

Vancouver Centre of Excellence



Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis

Working Paper Series

#97-08

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October 1997

RIIM

Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis

The Vancouver Centre is funded by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria. We also wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Metropolis partner agencies:

- Health Canada
- Human Resources Development Canada
- Department of Canadian Heritage
- Department of the Solicitor General of Canada
- Status of Women Canada
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
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Is there an immigrant “underclass” in Canadian cities?

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Abstract

The paper examines the appropriateness of extending American and Western European use of the underclass thesis to Canada, specifically to the circumstances of immigrants in large Canadian cities. Following a critical review of the development and themes of the underclass thesis, a methodology for identifying underclass census tracts developed by American researchers is extended to Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. The results indicate only one tract in each of Toronto and Montreal that fitted an underclass profile in 1991, and none in Vancouver. However, broader districts of multiple deprivation and deep poverty do exist, often associated with a high incidence of crime and subsidised housing. These districts have experienced some spatial dispersion since 1971 when they were uniformly located in close proximity to downtown. The immigrant correlation with multiply deprived census tracts is present but modest in scale; moreover it is limited to the first ten years of residence in Canada. Correlations between immigration and urban poverty are also modest and are eclipsed by more structural factors such as levels of male unemployment and the incidence of female-led families. On the basis of this analysis, the underclass thesis seems of limited value in analysing the experience of immigrants in the three largest Canadian cities.

Keywords: underclass, poverty, deprivation, immigrants, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver

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Introduction

Discussions of urban poverty have, over the last decade, made much of the emergence of a new subset of city dwellers whose acute disadvantage sets them apart not only from mainstream society, but also from other poverty groups (Auletta 1982, Wilson 1987, Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, Jencks 1992, Morris 1993, Gans 1995). This so-called “underclass” is characterised by multiple deprivations, reproduced intergenerationally, and widely thought to be a consequence of the development of a global economy characterised by the deindustrialization of the central city, a polarised employment structure, and a bipolar distribution of wealth (Wilson 1987, Kasarda 1990, Sassen 1991, Musterd 1994). Conceptualisations of the underclass vary markedly across national boundaries. In the American context, the underclass have most clearly been defined as those who live in extremely poor communities, marked also by high rates of welfare dependency, unemployment, mother-led families, and deficient education or work-related skills (Wilson 1987, Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, Hughes 1989). Criminal activity is another variable commonly ascribed to the American underclass (Auletta 1982, Harrell and Peterson 1992, Jencks 1992). British research focuses more explicitly on the unskilled and long term unemployed (Morris 1993). Other European studies seem to be concerned with marginality from the labour force and multiple deprivation that

disproportionately afflicts immigrants (Roelandt and Veenman 1992, Silver 1993, Wacquant 1993, Musterd 1994).

One characteristic about which all parties agree is underclass isolation from opportunity structures that facilitate upward mobility. Without the skills of work-related experience or education, the support of other adult family members and/or a stable income, members of the underclass are thought to be marginalised from adequately paying jobs, good educational programs, appropriate role models, affordable and good quality housing in well-serviced neighbourhoods, in short from the prospects of a better life. It is this isolation that is thought ultimately to bring about the social interactions and norms that shape this subset of the urban poor into a class of its own. The language of an excluded underclass has reached explicitly into public policy. In August 1997, for example, the British Prime Minister announced the formation of the Social Exclusion Unit, a new agency that he would head, to “reintegrate the ‘underclass’ into society”. One of his ministers elaborated on “the greatest social crisis of our time... This is about more than poverty and unemployment. It is about being cut off from what the rest of us regard as normal life” (Peter Mandelson, cited in Sylvester 1997).

There are of course those who contest the existence of an underclass. These scholars maintain that rather than being novel, what we are seeing is a familiar phenomenon reintroduced in a new context. For Eric Sheppard, “the problem of an ‘underclass’ is endemic to capitalism” (Sheppard 1990: 295). A similar point of view is shared by Christopher Jencks. “Since the term ‘underclass’ is relatively new” he explains, “most people assume that the phenomenon it describes must also be new. Yet what we

now call the ‘underclass’ bears a striking resemblance to what sociologists used to call the lower class. Both are characterised by high levels of joblessness, illiteracy, violence and despair.” (Jencks 1991: 28). Notwithstanding the prevalence of this perspective, the underclass has provided the defining narrative of urban poverty, particularly in the United States for the last decade.

Somewhat surprisingly the concept has scarcely been extended by academic researchers to urban Canada. Instead, discussion of a Canadian “underclass” has been largely left to the popular media (Cheney 1988, Ruttan 1992, Goar 1993, Welsh 1994). As a result there is no empirical evidence detailing either its existence nor any critical discussion about whether the underclass provides an appropriate paradigm for the Canadian experience of urban poverty. Since Canada shares an economic history similar to the United States and Western Europe, it is plausible that an underclass may also be identified in Canadian cities. Whether this is indeed so, and whether immigrants constitute a significant share of such a group, is a central objective of the research project reported in this paper. Our purpose in this manuscript is threefold. First, we will offer a review of the relevant literature from the United States and Western Europe. Second, we will attempt to determine, using census and other data, whether that literature illuminates the conditions of deep poverty in urban Canada. Third, we will analyse the specific relationships between immigration, an underclass and the large Canadian metropolis.

The American underclass: conservative versus critical perspectives

In 1962 Gunnar Myrdal hypothesized that changes in the modern economy were “creating an underprivileged class of unemployed, unemployables and underemployed

who (were) more and more hopelessly set apart from the nation at large and (no longer sharing) in its life, its ambitions, and its achievements” (quoted in Gans 1993). In 1982, journalist Ken Auletta painted a more sensational portrait. “They are the ‘underclass’” he wrote “the *passive* poor, usually long term welfare recipients; the *hostile* street criminals who terrorize most cities, and who are often school drop outs and drug addicts; the *hustlers* who ... earn their living in an underground economy; the *traumatized* drunks, drifters, homeless shopping bag ladies and released mental patients who frequently roam or collapse on city streets” (Auletta 1982: xvi, author’s italics).

The different perspectives embodied by these two statements lie at the crux of the American underclass debate. Conservatives subscribe to the view that the underclass is defined by, and is a product of, its own actions - teenage pregnancy, criminal activity, voluntary joblessness and welfare dependency (Auletta 1982, Murray 1990, Alex-Assensoh 1995). As Lawrence Mead explains, “the poverty of today’s ‘underclass’ differs appreciably from the poverty in the past: ‘underclass’ poverty stems less from the absence of opportunity than from the inability or reluctance to take advantage of opportunity” (Mead 1991: 3). Liberals and other critical scholars adhere to a more contextual perspective maintaining that behaviours defined as “underclass” are the result of dwindling opportunities brought about by broader forces in the economy and society. Specifically, they point to rising unemployment rates, the decentralisation of industry and employment to the suburbs and exurbs, disproportionate growth in the low paying, insecure job sector and the historical legacy of racism. Lone motherhood can be read as a lack of eligible, *ie* gainfully employed, male partners (Wilson 1987), while unemployment and welfare dependency are a function of the economy’s inability or

unwillingness to provide accessible, lucrative and steady job opportunities (Kasarda 1990, Gans 1993) and criminal behaviour (especially involvement in underground or informal economies) is a coping measure to make ends meet (Kuttner 1991, Davis 1991).

The divergent views about causality have led to different approaches with regard to definition and solution. For conservatives the underclass is quite a broad group, potentially including anyone whose behaviour places them at odds with mainstream society. As such, lone mothers, drug dealers and the homeless are placed on the same moral scale. Proposed solutions to the “underclass problem” include curtailing welfare payments so that work becomes a more attractive option. For critical scholars the underclass are victims of economic and social change. They are those individuals and families who are marginalised and excluded from the labour force because their minimal education and skill level can no longer secure them steady or well paid work. They are also those who suffer because cutbacks in the welfare system make resorting to the informal and underground economy necessary for survival. Particularly, they are the minority poor for whom racism acts as a further barrier to socio-economic advancement. From this perspective increases in welfare and job creation (and an end to systemic racism) are appropriate solutions.

While the conservative/critical divide has framed much underclass debate, the influential work of William Julius Wilson demonstrates that these two perspectives can effectively be merged. Wilson’s thesis, in large part because it speaks to both sides of the debate, provided the springboard for the underclass to become the defining paradigm around which urban poverty has been discussed in the last decade (Fainstein 1993a, Fainstein 1993b).

William Julius Wilson and the ghetto poor

The term “underclass” entered the academic forum most forcefully with the 1987 publication of William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged*. This work identified the underclass as a particularly marginalised subset of Afro-Americans living in the inner cities of large metropolitan areas in the North Central and Eastern United States. Wilson’s central thesis is that during the 1970s and early 1980s, job losses in the manufacturing sector, the decentralisation of new service based jobs to the urban and exurban periphery, and black middle class suburbanisation converged to affect the residents of black inner city districts in a profoundly negative way. As industry, commerce and wealthier populations moved away from inner city locations, only the poorest residents remained. Consequently, the comparative disadvantage already characteristic of many of these communities deepened and became increasingly concentrated. The primary effect of this growing concentration of poverty was the social and spatial isolation of residents who were deprived “not only of resources and conventional role models, whose former presence buffered the effects of neighbourhood joblessness, but also of the kind of cultural learning from mainstream social networks that facilitate social and economic advancement in modern industrial society” (Wilson 1991-92: 642). For Wilson, what sets the underclass apart from other poverty groups is their marginal labour force position intensified by their isolated and multiply deprived neighbourhood environment.

Two key features of Wilson’s thesis are responsible for its central position in the underclass debate. First, it provides a bridge between conservative and critical perspectives. Wilson’s contention that the underclass is socially and spatially isolated

from mainstream role models and opportunity structures speaks to the conservative belief that deeply impoverished communities suffer from a “culture of poverty” wherein long term joblessness, welfare dependency, fatherless families and criminal activity become community norms, perpetuated across generations. While Wilson states that an intergenerational tendency towards poverty exists, and that this is a reaction and an adaptation to a capitalistic, class based society, his perspective of how that reaction/adaptation is manifested differs from the conservatives. Following the lead of Oscar Lewis, conservatives would maintain that the poverty subculture is characterized by values and attitudes that make members of the underclass “not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their life-time” (quoted in Wilson 1987:13). In contrast, Wilson argues that the behavioural traits and characteristics of many “underclass” residents are a direct result of economic and urban transition, thus lending weight to the structural perspective of more critical scholars. Indeed, Wilson makes clear in his introductory chapters that part of his rationale for writing *The Truly Disadvantaged* was to interject critical liberal thinking into an arena that had, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, been largely abandoned to the conservative agenda. Wilson’s emphasis on the contextual importance of racial discrimination, labour market restructuring, and both household and business suburbanisation in underclass development and growth has been paramount in establishing an argument that could otherwise be construed as blaming the victim.

The second facet of Wilson’s thesis that has made it so pivotal is its emphasis on social geography. Two key geographical factors make underclass poverty unique. One is the spatial overlap of multiple forms of disadvantage, and the other is the growing spatial

concentration of families and individuals suffering from extreme poverty within these districts. According to Wilson, the underclass are the residents of areas with family poverty rates equal to or in excess of 40%. These communities can also be identified by their unusually high rates of unemployment, female-headed families, welfare dependency and criminal activity. As Wilson explains,

...the communities of the “underclass” are plagued by massive joblessness, flagrant and open lawlessness, and low-achieving schools, and therefore tend to be avoided by outsiders. Consequently the residents of these areas, whether women and children of welfare families or aggressive street criminals, have become increasingly socially isolated from mainstream behaviour (Wilson 1987: 58).

For Wilson then, it is the concentration of multiple disadvantage, coupled with the fact that these communities tend to be spatially isolated (i.e. deeply embedded in areas of lower poverty) that distances the underclass from mainstream role models and opportunities and forces them to “adapt to the situation of closed mobility they see before them” in a way that the urban poor have (supposedly) not had to do in the past (Wilson 1991/92: 652).

The geographical dimension of Wilson’s study prompted a flurry of American research that sought to define more specifically the characteristics both of the underclass population and of the communities in which they live (Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, Sawhill 1989, Mincey, Sawhill and Wolf, 1990, Ricketts and Mincey 1990, Hughes 1989a, 1989b, 1990). Rather than beginning in extreme poverty neighbourhoods as Wilson had done, these researchers defined “underclass neighbourhoods” as census tracts

with unusually high concentrations -- either one standard deviation above the national average (Ricketts and Sawhill 1988) or twice the metropolitan median (Hughes 1989a) -- of lone mothers, men not involved in the labour force, welfare dependents and high-school drop-outs. As individuals, the underclass were defined as residents of these communities who were “directly involved in at least one dysfunctional behavior” (Ricketts and Mincey 1990: 141). According to these studies, the underclass comprised a small but growing sub-component of American urban poor (in 1980 about 2.5 million persons or 1% of the national population).

One of the most important contributions that these studies made was their confirmation that the growth of the underclass population over the 1970-1980 period was not a result of increasing population numbers in individual tracts (in fact most showed declining absolute population numbers) but rather, the result of a growing number of qualifying census tracts (Sawhill 1989). This finding seemed to support one of Wilson's central arguments that poor communities became underclass communities as a result of the outmigration of residents who could afford to leave. Research from the 1980-1990 period indicates that this pattern continued throughout this decade as well. Jargowsky (1994) reports that the physical size of underclass areas continued to grow between 1980 and 1990 while the population density within these areas declined. This study also indicates that the proportion of black poor living in underclass tracts increased from 37.2 percent in 1980 to 45.4 percent in 1990, providing further evidence of the racial dimension of marginalisation from mainstream society.

In his research Richard Greene expresses concern that discussions of the social geography of the underclass have focused exclusively on the internal characteristics of

census tracts and not on how these extreme poverty tracts are related to one another across space, nor how these tracts move in and out of different levels of poverty over time (Greene 1991, 1994). Greene's research is critical to a comprehensive understanding of underclass development when we consider the aforementioned finding of Sawhill -- that underclass growth is a function of the increasing numbers of qualifying census tracts not of growing population numbers within existing tracts. In addition to confirming Sawhill's finding, Greene's research demonstrates that "once a neighborhood is classified as an extreme-poverty area, it has little chance of recovering" (1994: 372) and that "not only are the poor becoming more concentrated in extreme poverty tracts, but that the extreme poverty tracts in which they live are being added to much larger poverty settlements" (1991: 249). Only five percent of tracts designated as "ghetto underclass" tracts in Chicago between 1970 and 1990 escaped that status in the following intercensal period, while the absolute number of underclass tracts multiplied more than ten-fold over the twenty year period (Morenoff and Tienda 1997). In other words, areas of poverty are expanding across urban space while the poverty within these areas is deepening and more entrenched.

