

The Illinois Report 2009

Chapter 4: Racial Residential Segregation and Exclusion in Illinois

Transcript of video interview with author Maria Krysan

“When we think of the problem of racial residential segregation, we almost always picture a large city like Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. Almost anyone who spends any amount of time in Chicago quickly observes that whites, blacks and Latinos live in separate neighborhoods. Research confirms this observation, and the Chicagoland area is and has long been one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States.

“But what about the rest of the state of Illinois? How segregated or integrated are the small towns or smaller cities throughout the state? What are housing patterns like in places like Springfield, Carbondale, Mendota, Kankakee? This was the question we set out to answer in our research.

“We have basically three main conclusions. The first conclusion is that the overall pattern of racial residential segregation that we see in Chicago and the surrounding areas is similar throughout the state. It’s hard to find small towns and cities alike that have integrated communities and neighborhoods. The second conclusion is that there’s a pattern of black exceptionalism. By that I mean blacks are more segregated from whites than are Latinos. And this is true throughout the small towns and cities throughout the state of Illinois. The third conclusion is that there are large swaths of the state of Illinois where there are few racial and ethnic minorities living, certainly below the state averages.

“The causes of this exclusion are complicated in these areas where there are no African-Americans or Latinos, and they’re not simply a matter of preferences or demographic or market forces. Social scientists have long documented the host of social ills created by residential segregation. And they’ve emphasized that this segregation is caused by a complicated set of inter-related forces. The policies that can help to reduce this pattern of segregation then, of course, have to be equally as complex.

“What our chapter points to is that segregation is not unique to the Chicago metropolitan area, and that communities throughout the state should be mindful of these patterns of segregation and attend to policies that can work to change them.”