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PREVIEW

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**The city-suburb redistribution of selected household types in a
changing metropolitan structure: An analysis of the Providence
metropolitan area, 1967-1980**

Ortiz, Ronald Joseph, Ph.D.

Brown University, 1990

PREVIEW

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

PREVIEW

The City-Suburb Redistribution of Selected Household Types in a
Changing Metropolitan Structure: An Analysis of the
Providence Metropolitan Area, 1967-1980

by

Ronald Joseph Ortiz

B.A., Fordham University, 1980

A.M., Fordham University, 1982

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Sociology at Brown University

May 1990

This dissertation by Ronald Joseph Ortiz
is accepted in its present form by the Department of
Sociology as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date *Jan. 10-90*

Basil G. Zimmer
.....
Basil G. Zimmer

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date *Jan. 10, 1990*

Frances K. Goldscheider
.....
Frances K. Goldscheider

Date *Jan. 10, 1990*

David R. Meyer
.....
David R. Meyer

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date *1/17/90.*

Phillip J. Ste
.....

CURRICULUM VITAE

RONALD JOSEPH ORTIZ

May 1989

Office Address:

New York City Department of City Planning
Population Division
22 Reade Street - 4 West
New York, New York 10007
(212) 720-3446
Home: (718) 225-8841

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Place of Birth: Bronx, New York

Citizenship: United States

Home Address: 42-30 Douglaston Pkwy. Douglaston, NY 11363

CURRENT POSITION

Senior Demographer, N.Y.C. Department of City Planning

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Sociology, Brown University, May, 1990
A.M. Sociology, Fordham University, May, 1982.
A.B. Sociology, Fordham University, May, 1980.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Demography (Migration, Family, Urbanization in Developed Countries)
Urban Sociology (Human Ecology, Neighborhood Studies)
Applied Sociology (Evaluation Research)

METHODOLOGICAL SKILLS

Demographic Methods
Indirect Demographic Estimation Techniques
Multivariate Methods
Research Techniques in Urban Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

City Planner/Senior Demographer December, 19, 1988-Present. Population Division, New York City Department of City Planning.
Director: Evelyn S. Mann. Deputy Director: Joseph J. Salvo

Sociologist/Demographer, May 4, 1987-November 16, 1988. Socio-Demographic Unit, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.
Unit Supervisor: Linda K. Bentz

WRITTEN WORK

- 1989 Ortiz, R.J., and Salvo, J.J. "A Reassessment of Current Federal Standards for Defining the Outlying Areas of Metropolitan Areas." Paper presented at the 1989 American Public Data Users Meetings, Washington, DC October 22-25.
- 1989 Mann, E.S., Salvo, J.J., Ortiz, R.J., Vardy, F.P. and Banks, L.E.. Reaching All New Yorkers: A Targeting Outreach Study for the 1990 Census Publication Number DCP 89-41, New York: N.Y.C. Department of City Planning
- 1986 "Changing Household Composition and Residential Distribution." Paper presented at the 1986 Population Association of America Meetings, San Francisco California, April 3-5.
- 1985 Silver, H., McDonnell, J., and Ortiz, R.J. "Selling Public Housing." Journal of Housing. 42 (6) Pp. 213-228.
- 1985 Silver, H., McDonnell, J., and Ortiz, R.J. "Privatizing Public Housing." Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Meetings, New Orleans, LA, August 26-30.
- 1985 McDonnell, J., Ortiz, R.J. and Zimmer, B.G. "Household Structure, Mobility Patterns and Housing Demand: An Analysis of Changing Trends Within the Providence Metropolitan Area." Paper presented at the 1985 Population Association of America Meetings, Boston, MA, March 28-30.
- 1985 Changing Patterns of Residential Mobility Selectivity: An Analysis of the Providence Metropolitan Area, 1967-1980. Ph.D. Dissertation Proposal, Department of Sociology Brown University.
- 1984 Residential Neighborhood Change in Lowell, Massachusetts: 1960-1980. Master's Thesis, Department of Sociology, Brown University.
- 1982 Ortiz, V., Cooney, R. S., and Ortiz, R. J. "Sex Role Attitudes and Labor Force Participation: A Comparative Study of Hispanic females and Non-Hispanic White Females." Paper presented at the 1982 American Sociological Association Meetings, San Francisco, CA, September 6-8, 1982.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Assistant Professor of Sociology, Iona College. Spring, 1990.
Department of Sociology

Teaching Assistant, Brown University. Fall, 1986.
Department of Political Science

Teaching Fellow in Sociology, Brown University Summer Academy, Summer
1986.
Department of Sociology.

