

Weaving Social Seams: Stable, Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities as Places of Social Innovation

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Abstract

As the United States moves toward the predicted 2040 demographic status as a “majority minority” society, a primary question is: will we be a nation of segregated communities or will there be an increase of stable, multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities, particularly in our metropolitan areas? Similar issues of increased diversity are facing most European nations. In some cases these stable diverse communities are “ports of entry” for new immigrant groups.

Over the past 20 years, the author has examined a growing number of communities that have been stable and diverse for more than two decades. This research has identified “social seams” – geographic, institutional, and virtual spaces where different groups come in contact with each other, where routine social relations are fostered, and where differences are sometimes resolved. Some of these seams occur unintentionally or “naturally” while others are intentional, planned seams. Such seams can be parks, schools, business districts, ecumenical religious organizations, community-based organizations promoting stable diversity, and even local government.

Social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of social seams will be examined, using data from a 1998 study of 14 stable diverse communities in nine U.S. cities and more recent data from the 30 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. The paper looks at how new forms of social relationships have emerged in political, educational, cultural, and other social institutions. Similarly, it examines how innovative business practices have developed in diverse communities – practices that help to weave together divergent racial, ethnic, and immigrant communities.

Emphasis is placed on community-based organizations (CBOs) that explicitly work to create stable diverse communities. In some cases these CBOs are multiple ethnic-based, racially-based, or immigrant-based organizations that represent constituent groups in negotiating new inter-group relationships in the diverse communities. These new relationships can serve models for the broader society. Given the newness of such communities, citizen involvement is often greater than seen in more established communities. This produces greater levels of citizen voice in forming these new stable diverse communities, effectively building a new form of local democratic practice.

Keywords: racial diversity; community; multi-ethnic; community-based organizations; immigrants

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As the United States moves toward the predicted 2040 demographic status as a “majority minority” society, a primary question is: will we be a nation of segregated communities, or will there be an increase of stable, multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities, particularly in our metropolitan areas? Over the past 20 years, the author has examined a growing number of communities across the U.S. that have been stable and diverse for more than two decades. In the course of multiple research projects, the author has identified community-based “social seams” – geographic, institutional, and virtual spaces where individuals and different groups come in contact with each other, where routine social relations are fostered, and where differences are sometimes confronted and resolved. These are places where different segments of the community are bound together by social, cultural, political, and economic threads. Some of these seams occur unintentionally or “naturally,” while others are intentional, planned seams. Seams can be parks, schools, business districts, ecumenical religious organizations, community-based organizations promoting stable diversity, and even local government.

Using findings from a 1998 study of 14 stable diverse communities in nine U.S. cities, as well as further observations and interviews with leaders in some of the stable diverse communities in the 30 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. over the past two year, this article first presents an overview of the increasing diversity of U.S. metropolitan areas. Defining stable diversity and presenting an overview of stable diverse community trends in the U.S., a typology of social seams is presented. Finally illustrations of the community-level forces creating social seams, particularly the role of community-based organizations in innovations, are provided.

Stable communities in a more diverse nation

Most studies of diverse communities and neighborhoods in the U.S. have been problem-oriented and not solutions-oriented. They focus on issues of residential *segregation* (e.g. Massey and Denton 1994, Krysan & Farley 2002). This has been reinforced by scholarly research on the “tipping point” of communities, which focuses on what percentage white residents will “tolerate” before they decide to move out of the community (Card et al. 2006, Schelling 1971). This focus on the problem of segregated communities by academic researchers is consistent with the widespread popular notion that diverse neighborhoods are inherently unstable, unsustainable neighborhoods – neighborhoods expected to

resegregate. This most frequently manifests itself in media references to “white flight” which has become a proxy for saying “tipping point.”

Few studies have been conducted on what produces and sustains *stable* racially, ethnically, and economically diverse neighborhoods. A major flaw of the “tipping point” research is its exclusive use of quantitative census and housing data in the absence of any complementary qualitative data on the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the community. While there may be “tipping points” in many U.S. communities, a 1998 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) study documented that there are exceptions to this pattern in many communities (Nyden et al. 1998). More importantly, these exceptional communities could become the norm if policy makers, elected officials, and community leaders jettisoned the false notion that diverse communities are inherently unstable. Arms-length analysis of abstract data by economists or demographers is insufficient in understanding what factors counter the tipping point scenario and instead lead to the development of stable diverse communities.

A key question to ask is: what is the process in a successful, stable diverse community that challenges stereotypical notions in the minds of a middle-class white prospective homebuyer *or* a low-income, African-American, single mother prospective renter that the diverse community they are considering moving into will be stable down the road? How does a community counter the misgivings of a middle-class prospective homebuyer who is thinking about purchasing a new home in a diverse community, but fears that it will resegregate? How does a community reassure the African-American single mother considering moving into a diverse community, but who fears that it may expose her to yet another displacement as a result of higher rents and an unfriendly environment if the community gentrifies and becomes more white and middle-class?

This challenge is not just an abstract academic exercise. The U.S. is becoming a much more diverse nation, with projections that the country will be “majority minority” before mid-century. This begs the question to community leaders, elected officials, and policy makers: are we to become a nation of segregated, gated communities or are we to embrace this increased diversity and provide more support and encouragement for diverse communities? Over half of U.S. cities are majority non-white. This demographic change has not been restricted to central cities. The trend toward diversity is also apparent in the suburbs; over one-half of Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics in the country’s large metropolitan areas now live in the suburbs (Frey 2011). As demographer William Frey concludes in his analysis of 2010 Census data:

The historically sharp racial and ethnic divisions between cities and suburbs in metropolitan America are more blurred than ever. The shifting social, economic, and political structures of these places will challenge leaders at all levels to understand and keep pace with the myriad implications of their continued demographic evolution (2011, 13).

Some studies over the past 20 years have shown that there are stable, racially and diverse communities around the United States. The 1998 HUD-funded study of 14 communities in nine cities documented the existence of communities that had been stable and diverse for more than 20 years (Nyden et al. 1998). Other researchers have also studied stable diverse communities and factors contributing to their emergence and stability (Ellen 2000, Goodwin 1979, Maly 2005 Saltman 1990). These studies suggest that approximately 10 percent of city and suburban communities can be considered stable and diverse.

Such stable diverse communities can serve as incubators of opportunity for all residents. The focus of this article is on the cultural seams that bind together different members of these diverse communities (although there are additional political, social, and economic seams). The author builds on a 1998 HUD-funded study, incorporating additional more recent observations, interviews, and research.

Defining stable diversity

The measure of diversity used in the current analysis is a relative one and adjusts to variations in overall ethnic and racial diversity from city to city, as well as from city to suburb. Census tracts are used as the basic unit of analysis. (Ranging in size from 2,500 to 8,000, the boundaries of census tracts reflect the social, economic, and political boundaries that define day-to-day resident interaction patterns.) The ethnic and racial mix of these tracts is compared to the racial and ethnic mix of either the whole central city or the total suburban population, excluding the central city. So in examining central cities, a diverse census tract is defined as the top 15 % of all tracts in the city that have a racial/ethnic mix that comes closest to the city's overall racial/ethnic mix. A separate analysis is done comparing the racial/ethnic mix in suburban tracts to the overall racial/ethnic mix in suburban population in a given metropolitan area (excluding the central city population).

This makes this measure sensitive to different racial and ethnic mixes in different regions of the U.S. For example, San Francisco has a proportionately larger Asian population than Chicago, hence the top 15 % of diverse census tracts will reflect this San Francisco-specific population characteristic (more discussion of this methodological approach is available in Maly 2000). Unlike some measures of diversity which require that tracts have no more than 80 percent of any one racial or ethnic group present,

this measure better adjusts to the different composition of the diversity in different metropolitan areas. This measure creates a statistical flashlight that is used to shine light on clusters of diverse census tracts with the expectation that a more qualitative study will be completed in those communities to understand the day-to-day, on the ground social processes that create and sustain diversity.

If diverse neighborhoods were a random phenomenon, one would expect them to be scattered randomly throughout a city or entire metropolitan region. However, diverse neighborhoods – particularly neighborhoods that have been diverse over multiple decades – are not scattered randomly in U.S. metropolitan areas. Using census tracts as a measure, we have found that while some of these tracts are scattered throughout metropolitan areas, the majority of diverse tracts are *clustered* together in distinct, identifiable neighborhoods in the central city or in particular suburbs.

These concentrated clusters are evident in the recent analysis of the top 30 Metropolitan Statistical Areas for 1990, 2000, and 2010 and consistent with findings from our past analysis of 1970, 1980, and 1990 census data (Nyden et al 1998). (A Metropolitan Statistical Area has at least one urbanized area of 50,000 in addition to adjacent areas. The areas have a high degree of social and economic integration and typically are congruent with political boundaries, e.g. clusters of counties.) The pattern is continuing in 2010.

As a way of illustrating the non-randomness of diverse census tract clusters, Maps 1 – 8 show the distribution of diverse census tracts from 1990 and 2000 and from 1990 through 2010 in four metropolitan areas – Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose. Even a quick glance at the maps reveals that these clusters are not random, but are concentrated in certain areas of the city. There are social forces within and outside these communities creating this diversity and stable diversity.