A second important contribution was support for Wilson's contention that the underclass was predominantly Afro-American and concentrated in the most deprived and isolated communities of selected cities - those in the North Central and North Eastern United States that had been the most devastated by deindustrialisation. While recent research has suggested that both the ethnic and regional characteristics of the underclass changed through the 1980s, it remains true that the vast majority of people living in underclass areas are visible minorities, especially non-hispanic black (Jargowsky 1994).

It seems as if new immigrants to Chicago, for example, have tended to by-pass former inner city ports of entry in favour of inner suburban districts beyond the reach of the deepest poverty (Greene 1997). Indeed a recent typology of Chicago neighbourhoods noted that foreign-born accounted for less than three percent of the population of designated underclass districts (Morenoff and Tienda 1997).

The “underclass” concept abandoned

In contrast to studies that identify and measure the underclass and its growth is a significant number of papers calling for the term’s abandonment as a conceptual tool describing the urban poor. These calls stem largely from concern about the term’s political and policy implications. (Kuttner 1991, Gans 1995). Among critical scholars, there has been a long standing worry that “underclass” is a code word for the undeserving or profligate poor, especially those that are black -- and that this feeds into a conservative political agenda leading ultimately to a widespread withdrawal of public aid and the submergence of racial and class antagonism (Gans 1990). Moreover, critics also find the concept chaotic, grouping beneath a single conceptual umbrella too disparate a group of urban poor (Kornblum 1984, Jencks 1992). As Mingione (1993) explains, “the conflation into a single term of economic disadvantage, social exclusion and institutional isolation, lack of employment opportunities, ethnic origins, cultural characteristics, forms of deviant behavior and spatial concentration misses the point that these factors act as a sequence of causes within a complicated ongoing process” (325). Jencks (1992) argues that the composite elements of the underclass population need to be assessed separate from one another, for the links made between individual behaviours and economic change

are not as strong as the underclass thesis would have us believe. Moreover, when assessed separately some diagnostics (recently, crime, for example) of underclass status are declining rather than rising in severity as is usually implied.

Calling the underclass “the reigning conceptual hippopotamus” Fainstein (1993) criticises the thesis on the grounds that it obscures the powerful hand of racism in the determination of life chances and fails to illuminate that the experience for all Afro-Americans is one of limited opportunity. Such criticism has led even Wilson to reiterate his original arguments clarifying that he was not overlooking the power of racism, but rather suggesting that it is no longer the pre-eminent force shaping the ghetto. Also concerned about the use of the term “underclass” to “increasingly discredit the urban minority poor,” Wilson too has joined the chorus to jettison underclass language (Wilson 1991-92).

Whether critical, or merely wary, of the “underclass” controversy, it is important to recognize that many scholars have nonetheless chosen to maintain the methodology of Wilson’s group, while disclaiming its terminology. Rather than defining census tracts with rates in excess of 40 percent as underclass tracts, they are now labelled neighbourhoods of concentrated urban poverty (or simply ghettos). Although these authors set themselves apart from the underclass debate, their research addresses a similar if not identical set of empirical and methodological questions and contributes significantly to the underclass research agenda (Wilson 1992, Jargowsky 1994, Greene 1994, Hajnal 1995). For example, such studies often make note of the fact that concentrated urban poverty (CUP) or ghetto neighbourhoods tend to demonstrate

unusually high rates of joblessness, lone parenting, welfare dependency, high school dropout and criminal activity (Jargowsky and Bane 1991, Jargowsky 1994, Greene 1994).

The British “underclass”

Rather than defining an underclass on the basis of overlapping patterns of multiple deprivation, or on the spatial concentration of those patterns, British researchers have focused on one particular element of the original “underclass” concept -- the experience of the long term unemployed. Apart from what is widely viewed as the mischievous intervention of American conservative scholar Charles Murray there is general agreement that the roots of underclass development in the United Kingdom are structural (Murray 1990, Morris and Irwin 1992). As in the United States, the effects of economic restructuring have been distributed unevenly across Britain’s regional landscape. Deindustrialisation has been concentrated in the North and the Midlands, while growth in the new service and technological industries has been more prominent in the South. Most empirical research about a British ‘underclass’ then, has taken place in such industrial cities as Hartlepool, Coventry, Rochdale and Kirkcaldy (Morris 1993, Gallie 1994). In conjunction with the job losses associated with deindustrialisation, Britain has also seen a steady rise in the number of its long term unemployed, particularly among the nation’s working age youth. This has led several scholars to speculate that Britain may be witnessing the birth of an “underclass” -- a new “social stratum that suffers from prolonged labour market marginality; ... that experiences greater deprivation than even the manual working class; (and that) possesses its own distinctive sub-culture” (Gallie 1994: 737).

Two questions frame underclass discussion debate in Britain. First, as noted above, is there evidence of an underclass developing among the nation's growing number of long term unemployed? Second, does this group demonstrate sufficient social cohesion to be categorised as a class of its own? The consensus is that while evidence for the existence of an economically-defined underclass may be persuasive, there is as yet little evidence to support the emergence of a cultural underclass. More simply put, there are growing numbers of people marginalised and excluded from the labour force for longer periods of time than before, but it does not seem that among these people an identifiable sub-culture is forming (Morris and Irwin 1992, Morris 1993, Gallie 1994, Payne and Payne 1994). Moreover, overlapping measures of deprivation are not a new phenomenon, but were frequently observed in Britain and elsewhere from the mapping of social indicators in the 1970s (Herbert 1975, Ley 1983), itself a development from the cartographic exercises of human ecologists in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s.

As in the American case, several British scholars conclude that underclass terminology obscures more about the experience of urban poverty than it illuminates and as such should either be abandoned or used with caution (Gallie 1994). Of greater concern for some researchers though is the fact that labelling the long term unemployed as underclass cuts them off arbitrarily from their traditional class position. As Morris and Irwin explain, "since long-term unemployment is bred of a weakness in the labour market by virtue of unskilled status and/or lack of formal craft qualifications, then to separate the unemployed from their class position when in work, is to overlook the source of their vulnerability" (418).

The European “underclass”

Other European researchers also view the creation of an underclass as a function of long term unemployment and continued exclusion from the labour market and other avenues of upward mobility (Mingione 1996). While many of the questions that preoccupy British researchers remain of concern, two relationships are explored that are not clearly articulated in American or British studies. First, many European studies cite the importance of the housing market as a contributing factor in underclass development. Second, it is in the European literature that the relationship with immigrant populations receives the most sustained attention.

Recognising the connection between housing and the underclass is critical. If we declare that one of the defining characteristics of the underclass is isolation from conventional structures of opportunity, then we must assess to what extent that isolation is spatial. To do so requires an investigation of the geography of residential location. In an article about the possible emergence of an underclass in Hamburg, Dangschat observes that “the number of (people) being trapped either by their work or by the housing market or by both is increasing within cities” (Dangschat 1994: 1145). This new poverty group tends to be

spatially concentrated in pockets of poverty by the logic of the housing market and the allocation of public funds: they are in run-down, ungentrified inner-city neighbourhoods, in low standard housing estates from the post-war period and in the high-rise housing estates of the 1970s and 1980s that were so long used to

house all kinds of different problematic social groups in environments that disadvantaged them still further (Dangschat 1994: 1145).

The extent to which disadvantage is exacerbated by residence in public housing estates and/or run down peripheral communities is addressed by Wacquant (1993), who contends that stigmatisation about underclass communities is partially responsible for the social disorganisation identified within them. He notes for example, that “residential discrimination hampers the search for jobs and contributes to entrench local unemployment since inhabitants ... encounter additional distrust and reticence among employers as soon as they mention their place of residence” (Waquant 1993: 372). In response to such stigmatization, residents distance themselves from associations with their own communities thereby contributing to the creation of

impossible communit(ies) perpetually divided against themselves, which cannot but refuse to acknowledge the collective nature of their predicament and who are therefore inclined to deploy strategies of distancing and ‘exit’ that tend to validate negative outside perceptions and feed a deadly self-fulfilling prophecy through which public taint and collective disgrace eventually produce that which they claim merely to record: namely, social atomism, community ‘disorganization’ and cultural anomie (Waquant 1993: 374-375).

It is important to recognize that the location and concentration of designated low income or publicly subsidized housing does not necessarily indicate a community of poverty and the potential site of underclass development. With regard to Dutch cities, Van Kempen (1994) makes the point that national subsidy policies and housing market regulation have had the effect of ensuring that many central city neighbourhoods remain socially mixed

thereby avoiding the marginalisation and ghettoisation characteristic of underclass communities.

Nonetheless signs of what could be considered underclass communities do exist in the Netherlands, their marginality defined primarily by the limited life chances of the majority of residents - by their long term, if not irreversible, exclusion from the labour market and by extension from mainstream society. In her discussion of these communities Van Kempen indicates the importance of immigration in European discussions about the underclass. Of her poverty indicators, living on welfare is one, ethnic origin the other. Neighbourhoods which tend to fit an underclass profile, Van Kempen explains, are those “where both the concentrations of ethnic minorities and people living on welfare are high and where poor turnout at elections and a high criminality rate underlie the socially peripheral character of the neighbourhood...” (Van Kempen 1994: 1003). Such a definition suggests that in Dutch neighbourhoods at least, ethnic origin or immigrant status are considered reliable indicators of multiple and concentrated poverty (Roelandt and Veenman 1992); note that in their study of Dutch urban poverty Burgers and Kloosterman (1996) also use ethnic minority status as an indicator of deprivation. Similar associations have been noted in Copenhagen (Aydas 1997, Hjarno 1997), Stockholm, and many other European cities; in Britain especially, race crosscuts the issue of foreign origin. The “intersection of national origin, economic exclusion and spatial segregation” has also captured the attention of French researchers who have established that immigrants are disproportionately unemployed and overwhelmingly concentrated in deindustrialised, low income suburban peripheries (Silver 1993: 347). Such findings have spurred the French press to draw parallels between

the American ghetto and the French suburban cités. The *Monde Diplomatique* describes “(les cités) -- des sortes de ghettos, rassemblant une population qui cumule de nombreux handicaps sociaux: chômage, origine étrangère, jeunesse, qualification nulle ...” (Silver 1993: 347). Again we see immigrant status as one of the key indicators of social disadvantage.

The membership of immigrants and minorities within “impossible” or “underclass” communities is explored more critically by Wacquant. While immigrants and minorities may be a very visible and growing presence in notably disadvantaged communities, we should not presume that they are the primary members of that population. Whereas the American underclass is thought to draw from a very specific racial group, its French equivalent draws from across the ethnic spectrum encompassing both the French and an array of foreign born (Wacquant 1993, Silver 1993). The point that the European underclass “although *homogeneous* in terms of labour market position, is rather *heterogeneous* in terms of social, political and cultural outlook” is further made by Burgers and Kloosterman (1996: 435) in their study of social exclusion in Dutch cities. The existence of an exclusively immigrant underclass is further challenged by research which demonstrates that in addition to rapid assimilation into the French culture, second generation immigrants show increasing upward mobility in terms of educational, occupational and economic standing (Wacquant 1993). Even though immigrants to France show higher overall rates of unemployment and lower incomes than the native born, the fact that over time their position is likely to improve challenges the intergenerational aspect of underclass categorisation.

The paucity of Canadian research

Though portable, the term “underclass” clearly carries with it different meanings and membership as it crosses international boundaries. Whether or not the term is appropriate to describe urban poverty in Canada has yet to be explored. While Canadian studies have suggested that a new poverty population (which includes children, young adults and those within the workforce) is emerging, it is not known whether this population constitutes an urban underclass and whether visible minorities and immigrants are prominent members (Vance 1990, Economic Council of Canada 1992). Given that comparative research in the U.S. and Europe cite visible minorities and immigrants as key members of an underclass population, unravelling the composition of a Canadian underclass, should it exist, is critical, particularly when the media state that the poverty rate for newly arrived immigrants is three times the rate for Canadian born (Sarlo 1992).

A relevant precedent is a recent ethnography of Caribbean immigrants in Toronto, that points explicitly to

a growing “underclass” composed of youth born to (immigrant) working class parents or single mothers who are increasingly frustrated by the barriers of racism and poverty that they experience in Canada. They feel uncomfortable in the school system... and are easily led to drop out. Some succumb to the easy money and lifestyle of drug dealing and other forms of hustling. They develop a cynical, negative view of Canadian society and feel marginalized (Henry 1994: 269).

This same study also found that although the labour force participation rates for people of Caribbean origin were higher than the national average, “Caribbean migrants were poorly

represented in managerial and supervisory positions and over represented in skilled, semi-skilled and manual occupations” (Henry 1994: 275). Henry’s interpretation introduces a distinctive integration of the European and American findings. Like the European work, immigrant status and exclusion from better jobs is emphasised, while at the same time the fact that exclusion is racialised, affects particularly the children of immigrants (*i.e.* Canadian-born), and includes subcultural as well as structural effects, introduces American and British inflections to the discussion. Such findings clearly point to the necessity for further exploring the “underclass” question in the Canadian context in more detail than will be possible in our analysis.

Canadian research on the connection between visible minorities, immigrants and an underclass is also warranted when we consider studies which allude to the emergence of poverty pockets in Canadian suburban communities that are populated principally by immigrants and visible minorities (Murdie 1993, forthcoming, Ray 1994). This situation differs from the American experience of underclass development but parallels findings from some European cities. While an American underclass tends to concentrate in the poorest, most geographically isolated neighbourhoods of the inner city, work in Toronto shows that concentrated poverty is also establishing itself in suburban areas (Bourne 1993, Murdie 1994, Smith 1992, Ray 1994). In Toronto, Murdie observes,

(The) relative decline in status of the Inner Suburbs results primarily from two phenomena ... One concerns the changing geography of ethnicity in Toronto, especially the increased number of new immigrants and refugees who have found accommodation in lower rent areas of the Inner Suburbs. This is perhaps the major factor. The other is the number of low income families living in public

housing developments, many of which were built on green field sites in the Inner Suburbs (especially North York and Scarborough) during the 1960s and 1970s.