Teaching Assistant, Brown University. Fall, 1983.
Department of Sociology.

Teaching Assistant, Fordham University, Fall, 1981.
Department of Sociology.

HONORS/AWARDS

1982 NIH Traineeship in Demography.
1985 Population Studies and Training Center.
 Department of Sociology, Brown University.

1980 NIMH Traineeship in Urban Sociology.
 Department of Sociology, Fordham University.

1980 Gold Key, Fordham University

1980 University nominee for the Danforth Foundation
 Fellowship, Fordham University

1977 Academic Dean's List, Fordham University.
1980

1978 Silver Key, Fordham University.
1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of writing a dissertation, as anyone who has written one will tell you, is no easy task. In my case, the difficulty of the chore was softened considerably by the help, support and encouragement of some very, very special people. Without their help, I can honestly say that this work would not have been completed. It is, therefore, with a great sense of pleasure and love that I acknowledge their contributions and thank them for all their help.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the chairman of my dissertation committee, Dr. Basil G. Zimmer. It was Dr. Zimmer's ideas on the processes underlying metropolitan structure and change that provided the basis of this dissertation. With his guidance, I was able to expand on his research, and slowly but surely, put together my own theoretical framework. His comments and suggestions, along the way, proved invaluable and enhanced the quality of the final product. Most importantly, Basil was always there to encourage me and lend support whenever I needed it. It would be virtually impossible for me to count the number of times that I turned to Basil for help, either professional or personal, and equally impossible to recall one instance when he did not come through. It is with great humility and honor that I call this warm, compassionate and courageous individual my friend.

David R. Meyer and Frances K. Goldscheider rounded out what was an outstanding dissertation committee. Dave's insightful comments and helpful hints improved the quality of my arguments and analysis, as well as the readability of the final draft. Without Fran's patient direction on the statistical procedures, especially the multinomial logistic

regression, I would not have been able to have adequately tested my model. In addition to all their assistance on technical and academic matters, both Dave and Fran were constant sources of encouragement and friendship throughout the dissertation process.

Aside from being difficult, the dissertation process can be a very lonely, and at times, frustrating affair. Getting through the difficult periods was made much easier by the special friends I made during my graduate school career. People whose friendships I will cherish for the rest of my life. Eun Mee Kim, Robert Gay, Elizabeth Cooksey, George Cassidy, Ma Rong, Ji Ping, Phil Guest, Berkeley Miller, Julie Hayden, Rebecca Clark, and Mark Shields were always there to make me smile when I needed to the most. Thank you all! I would, however, like to especially thank Judy McDonnell and Lindy Williams, who not only made the dissertation process bearable, but through their wonderful personalities filled my life with a tremendous amount of warmth and happiness. I consider their friendships among my most cherished possessions.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing the dissertation was having to do it part time while holding a full time job. Linda K. Bentz, my first supervisor in the "real world" was a constant source of support. Her concern for my completing my dissertation was genuine, so much so, that we actually devised a schedule where I could allocate some time during the business day to work on the manuscript. She was always willing to listen to my dissertation problems, and more often than not, say the right thing to make me feel better.

As a sociologist, I know that the most important source of support comes from the family. I am sure, however, that a number of non-sociologists have already figured that out. I have been blessed with one of the most wonderful families a person could have. It was the incredible amount of love that I received from my aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews that got me through difficult periods of my academic career. I would, however, like to especially thank my aunt Olga Martin for always managing to be there when I needed her.

I must admit that I am twice blessed, because when I married, I became a part of another family that is equally as loving and as wonderful as the one I was born into. Theodore and Tommasina Vaphiades are the best in-laws a person could ever have. They are warm and caring parents, and over the past three years have looked out for me as much as they have for their own daughter. If not for their incredible support especially over the three years of writing the dissertation completing the manuscript would simply have not been possible.