[Maps 1 – 8 Here]

Looking in more detail at Chicago census tracts, these maps essentially point us to distinctive neighborhoods where housing configurations (the “right mix” of renters and homeowners rates), anchor institutions (single large employers such as universities, hospitals, and large corporate employers are present), and active pro-diversity community-base organizations – among other factors -- are present. Map 1 shows diverse census tracts for the city of Chicago, mapping diverse tracts in 1990, in 2000, and in both 1990 and 2000. Even a quick glance at the map reveals that these clusters are not random, but are

concentrated in certain areas of the city. Some of these clusters are communities that have long-term histories of stable diversity. For example, Cluster 1 includes three community areas (Rogers Park, Edgewater, and Uptown) with a total population of over 180,000 and a history of stable diversity dating back to before 1970. Cluster 5, is a longstanding diverse community, Hyde Park, surrounding the University of Chicago. Other clusters, such as Clusters 2, 9, and 10 on the northwest side of the city and 8, 11, and 14 on the southwest side of the city represent more fluid boundary lines between shifting black, white, and Hispanic populations along the edges of what have been more segregated communities historically.

Similarly, the suburban Chicago clusters are not random (see Map 3). Each cluster has a different story behind it. In some cases these are established diverse communities -- such as Cluster 10 in Evanston just north of the city of Chicago where the public schools have been among the most diverse in the region since the 1960s. In other cases these clusters represent emerging stable diverse communities, such as Cluster 1 in south Hammond, Indiana, a blue-collar community that has experienced significant declines in factory employment in the past three decades, but has seen an increase in the Hispanic population. To understand the factors contributing to numerical diversity, it is critical to take a closer look at the social processes and social seams that create and sustain these communities – processes that create and sustain these communities in the face of broader societal skepticism that diverse communities can remain stable.

Social Seams

Social seams are not unique to stable diverse communities. They are common in most vibrant, economically successful communities. However, the author is arguing that strong networks of social seams are not only present in successful, stable diverse communities, but that such networks are a *requisite condition* for stable diverse communities. Since neighborhood diversity is typically seen as an unstable or transitory state, it is the strong network of social seams that helps diverse communities to develop the internal strength and the internal connections needed to overcome the negative perceptions inside and outside the community.

In her classic book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs (1961) introduces the concept of “seams” in describing the day-to-day interactions of city residents as mediated by the built environment. She examines everything from high-rise apartment buildings and major downtown arts complexes to the layout of city streets and the orientation of residential housing to the sidewalk. According to Jacobs, a city needs these seams -- places where different social worlds meet or mingle. These are places where people build up familiarity with each other – a familiarity that lays the foundation for trust between citizens. In specifically discussing segregation and discrimination, Jacobs states that

The tolerance, the room for great differences among neighbors – differences that often go far deeper than differences in color—which are possible and normal in intensely urban life ... are possible and normal only when streets of great cities have built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilized but essentially dignified and reserved terms (p. 72)

Jacobs recognizes the importance of community-based organizations and grassroots leaders in facilitating connections both within diverse neighborhoods and between different neighborhoods. She observes that “[s]mall organizations and special-interest organizations grow in our cities like leaves on the trees, and in their own way are just as awesome a manifestation of the persistence and doggedness of life” (134). She is quick to point out that this is not a matter of protecting the parochial interests of individual neighborhoods. Rather, in her characteristic populist vocabulary, Jacobs coins the term “hop-skip people” to describe those who both bring local community perspectives to the larger urban dialog *and* bring the larger, diverse issues back to the local neighborhood. Jacobs explains that in forming effective, diverse, vibrant communities,

“[a]n interweaving... set of relationships must grow up; these are working relationships among people, usually leaders, who enlarge their local public life beyond the neighborhoods of streets and specific organizations or institutions and form relationships with people whose roots and backgrounds are in entirely different constituencies.... These hop-and-skip relationships are more fortuitous in cities than are the analogous, almost enforced, hop-and-skip links among people from different small groupings within self-contained settlements. It takes surprisingly few hop-and-skip people, relative to a whole population, to weld a district into a real Thing (134).

In her extensive discussion of the city’s physical environment, she emphasizes the need to eliminate boundaries and “border vacuums.” She points to successful parks and business districts -- as well as some cultural institutions – as seams weaving together communities and contributing to local vitality. Jacobs’ writing has provided a springboard for multiple generations of urban researchers and planners.

The most recent and most comprehensive combined look at diversity, physical design, and social organization is by urban planner Emily Talen’s in *Design for Diversity: Exploring Socially Mixed Neighborhoods* (2008). Talen focuses on “*place diversity* – the phenomenon of socioeconomically diverse peoples sharing the same neighborhood, where diversity is defined by a mix of income levels, races, ethnicities, ages and family types.” She argues that “good urban form can help sustain diversity.” Talen adds that “[p]lace diversity is diversity that exists within the realm of ‘everyday life’ activities – attending school and shopping for groceries, for example.” Pointing to the work of sociologist Mary Patillo (1999), Talen continues, explaining that place diversity “concerns neighborhoods, whose pattern,

design, and level of resources constitute the ‘things that really count’ – schools, security, jobs, property values, amenities” (p. 5)

Paralleling the concept of social seams, urban planners have long talked about maximizing “connectivity” in communities to enhance the quality of life of and interaction among residents and visitors to those communities (Alexander 1965; Hiller & Hanson 1984; Manzi 2010; Salingaros 1998). In her research, Talen focuses on three factors contributing to connectivity: “identity space,” “collective space,” and “institutions.” Identity space is the collection of “images, symbols, and landmarks of a neighborhood [that] serve to hold a diverse population together and provide a rallying point. Identity space provides a way of binding disparate people and places” (p. 152). As Talen explains “[c]ollective space is less about forming an identity and more about finding opportunities for interaction. Collective spaces promote exchange. This is important in any neighborhood, but it is especially important in a diverse neighborhood as a way of counteracting the distrust or fear residents might be harboring about people unlike themselves” (p. 152). For the third factor, Talen points to an institutional web that supports social diversity, e.g. religious institutions, schools, and local retail stores (p. 163-171).

Much of the research in the subfield of “community sociology” also sheds light on community cohesion, community identity, and community stability. In Claude Fischer’s 1982 study of personal interactions among over 1,000 men and women living in 50 localities, he emphasizes that day-to-day interactions are the building blocks of our larger society:

Individuals’ bonds to one another are the essence of society. Our day-to-day lives are preoccupied with people, with seeking approval, providing affection, exchanging gossip, falling in love, soliciting advice, giving opinions, soothing anger, teaching manners, providing aid, making impressions, keeping in touch – or worrying about why we are not doing these things. By doing all these things we create community. The relations these interactions define in turn define society, and changes in those relations mark historical changes in community life (p. 2).

Similarly, Gerald Suttles’ classic, *The Social Construction of Communities*, sought “to show how people use territory, residence, distance, space, and movement to build up collective representations which have communicative value.... [and] to show how residential groups and locality groups are inevitably partial structures whose very existence and character depend on their relationship to a wider society” (p. 7). Even though Suttles’ book is known for its discussion of the “*defended* neighborhood” – places that seek to seal themselves off from others unlike themselves – its core focus is on how social connections are the building blocks of community.

Sociologists such as Ray Oldenburg (1999) have looked at how everyday gathering places -- from coffee shops to beauty parlors -- provide the routine opportunities for people to mingle and talk, or at least be aware of who lives in their community. Al Hunter examined how neighborhood level conversations and perceptions are used to define understandings of the shape and boundaries of a community (1974). Still others have focused on more conscious efforts in shape interaction and debates through community organizing (Stoecker 1994; Warren 2001).

A Social Seam Typology

Drawing from this strong theoretical and research underpinning from both sociological and urban planning fields, it is logical to expect to find social seams in successful diverse communities. These physical and social places where connections can be built and sustained are the glue that holds together diverse communities and function to:

- 1) *Integrate* different community members into a diverse community;
- 2) *Display* a group's distinctive identity (e.g. ethnic, racial, sexual orientation); and
- 3) *Discuss, agree, disagree, negotiate, and develop* new ways of thinking and doing.

Social seams are *necessary and critical elements* in maintaining the stability and quality of life in diverse communities. Since stable diverse communities are stereotypically seen as unstable, community building is critical to their long-term survival, if they are to resist these popular notions. This is consistent with other research findings on stable diverse communities (Alba 2009, Boal 2000, Briggs 2005, Ellen 2000, Flint & Robinson 2008, Hartman & Squires 2010, Keating 1994, Maly 2005, Saltman 1990).

Dimensions and Characteristics of Social Seams

In addition to understanding the functions of social seams, it is helpful to look at the various dimensions of these social seams:

- § *place* (physical location versus community-wide program or virtual presence),
- § *level of engagement facilitated* (passive versus proactive),
- § *connection directions* (inward/outward),
- § *visibility*, and
- § *level of permanence* (permanent versus temporary).