This housing was often developed in close proximity to low cost private rental accommodation thereby increasing the number of relatively low rent units in these areas and the concentration of low income households (Murdie forthcoming: 18).

In addition a recent study comparing U.S. and Canadian populations of concentrated urban poverty suggests not only that concentrated urban poverty exists in Canada, but also that compared to the United States, Canada has proportionately *more* persons living in such communities (Hajnal 1995). This is not the first study to explore issues of comparative poverty between the U.S. and Canada (*e.g.* Broadway 1989), but it is the first to situate analysis within the underclass/concentrated urban poverty paradigm. Hajnal also suggests that like the U.S., there is a distinctive interurban geography of deep poverty in Canada -- with Montreal showing particularly high levels. However, he has little to say about its intraurban distribution, or its relation to immigrants, characteristics that we now seek to explore in the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver CMAs.

An “underclass” in Canada?

Our investigation of the relationship between a Canadian underclass and immigrant populations has proceeded in two phases. First, we sought to determine the relevance of the underclass concept to the geographies of poverty in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In addition to very different immigration profiles, these cities exemplify varying economic and policy trajectories, characteristics that might help unravel some of the underlying factors of underclass/concentrated poverty development and give insight

into the importance of local geographies. The second phase of our research involves analysis of the spatial coincidence between immigrant populations and the location of designated underclass and multiply deprived communities. To what extent do such ethno-cultural variables as place of birth, year of arrival in Canada, and mother tongue have any bearing on underclass membership? Moreover, is there an association between immigration and the map of urban poverty more generally?

Identifying an underclass in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver

To permit comparison with American research, we begin by utilising the definition of the “underclass” as operationalised by Ricketts and Sawhill (1988) and Hughes (1989a, 1989b, 1990). Specifically, “underclass” areas are designated by virtue of multiple deprivation. Like Ricketts and Sawhill we defined an underclass as the population of a census tract whose rates of non-labour force involvement, female-led families, welfare dependency and high school non-completion were notably high. Like Hughes, we set our thresholds at twice the current CMA median for each variable in question (Table 1).

There are, however, two important differences between our study and its precedecessors. First, whereas Hughes and Ricketts and Sawhill identified only tracts which qualified on all four variables, we also identify tracts which qualify on one, two or three of the variables. In this way we are able to get a sense of the envelopping spatial context of any underclass community and assess the possibility of the incipient formation of underclass tracts. A second difference lies in the variables themselves. The American and Canadian censuses do not permit exact replication. As Table 1 shows, we chose variables that were the most compatible. While the female lone parent family and

dependency on welfare variables seem to be comparable between the two countries, there are some differences between the Canadian and American educational and employment variables. Whereas Wilson, Ricketts and Sawhill, and Hughes measured the proportion of high school dropouts (ages 15-24) in a census tract, our variable measures the proportion of all persons 15 years of age and older whose highest level of schooling is below a high school diploma. Second, while the American studies examine non-participation in the work force, we chose to use unemployment. Our concern with using the Canadian variable that measures lack of participation in the labour force was that it captured the elderly and students as well as other persons who were neither working nor looking for work -- risking an inflation of the number of persons qualifying for inclusion.

Examination of census tract scores on the four variables indicates that, unlike the other three indicators, relatively few tracts qualify on the educational variable. While we suspect this represents a genuine departure between Canada and the U. S., it is possible that the lack of extreme high school drop-out levels in Canada is in part a product of measurement differences. Figures 1, 2 and 3 identify designated census tracts in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver for 1991. As the maps show, only one tract in Toronto and Montreal qualified on all four underclass indicators, and none in Vancouver. The Toronto tract, corresponding with the public housing project of Regent Park, is embedded within the inner city of Toronto and, as the map illustrates, is adjacent to two tracts which score on three underclass variables and another tract which scores on one. The underclass tract in Montreal is also on the eastern edge of downtown in a district of subsidised housing.

How does this compare with American results? In his study in the 50 largest American cities, Hughes found that the number of “underclass” tracts in individual cities ranged from 0 to 42. Although not directly comparable because Hughes was using 1980 data, Toronto’s and Montreal’s 1991 score of a single census tract (home to less than 0.2 percent of the CMA population) contrasts with near neighbours Buffalo and Rochester with three underclass tracts, representing 1 percent of their populations. Somewhat further afield, Cleveland yielded 21 tracts (4 percent of the city population) in 1980, while Detroit contained 40 such tracts, for 4 percent of its population.

What does the identification of a single underclass tract in Toronto and Montreal indicate? First, it is clear that the overall lack of overlap among the four indicators in all three cities makes a coherent theory of an underclass as defined in this analysis highly problematic in urban Canada. Second, while it is true that the single Toronto tract does strictly speaking qualify for underclass status, particularly because it is embedded within a set of census tracts which also exhibit unusually high social disadvantage, the necessary isolation of residents is far from complete, for nearby are the gentrified district of Don Vale, the stable, socially-mixed St. Lawrence project, and downtown condominiums. A significant (and unanswered) question then becomes the scale of isolation necessary for spatial embeddedness to have effects. Is it a territory defined by the catchment area of a single elementary school? Should it be a larger set of contiguous tracts, or as small as a single housing project?

Although mapping underclass tracts with conventional social and economic indicators yielded only one tract, the social geography of tracts qualifying on fewer deprivation measures is worthy of examination. Discounting a few suburban outliers,

Vancouver tracts that scored on two variables were almost exclusively concentrated in the inner city, in a compact cluster of a dozen tracts east of downtown, a pattern similar in location (though perhaps not in extent) to the geography of urban disadvantage commonly associated with American cities. This finding was somewhat surprising considering the attention that both academic and popular sources pay to emerging suburban poverty in Canada. The Montreal map showed more diversity. While the largest block of deprived tracts exists in the city's inner east end, adjacent to the St. Lawrence River, a further concentration is found immediately south-west of downtown in the old-established poverty area of 'the city below the hill'. Smaller concentrations of a handful of tracts each occur in several older suburbs including Côte-des-Neiges (cf. Séguin 1997).

The geography of multiply deprived census tracts in Toronto does, however, correspond to recent suggestions that poverty groups and immigrants are concentrated not only in the inner city, but also in isolated suburban communities (often in public housing) where access to employment, education and social resources is limited (Murdie 1994, 1996, Ray 1994, Smith 1992). This is exactly what our map shows for Toronto, as clear pockets of deprivation are positioned both in the inner city and in several suburban boroughs. Two important points arise from this pattern. First, it could be argued that this dispersed rather than compact map of disadvantaged tracts lessens the spatial isolation of deprived households. While many of the suburban tracts identified on our map are at a considerable distance from the city centre and its employment and service opportunities, these communities are also adjacent to middle-class districts, a condition at odds with the American argument that areas of multiple deprivation are embedded in existing inner city ghettos that are growing and therefore increasingly separated from the middle class or a

stable working class. Once again, the existence of a conventional underclass in this city at least remains dubious.

Deprived tracts and crime rates

Before moving away from social and economic indicators of deprivation, we should not overlook the issue of criminal activity, commonly attributed to underclass individuals and communities, particularly in the United States (Auletta 1982, Wilson 1987, Kornblum 1991). Crime data, whether at the individual or neighbourhood scale is notoriously difficult to access. However, we have been able to obtain good data from the Metropolitan Toronto Police, and more patchy coverage from the City of Vancouver Police. In Metropolitan Toronto, we were able to obtain reported criminal activity for each of the region's 207 patrol areas. Rates of reported crime on an ordinal scale were prepared by the police for each patrol area, and by summing ranks for different crimes we were able to identify those patrol areas with the highest overall rankings of reported crime (Figure 4). The overlap between high crime patrol areas and the districts of multiple deprivation is striking, as is the incidence of high scoring patrol areas outside the City of Toronto. While crime data are available only at the relatively unhelpful municipal scale outside Vancouver, within the city crime data, for example assaults and drug arrests, show a close association with the compact inner city cluster of deprived tracts east of downtown. As in the United States, deprivation and crime are highly correlated. To this relationship we need now to add considerations about the incidence of poverty.

“Underclass” tracts and extreme rates of poverty

If underclass theory is not sustained in large Canadian cities by the conventional evidence of indicators, the existence of deeply impoverished districts most certainly is. The next stage of our analysis was to isolate those tracts with population poverty rates in excess of 40 percent, the conventional threshold of extreme poverty employed in American studies and the basis for the classification of concentrated urban poverty. In his original study, Wilson identified extreme poverty areas as those whose rates of family poverty are equal to or exceed 40 percent, while categorising communities with poverty rates in the 30 percent range as areas of high poverty. As Wilson explains, “it is the growth of the high- and extreme-poverty areas that epitomizes the social transformation of the inner city, a transformation that represents a change in the class structure in many inner-city neighborhoods as the nonpoor black middle classes tend no longer to reside in these neighborhoods, thereby increasing the proportion of truly disadvantaged individuals and families” (Wilson 1987: 55). Extending this discussion to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, we also use a 40 percent cutoff, but assess persons in poverty, not families.

Two conclusions emerge prominently from the poverty maps (Figures 5, 6 and 7). First, all three cities exhibit many more high and extreme poverty tracts than underclass tracts; presumably the origins of poverty are sufficiently diverse that the coincidence of indicators required to define underclass status is not achieved. Second, the poverty patterns are again markedly different among cities. Toronto shows a considerable suburbanisation of poverty, while Vancouver follows the more conventional American model of inner city poverty hugging the urban core, although there is a clear suburban pocket of several tracts along the Fraser River in North Surrey and New Westminister.

Montreal falls between the other two. While several dozen tracts north-east and south-west of downtown form solid blocks of extreme poverty, further concentrations occur in several older suburban districts (cf. Séguin 1997). What is also apparent is that in the central areas of these cities, extreme and high poverty census tracts tend to be nested in, or adjacent to, more expansive areas of lesser poverty of 20 percent and more. Census tracts of extreme or high poverty found in suburban locations tend to stand alone, surrounded by wider communities of comparative affluence, as in the city of Scarborough, east of Toronto. An exception in Toronto is a poverty sector that runs fairly continuously from tracts west of downtown, and northwest through the Junction into the suburbs along the spine of the Jane Street corridor. East of downtown, extreme poverty tracts coincide with the public housing projects of Regent Park and Moss Park, and the inhospitable high density rentals of St. Jamestown. In parts of both inner cities a tentative theory of concentrated urban poverty might be supported.

Strong correlations clearly exist between the maps of high and extreme poverty, criminal activity, and multiple deprivation. As stated previously, a key component of the underclass argument is the social and spatial isolation of underclass communities that is in large part defined by their complete and deepening envelopment in areas of high and extreme poverty. There are indications of such circumstances in all three cities. In each CMA, a number of multiply deprived tracts are embedded in more expansive districts of high or extreme poverty. But at the same time these relations are not developed as fully in the Canadian cities as in the American 'ideal type'. Various forms of deprivation do not coincide in the Canadian case to nearly the same degree, nor (aside from eight tracts in Vancouver's East Side and a larger number in Montreal's east end) are deprived tracts

contiguous and compact; Toronto's social geography in particular is considerably more complex.

An obvious question requiring attention concerns the variable geographies of poverty, deprivation and crime among the cities. Our findings support other research that suggests that suburban poverty pockets coincide with the location of public housing (Murdie 1994, 1996, forthcoming). The map of public housing we have compiled for Metropolitan Toronto reveals a strong spatial coincidence with the location of underclass and poverty tracts. Obviously the larger projects are more likely to influence the characteristics of their census tracts. Decisions made concerning the location of public housing in the 1960s, often on greenfield sites, have, with the trend toward residualisation in public housing, become the homes of multiply deprived communities in the 1980s and 1990s. It is the same story in Vancouver, with the heaviest concentration of deep needs housing coinciding with the extreme poverty locale of the city's East Side. Non-market housing comprises over one-third of housing units in the three neighbourhoods that make up the core of this poverty region (City of Vancouver 1997).

To summarise: our analysis shows a constellation of tightly interlocked variables that form an integrated social geography. They include extreme poverty, multiple deprivation, crime, and non-market housing. The fact that a good deal of this deep needs housing is located in the inner suburbs separates Toronto from Vancouver, and to a lesser degree, Montreal. But while this set of variables is interlocked, their binding is looser and their incidence less extreme than has been identified in some large American cities.

The geographical stability of deprived districts, 1971-1991

The analysis to date has explored the structure of poverty and deprivation at a fixed point in time. But an integral component of underclass thinking is its emphasis upon temporality: the social and cultural relations inherent in Wilson's thesis require time to unfold, while his stress on social reproduction carries them forward intergenerationally. To examine more than a single census time period is then a minimal acknowledgement of the longitudinal implications of underclass theory. Moreover, American studies have shown considerable stability exists in the geography of multiply deprived districts between census dates. A typical tendency has been for one or several deprived nodes existing in 1970 to survive and anchor subsequent expansion; as noted earlier one Chicago study showed an erosion of less than five percent of designated underclass tracts over a twenty-year period, while the initial cluster of tracts expanded ten-fold in number between 1970 and 1990 (Morenoff and Tienda 1997; also Green 1994). Presumably such spatial stability facilitates the perpetuation of existing social and cultural relations required by the underclass thesis.

There is a second advantage to carrying the analysis of the largest Canadian cities back to 1971, for this census marked an important threshold in immigration history. New legislation in the late 1960s transformed the regions of origin of Canadian immigrants. In the mid 1960s, close to 90 percent of new arrivals originated in the traditional (and Caucasian) source regions of Europe and the United States that had dominated immigration every year since Confederation. But over the next generation, directed by new legislation, a remarkable transition occurred, so that by 1996 this traditional migration accounted for only 20 percent of all arrivals, leaving the majority to new (and

mainly non-Caucasian) source regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America. To what extent have relationships between deprivation and immigration displayed any discontinuities across this threshold? This is not an idle question, for Borjas (1995) has identified a significant deterioration in the economic well-being of immigrants to the United States between 1970 and 1990, an argument with some clear resonances in Canada (DeVoretz 1995).

