

Voluntary integration and white flight

A new analysis of school integration statistics indicates that the exodus of white children from urban schools may be diminished if desegregation is pursued using voluntary methods. The report was prepared by David J. Armor of the Rand Corp.

Previous studies of this so-called "white flight" phenomenon have been criticized for not taking into account the type of desegregation involved and for ignoring other factors that might have induced white families to leave the central city anyway. Armor tries to correct these deficiencies by comparing white flight under court-ordered busing to that under voluntary integration plans, and by trying to estimate what demographic changes would have occurred if no desegregation plans had been implemented.

He concludes that some white out-migration would indeed have occurred under any circumstances, but finds that the rate of exodus is increased two to four times by court-ordered desegregation. However, "many school districts, including Los Angeles and San Diego, have promoted voluntary busing programs that have brought large numbers of minority students into schools that were formerly nearly all white. Yet little or no white flight has been observed as a result of these voluntary programs."

The crux of the matter, he says, is what happens to schools several years after integration — white flight, if severe enough, can simply make inner-city schools all black, resulting in more segregation than before. Such resegregation can be seen in several cities that first scored marked success in the forced mixing of white and black students. Pasadena, Calif., for example, started out with substantially more segregated schools than San Diego in 1969, became more integrated from 1970 to 1975, and now is more segregated again.

Preventive medicine: The need for trust

When researchers from the University of Chicago asked patients who had been warned they might have cancer why they did not seek prompt treatment, they got an earful: Several replied they had been unable to find "good family doctors." One ghetto dweller said she wouldn't go to the "Medicaid Mill" in her community. Another went to a large clinic but got so entangled in paperwork that she saw "everyone but a doctor." Some went so far as to characterize physicians as "robber barons" and "rip-off artists."

The researchers, Howard P. Greenwald, Selwyn W. Becker and Michael Nevitt, conclude that the success of preventive medicine techniques, such as large-scale cancer screening, may depend largely on making sure the patient has access to and confidence in the rest of the medical care system. Those most likely to seek follow-up care had several characteristics in common. The group included those who already had a family doctor, who believed in periodic routine checkups or who had had relatives with cancer.

The cancer screening center where the research was conducted examines 2,000 people a month, uncovers suspicious symptoms in about 12 percent of them, and, in an average year, discovers approximately 120 proven cases of cancer. Yet, of the persons who had been warned of suspicious signs, nearly a quarter had either not contacted a physician at all or waited four months to do so.

The authors conclude: "Nationwide cancer screening may be meaningless if the relation of this activity to the health care system in general is not strengthened. . . . Building confidence in the medical profession, then, seems as important for cancer control as improving access to primary care or erecting early detection facilities themselves."

Population density and crime

One of the most fundamental and widely accepted canons of criminology has been that increasing population density increases crime. But now David Shichor, David L. Decker and Robert M. O'Brien of California State College in San Bernardino conclude that for many types of crime, just the opposite may be the case.

The researchers used "victimization data" gathered from interviews (rather than the supposedly less accurate police statistics on "reported crime") to correlate 10 different types of crime to population density and population size in 26 U.S. cities. They found that total city size apparently does not correlate significantly with any of the types and that the effect of density on crime rate can either be positive or negative.

The authors distinguish three broad categories of crime according to the relationship to density: "Property crimes with personal contact" (such as armed robbery) do increase with population density, as expected. But "property crimes without contact" (like burglary) *decrease* with rising population density, as do "non-property assaultive crimes" (for example, forcible rape).

No comprehensive explanation of these puzzling effects is offered, but the authors conclude that at the very least crime statistics should be reexamined to see what other causes may be involved. They say, for example, that simple population density must be distinguished from actual overcrowding, which may indeed breed crime. They also suggest that different parts of the country may have different patterns of crime in relation to population factors.

Suggestion and suicide

Imitation and suggestion may play a significant role in suicide. David P. Phillips of the University of California in San Diego found that in California automobile fatalities increase by 31 percent three days after a publicized suicide. The more the suicide is publicized, the more automobile fatalities increase. The age of the driver in these accidents is significantly correlated with the age of the person described in the suicide story.

Blacks in the 1970s

Robert B. Hill of the National Urban League Research Department studied the economic progress of middle- and low-income blacks for the 1960s and 1970s and concludes that the momentum has gone out of early equality efforts. "Most of the economic gains made by blacks during the 1960s was significantly eroded by the 'benign neglect' policies of the Nixon-Ford Administration and the devastating recession/depressions of the 1970s."

Computers, networks and society

If computer networks and electronic mail finally blossom as planned, the result will be "to create much larger, denser, decentralized and geographically dispersed social networks than have ever existed previously," according to Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Tuross of Upsala College and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

"As communication satellites and international packet-switched networks reach out to other cities and villages around the world . . . we will become a 'global village' or 'wired world' whose boundaries are demarcated only by political decisions of some governments which choose not to become part of an international computer network. One will, literally, be able to work, shop or be educated by or with persons anywhere in the nation or in the world."