Place

Social seams are anchored to a particular physical space in different ways. A shopping mall or a park are physically-anchored spaces that can provide places where people interact, or at least where they come to see diversity as a normal part of day-to-day interactions. Restaurants, barber shops, or art galleries can be such spaces. Events or entertainment venues can be such spaces; a sporting event at a high school playing field can be an anchor for a social seam. Ray Oldenburg describes many of these social seams as “third places” distinct from work and home. He argues that

[i]n order for the city and its neighborhoods to offer the rich and varied association that is their promise and their potential, there must be *neutral ground* upon which people may gather. There must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable. If there is no neutral ground in the neighborhoods where people live, association outside the home will be impoverished. Many, perhaps most, neighbors will never meet, to say nothing of associate, for there is no place for them to do so. Where neutral ground is available it makes possible far more informal, even intimate, relations among people that could be entertained in the home (pp. 22-23).

Places of employment, particularly hospitals and universities, can create social seams, or at least add to the diversity of a local community by creating more opportunities for interaction across racial and ethnic lines. While some workplaces are miles away from local communities, others have a profound effect on local communities. Many of the concentrations of diverse census tracts that the author has identified in the top 30 MSAs in the U.S. surround universities and hospitals. Both institutions require large numbers of workers at different skill and education levels; this, in turn, tends to create a racial, ethnic, and economic diversity among people living in residential areas around these institutions. In the case of universities, student populations contribute even more to this mix – particularly graduate and professional students who live in rental housing outside the university proper.

Even in cases where employers may not be in, or adjacent to, the community, where there are large concentrations of single industries that have distinctively diverse workforces, these employers can have region-wide impacts. Such is the case with the high-tech industries in Silicon Valley. These are newer industries reflecting both hiring practices sensitive to diversity and also hiring a significant number of Asian-American workers. High tech industry workforce diversity has spilled over into scores of local communities in the Silicon Valley/San Jose area of California. Not only does this produce diversity by the numbers, but it creates another layer of work-related social seams which can be overlaid on local communities. City officials in both Santa Clara and San Jose, California have indicated that government policy and social relationships in their communities have been influenced by the impact of this diverse workforce (Chen 2010, Hewitt 2010, Pedersen 2010, Riley 2010).

However, seams are not always physically-anchored spaces. Increasingly the internet and other electronic communication networks serve as connectors among people. A web site can be used to promote a community's diversity and encourage positive discussions about the advantages of stable diversity. It can also be a place where the diverse quilt of community life is displayed one panel at a time. These can be web sites, blogs, and twitter discussions connected to local government, newspapers, or community organizations, but they can also be independent from such formal institutions or businesses.

Level of engagement

Social seams can be *passive* and just provide the place where one *sees* other members of the community, e.g. in the grocery store, coffee shop, or park. Alternatively, some social seams can be more *proactive and conscious*. Efforts by a community-based organization to explicitly work to maintain diversity through advocacy for mixed-income housing or by a cultural institution to routinely display artwork from different cultural groups are examples of more proactive seams.

For example, the Organization of the NorthEast (ONE), a community organization in Chicago's longtime diverse Uptown, Edgewater, and Rogers Park communities along Chicago's northern lakefront, promotes diversity on many fronts. An umbrella organization of block clubs, businesses, religious congregations, tenants associations, school groups, immigrant mutual aid societies, and other organizations in the area of 180,000 residents along Chicago's northern lakefront, ONE has worked for over 30 years to promote and preserve diversity. ONE describes itself as "a mixed-income, multi-ethnic, intergenerational organization of institutions that unites our diverse community. Our mission is to build power and develop leadership so that the community can address critical human rights issues that improve our common life" (ONE 2011). ONE has successfully campaigned for affordable housing, jobs programs, community safety, school reform, and cultural bridges between different immigrant groups, among other programs.

Connection directions

Social seams can be directed *inward* toward the community or even toward just small clusters of blocks (100 or so people). Seams can also be directed *outward*, toward the entire community or beyond. Both types of social seams are components of successful stable diverse communities. Inward-directed groups can serve as constituency groups that can be pulled together by larger more outward-directed networks when the need arises. Block clubs or immigrant organizations (inward-directed seams) may have their own constituency as a primary focus, but community-wide organizations (outward-directed

seams) may find these “pre-organized” groups very useful when communicating with or convening gatherings of the entire community. These smaller groups represent seams that can be further woven into a larger community fabric. Community-wide coalitions of inward-directed groups have been used to protect diverse community interests in preserving affordable housing, promote business districts, and school improvement among other issues.

This concept of connection direction is consistent with Robert Putnam’s discussion of the “bridging” and “bonding” relationships critical in creating strong civic engagement. In talking about “social capital” – the assets that a community has to sustain itself and maintain a comfortable quality of life for all – Putnam states:

Of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between *bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive). Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations (2000:22).

Block clubs are the small inward-directed organizations that can produce a micro-seam that pulls together neighbors who share an alley behind their houses or who live across the street from each other. Ethnic or immigrant-based mutual aid societies can pull together members of an immigrant group who may not live in physical proximity on a single block, but might be concentrated in a particular part of a city. For example, in diverse Chicago communities mutual aid societies serve to organize new immigrant communities; these include organizations such as the Cambodian Association, the Ethiopian Community Association, Chinese Mutual Aid, the Vietnamese Association of Illinois, Centro Romero, and Lao American Community Services.

Visibility

Social seams vary in their visibility – particularly in their visibility to people outside the community itself. The mingling of different ethnic and racial groups in parks, restaurants, business districts, and shopping malls, as well as at neighborhood festivals celebrating the overall diversity of a community, are highly visible, routinely functioning, social seams. Such seams provide very public, very visible opportunities for different members of the community to either interact in public venues or at least be reminded that diversity is “normal” in their community. Non-residents visiting or traveling through the community are also made aware of its diversity in such places and at such events.

Less visible social seams may not be as effective in advertising the community's diversity to outsiders, but may be particularly effective in promoting positive relations within the community. Integrated local schools represent the most common and powerful social seams in many diverse communities. Such schools come to represent a point of pride among residents. In a community visit to Southeast Seattle as part of the 1998 study of 14 stable diverse communities throughout the U.S., the author commented that a neighborhood school in one of Chicago's diverse communities had students coming from families speaking 65 different languages or dialects, to which a local Seattle leader pointed to an elementary school in their community, and declared that "our school as 75 different languages represented."

A community can be thought of as having a collective "front yard" visible to insiders and outsiders, as well as a collective "back yard" only visible to people in the neighborhood. It is these backyard activities that serve as less visible, but no less important social seams. Back yard activities can include the collective work of block clubs in promoting social connections among various neighborhoods. They can also include the work of community-based organizations in addressing community safety, economic development, and affordable housing preservation. These activities may not be visible to the casual observer, but are critical in contributing to the quality of life and residents' recognition that their diverse community is a stable, functioning, community.

Level of permanence

Social seams may be relatively permanent and anchored by way of local organizations, cultural institutions, or long-standing annual celebrations. They may also be more fleeting, such as a one-time photography show celebrating a community's diverse past and present. Jackson Heights, Queens one of the most diverse communities in the nation that has served as a port-of-entry for multiple immigrant groups, sponsored a "Babel Exhibition" in 2010. The tag line for the exhibition read, "Experience the world in one neighborhood." Artwork illustrated the multi-ethnic and multi-national character of the community. While the exhibition itself has less permanence, the organizations behind it – such as the Queens Media Arts Development (connected with a City Councilmember's office) or JacksonHeightsLife.org, an on-line realtor site promoting Jackson Heights' vibrant neighborhoods -- represent more permanent organizational seams.

Murals and public art often represent objects that can range from the permanent to temporary. Murals may be used as an artistic update on current community debates defining what is diversity. In Chicago's

Uptown community a community group commissioned an artist to portray the community's long history as a port-of-entry for new immigrant (see Uptown United's web site: <http://www.uptownunited.org/roa/allportals.htm>). However, the subtlety of the mural is that the future "immigrants" are represented by a question mark, a nod, some say, to the white, Anglo gentrifiers in the local community.

Social seams across a variety of community institutions

Social seams are located in a vast variety of social institutions in diverse communities. The author uses the traditional sociological definition of social institutions, which can refer to more formal institutions, such as public schools, but also can refer to formal and informal social processes in which we engage and which shape our day-to-day lives. Social institutions can serve cultural, political, economic, educational, and/or religious functions. For the purposes of illustration in this paper, I have particularly focused on cultural institutions.

Food cultures

While not a feature of all stable diverse communities, a broad mix of restaurants is a visible social seam in many multi-racial and multi-ethnic communities. Often created by a confluence of many immigrant groups, ethnic restaurants become the visible, permanent, inward- and outward-directed social seams in many diverse communities. Although ethnic restaurants are not necessarily created to advertise a community's diversity, they quickly become meeting places not only for a particular ethnic group, but for all community residents.