This stage of the research, repeating the earlier analysis but with 1971 census data, was restricted to Toronto and Vancouver. This decision was partially made for practical reasons, since the preparation of census data required a costly reconstruction of 1971 variables by Statistics Canada in order to maintain consistency with 1991 variable definitions. The map of deprived tracts for Vancouver in 1971 (Figure 8) showed little change in outline from 1991, but some instructive variation in detail. In 1971 deprived tracts were compactly arranged in the city's East Side with only four suburban outliers. Not only was poverty more spatially concentrated, but within the East Side there was also considerably more overlap of deprivation measures than existed twenty years later. Whereas there were no tracts in the Vancouver CMA where three deprivation indicators coincided in 1991, there were three such tracts in 1971, in a compact group in the East Side. The tendency in the data, then, is for deprivation in 1991 to be both more dispersed spatially, and less deep in any one site than it was in 1971. The 'shallowing out' of indicators in the Downtown East Side is consistent with the protests of activists against what they see as the erosion of the district by redevelopment since 1986 (Ley 1994).

The same trend existed in Toronto (Figure 9). In 1971 poverty was strongly localised in the central city, particularly east and west of downtown. This sharper spatial

concentration was also accompanied by social deepening, with 14 tracts in the CMA exhibiting three deprivation measures (against 7 tracts displaying three or four indicators in the much larger CMA of 1991). Moreover, 11 of these 14 were contiguously arranged in the city's inner east side around the Regent Park and Moss Park public housing projects and the deteriorated private rental housing in adjacent districts. Such a profile is not dissimilar to equivalent American cities in 1970 where a compact but modest set of underclass tracts provided the anchor for deepening and considerable spatial expansion during the next two decades. But Toronto's social geography has followed a different path. Since 1971 the incipient underclass area east of downtown (and to a lesser degree west of downtown) has been fragmented and massively displaced by gentrification and reinvestment (Ley 1996). In a significant departure from the American case, fully two-thirds of the tracts in this zone scoring on two or three of the deprivation indicators in 1971 no longer did so in 1991. Deprivation has dispersed spatially and shallowed out socially. Unlike, say, Chicago, many Toronto tracts that were close to underclass status in 1971 have experienced relative upgrading since. We may in fact claim that using the definition of the American underclass, Toronto and Vancouver were much *closer to exhibiting an urban underclass in 1971 than they were in 1991* -- though this is not to say for a moment that there are not widespread zones of poverty in both cities in the 1990s. But that is a somewhat different thematic.

Multiple deprivation: an immigrant connection?

It is time now to turn directly to the relationship between multiple deprivation and immigration. Recall that to a considerable degree American underclass conditions are

'homegrown', while the European literature associates multiple deprivation with immigrant status. This is clearly an oversimplification, and appropriate qualifications were made earlier, but it does identify the different emphases in the two literatures in specifying the incidence of multiple deprivation and extreme poverty. From the evidence of Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, on what side of this dichotomy does urban Canada belong?

A first stage in addressing this question is to map the location of immigrants in both metropolitan areas (Figures 10-12). Visual inspection sustains several of our existing interpretive themes. The most striking is the containment of the highest immigrant tracts (over 45 percent) within the City of Vancouver, with lower levels in all suburban tracts. In contrast is the social geography of immigration in Toronto. Considerably more tracts in Metro Toronto contain more than 60 percent foreign-born, with the largest single cluster in northwestern Scarborough. Indeed as one passes northward through Scarborough, and further from downtown, the immigrant share of the population increases. Ray (1994) has shown that a number of immigrant groups are more concentrated in the Metro suburbs than in the city itself. The lesser number of newcomers from overseas in the central city is due to the survival of the established elite sector of North Toronto and to the encirclement of downtown by Canadian-born gentrifiers, and their diffusion through the eastern inner city (Ley 1996).

The other major tendency in the immigrant map of Metro Toronto is the northwestern sector running from the inner city to the northern bounds of Metro. This sector describes a broad swath around the corridor of high poverty noted earlier, and it immediately forces the question of the relationship between immigration and

poverty/deprivation. From the cartographic evidence these associations do not appear to be as marked in Vancouver, where only two of the eight extreme poverty tracts in the East End (and two of the nine multiply deprived tracts) include more than 45 percent foreign-born. Correlations appear even weaker in Montreal. While immigrant clusters correspond with deprived tracts in some older suburbs (notably Côte-des-Neiges), the largest concentrations of multiple deprivation and poverty north-east and south-west of downtown contain relatively small numbers of immigrants.

What then are the immigrant characteristics of multiply deprived tracts in each metropolitan area? The analysis was limited to tracts displaying at least one deprivation indicator plus a poverty rate of over 20 percent. Table 2 shows four ethno-cultural characteristics of these multiply-deprived districts. As before, there are also some interesting variations between the CMAs.

In all three cities immigrants are over-represented in multiply-deprived census tracts (Table 2a). In Montreal and Vancouver this figure is quite low, less than 5 percent greater than their share of the population of the entire CMA. In contrast the spread is more than twice as large in Toronto, with immigrants comprising 48.5 percent of residents in multiply deprived tracts. There is not space here to discuss the reasons for this divergence in any detail, though clearly it is associated with the proportionately greater preference for Vancouver among wealthier business-class immigrants (Ley 1995), and the high level of francophone poverty in Montreal. In contrast Toronto has been a more popular destination for poorer refugee-class arrivals. But it is equally evident that in all cities more than half the residents of multiply-deprived districts (in Vancouver the figure is two-thirds, in Montreal almost 80 percent) are Canadian-born. Like the

European research, then, we would conclude that while immigration plays a role in membership of multiply-deprived tracts, deprivation displays far greater heterogeneity, and indeed a majority of members of such tracts are native-born.

Additional characteristics of the immigrants in multiply-deprived districts appear in Table 2. First, they are far more likely than other CMA immigrants to have a mother tongue that is neither of Canada's official languages, and to use this language as their tongue at home (Table 2b). Second, they are rather more likely to trace their origins to 'new' immigrant source regions, rather than the 'traditional' source regions of Europe and the United States (Table 2c). This relationship of course is also related to time of arrival for, bearing in mind the recent evolution of Canadian immigration, it is probable that newcomers from 'new' source regions are also more recent arrivals. Table 2d explores this connection, and indicates that recent immigrants with ten or fewer years in Canada are significantly over-represented in multiply deprived tracts (and rather more so in Montreal) relative to longer-established foreign-born. This result repeats the findings of other research, suggesting the interpretation that once the difficult early years of settlement are passed, upward mobility carries households out of disadvantaged districts. After between ten and twenty years in Canada, immigrants are evenly balanced in the multiply-disadvantaged districts relative to their numbers elsewhere, while after more than twenty years they are significantly *under*-represented. This general trend repeats an old story of longitudinal upward mobility, a narrative of course at odds with the longitudinal entrapment that is central to underclass theory. This is not to say that lack of social mobility does not occur for particular sub-groups of immigrants, but it is not the

overall trend. The specification of these sub-groups experiencing blocked mobility must await more disaggregated analysis using individual household data.

Relations between immigration and urban poverty

If the stronger underclass thesis cannot be sustained with census tract data in the three cities, it remains worthwhile to examine the relationship between immigration and deep poverty, which as we have seen, though related, is not the same thing. The final stage in this phase of the research is to isolate urban poverty and consider its relations with ethno-cultural variables on the one hand compared with the more structural variables that we have used as underclass indicators on the other. To what extent does the set of ethno-cultural variables specified in Table 2 offer a separate and significant contribution to the incidence of urban poverty once the socio-economic factors associated with the underclass thesis have been controlled for? Because there are relatively few multiply deprived tracts in the three cities to use as a sample in multiple regression analysis, we are here using all census tracts in each of the metropolitan areas as observations. The dependent variable is the percentage of economic families that fall below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off, available in the census for 1991 and reconstructed in a custom tabulation for 1971 – in contrast to families, numbers of persons below the cut-off could not be reconstructed for 1971. The independent variables comprise the four underclass indicators and the ethno-cultural variables in Table 2. To explore any changes brought about by the 'new' immigration since the late 1960s, the analysis is undertaken for 1991 and again for 1971, though for the earlier year only Toronto and Vancouver were examined.

Consider Table 3 which lists the simple correlations between the incidence of low-income families and the two sets of independent variables for census tracts in 1991. The similarity between the three CMAs is notable, indeed remarkable, suggesting a very similar socio-spatial patterning across each of them. In each case the structural variables are more significant in their co-variation with the incidence of low-income economic families than the ethno-cultural set. The incidence of female-led families, male unemployment, and government transfer payments offer the strongest of all correlations; interestingly, failure to complete high school does not figure as prominently. It is not difficult to establish causal arguments linking poverty and these factors -- though presumably in most accounts the level of transfer payments would feature as an effect rather than a cause of poverty. Causal arguments are aided by multiple regression that shows a high coefficient of determination (R^2) linking the structural variables and low income families, ranging from 0.80 in Montreal to 0.82 in Toronto and 0.85 in Vancouver.

In contrast the ethno-cultural indicators show more modest correlations and a weaker coefficient of determination. The percentage of immigrants in a tract shows a moderate positive correlation with the poverty rate measure, ranging from 0.28 in Montreal to 0.42 in Vancouver and 0.56 in Toronto. Significantly the pattern of relationships for this and the other ethno-cultural variables is consistent with the simpler analysis in Table 2, although there we were limiting our attention to a smaller number of multiply deprived tracts. As in Table 2, there are consistent positive correlations with lack of use of the official languages, ranging between 0.43 and 0.62, and with an origin in one of the new immigrant source regions ($r = 0.45$ to 0.48), a proxy as noted earlier for visible

minority status. But this latter effect is confounded by time of arrival, for immigrants from the 'new' regions of origin have also arrived disproportionately in the 1980s ($r = 0.80$ in Vancouver, $r = 0.78$ in Toronto, $r = 0.66$ in Montreal). As we saw earlier, there is a regular trend whereby length of residence in Canada is consistently related to economic success. The regularity of this progression is quite striking in each of the three cities; in Toronto, for example, the association with family poverty is negative for immigrants who arrived before 1961 (-0.45) and from 1961 to 1971 (-0.45), inconsequential for arrivals in the 1970s ($r = 0.13$), but clearly positive for newcomers in the most recent decade of 1981-1990 ($r = 0.61$). Of no less significance, recency of immigration shows a stronger relationship with poverty than region of origin. In other words, time of arrival offers a better predictor of poverty status than region of origin, and thereby visible minority status.

The predictive power of the ethno-cultural variables as a set in 'explaining' poverty is considerably weaker than the socio-economic or structural indicators. The R^2 value in the three cities falls in the range of 0.43-0.55, well below the levels of the socio-economic group. The secondary rather than primary role of ethno-cultural variables in shaping poverty is indicated when the two sets are joined in a combined regression equation against the incidence of low-income families. The coefficient of determination is enhanced by between only two and six percentage points in the three cities beyond the statistical explanation offered by the socio-economic variables alone. In other words, once the structural variables have been accounted for, the immigration and ethno-cultural variables offer very minor additional explanation to the variation in urban family poverty.

Lastly, this line of analysis was repeated for 1971 to examine the level of stability in the relationships at an earlier period when Canada had a markedly different

immigration regime. Table 4 shows the simple correlations for Vancouver and Toronto. The consistency of relationships with the pattern for 1991 is striking. The structural variables -- male unemployment, government transfers, female headed families, and (to a lesser degree) lack of a high school diploma -- offer strong correlations with the incidence of low income families, and in multiple regression combine to effect a high coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.87 in Vancouver and 0.84 in Toronto. In contrast the ethno-cultural variables once more assume a secondary position with R^2 values of 0.49 (Vancouver) and 0.55 (Toronto). The direction and strength of simple correlations are consistent with the 1991 results. Failure to speak an official language and recency of immigration contribute to poverty status, while immigrants resident in Canada for 10-25 years have succeeded in escaping the low-income districts. The combined regression with both structural and ethno-cultural variables again shows little improvement (R^2 of 0.89 in Vancouver, 0.90 in Toronto) over the equation including structural factors alone.

There are some other points of interest in the 1971 correlation matrix. Immigrants from new (*ie.* primarily visible-minority) source regions continue to be associated with the then most recent (1961-70) wave of arrivals ($r = 0.44$ in Vancouver, 0.51 in Toronto), and this cohort tends to perform poorly in income terms. However, if we follow this same 1961-70 cohort of arrivals forward to the 1991 Census we find it to be *negatively* correlated with the incidence of family poverty at this later time period. Care in interpretation is needed here for we are dealing with aggregate not individual data, but there are some grounds for optimism in seeing the first postwar cohort that included significant numbers of visible minorities, having difficulties of adjustment in the 1960s, but performing well by the time of the 1991 data. Moreover, Toronto tracts containing

visible-minority immigrants in 1991 were no more likely to be experiencing family poverty in 1991 than they were in 1971; in Vancouver tracts with substantial numbers of visible minority immigrants showed a *lower* correlation with family poverty in 1991 than they had in 1971. There is no evidence here to suggest that immigrants from new source regions are performing more poorly economically in 1991 than they had been twenty years earlier. In contrast, partitioning the data not by region of origin but instead by time of arrival, we find that recent immigrants in 1991 *were* more likely than their counterparts in 1971 to be associated with tracts containing low income economic families. Here there is evidence to support the thesis of a declining level of immigrant performance, but it is important to repeat that this relation by time of arrival is stronger than any identification with the 'new' immigration by region of origin or visible minority status.

Another relevant theme is the pattern of relationships with government transfers (Table 5). Tracts scoring high on the immigration and ethno-cultural variables show only modest correlations with the level of state transfer payments. American observers have also remarked that despite public impressions, immigrants are not heavy users of welfare (Laws 1997). Despite the tendency for recent immigrants to perform less well in income terms, tracts where they were concentrated have made quite modest calls upon transfer payments. In Vancouver, the correlation for the most recent cohort of immigrants against the level of state benefits was insignificant, -0.05 in 1971 and 0.13 in 1991; for Toronto the figures were 0.21 and 0.28. Only in Montreal in 1991 did the correlation assume any importance, with a value of 0.48. The fact that these correlations are consistently below those for the incidence of poverty among recent immigrants raises an interesting question about their take-up of benefits. Of course this needs to be balanced against the fact that

immigrants may not qualify for the full suite of transfer payments, as Shamsuddin and DeVoretz (1997) have noted in the case of old age pensions. More generally, and except for Vancouver in 1971, the ethno-cultural variables as a whole show weaker associations against transfer payments than they do against family poverty. Correlations between the incidence of immigrants from new source regions (the visible minorities) and the size of welfare state payments in 1991 ranged from 0.10 in Toronto to 0.21 in Vancouver and 0.33 in Montreal. Interestingly these correlations were lower than the corresponding values in Toronto (0.31) and Vancouver (0.55) in 1971. More disaggregation is required to be confident of the precision of these relationships, but at first cut they do not support the argument that a disproportionate welfare burden accrues as a result of payments to immigrants from newer regions of origin, or that this burden is increasing.