I have come to the conclusion that the most difficult part of writing a dissertation is what I am about to do now namely thanking the two most important people in my life. It is almost impossible to adequately tell your mom and your sweetheart how great a role they have played, not only in the completion of this dissertation, but in all of my accomplishments. I will, however, make the foolish attempt to try. I would like to thank my mother, Rachel Flores Paul, for the love and support she has always given me. Her hard work and drive provide the example that I have lived by. Her first rule was to get a good education and aspire to be the best person you can be. I have always tried to

live by that rule. I can only hope that I have made her as proud of me, as I have always been of her.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, Cynthia Vaphiades-Ortiz for all the typing, proofreading, editing, photocopying and general running around associated with a dissertation. Most importantly, I would like to thank her for her love, devotion and companionship that has made my life so full. I also thank her for all the sacrifices she has had to make on behalf of completing the dissertation. Finally, I would like to apologize for all the times I had to say: "I can't this week, I have to work on dissertation." Now that the work is done, I only hope that I can keep all the promises I made to her over the past three years. But if I could make one more promise, it would be that I will try.

This work, as is everything I do in life, is dedicated to my mother, Rachel and my wife, Cynthia.

Ronald J. Ortiz

Providence, Rhode Island

May, 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: THE ISSUES.....	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK...	12
CHAPTER III: DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN.....	71
CHAPTER IV: THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLD TYPES IN THE PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA: 1967-1980.....	96
CHAPTER V: CHANGES IN THE HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF SELECTED RESIDENTIAL ZONES IN THE PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA: 1967-1980.....	121
CHAPTER VI: PATTERNS OF RESIDENTIAL LOCATION OF SELECTED HOUSEHOLD TYPES: 1967-1980.....	151
CHAPTER VII: PATTERNS OF RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY AMONG HOUSEHOLDS IN THE PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA: 1967-1980.....	234
CHAPTER VIII: THE COMMUTATION PATTERNS OF WORKERS BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS: 1967-1980.....	264
CHAPTER IX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS.....	284
REFERENCES.....	323

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1	SELECTED POPULATION AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS OF RESIDENTIAL ZONES: 1970 - 1980	79
TABLE 4.1	PERCENT OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE HEADED BY A SINGLE ADULT BY AGE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980...	99
TABLE 4.2	DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY AGE AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	101
TABLE 4.3	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN PRESENT BY AGE AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980....	102
TABLE 4.4	INCOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	105
TABLE 4.5	MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY AGE AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	106
TABLE 4.6	PERCENT OF ALL SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE HEADED BY A MALE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA 1967 - 1980.....	107
TABLE 4.7	ECONOMIC AND FAMILIAL CHARACTERISTICS SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY SEX: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA 1967-1980.....	109
TABLE 4.8	DISTRIBUTION OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY MARITAL STATUS AND SEX: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	110
TABLE 4.9	ECONOMIC AND FAMILIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SINGLE HOUSEHOLD HEADS BY MARITAL STATUS AND SEX: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	112
TABLE 4.10	PERCENT OF ALL SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY AGE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA 1967 - 1980.....	114
TABLE 4.11	EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE OF MARRIED COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY AGE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	115
TABLE 4.12	ECONOMIC AND FAMILIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MARRIED COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	117
TABLE 5.1	RESIDENTIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	124
TABLE 5.2	PERCENT OF MARRIED COUPLES BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	125
TABLE 5.3	DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY AGE AND TYPE FOR EACH ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	128

TABLE 5.4	PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	133
TABLE 5.5	DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME AND TYPE FOR EACH ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	137
TABLE 5.6	PERCENT OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE MALE BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	140
TABLE 5.7	MARITAL STATUS OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980...	141
TABLE 5.8	PERCENT OF EMPLOYED SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980...	143
TABLE 5.9	EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE OF MARRIED COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	144
TABLE 6.1	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	154
TABLE 6.2	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY AGE AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	157
TABLE 6.3	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	160
TABLE 6.4	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY INCOME AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	163
TABLE 6.5	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY SEX OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLD: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	166
TABLE 6.6	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY MARITAL STATUS OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	167
TABLE 6.7	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	168
TABLE 6.8	EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE OF MARRIED COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENTIAL ZONE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	170
TABLE 6.9	VARIABLES EMPLOYED IN THE MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES OF RESIDENTIAL LOCATION.....	176
TABLE 6.10	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967.....	179