Ethnic restaurants become the visible and easy way for outsiders – mealtime tourists -- to experience a community's diversity. This form of diversity easily fits into established ways of understanding communities within a city. City tourist bureaus, tour books, and regularly published city life magazines, have specific sections on restaurants and generally break them down by ethnicity. Restaurants have a way of making diversity accessible and exciting. One of the subway lines in Jackson Heights, Queens is referred to as the "ethnic express" and brings visitors into this diverse community. As sociologists Philip Kasnitz, Mohammad Bazzi, and Randal Doane describe:

The ethnic variety that one can see, hear, smell, and taste on the streets of Jackson Heights is truly stunning. At 74th Street, north of Roosevelt Avenue, lies Little India, where visitors find some of the finest subcontinental cuisine in all of New York City. Along 37th Avenue, trattorias

share walls with cantinas. Elsewhere, Colombian bodegas share a dumpster with pizza and doughnut shops.. Koreans and Chinese, Peruvians and Hondurans, Dominicans and Jews all have developed pieces of Jackson Heights as their own and fused them together to form a new and dynamic whole (1998, 161).

Similarly small food markets display local diversity. To local ethnic groups it may be their grocery store; but to others outside the community it may be an exotic place with fruits, vegetables, fish, and meat that one never sees in large chain grocery stores. In the diverse community, Houston Heights, the Fiesta grocery store chain originated as a business specifically set up to serve multiple ethnic and immigrant groups (Garcia 2010). Aisles organized by ethnicity or nationality group, such as Nigerian, Mexican, Guatemalan, Indian, and Pakistani. While the store has gone through some changes in recent years, it still states that “just as every neighborhood has a personality, so does the Fiesta that serves it” (quote from video introduction to Fiesta stores on their web site: <http://www.fiestamart.com/html/index.php>, viewed May 15, 2011).

Just as food cultures can promote positive images of diverse communities to outsiders, food can be used as a common bond within diverse communities, particularly at community meetings, school gatherings, and other organizational events. During efforts to organize tenants in a 200 unit high-rise building in Chicago’s Uptown community in the 1990s, pot luck dinners, including everything from Ethiopian injera bread to Mexican enchiladas, were routinely used to establish a common ground among the 17 different ethnic groups living in the building. Local food cultures became a way of both maintaining one’s ethnic identity and discovering the commonalities among different cultures.

Art

Organizations such as cultural centers, museums, youth arts programs, and public art can all serve as social seams. They can be seams where different cultures come together to be understood by others; they can also be seams where community identity is debated and new understandings negotiated. In the 1998 HUD study, arts and artists factored in creating stable diversity. In Houston Heights, along with restaurants, antique dealers, and other businesses, the presence of artists’ galleries “refurbished a deteriorating commercial center of the community and established an eclectic array of shops....” (Nyden et al. 1998, p. 246).

In a number of studies by the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy and Practice have documented the correlation between diverse communities and a

higher-than-average concentration of arts organizations. In their study of arts organizations in Philadelphia and other cities, Mark Stern and Susan Seifert describe multiple cases of the “natural cultural district” that has “spawned a density of assets – organizations, businesses, participants, and artists that sets it apart from other neighborhoods” (2007, p.1). They go on to explain that

Diverse neighborhoods seem to have a level of energy and vitality that is conducive to creativity. Sometimes cultural expression is a product of cooperation – as communities seek to develop multi-cultural institutions that bridge community differences. Other times, the high levels of cultural engagement may be a product of competition, as each group within a neighborhood seeks to create its own cultural identity (p. 4).

In Chicago’s Uptown community, the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) uses its eight-story building for its own educational programs to promote cross-cultural understanding, and also leases out space to a variety of organizations serving different segments of the surrounding diverse community: mutual aid societies for new immigrants, medical clinics for homeless and low-income persons, and job placement services for the unemployed. To capture this diversity the ICA commissioned a mural to let people know that they “are entering a very special place in America: ‘Uptown, where diversity brings success’” (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

While art itself can be the medium through which people communicate similarities and differences, community-based arts organizations and the comfortable space they create can serve as neutral territory where controversial community issues can be discussed. In Chicago, Craig Harshaw, the executive director of Insight Arts, an organization “dedicated to increasing access to cultural work that supports progressive social change” in its racially, ethnically, and economically diverse north side community, explains that “We are a place where people from all the diverse cultural and linguistic groups come. We provide a site for real dialogue to happen. . . . Being in the same room, people come together and have a dialogue.” (Harshaw quoted in Grams & Warr 2003, p. 26).

Art installations can sometimes be explicitly structured as social seams. Among the more notable examples is the University Avenue Project that placed more than 400 photographs by Wing Young Huie in storefront windows and on the side of buildings blown-up to billboard size along St. Paul, Minnesota’s University Avenue. Wing captured day-to-day life in one of that city’s more diverse areas, featuring “the dizzying socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic realities of the citizens who work, live, and go to school

along this corridor that is jammed with storefronts, taverns, big-box retailers, blue-collar neighborhoods and condominium communities.” (Wing 2011) As further explained on the photographer’s web site:

Built and still sustained by immigrant populations of the late 19th century, the University Avenue corridor is now home to one of America’s highest concentrations of new immigrants. Blending documentary photography with revelatory statements by his subjects, Wing has created a tapestry of images and words that raise complex issues of race, class, gender, sexual preference, immigration, religion and cultural disconnection. The University Avenue Project is a chronicle [of] the colliding and evolving American experience (Wing 2011).

Wing recounts that many larger retailers along University Avenue initially refused to display photographs in their store windows. However when they saw what an attraction this had become for local residents and tourists from outside the community, they subsequently went out of their way to request photographs for their stores.¹ This underscores that such art displays are not just *displaying* a community’s diversity, but *become social seams* themselves by pulling different parts of the community together to view and participate in a cultural event.

[Insert link to Minnesota Public Radio video of interview with, and photographs of, Wing Young Huie here: http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2008/05/university_ave/huie_slideshow/index.shtml]

Neighborhood Festivals

One of the more visible venues for mixing art, culture, and diversity is through neighborhood arts or cultural festivals. These are sometimes used to draw visibility to a particularly ethnic or racial group within the community; throughout the year the sum total of festivals underscores the diversity of a community. In other cases, there are specific festivals highlighting the multi-ethnic and multi-racial character of a community. Still other festivals provide bridges to the broader diversity in the community and city around the immediate area. For example in Chicago’s Andersonville community which now has a Swedish-themed retail district, promotions for their annual Midsommarfest (an annual June rite in Sweden welcoming the warmer summer weather in that country) include the banner headline: “A quaint village in the middle of a world class city.”²

¹ Wing Young Huie, lecture to Shared Text program at Loyola University Chicago, March 3, 2011.

² Andersonville Chamber of Commerce web site: <http://www.andersonville.org/> (Viewed May 5, 2011).

A self-consciousness in using ethnic cultural images in promoting diversity is more apparent in Chicago's Andersonville than in most diverse communities. A neighborhood once dominated by Swedish immigrants in the first half of the 20th century, Andersonville now part of a larger community that, over the past three decades, has served as a port of entry for immigrant groups such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Nigerian, Bosnians, and Filipinos. Andersonville businesses have become adept in straddling cultural lines and producing cultural seams. Although few Swedish-Americans live in the area anymore, business and community leaders have used the banner of "Swedish" culture to give a distinctive character to this retail district dominated by non-Swedish ethnic restaurants and businesses. Anchored by the Swedish American Museum, two small Scandinavian restaurants, a Swedish delicatessen, and a popular Swedish bakery, this seven-block long retail area provides a comfortable home for non-Swedish stores and restaurants which far outnumber the Swedish businesses and cultural institutions. The owners of Dutch, Persian, Lebanese, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Thai restaurants happily co-exist under the Andersonville banner, literally and figuratively.

Cultural festivals can also affirm that particular racial and ethnic groups are legitimate, accepted members of a local community. San Jose, California, community organizer and minister Rev. Michael Ray-Matthews points to the "Juneteenth" festival in his neighborhood as a positive event that made his family feel welcomed in their diverse community (2010). (Also referred to as Emancipation Day or Freedom Day, Juneteenth is a holiday commemorating the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas on June 19, 1865.) Talking about all of the festivals in local parks and schools, he explains that the "little pieces of events and activities... create a community feel... [These are] "stabilizing forces." Even though he does not feel that neighbors in the diverse blocks immediately around his home interact much – where he says neighbors "just get glimpses of each other," it is on this community level that they interact. This community-wide cultural focus creates connections not present in the block-level neighborhoods.

Popular Culture and Consumerism

In looking at arts, culture, and community diversity, it is easy to overlook the role of consumerism in modern capitalist society. Increasingly the boundaries between leisure time and consumer activities have been blurred. Given this, it is logical to look toward these non-residential places in the community as weavers of social seams. Ray Oldenburg's "third places," discussed previously, certainly fit into this model. National chains such as Starbucks and Barnes & Noble, have built in socializing space as part of their business. Shopping malls, while often seen as the antithesis of small downtowns, do serve as social seams. They are both teenage and adult hangouts. Shopping malls in and around diverse communities, while not necessarily creating more intimate interaction between different racial and ethnic groups, do

serve the function of making it “normal” to see people of different races and ethnicities during everyday shopping activities.

