood, as we know Washington DC was known as chocolate city into a white neighbourhood. So in your conclusion you talk about a coalition I don't exactly know what kind of coalition can happen when those social economic conditions are not really discussed.

William Julius Wilson

Yeah, I think it's you can't really get a coalition off the ground if you can't identify areas of common concern and it becomes more difficult in an area like Washington DC when you have such rapid racial turnover, it's more challenging in Washington than it would be in Chicago, but I would still maintain that you can generate some cooperation among the people who live in the city if you could get the leaders together and say "Look, what concerns us?" and if you can agree on certain concerns, for example, garbage delivery in Washington is terrible. If you can agree on certain concerns then you reduce the possibilities over the long term for ethnic conflict and generate cooperation. I just want to see ethnic leaders begin to try to do this. They're starting to do this Los Angeles now; where some leaders with a vision are trying to pull together Latinos, blacks and whites who live in Los Angeles to form a coalition to address issues that concern them all. Coalitions work, we just have to believe in them. It's not possible to generate a coalition unless you can convince people that they need each other. If you can't generate that sense of interdependence then you're just going to throw up your hands in frustration when you try to form coalitions.

Coalition building in Washington DC presents a greater challenge than in other cities, but I still think it's possible.

Question 3

Thank you very much. Professor Wilson, I visited Chicago in around 1991, the city of Chicago...

William Julius Wilson

Where are you?

Question 3

Sorry?

William Julius Wilson

Oh, okay.

Question 3

<??> and I was appalled with what I'd seen, in fact they were so reluctant for me to visit Chicago south side, but I did visit and <??> and Chicago south side was appalling, I don't believe this existence <??> but my question to you is this, you seems to be saying that the blacks in the neighbourhoods you have studied are incapable of hating whites, is this the case?

William Julius Wilson

I'm not saying they're incapable.

Question 3

Well, I'm just putting it to you, you seem to be saying that their incapable of hating whites and is this case is the first part of my question; and secondly if that's the case is this a sense false consciousness on their part?

William Julius Wilson

Interesting question. Groveland is a lower middle class black neighbourhood that has certain unique features--disproportionate number of workers who worked for the city in civil service jobs, unionised jobs and so on. Groveland is not representative of all black neighbourhoods, but I think it is representative of lower-middle class black neighbourhoods. I can take you into higher income professional black neighbourhoods and believe me you won't get any expressions about how nice white people are. You get expressions of deep bitterness and frustration about whites and these are higher income, professional blacks who are in daily competition with whites and interestingly enough when you go in the black ghettos, that's where false consciousness really is on display, they're not criticising whites in the same way that whites and Latinos criticise blacks, in fact I was surprised to see that they don't talk about race much at all, what they're really concerned about are jobs, you see; and conditions of living.

So all I wanted to emphasis is that we shouldn't over generalise, there's great diversity within the black community and in neighbourhoods like Groveland people displayed more racial tolerance because of certain structural conditions, you know, the jobs that they have, the fact the neighbourhoods are relatively stable, and the fact that they have little day-to-day contact with whites and I would also say that they are incapable, I mean they are capable of displaying white hostility. You know, race prejudice is a product of situations, economic situations, political situations, and social situations. We often make a mistake when we use race prejudice as the independent variable to explain social outcomes. Why? Because race prejudice really should be the dependent variable and we should be looking at other factors that give rise to race prejudice.

John Hills

Can I take, I think three at once, well not at once but one after the other.

Question 4

Good evening, thanks for that very stimulating talk. I mean what is about the competition for the social wage that makes people so mad? I mean we have nothing like the degree of ethnic segregation between neighbourhoods in Britain as you do in Chicago and other American cities, but there's, you can characterise the British situation that there are, you know, dispossessed groups of people competing for a shrinking social wage; and the one thing that has real potential for conflict, that really gets people going, that short circuits their tolerance is the notion that ethnically distinct incomers are getting an unfair slice of the social wage.

William Julius Wilson

Right. Again going back to the point I was making before, race prejudice is a product of situations--economic situations, social situations, political situations. You give me a full employment economy, an economy where employers are looking for workers rather than

workers looking for employers, and then you will witness a reduction in race prejudice. In the late 1990s in America there was a significant reduction in social tensions, including racial tensions, why? Because we had this incredible period of economic growth from 1996 to year 2000 and social tensions were lessened and people were getting along better. A sustained period of full employment is the best way to reduce racial tensions over time.

On the hand, you create the kind of slack labour market that we now have in America you are going to have the conditions that will elevate racial and ethnic tensions. It's a relative thing, I'm not trying to suggest that if you have full employment you're going to eliminate racial prejudice but you can certainly reduce it. It's one of the reasons why I've been trying to get black leaders to pay far more attention to macro-economic policies in the United States, because blacks have benefited, definitely benefited, from tight labour markets and economic growth because more jobs are available and therefore racial competition over employment is minimized.

Question 5

I speak as a white mother of an adopted central American child, Hispanic I guess you'd call her and I just want to make the first point that it's just absolutely not true and I only experience the racism I've experienced as a white mother of a black child, it's just true that there isn't racial prejudice. I live in a part of Sheffield, city in the north, and your description of Beltway absolutely fits the area where I live; and I just wanted to make the point and ask you whether you would think this is right that actually there's a kind of global racism that I think has become incredibly apparent since the 9 September here as well as in the US and that there has also been really fed into firstly through all the issues that have been raised around the Iraqi war and secondly particularly here around asylum seekers; and I can tell you that my daughter has come home with stories of actually having been called at the age of 12 a terrorist on a bus in Sheffield, has been called a Kosovan, which is slang if you like for asylum seeker, and told to go home on numerous occasions and I just think there's an issue about, which takes it out of the neighbourhood level if you like, where I think that our national government actually through the statements of people like David Blunkett actually encourage some of those views amongst younger people and people in general to be expressed in that kind of way.