TABLE 6.11	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1980.....	188
TABLE 6.12	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967 - 1980, THE DYNAMIC MODELS.....	194
TABLE 6.13	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967 (Married Couples Only).....	200
TABLE 6.14	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1980 (Married Couples Only).....	206
TABLE 6.15	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED MARRIED COUPLE CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967 - 1980, THE DYNAMIC MODELS.....	211
TABLE 6.16	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967 (Single-Adult Households Only).....	217
TABLE 6.17	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1980 (Single Adult Households Only).....	222
TABLE 6.18	MULTINOMINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SELECTED SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS ON RESIDENTIAL LOCATION: 1967 - 1980, THE DYNAMIC MODELS.....	226
TABLE 7.1	SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY MOBILITY STATUS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	238
TABLE 7.2	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	241
TABLE 7.3	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES BY AGE AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	243
TABLE 7.4	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967-1980..	245
TABLE 7.5	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES BY INCOME AND TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	247
TABLE 7.6	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES FOR SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY SEX: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	251
TABLE 7.7	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES FOR SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	251

TABLE 7.8	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES FOR SINGLE-ADULT HOUSEHOLDS BY MARITAL STATUS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	252
TABLE 7.9	DESTINATION PROPENSITY RATES FOR MARRIED COUPLES BY EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967-1980.....	254
TABLE 7.10	MOBILITY STREAM PROPENSITY RATES BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	257
TABLE 7.11	DISTRIBUTION OF ZONAL POPULATION BY MOBILITY STATUS AND PLACE OF ORIGIN: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	259
TABLE 8.1	JOB LOCATION BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	267
TABLE 8.2	JOB LOCATION BY SEX AND BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	268
TABLE 8.3	JOB LOCATION BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE (All Workers): PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	271
TABLE 8.4	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	273
TABLE 8.5	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION BY PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT AND SEX: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	275
TABLE 8.6	PATTERNS OF COMMUTATION AMONG DUAL-WORKER HOUSEHOLDS: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	276
TABLE 8.7	PATTERNS OF COMMUTATION AMONG DUAL-WORKER HOUSEHOLDS BY NUMBER OF FULL TIME WORKERS PRESENT: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	278
TABLE 8.8	COMMUTATION STREAMS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE: PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN AREA, 1967 - 1980.....	281

CHAPTER I
THE ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Over the decade of the 1970s, urban scholars observed that the structure of older metropolitan areas changed in ways that had significant implications for the distribution of selected household types within them. Prior to the Seventies primary¹ and childless couple households resided disproportionately in the city, while the more family oriented households, such as married couples with children were located primarily in the suburbs. These patterns of residence by household type were attributed to the structure of the metropolitan community. Smaller reasonably affordable rental apartments, which best suited the needs of childless households, tended to be concentrated in the city, while the more spacious single family dwellings surrounded by an environment generally perceived to be better suited for raising children were found in the suburbs. Moreover, the availability of employment in the city made living there attractive to households who could not afford a long distance commute.

¹ Primary households are defined as those consisting of only one adult or of more than one unrelated adults. During the course of the analysis we will refer to single-adult households or single household heads which are general terms which include both primary households and single-parent households.

During the Seventies the levels of employment and multiunit housing growth in the suburbs exceeded that which occurred in the city. As a consequence, many of these suburban communities were structurally beginning to resemble the character of central cities, particularly with regard to those factors which have been most closely associated with the locational patterns of smaller households. The principle issue to be addressed in this research, therefore, is whether the redistribution of selected household types in the Providence metropolitan area changed over the Seventies in ways that reflected these structural changes.

Our basic thesis of this research is that primary and childless couple households demonstrated an increasing propensity to live in the suburbs over the 1970s due to a general process of maturation underway in many suburban communities. This process is outlined in the classic ecological life cycle model of neighborhood and metropolitan change (Hoover and Vernon, 1963). Neighborhoods, as they age, follow an evolutionary cycle of growth, stability and decline in which their housing and population characteristics change predictably. In the earliest stages of the neighborhood life cycle, population and housing growth is intense. The composition of the population is typified by young families of higher financial means who are pulled to these communities by the newer more spacious and attractive housing. Over time as the housing stock ages and loses its attractiveness, young families are no longer drawn to these communities, but rather settle in the newer housing located along the outer periphery of the metropolis. As a consequence, the level of population growth declines, the population continues to age, and the familial character of the resident

households decreases. Further, without a continued influx of young affluent families, the socioeconomic character of the neighborhood also declines.