While most developers of arts and culture would not think of shopping malls as local outposts of culture, they are very much part of the fabric of modern society. Whether it is sculptures, fountains, or artistic kitsch in the mall itself, or the culture of fashion and design displayed in store windows, malls are a key part of modern-day culture. Malls are cultural objects themselves, but are also cultural venues where interaction among different groups takes place. It may not be a place of “high culture” or one frequented by “cultural elites,” but it *is* a cultural venue. Australian sociologist Greg Noble’s (2009) concept of “everyday cosmopolitanism” is quite fitting here. Countering the view that to be “cosmopolitan” is to be “‘above’ local cultures,” he stresses the importance of “everyday,” seemingly mundane activities in producing diverse, intercultural communities. He states that we must examine the “productive practices which habituate us to difference, and develop the capacities to navigate our way around them.” He adds that “[i]ronically, if everyday cosmopolitanism entails habituation to ‘strangers,’ then everyday cosmopolitanism dissolves their unfamiliarity” as well (61).

Conclusions

Building community and building social capital are critical elements in creating, preserving, and promoting stable racially and ethnically diverse communities. A strong social fabric is a characteristic of most successful communities. However, given the stereotypical view that diverse communities are unstable and likely to resegregate, this set of communities is constantly swimming against the current of popular perception. Given the defining character of cultural elements in any community, the social seams woven by both formal cultural institutions and day-to-day activities of neighbors are critical to the survival of stable diverse communities.

As the U.S. and other nations experience a growth in diversity, more attentions to the dynamics of successful, sustainable diverse communities becomes more than an ideal of dreamy-eyed human rights activists. Such communities represent a stable, functional, alternative to past segregation. They also represent a preferred alternative to increased ethnic- and race-based conflict that has become increasingly apparent in European nations as immigrant populations have grown in recent decades. The U.S. has long been viewed as a nation of immigrants, a “melting pot” for many races, ethnicities, and cultures. While this rose-colored glasses view of the U.S. can obscure the racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and segregation that have been part of American culture for decades, it is worthwhile to pay attention to

successful grassroots efforts in creating the new stable communities of the 21st century. Cultural institutions and cross-cultural understandings are at the heart of many of these efforts. There are lessons to be learned for community activists, elected officials, policy makers, and academic researchers alike.