So I don't, I just wanted to ask about that, I agree with your analysis, it was really interesting, but I also think that feeding into that this kind of more general view that peoples of the Third World in general are of a lesser order, are inferior in many respects and that this kind of underwrites if you like a growing sort of racism on that basis.

John Hills

Bill, can I take two more and then we'll have to close in a moment, so next one there and then over here?

Question 6

Hi, I'm interested to see how you see the relationship between race and class in the US and to what extent you think interdependence could be fostered through the recognition of collective class interests. A lot of the groups you seem to study were working class communities and examples like say the Bush tax cuts across the US which must have affected the entire working class community. Couldn't interdependence be fostered through the kind of recognition of class interests rather than racial?

Question 7

I was just interested from a methodological point of view in terms of whether ethnic matching was carried out for ethnographers and whether you think that's important in terms of the views that were given.

William Julius Wilson

Let me take the last question on ethnic matching first. I was told to cut my talk to 45 minutes. I had a two-paragraph description of ethnic matching, so I didn't include them because of time constraints. We had black researchers in the black neighbourhoods and we had white researchers in the white neighbourhoods.

However, we had difficulty finding Hispanic researchers for the Hispanic neighbourhoods, but the white researchers who were in the Hispanic neighbourhoods, including Dover, which transitioned from white ethnic to Spanish, spoke Spanish. Three of the five researchers spoke fluent Spanish, the others could communicate in Spanish. It would have been ideal to have Spanish researchers in those communities, but unfortunately, we were unable to find such researchers.

The relationship between race and class as a way to talk about class base coalitions as opposed to race based coalitions. There is an important interaction between race and class. When I think about multiracial coalitions we bring diverse groups by emphasizing class issues, bread and butter basic economic issues. The Bush tax cut is an ideal example of issues in which lower, working, and middle class whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians could be rallied around. Why isn't that happening? Because of the lack of effective democratic leadership.

One thing that impressed me about Bill Clinton in 1992 is that he was able to bring together antagonistic racial groups in a very effective coalition by emphasizing class-based issues in a way that the masses could identify and relate to. He went into a black church in Houston, Texas and talk about how failed economic policies and failed political policies that have created problems for the working and middle classes and our political leaders are trying shift attention away from these problems by trying to get people to turn on each other and blame each other for these problems--race against race. This is a populist message that resonated with the black residents in the Houston church. He gave that same speech in a white church in Baton Rouge Louisiana and the whites in the church stood up and clapped. No one in the American press was writing about this important development, so I called up the *New York Times* and said "Look, something is happening here that you're reporters are not capturing. Here's a political leader bringing together peoples from different racial groups based on a class-based populist message that is very effective>" And I said "This is going to be important, it's going to get him elected." So, the editors of the New York Times invited me to write an op-ed piece on the matter, which I did. It was entitled *The Right Message*. I've got more to say about this but time is running out. But I could not agree with you more that we ought bring these multiracial groups together around basic bread and butter issues and the Bush tax cuts is one of the issues that coalitions leaders could focus on.

I've got to say this; it's hard to live in America these days. The right wing has control of our government and people are so psyched out about September 11 that Bush is able to get away with all kinds of nonsense. So until people somehow overcome their dreaded fear of another September 11, it's going to be even more difficult to forge political coalitions against Bush.

Now, the first question, racism in England. Yeah, there sure is racism in England. There's racism across Europe. I was watching my favourite tennis player in France, Serena Williams and the mean spirited way the crowd treated her had to represent some element of racism. I mean it really angered me. McEnroe, when he was playing, could stand up and scream and so on but the fans never jumped on him the way the French tennis fans jumped on did Serena. And for no apparent reason. And Serena unravelled and lost the match. The crowd behaviour was mean spirited and I maintain it was a manifestation of racism! Don't get me started on that. I want to see how the British fans treat her. She's playing in Wimbledon right now.

Yeah, there is racism across Europe, but again I want to come back to the point I made earlier. There are conditions that enhance racist feelings and conditions that minimise them. I remember the first time I flew into Sweden, this is in late 1970s and I was looking forward to going to this liberal paradise. So I landed in Stockholm and we take a train to Uppsala and was walking in downtown Uppsala with a colleague from Singapore and saw on a white fence, big red letters in English, the words "Niggers go home" and my colleague from Singapore said "Not to worry, they're referring to the guest workers, the immigrants from Italy". It so happened that Sweden was in a recession at that time and the workers were concerned about these immigrants coming in and taking their jobs.

So even in liberal Sweden you if the right conditions are created, you see racism.

Thank you very much.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

John Hills

Before you all go could I just make one advertisement. I'm sorry there was no time for more questions, but tomorrow I think the BBC are recording on the Laurie Taylor programme *Thinking Allowed* a debate or discussion featuring both Bill and Anne Power, you'll have seen I think as you came in or on your chairs information about the book <??> has recently published called *Eastenders* about two quite mixed and rapidly changing neighbourhoods in East London. So I think that programme will actually be broadcast next week.

But following the advertisement can I just finally thank Bill very much not just for his lecture but also for his patience in taking so many questions. I think this evening has been a very well timed evening, sadly ending on a low note, not just in the US but following the disturbances that we've had in Wrexham in north Wales between local residents and asylum seekers in the last two days. These are obviously critical issues for us as well as for the United States.

You've given us huge food for thought, much of it very worrying but some of it inspiring. As a final note of thanks if you'll allow me to adapt one of your own titles I think tonight those of us listening to you have been a truly advantaged.

Thank you very much indeed.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

[END]