The great wave of suburbanization which led to the development of many of the suburban neighborhoods in the Providence metropolitan area began after World War II and continued through the 1950s. These neighborhoods by 1980 were over thirty years of age and many of the original residents had entered or were preparing to enter into retirement age. Given their age, therefore, these neighborhoods had begun their progression through the latter or declining stages of the neighborhood life cycle. The distribution of these older suburban communities across the periphery is not random but organized spatially according to the principles of metropolitan expansion. Metropolitan communities expand outward, and thus neighborhoods along the outer edge are in earlier stages of development, while those closer to the urban core or central city are in the latter stages of development. As such, those suburban neighborhoods that are spatially closest to the CBD, which we will collectively call the inner suburbs, are hypothesized to be the ones that became more "citylike" in terms of their structural and population characteristics over the Seventies. Conversely, those suburban communities farther away from the CBD, which we refer to as the outer suburbs, became more "suburbanlike" as open country and older towns along the periphery were incorporated into the metropolis.

The progression of the inner and outer suburbs through these very different life cycle stages indicate that the increased suburbanization of single-adult households and childless couples would most likely have

occurred in the inner suburbs. This inner suburbanization was driven by two forces: first, an increased inner suburban directed mobility among young single adult and childless couple households and; second, the changing composition of older households as they aged-in-place. Conversely, the newer housing along the periphery lead to an increased outer suburbanization of young families with children. This was not unlike previous suburbanization flows, with the exception that this outward shift originated from the inner suburbs, as opposed to the central city.

Socioeconomically, the more attractive housing in the outer suburbs increasingly drew the more affluent young families to the outer suburbs. The decreasing attraction of the older housing in the inner suburbs suggests that population growth would have declined. This lack of growth implies that these communities would not have been able to have maintained their level of socioeconomic status over the decade.

The changes in the residence location patterns of households is expected to have lead to a transformation of the demographic profile of inner and outer suburban households. Over the Seventies the differences in the characteristics of households within the two types of suburbs will increasingly resemble the differences observed between the city and its suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically, an older, non-familial, inner suburban zone coupled with a younger, familial, outer suburban periphery.

Concurrent with these changes is the emergence of a relationship between the two suburbs that is reminiscent of the type of interaction between a city and its suburbs. Zimmer (1985) has noted that much of

the shift in employment in the Providence metropolitan area was toward the inner suburbs. The levels of inner suburban directed commutation, therefore, are expected to increase. If the locational shifts in households were directed toward the outer suburbs, then the bulk of the increase in inner suburban directed commutation came from the outer suburban periphery. Thus it is possible that the linking of the outer periphery to the metropolis was increasingly taking place through the inner suburbs as opposed to what has traditionally been a central city function.

The Seventies also marked a period for change for central cities. Socially and economically, it was a difficult period for central cities as evidenced by a severe fiscal crisis, coupled with crime, high taxes, unemployment and poor services. Given these conditions it is logical to assume that single-adult and childless couple households would increasingly move to the inner suburbs as the increases in multiunit housing and employment in these areas provided an alternative to city living. Many of the city's problems, however, were associated with the transformation of its economy from a manufacturing to a service base. This transformation was expected to have positive implications for cities as well, perhaps leading to a revitalization period after years of decline.

The transformation of the national economy to a service base was driven primarily by the rise of producer services. The labor force associated with these industries is highly concentrated in professional and managerial occupations. Producer services have traditionally gravitated to central cities; and as a result, central city employment

became increasingly white collarized during the Seventies. Much of the high unemployment observed during this period occurred among blue collar workers who were left without jobs as the manufacturing base shifted first into the suburbs and eventually out of the country. While cities may have lost their attraction to blue collar workers, they may have begun to welcome the more affluent professionals tied to the service economy. These economic changes were one of the causes cited as underlying the gentrification phenomenon that received so much attention in both the popular and scientific literature in the late Seventies and early Eighties. Another cause frequently cited was demographic in character and provides the context for all the analyses in this research, namely, the structural changes that occurred within the American household (Santi, 1988).

The 1970s witnessed dramatic shifts in the American household which are best characterized by a declining emphasis on marriage and children. Dramatic growth rates have been documented for primary and single-parent households, as well as dual earner and childless married couple households. Juxtaposed against their growth has been a decline in the more traditional "homemaker mother/breadwinner father" with children household. These changes many argued could have significant implications for the redistribution of households in metropolitan areas. If the locational and mobility patterns of household types which prevailed during the 1950s and 1960s did not change, then the emergence of smaller, adult oriented households would result in a redistribution of households favoring the central city. At the same time suburbanward movement would wane as fewer households with heads in their late twenties and early thirties will have children present.