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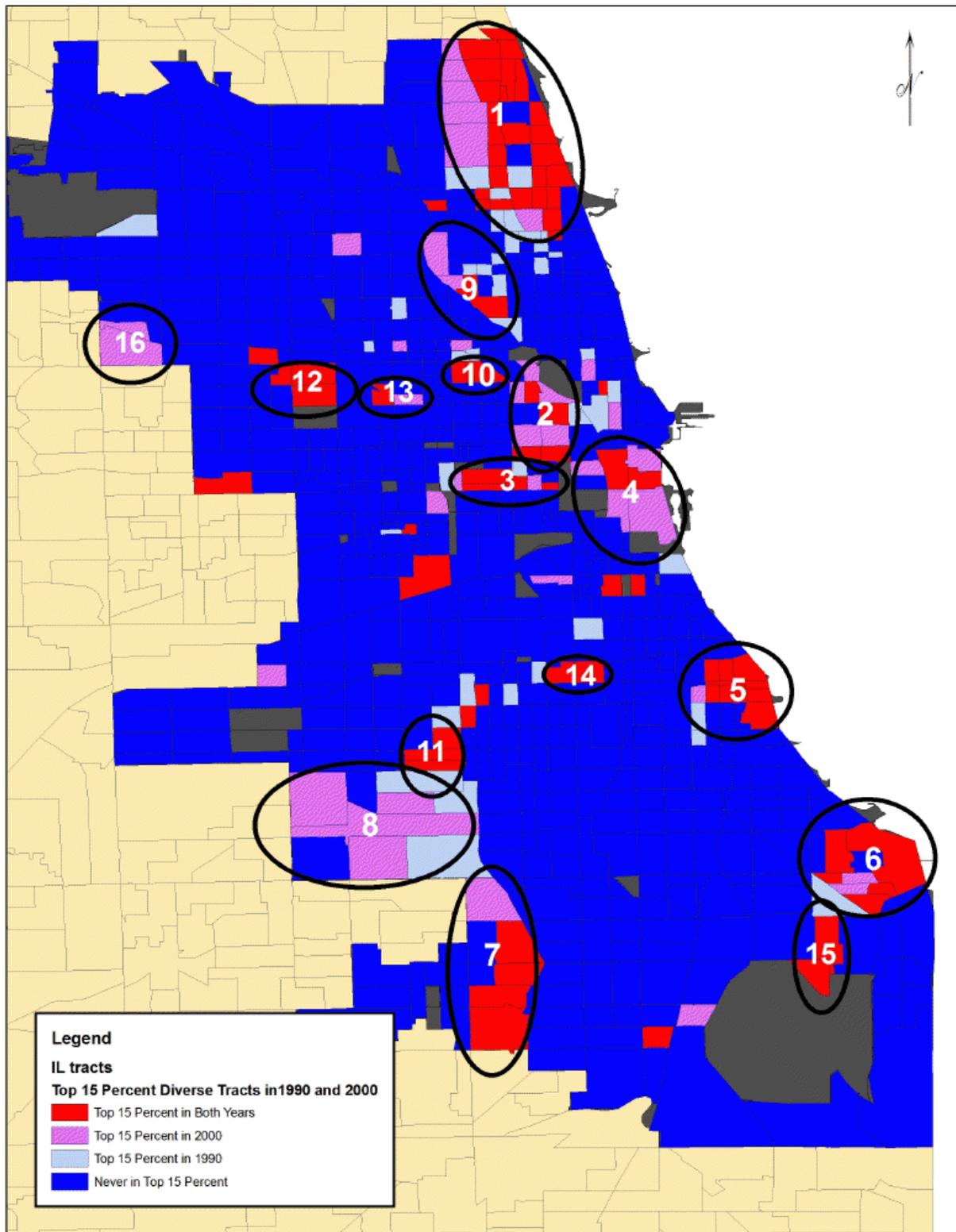
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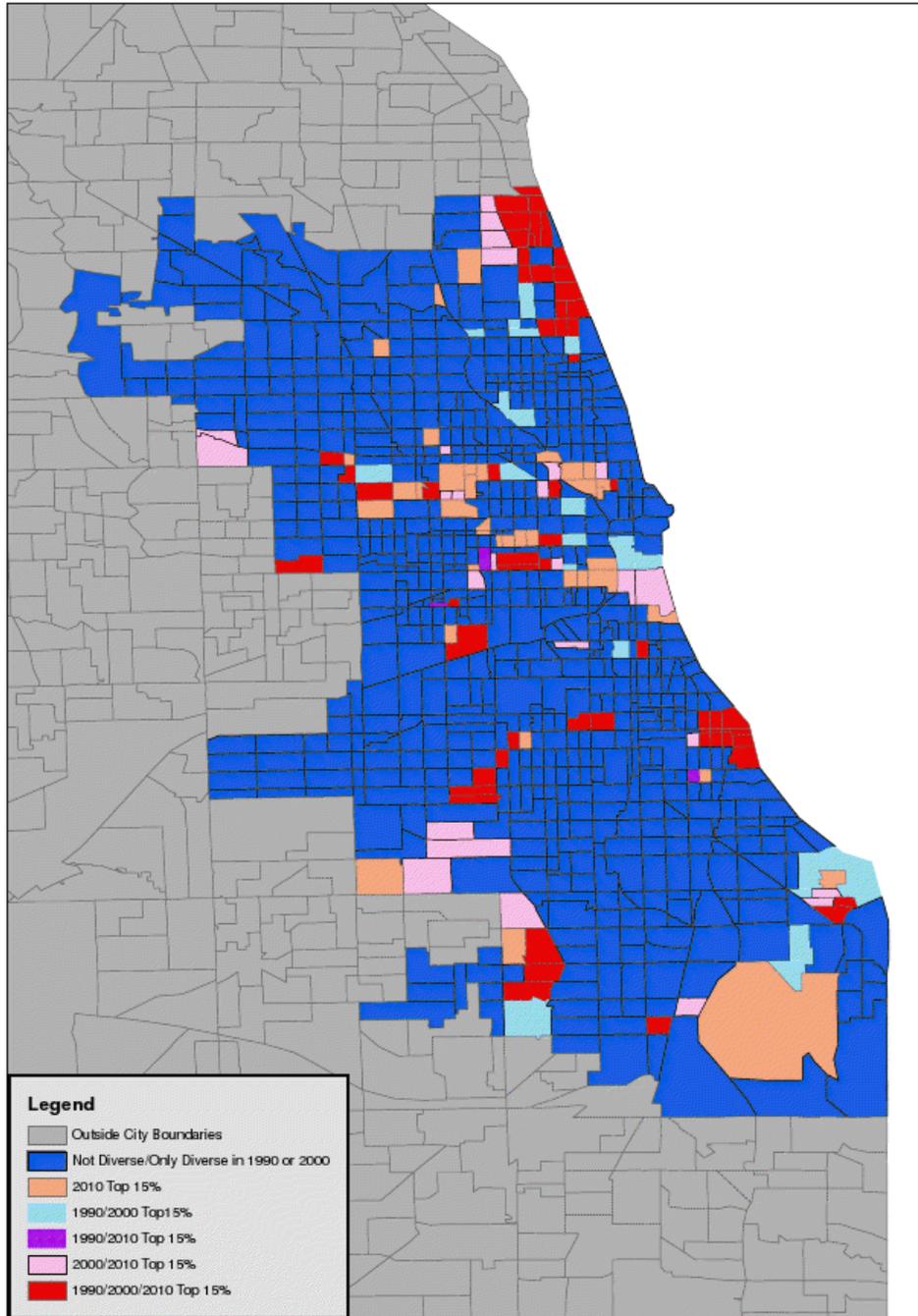
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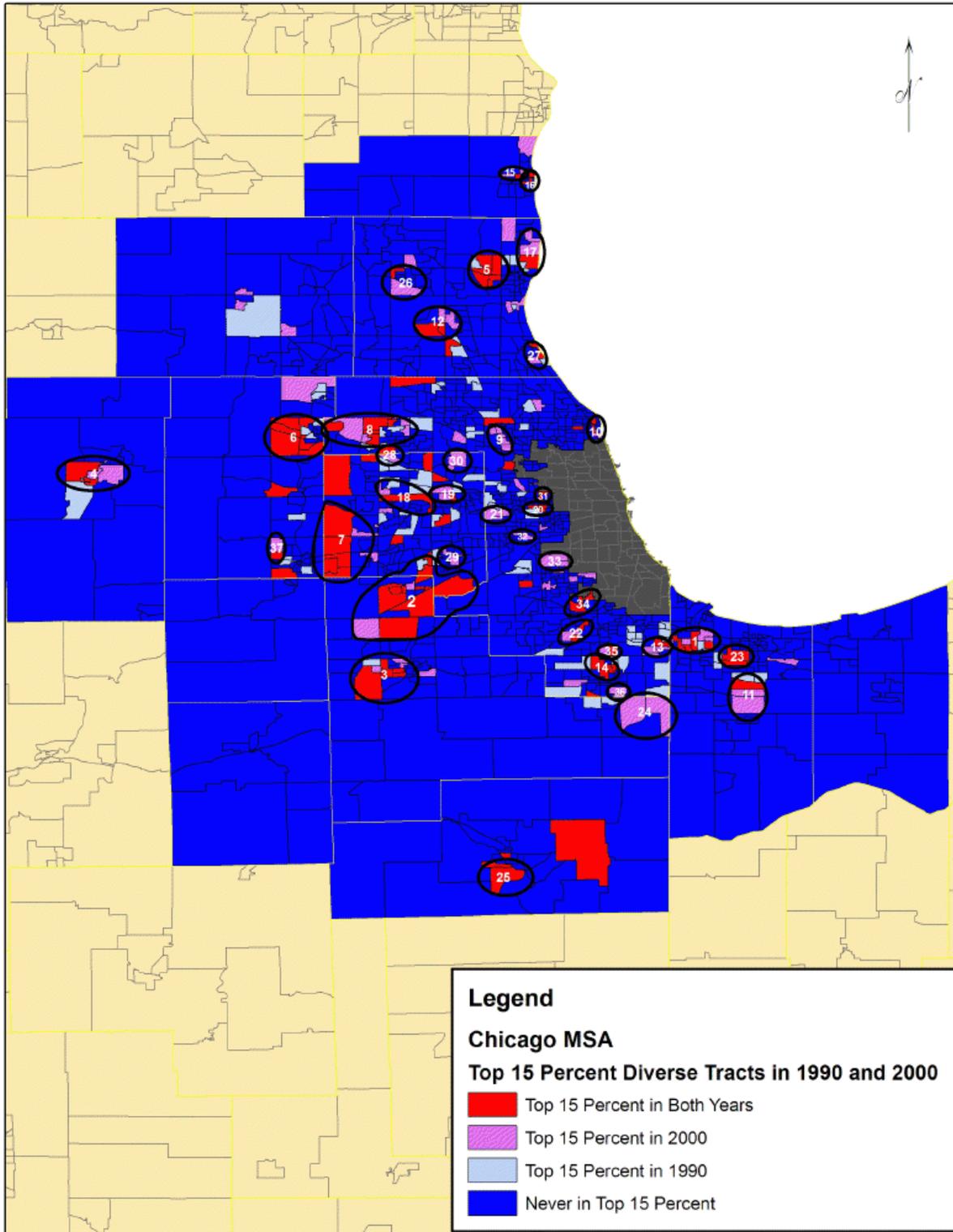
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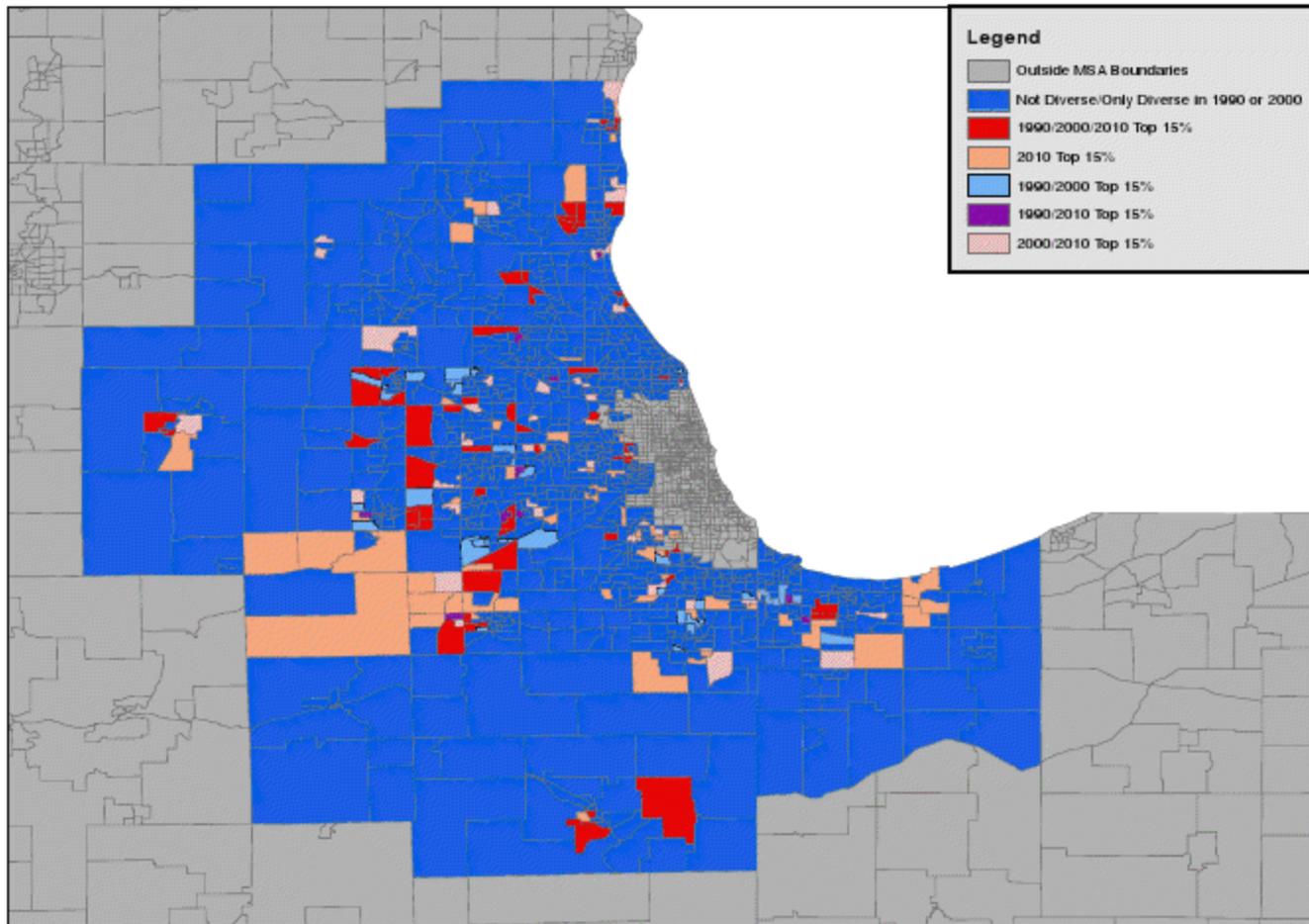
Map 1: Diverse Tract Clusters in Chicago city 1990-2000
 Census data analyzed by Kimberlee Guenther and Travis O'Rear,
 Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning.