Conclusions and further work

A major conclusion of the analysis is that employing the same methodology as a number of American studies, we find that the underclass concept has limited purchase in Canada's largest cities, and little relevance as a description of the status of immigrants as a whole. It is certainly possible that the concept will have some appropriateness with smaller subgroups identified more purposefully -- that, for example, is Frances Henry's claim for one part of Toronto's Caribbean community from her ethnographic research -- but the methodology employed here that reveals significant underclass populations in Cleveland and Detroit fails to identify more than a single census tract in Toronto and Montreal and none at all in Vancouver. Clearly relationships in Canada are considerably more nuanced. Indeed, even Henry extends the underclass designation not to immigrants

themselves, but more usually to their children, commonly Canadian-born. In another important respect, there is a departure from the American experience, for whereas the contribution of immigrants to underclass theory is a peripheral consideration in the United States, we have seen that in Canada multiple deprivation does involve the recently arrived foreign-born in a more formative manner, though they play a more secondary role than that implied by a number of European studies. Beyond this, we have seen differences in the geography of multiple deprivation among the three cities, with increased suburbanisation of poverty households in Metro Toronto deriving in substantial measure from decisions about the location of public housing made in the 1960s. But whatever the geography of multiple deprivation, what is clear is a robust association between deep poverty, multiple deprivation, subsidised housing, and the incidence of reported criminal activity, though immigrants, more precisely recent immigrants and only a portion of them, are only one group among a range of Canadians whose opportunities are limited within these demoralising conditions.

Historically, the Canadian experience also seems to move in a separate direction from that of the United States. In 1971 Toronto and Vancouver seemed much closer to an underclass scenario than in 1991. Deprivation indicators showed greater spatial overlap, and were concentrated in compact inner city clusters. However, over the next twenty years while American cities showed the tenacity of these initial clusters and a deepening and expansion of underclass indicators, in both Canadian cities the indicators 'shallowed out' with declining levels of overlap; in addition, especially in Toronto significant dispersion of poverty districts occurred associated with gentrification of the private sector stock in the inner city, and the residualisation process in public housing in the suburbs as

well as the centre city. Overall, the cluster of variables around urban poverty in Toronto and Vancouver is worked out in a spatial context that appears much less fixed and intractable than underclass theorists have found in the U. S.

Nor can we see a major departure after 1971 that would coincide with the significant shift in Canada's immigration regime. The 'loosening up' of 1971 poverty areas at the census tract scale over the following two decades coincided with the arrival of large numbers of visible minority immigrants; while enclaves may exist, ghettos (and the semantic baggage they convey) do not. The structure of Canadian immigration in 1991 is one where recency of arrival and ability to speak English or French is more important than region of origin and visible minority status in shaping economic performance. Moreover, ethno-cultural variables are consistently less important than more conventional socio-economic variables in their association with deep poverty; in multiple regressions immigration and ethno-cultural variables contribute minute additional explanation to predictive equations once such structural factors as male unemployment and mother-led families are taken into account.

A number of questions remain for subsequent research. This analysis has worked with aggregate, tract-scale data -- with the big picture -- but further research might extend its consideration to individual households, to uncover more detailed relations; for example, one could disaggregate country of origin with more specificity than we have been willing to do with aggregate statistics. Bearing in mind the longitudinal horizon of the underclass thesis, a relevant strategy, assuming the availability of appropriately disaggregated tax returns, would be to follow the mobility trajectory over time of immigrant households whose initial residence in Canada is in a district of multiple

deprivation. Such monitoring would enable questions about the longevity of poverty conditions to be answered, and give a sense of immigrant profiles that are associated with slow or rapid escape from the least desirable of urban environments. A third and necessary extension of the present work is more qualitative ethnographic research that may more readily address the cultural aspects of the underclass thesis that cannot be accessed by formal census statistics.

Conceptually, the sometimes confining underclass literature, which we have already broadened into discussions of multiple deprivation, is capable of further expansion. Our emphasis upon multiple deprivation in some respects follows on from Hughes (1989b) who encouraged work on the “isolated deprivation of the ghetto” rather than a focus on the “underclass”. A second and promising conceptual path is to view underclass development as a consequence of the broader processes of social polarisation. While the evidence for a full-blown underclass in Canadian cities is slight, the presence of deep poverty is abundantly evident. The international literature on polarisation not only permits the underclass concept to be located in wider processes of economic *and* political restructuring (Sassen 1991, Hamnett 1996), but it also permits discussion to move beyond the particularities of American racialisation to consider the widening face of urban poverty. The creation of an economically and socially polarised population alludes both to an “over” and an “underclass” (Sassen 1991, Hamnett 1994, Musterd 1994). Social polarisation theorists, notably Sassen in New York, have identified visible minorities and immigrants (especially the women in these groups) as key members of this underclass.

The social polarisation thesis of underclass development in major cities has demonstrated a high degree of international portability. In Canada its members share a

broad constituency, including part-time, even some full-time, workers in the low-paid service sector, the unemployed, including those stranded by automation, manufacturing flight and resource depletion, single mothers, youth, aboriginals, and immigrants, all of whom experience limited access to skills training programs and other public services because of government cut backs. The Economic Council (1992) suggests that could an underclass be identified it would likely include high numbers of young people unable to find adequately paid employment or work at all. Indeed, in 1986 the incidence of youth poverty in Canada surpassed the incidence of lone parent family poverty for the first time in 23 years. In this manner both the concept of the underclass and the issue of immigrant poverty are moved into a more fruitful conceptual and policy environment, where they may be seen to be part of much broader restructuring processes, rather than being contained within the sometimes polemical discussions of race, ethnicity and immigration.

Table 1**“Underclass” Definition****American****High School Drop Outs**

Percentage of 16-19 year olds who are not enrolled in school and who are not high school graduates.

Labour Force Activity

Prime-age males not regularly attached to the labour force – males 16 years and over who are not working regularly where working regularly is defined as having a full or part time job for more than 26 weeks a year.

Public Assistance Recipients

Percentage of households receiving public assistance income.

Female Heads of Families

Households with children, headed by women.

Calculations

Ricketts and Sawhill define an underclass neighbourhood as one in which all four of the American variables score 1 standard deviation away from the 1980 national mean.

Hughes defines an impacted ghetto as one in which all four of the American variables score 2x the current SMSA median.

We define an “underclass” community as one in which all four of the Canadian variables score 2x the current CMA median (1991 or 1971).

Canadian Proxy 1991**Lack of High School Diploma**

Population 15 years or older whose highest level of education is lower than a high school diploma.

Male Unemployment

Males 15 years and older who during the week of enumeration were without work, actively looked for work in the past four weeks and were available for work; or were on layoff and expected to return to their job and were available for work or had definite arrangements to start a new job in four weeks or less and were available for work.

Government Transfer Recipients

Composition of census tract total income from government transfer payments.

Female Lone Parent Families

Lone parent families with children, headed by women.

Canadian Proxy 1971**Highest Level of Schooling < Gr.12**

Population 15 years or older whose highest level of education is less than Grade 12.

Male Unemployment

Male 15 years and older who, during the week prior to enumeration, were not working but were looking for work, or were on temporary lay-off, or would have been looking for work except that they were temporarily ill, or believed no suitable work was available in the community.

Government Transfer Recipients

Composition of census tract total income from government transfer payments.

Female Lone Parent Families

Lone parent families with children, headed by women.

Table 2a Immigration Status of 1991 Deprived Census Tracts¹

	<u>Immigrant Percent</u>		
	Toronto	Montreal	Vancouver
a) Deprived tracts	48.5	20.9	34.3
b) All of CMA	37.7	17.4	29.7
c) Ratio of a:b	1.29	1.20	1.15

Table 2b Immigrants in Deprived Census Tracts by Mother Tongue

	<u>Neither Official Language Spoken (%)</u>		
	Toronto	Montreal	Vancouver
a) Deprived tracts	7.6	3.4	7.3
b) All of CMA	3.7	1.8	3.4
c) Ratio of a:b	2.1	1.9	2.1

	<u>Neither Official Language Normally Spoken at Home (%)</u>		
	Toronto	Montreal	Vancouver
a) Deprived tracts	31.2	15.6	22.7
b) All of CMA	19.5	10.2	14.8
c) Ratio of a:b	1.6	1.5	1.5

¹ Deprived census tracts are those which display at least one deprivation indicator plus a poverty rate of at least 20 %.

Table 2c Immigrants in Deprived Census Tracts by Source Region, 1991²

	<u>'Old' Source Regions (%)</u>			<u>'New' Source Regions (%)</u>		
	Tor	Montr	Vanc	Tor	Montr	Vanc
a) Deprived Tracts	42.0	34.8	35.1	56.1	64.4	61.6
b) All of CMA	51.9	51.1	45.2	47.6	48.5	51.2
c) Ratio of a:b	0.81	0.68	0.78	1.18	1.33	1.20

Table 2d Immigrants in Deprived Census Tracts by Period of Arrival (%)

	<u>1981-1990</u>			<u>1971-1980</u>			<u>1961-1970</u>			<u>Pre-1961</u>		
	T	M	V	T	M	V	T	M	V	T	M	V
a) Deprived Tracts	45	51	41	26	26	28	15	10	13	15	12	17
b) All of CMA	33	33	33	26	24	28	20	20	17	21	23	22
c) Ratio of a:b	1.4	1.6	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.0	.75	.50	.76	.71	.52	.77

² Old Source regions refer to The United States and Europe. New Source regions refer to Asia, Africa and Latin America.

**Table 3 Geographical Correlates of the Incidence of Low-Income Economic
Families, 1991**

	<u>Vancouver</u>	<u>Toronto</u>	<u>Montreal</u>
	(N = 297)	(N = 801)	(N = 732)
% Male unemployment	0.82	0.75	0.81
% Female-led families	0.75	0.84	0.82
% No high school diploma	0.46	0.53	0.61
% Income from Gov't transfers	0.75	0.74	0.84
% Immigrants	0.42	0.56	0.28
% Traditional sources	-0.48	-0.44	-0.47
% New sources	0.48	0.45	0.47
% No official language	0.57	0.62	0.49
% No official language at home	0.51	0.62	0.43
% Arrived pre 1961	-0.40	-0.45	-0.42
% Arrived 1961-1970	-0.43	-0.45	-0.45
% Arrived 1971-1980	0.11	0.13	0.01
% Arrived 1981-1990	0.50	0.62	0.61

**Table 4 Geographical Correlates of the Incidence of Low-Income Economic
Families, 1971**

	<u>Vancouver</u>	<u>Toronto</u>
	(N = 176)	(N = 442)
% Male unemployment	0.82	0.86
% Female-led families	0.71	0.75
% No high-school diploma	0.63	0.59
% Income from Gov't transfers	0.84	0.84
% Immigrants	0.43	0.49
% Traditional sources	-0.59	-0.45
% New sources	0.59	0.45
% No official language	0.65	0.52
% No official language at home	0.61	0.52
% Arrived pre 1946	0.18	-0.05
% Arrived 1946-60	-0.45	-0.56
% Arrived 1961-70	0.21	0.50

Table 5 Geographical Correlates of Levels of Government Transfer Payments

	<u>Vancouver</u>		<u>Toronto</u>		<u>Montreal</u>
	(N = 176)	(N = 297)	(N = 442)	(N = 801)	(N = 732)
	<u>1971</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1991</u>
% Low-income families	0.84	0.75	0.84	0.74	0.84
% Male unemployment	0.85	0.78	0.79	0.67	0.78
% Female-led families	0.50	0.48	0.70	0.64	0.78
% No highschool dipl	0.66	0.65	0.57	0.51	0.75
% Immigrant	0.50	0.23	0.24	0.39	0.11
% Traditional sources	-0.55	-0.21	-0.31	-0.09	-0.33
% New sources	0.55	0.21	0.31	0.10	0.33
% No official lang	0.72	0.51	0.30	0.53	0.37
% No off lang home	0.63	0.34	0.30	0.51	0.28
% Arrived < 1946	0.42		0.25		
% Arrived 1946-60	-0.49		-0.50		
% Arrived 1961-70	-0.05	-0.30	0.21	-0.29	-0.41
% Arrived 1971-80		-0.10		-0.12	-0.07
% Arrived 1981-90		0.13		0.28	0.48

