

“New Deal Public Housing and Racial Segregation in U.S. Cities” by Hector Blanco and Luca Perdoni

Discussion by Christophe Spaenjers (CU Boulder)

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 - ▶ Somewhat related to papers on (unintended?) impact of construction of transportation infrastructure on segregation (Lee, 2022; Bagagli, 2025)?
- ▶ Why *might* public housing have played a role?
 - ▶ Early federal public housing was explicitly racially designated
 - ▶ “Direct” mechanical effects: racial composition of project residents may reinforce or slow down segregation dynamics
 - ▶ “Indirect” effects: endogenous migration responses to projects

Paper is not about this type of housing...



...but about this kind of housing

Figure I: Examples of realized PWA Public Housing Projects



(a) Atlanta GA



(b) Dallas TX

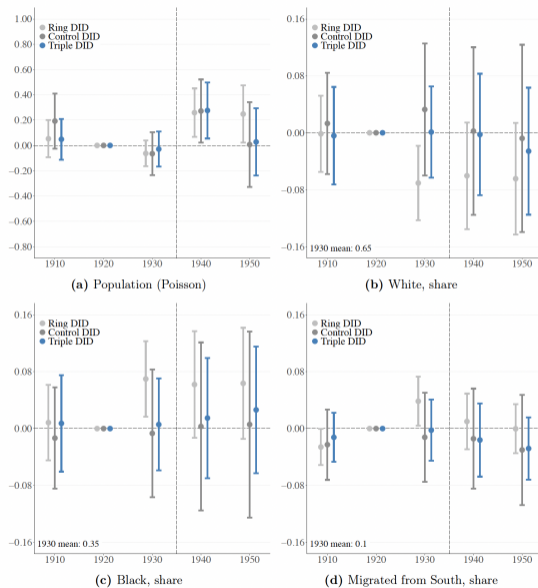


(c) Montgomery AL

Main findings

- ▶ On average, no effect on Black and White share
- ▶ Projects for Black (White) households increase Black (White) share
- ▶ Beyond that, both project sites and nearby areas “would likely have experienced similar demographic shifts... even in the absence of PWA construction”
- ▶ No evidence of White out-migration in response to Black-only projects; limited evidence of Black displacement to the construction of White-only projects

Figure V: The impact of the projects on the project site by identification strategy



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- ▶ Paper shows that control group matters: using ring DiD can lead to different conclusions than using counterfactual sites as controls
 - ▶ Especially in times of fast urban change around the time of treatment
 - ▶ Center paper around this observation? What papers on this topic rely on ring DiD methods only?

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- ▶ Even if you did find something, too few public housing projects to really be a major driver of aggregate segregation patterns at the time?
- ▶ External validity re more recent public housing initiatives? What do we hope to learn about optimal policy design today? What trade-offs are still relevant today?

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- ▶ Limited out-migration of White residents around Black projects: new light on "white flight"?

Minor points (for authors only)

- (i) Why not make 1930 the left-out category in Figure V?
- (ii) Unsure how to interpret finding that Whites-only projects increased Black population within a 750-meter radius but also displaced Black residents in the broader area
- (iii) White-only projects led to increases in home values which the paper argues is evidence of “positive local amenity effects”. But also raises the possibility of incumbent households being priced out and being displaced?
- (iv) Vetting procedure included home visits. This opens up possibility of discrimination (although arguably not on race in this case, given the explicit racial designation of most projects)?

Final thoughts

- ▶ I can highly recommend this paper to everyone (not just PhD students)
- ▶ Good luck in the publication process!