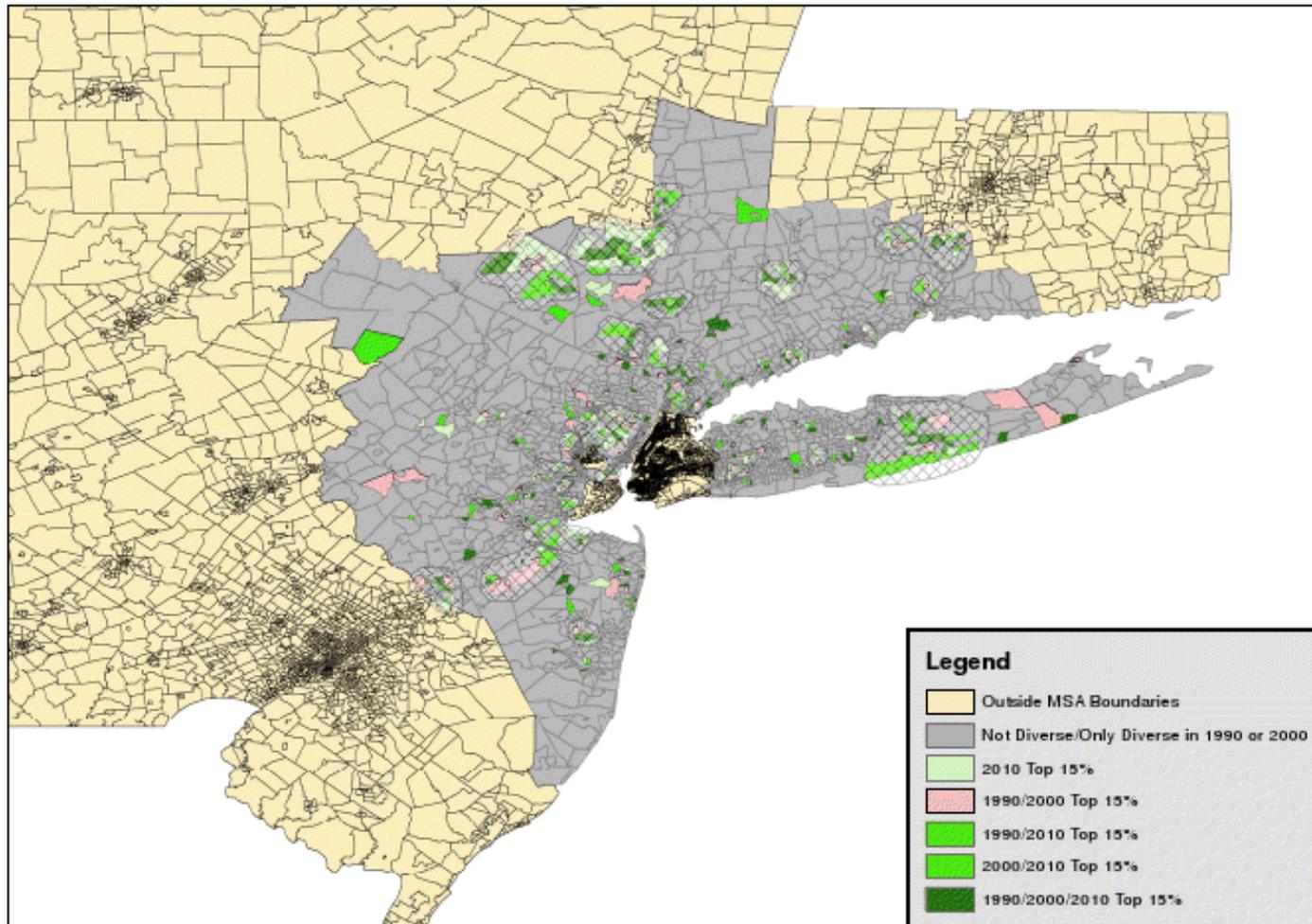
Map 2: Diverse Tract Clusters in Chicago city 1990-2010
 Census data analyzed by Kimberlee Guenther and Travis O'Rear,
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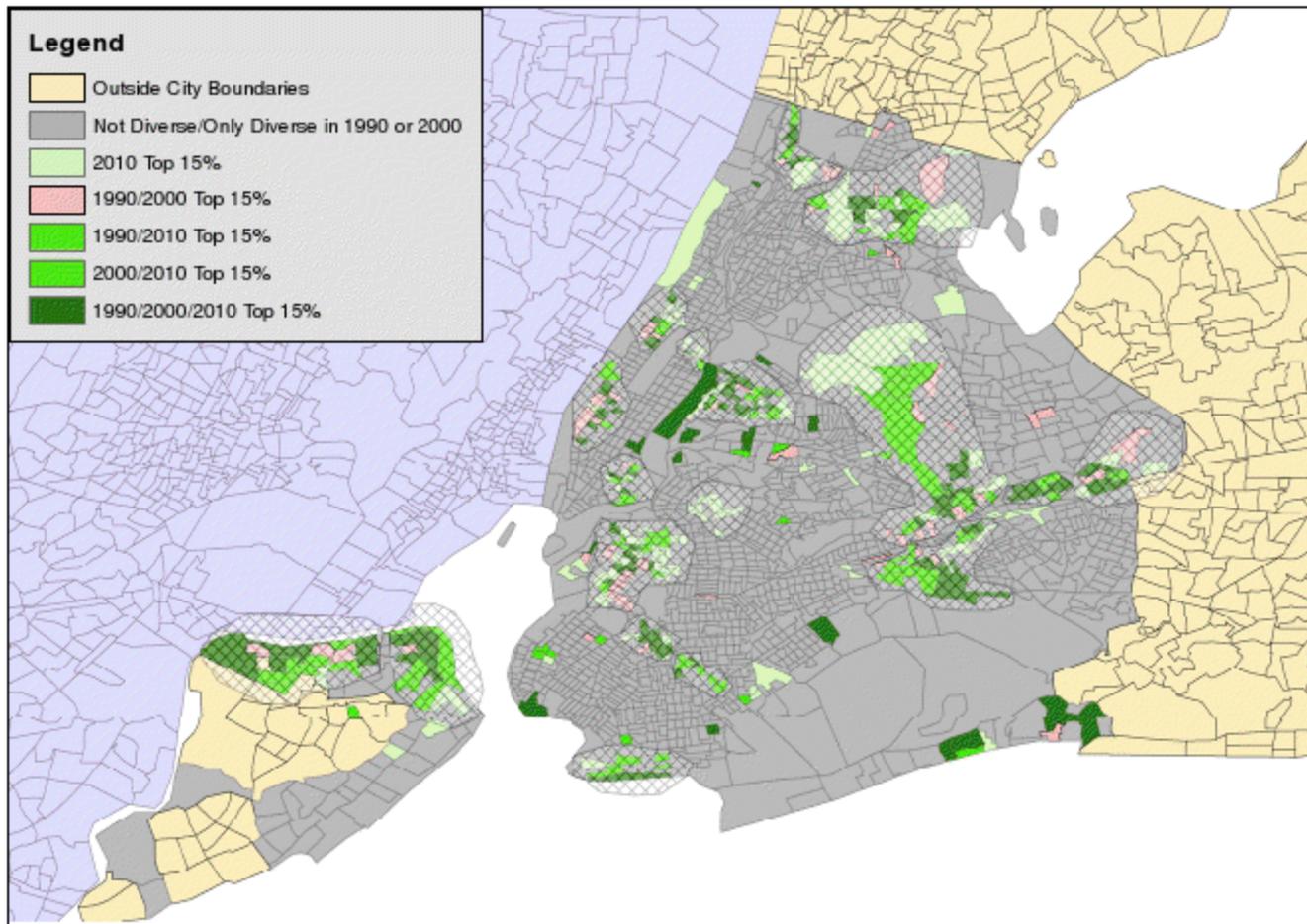
Map 3: Diverse Tract Clusters in Chicago MSA 1990-2000
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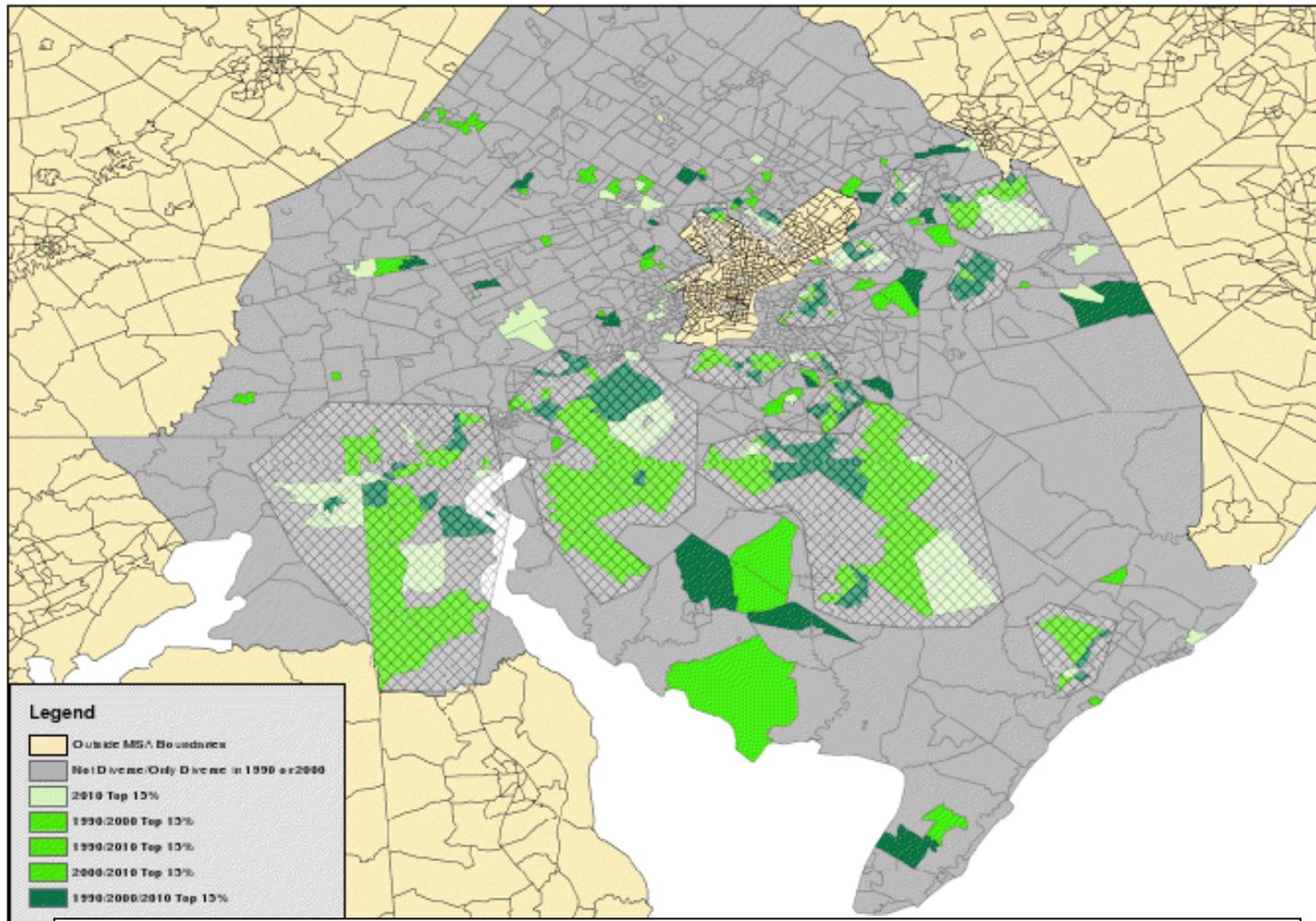
Map 4: Diverse Tract Clusters in Chicago MSA 1990-2010
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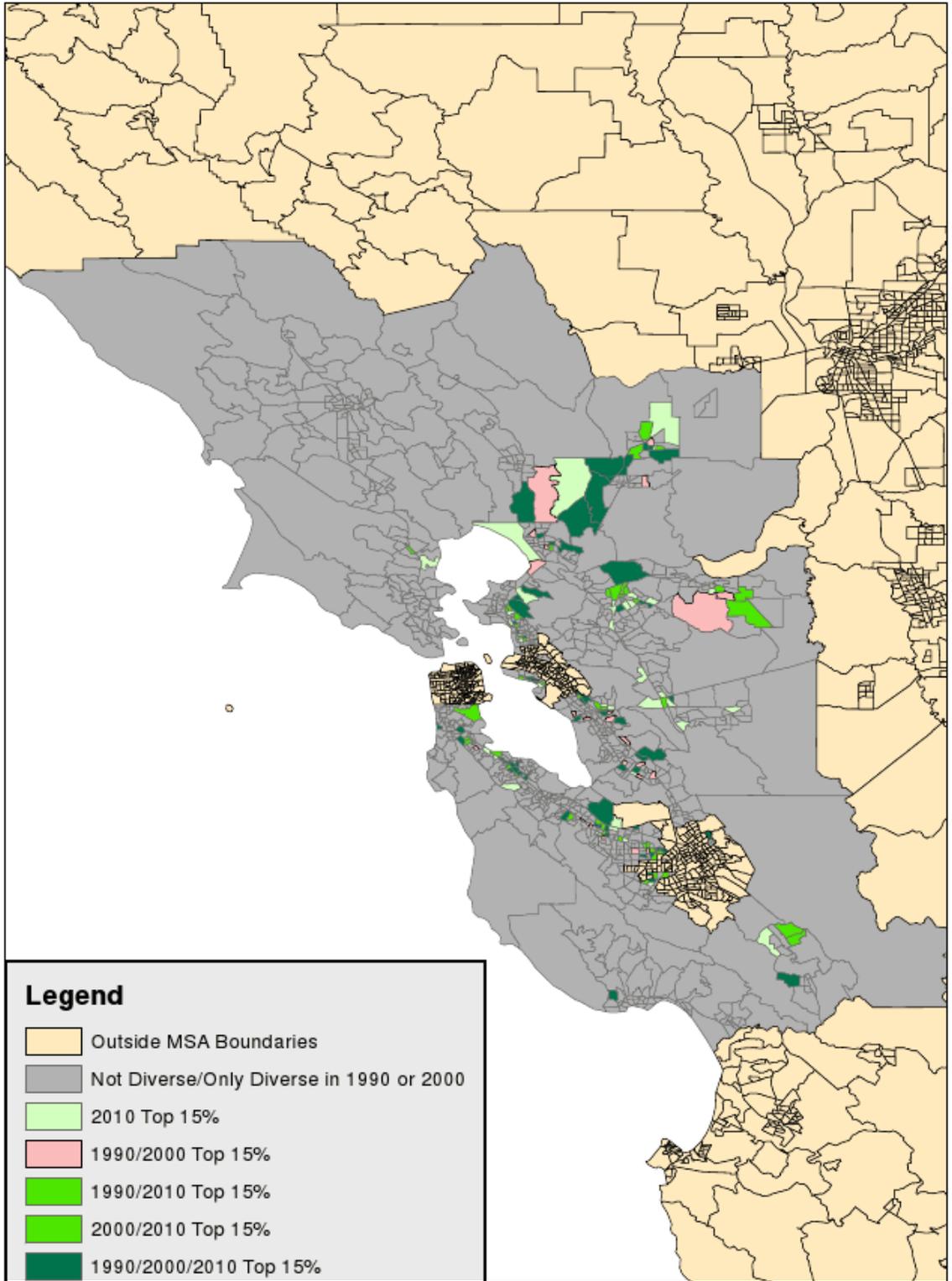
Map 5: Diverse Tract Clusters in New York MSA 1990-2010
 Census data analyzed by Kimberlee Guenther and Travis O'Rear,
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Map 6: Diverse Tract Clusters in New York City 1990-2010
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Map 7: Diverse Tract Clusters in Philadelphia MSA 1990-2010
Census data analyzed by Kimberlee Guenther and Travis O'Rear,
Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning.