Figure 1. "Deprived" Census Tracts, Toronto CMA, 1991

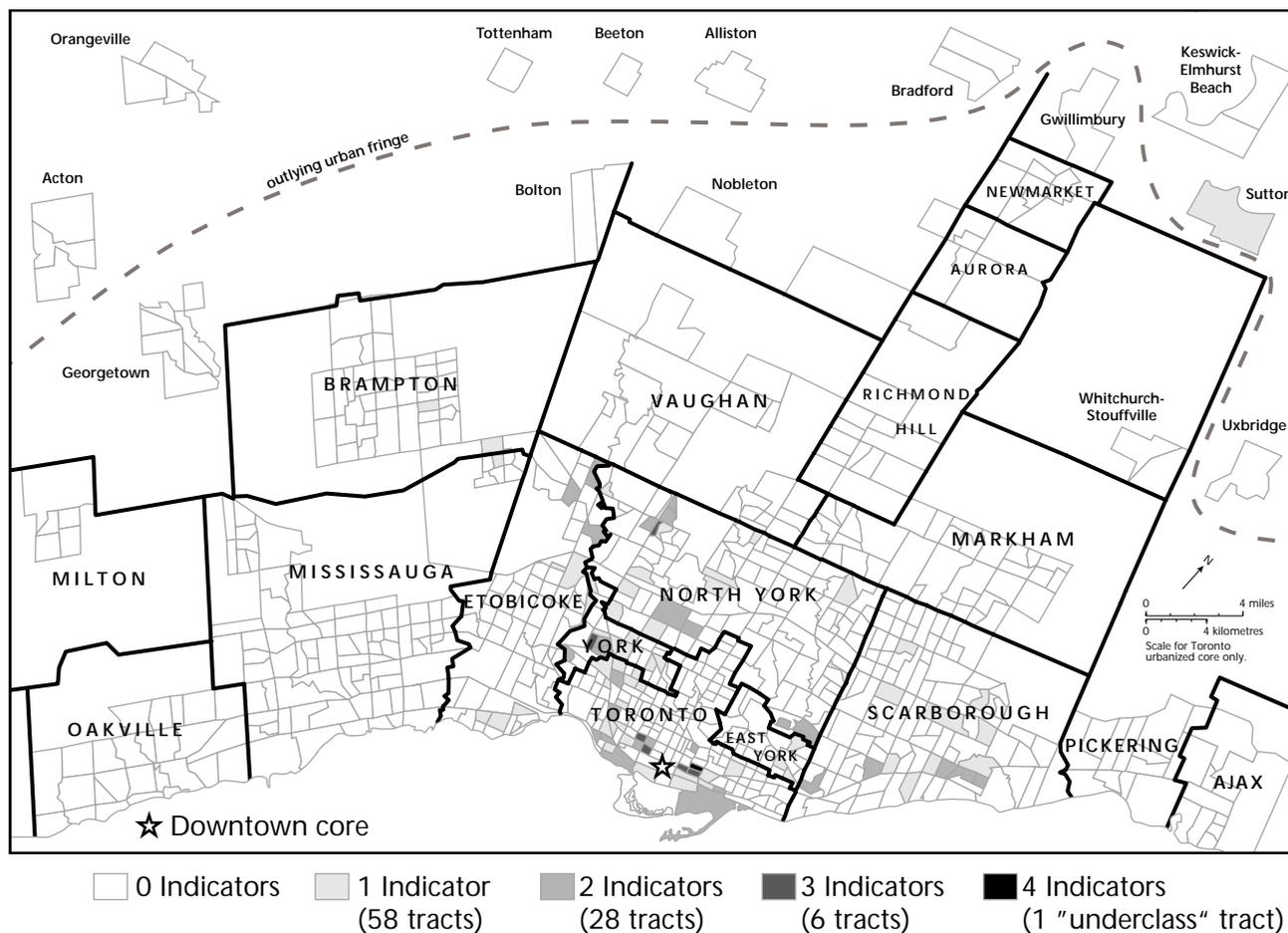


Figure 2. "Deprived" Census Tracts, Montreal CMA, 1991

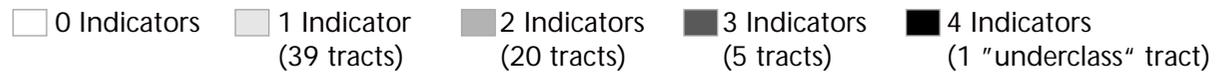
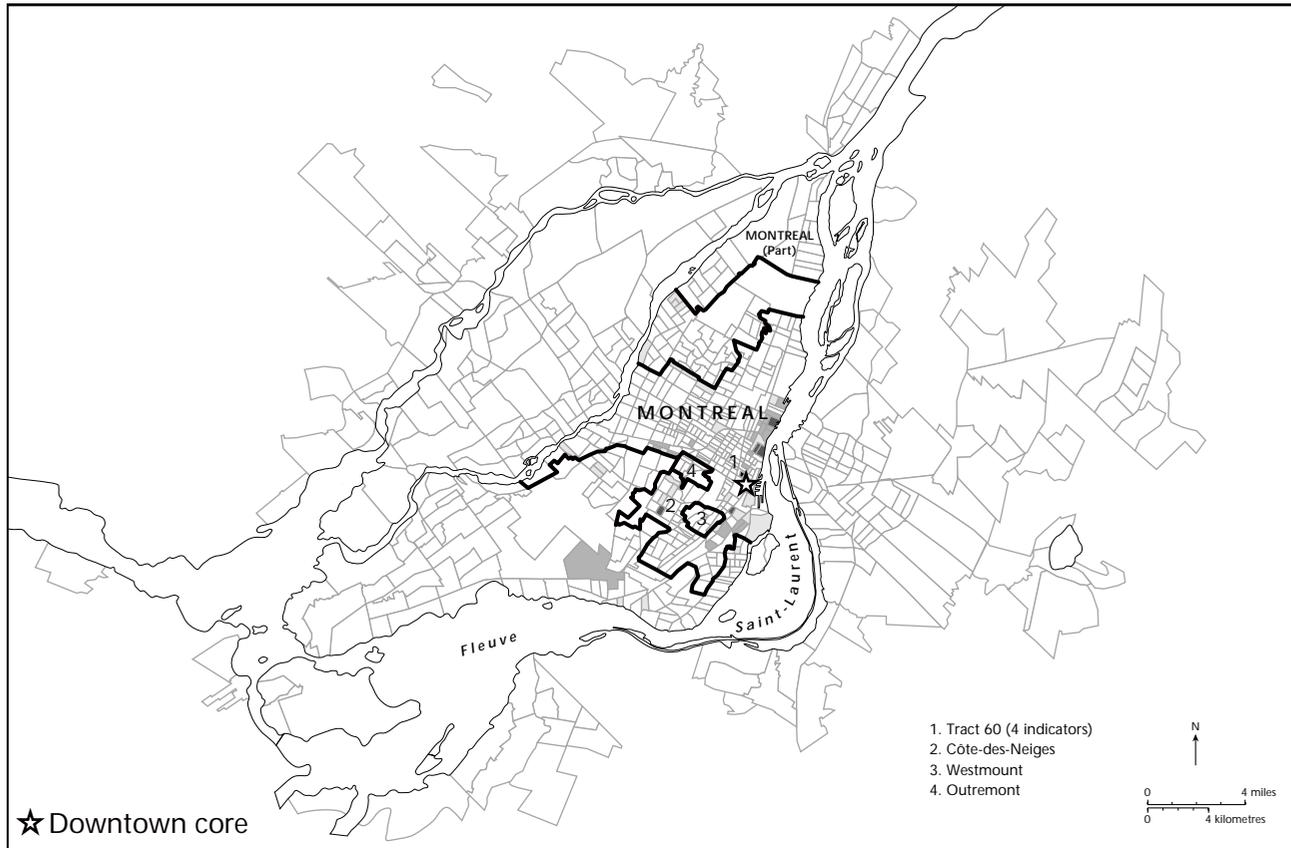
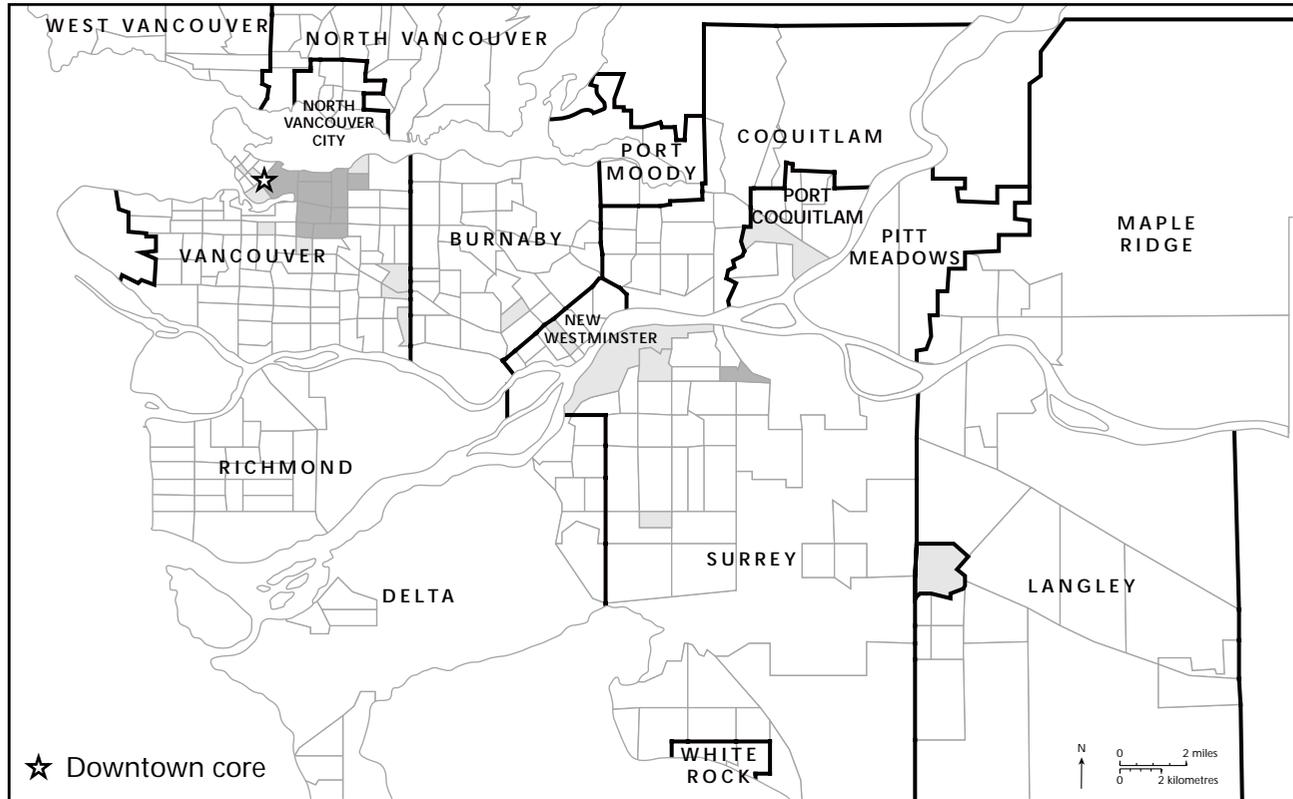
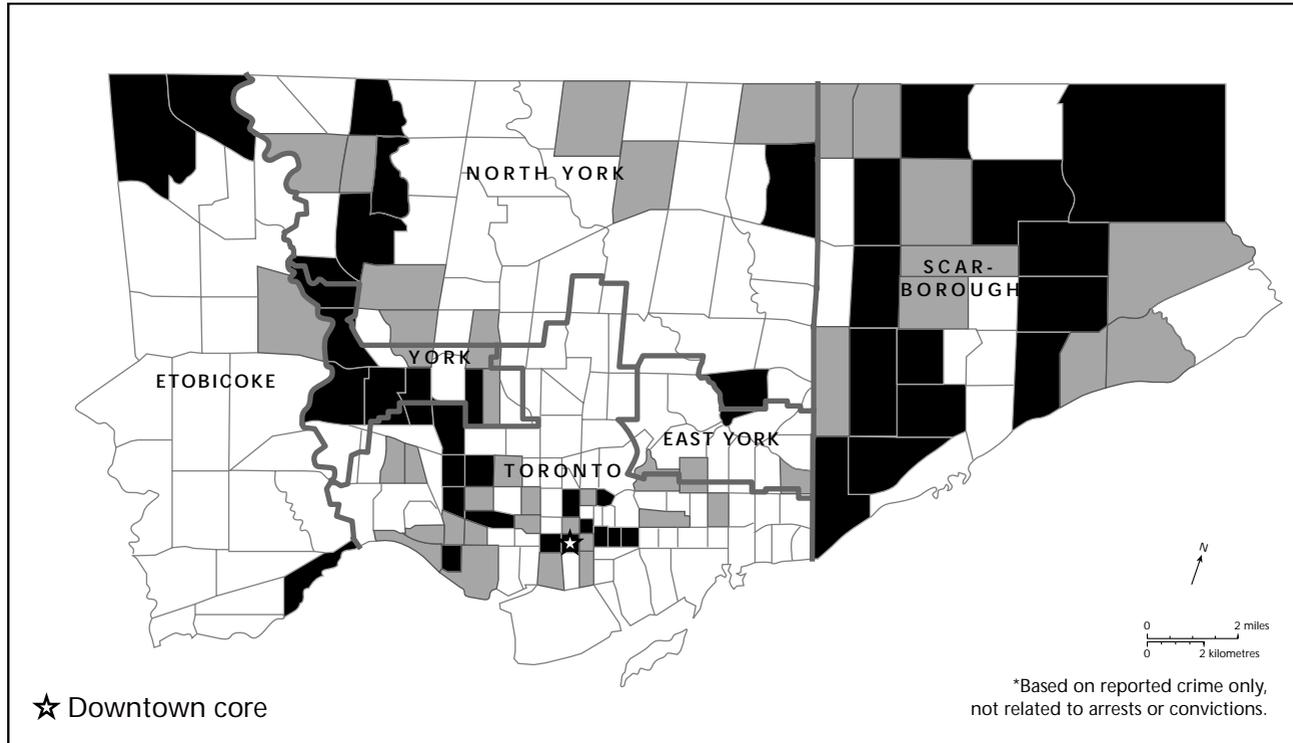


Figure 3. "Deprived" Census Tracts, Vancouver CMA, 1991



0 Indicators
 1 Indicator (16 tracts)
 2 Indicators (10 tracts)
 3 Indicators (0 tracts)
 4 Indicators (0 "underclass" tracts)

Figure 4. Patrol Areas of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Department, 1992: Worst 40% by crime reported*.



