

Beginning in the 1990s, a surge of films and sitcoms—*Love Jones* (1997), *Best Man* (1999), *The Brothers* (2001), *Two Can Play That Game* (2001), *Brown Sugar* (2002), *Deliver Us From Eva* (2003), as well as, *Living Single* (aired from August 1993 to January 1998) and *Girlfriends* (aired beginning September 2000)—targeting a black middle class audience emerged. Overwhelmingly, the characters of this genre are members of what I am coining the *Love Jones cohort*. This is a growing segment of individuals within the black middle class that are young, educated, professionals that are not married and do not have children.

The emergence of this group drives my research questions. Has the black middle class experienced compositional changes since the civil rights? If so, is the current definition of the black middle class that emphasizes the traditional four-person household (married-couple family with children) obsolete? My hypothesis is that although a numerical minority, the *Love Jones cohort* is a growing subgroup within the larger black middle class. Given these changes, the current definition of the black middle class is obsolete and a redefinition is necessary.

The second set of research questions addresses the spatial location of the black middle class. Is the black middle class spatially separate from the larger black community? Is this *Love Jones cohort* spatially separate from traditional black middle class areas? Is this *Love Jones cohort* spatially separate from the larger black community? I hypothesize that the black middle class is modestly spatially separate from the overall black community. Additionally, I argue that the *Love Jones cohort* lives in areas more representative of the larger black community than traditional black middle class areas.

The last research questions relates to predicting spatial separation. What census tract attributes predict higher degrees of spatial separation between married-couples and non-family households? I predict higher spatial separation between married-couple families with children and non-family households for census tracts characterized as middle class.

William Julius Wilson (1987) theorizes that, economic restructuring and industrial migration of the central cities increases residential segregation and class bifurcation. His argument suggests that labor force participation and family characteristics, such as a dual-earner household, can serve as stabilizing forces in the larger black community. According to Wilson, stable middle class blacks move both their families and human capital out of central cities to neighborhoods with more attractive amenities. To this end, the black middle class families leave behind an environment of increased poverty and isolation for what Wilson describes as the “ghetto underclass.” A logical extension of this argument is that non-family and other-family households live in the central city while married-couple family households are residentially distinct, more often living outside central black settlement areas or on the outskirts of the city.

Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) agree with Wilson that black out-migration is occurring and further suggest that all middle class households, regardless of race, seek to escape from the poor. However, for the black middle class, systemic racism prevents them from escaping the poor unlike other racial and ethnic groups, and makes them more susceptible to higher levels of exposure to the black poor (Massey and Denton, 1993:9). These limitations mirrors the phenomenon of the glass ceiling—a barrier to advancement within an organization experienced by members of certain

groups because of prejudice—and could be termed the *residential ceiling*—a barrier to residential upward mobility and improved life chances for blacks because of their race.

My paper has three components: first, it uses the dissimilarity index to compare the spatial separation of married-couple family households (a householder and a spouse present) with children and non-family households (a householder living alone or living with nonrelative(s)) by race and class for Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Second, it maps census tract level household distributions to give a countywide understanding of the spatial location of married-couple families and non-families. Third, it utilizes a multivariate analysis to predict the spatial separation of married couples with children from non-families given certain census tract variables. The 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial US census, Summary Tape File 3A and 4A are the primary data sources.

This research addresses four social implications for the persistence of racial inequality. As non-family households increase, especially within the black middle class, the proportion of children bore into middle class status decreases. The absence of children in middle class non-families could increase the proportion of children born into poverty. This non-family household, whether directly or indirectly, promotes non-marriage role models for the blacks. Lastly, if it is found that non-family households are in close proximity to the larger black community, it can be argued that the emerging *Love Jones cohort* may embrace cultures of the larger black community, such as hip-hop, that are not widely accepted by the white mainstream.