Map 8: Diverse Tract Clusters in San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose MSA 1990-2010
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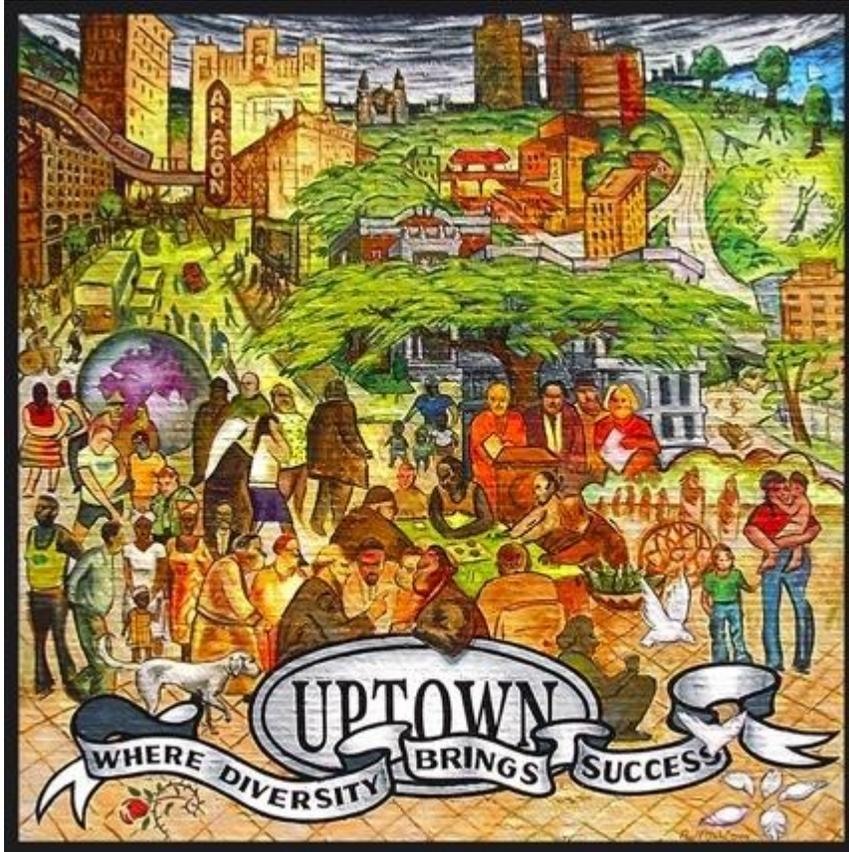


Figure 1: Mural in Chicago's Uptown community commissioned by the Institute of Cultural Affairs

From: <http://www.icanda.org/ICandA/site/UptownMuralPage.html>, Viewed May 2, 2011

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