Crime reported

■ Second highest quintile ■ Highest quintile

Figure 5. Incidence of Low Income Persons, Toronto CMA, 1991

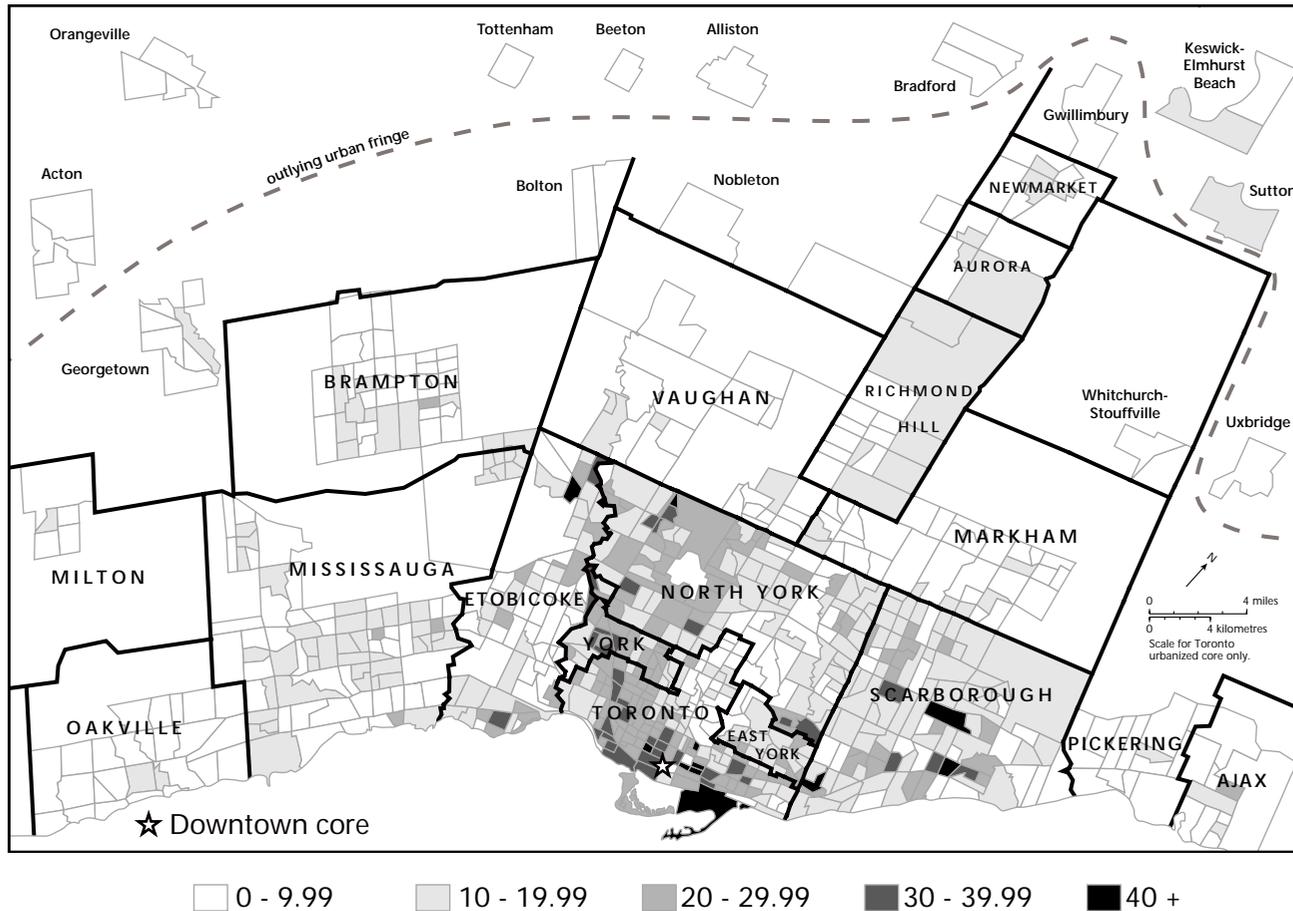


Figure 6. Incidence of Low Income Persons, Montreal CMA, 1991

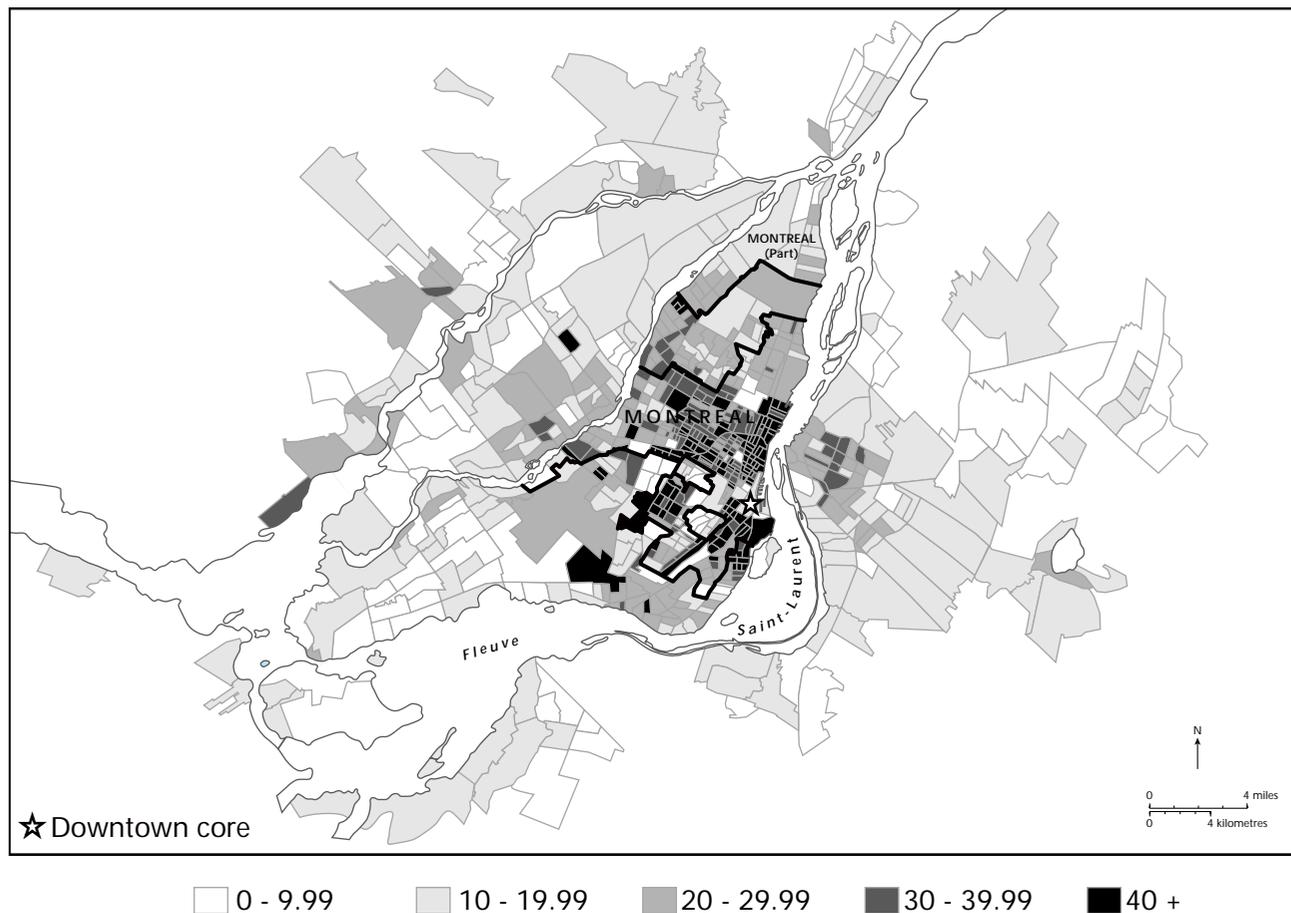


Figure 7. Incidence of Low Income Persons, Vancouver CMA, 1991

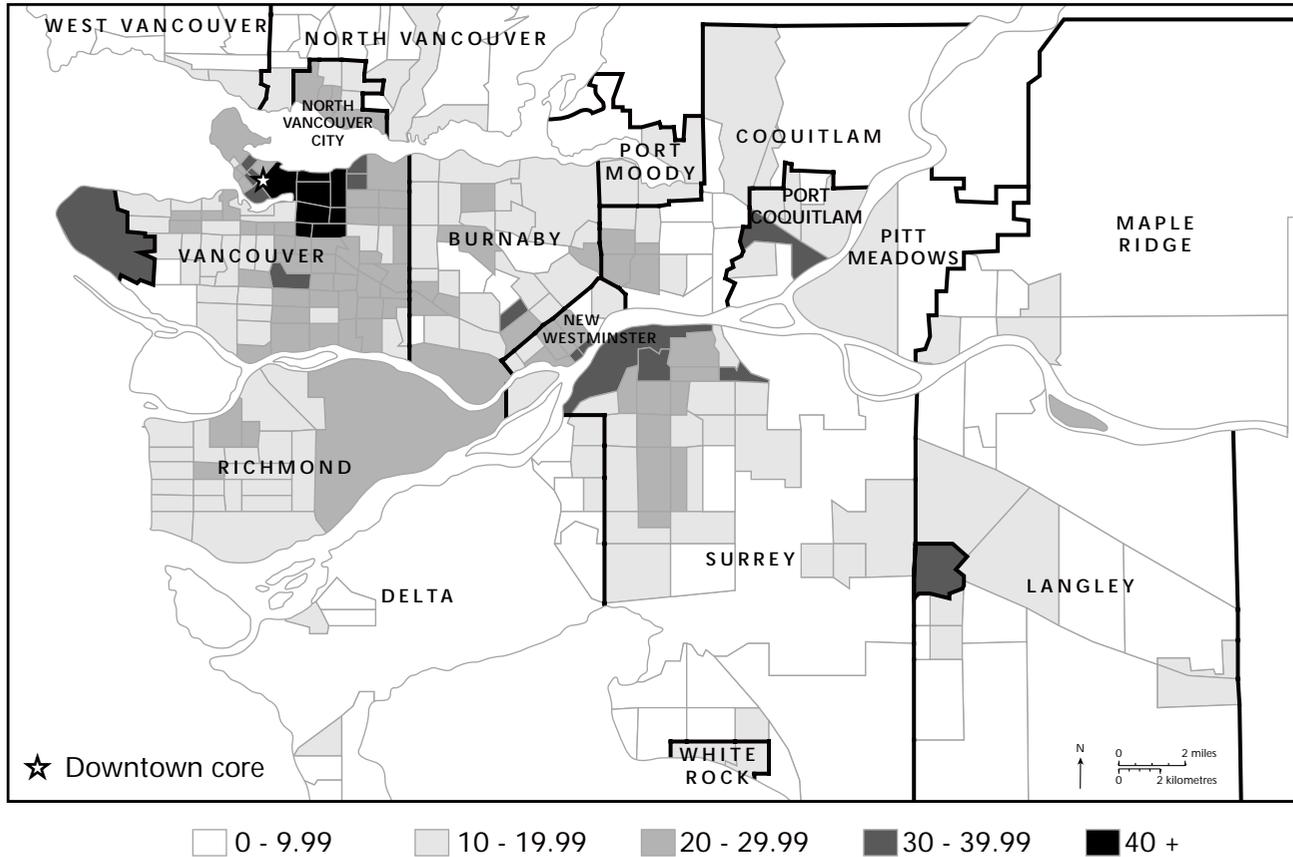
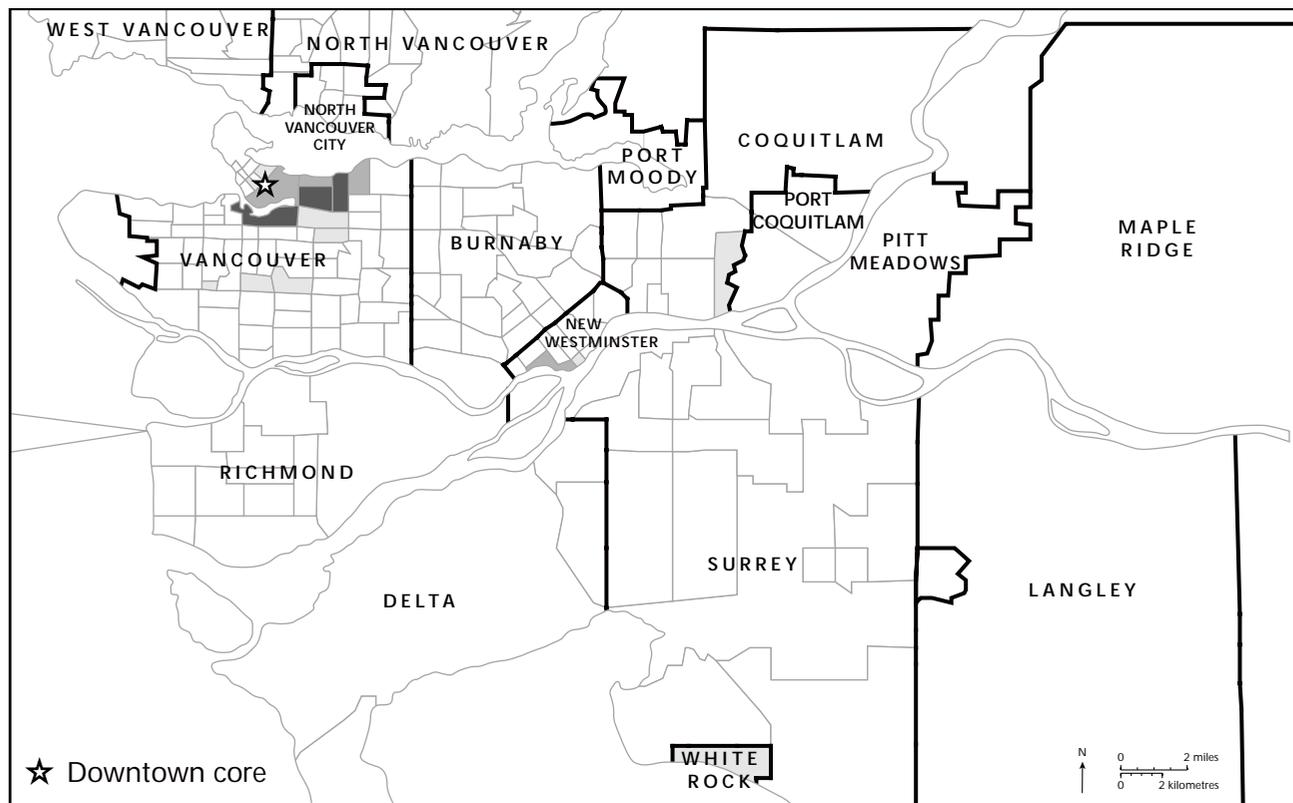


Figure 8. "Deprived" Census Tracts, Vancouver CMA, 1971



0 Indicators
 1 Indicator (10 tracts)
 2 Indicators (4 tracts)
 3 Indicators (3 tracts)
 4 Indicators (0 "underclass" tracts)

