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The structural determinants of urban poverty: A comparison of whites, blacks, and Hispanics

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Abstract

This paper analyzes similarities and differences in structural forces generating urban poverty among whites, blacks, and Hispanics. We specify an integrated structural equation model based on current theories about the causes of urban poverty proposed by [Murray \(1984\)](#) and [Wilson \(1987\)](#). This model is estimated for each group using data on 59 U.S. standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs) in 1980. Neither theory provides a good explanation for patterns of white poverty, which are determined more by prevailing wage rates and levels of white education. Both theories, however, are verified when applied to the two minority groups; but neither theory identifies the single factor which most strongly determines minority poverty: prevailing wage rates. In general, Murray's hypothesis proves to be more powerful than Wilson's in accounting for urban poverty among blacks, whereas Wilson's theory provides a more powerful explanation in the case of Hispanics. Wilson's structural economic effects, however, are

mediated less through the minority marriage market than through their direct effect on the income distribution.



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