Figure 9. "Deprived" Census Tracts, Toronto CMA, 1971

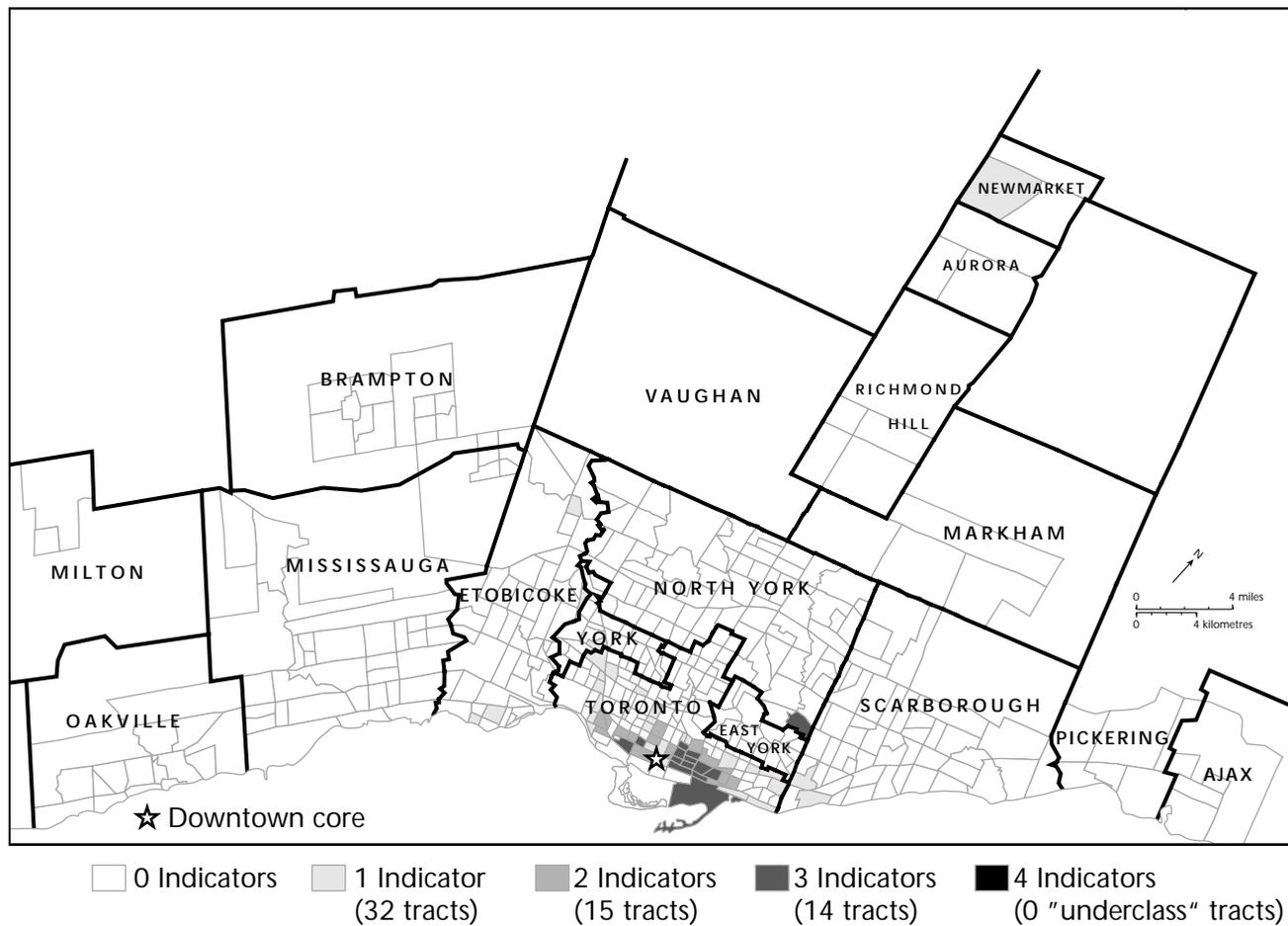


Figure 10. Percent Census Tract Population Immigrant, Vancouver CMA, 1991

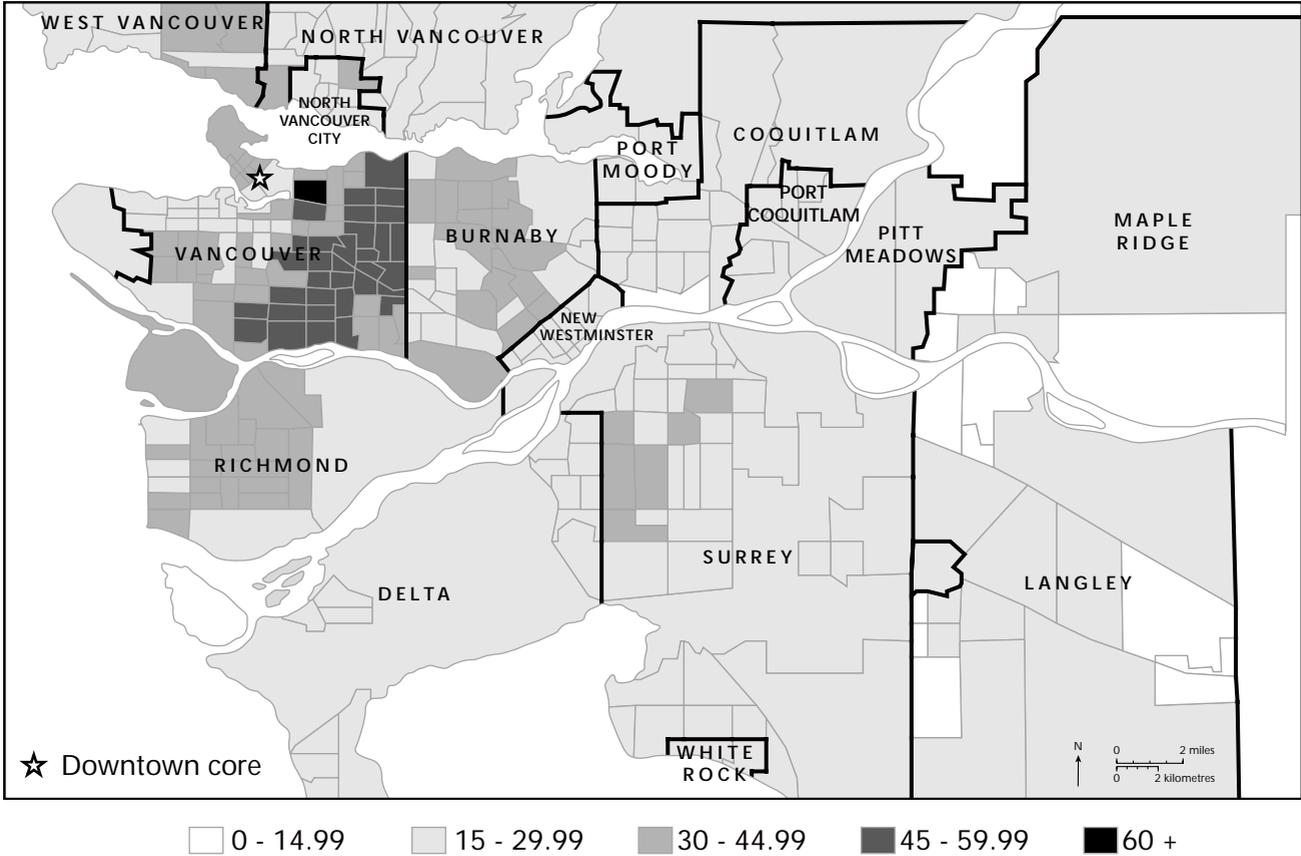


Figure 11. Percent Census Tract Population Immigrant, Toronto CMA 1991

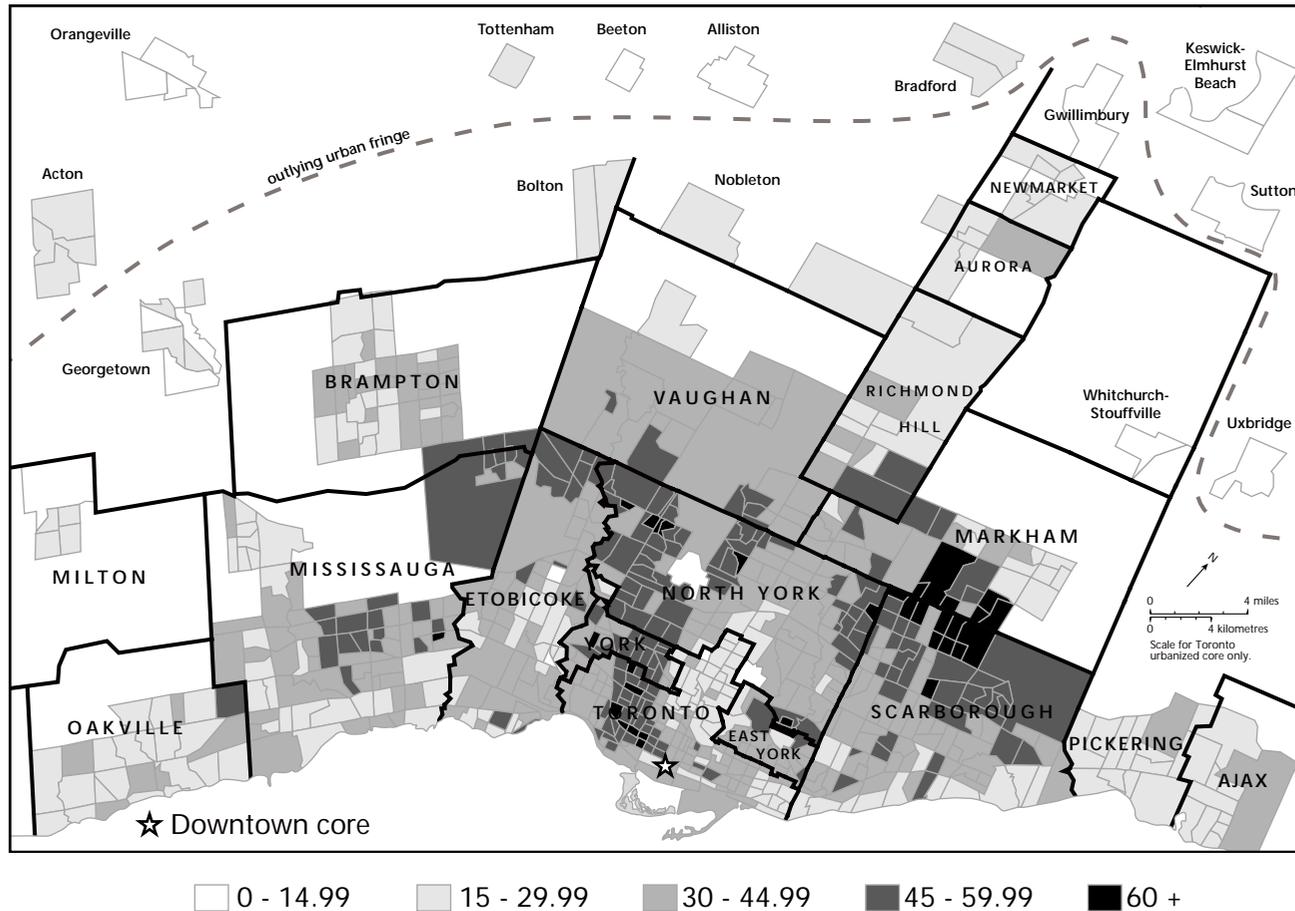
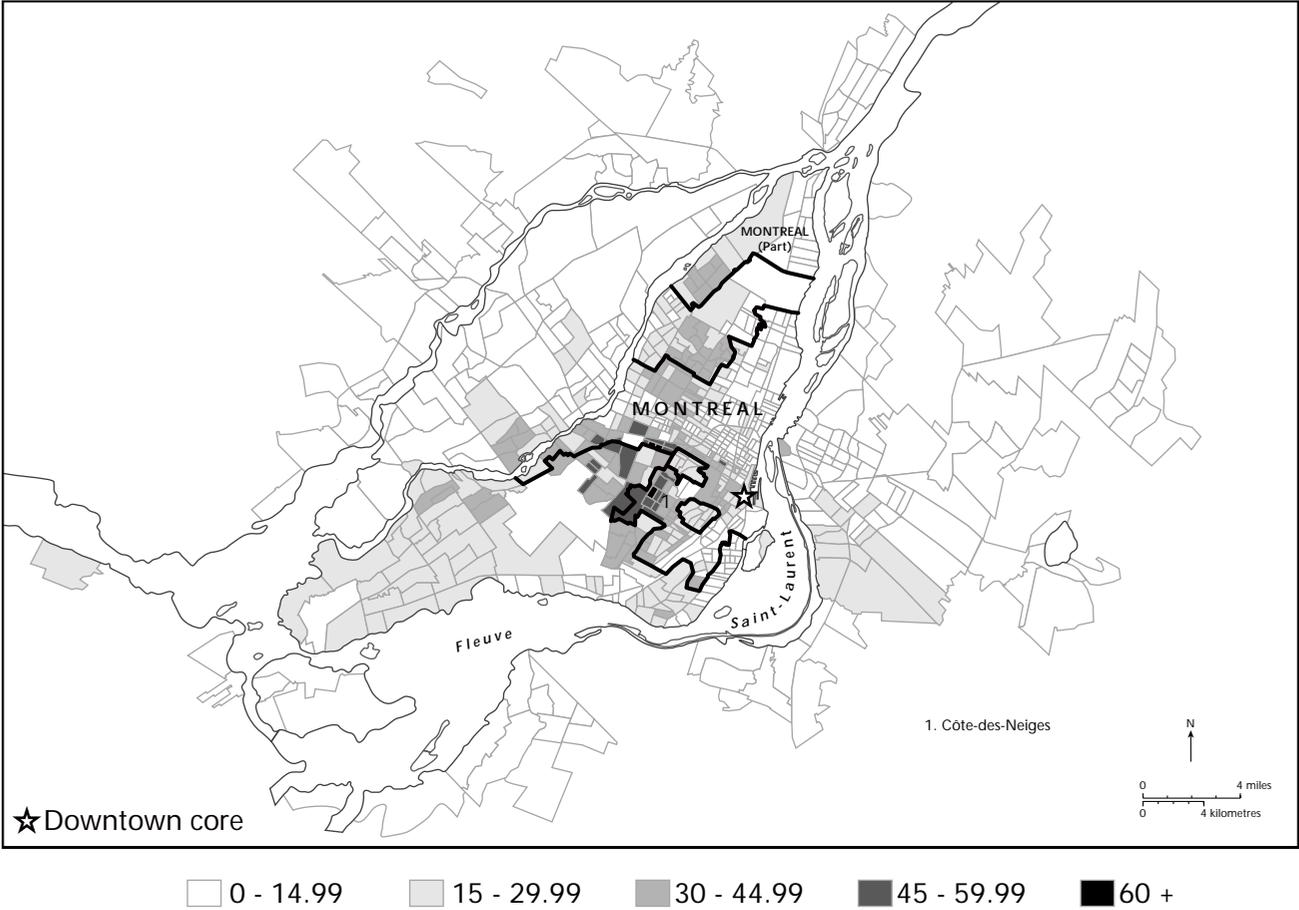


Figure 12. Percent Census Tract Population Immigrant, Montreal CMA, 1991



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