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# Redlining in a Majority Black City?: Mortgage Lending and the Racial Composition of Detroit Neighborhoods

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## *Abstract*

*This article examines the effects of population and housing characteristics on mortgage lending patterns in the City of Detroit, MI. Data from 2000 HMDA aggregate reports and the 2000 U.S. Census are analyzed using multiple regression and stepwise regression. The results from this analysis indicate that after controlling for other population and housing characteristics, the proportion of African American residents in a neighborhood is significantly correlated with a drop-off in mortgage lending activity. In light of these findings, recommendations are made to expand community reinvestment legislation, and assist community development professionals and grassroots activists in addressing lending disparities based on race.*

## *Race and the Lending Gap*

Redlining, which entails the denial of credit to low-income and minority communities, has been a concern in the United States for decades. The practice took its most overt form in the early to mid-1900s, when the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) discouraged lending in urban communities with high concentrations of the poor and minorities (Judd, 1984; Massey and Denton, 1993; McKenzie, 1994). Since that time, redlining was made illegal by the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968. Following the passage of this act, community activists led the campaign for a series of laws passed at the federal, state, and local levels which shifted the government's stance from "a position requiring segregation to one prohibiting it, at least in terms of the letter of the law" (Squires, 1994: 69). The Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) of 1975 and the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) of 1977 were among the more important laws passed during this period.

These laws have provided community advocates and researchers with data and enforcement mechanisms to challenge discriminatory lending policies of banks. Despite opposition from financial institutions, HMDA and CRA have been strengthened over the years due to the combined efforts of community advocates and researchers (Nyden et. al., 1997; Squires, 2003). Together, these efforts have come to form the community reinvestment movement in the United States (Squires, 1992).

A major watershed in the community reinvestment movement came in 1988 when a series of articles titled "The Color of Money" was published in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Dedman, 1988). These articles brought the issues of redlining into the public eye, adding momentum to efforts to address discrimination in housing markets. The articles indicated that a gap existed in mortgage lending between African Americans and whites living in the Atlanta, Georgia. This lending



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gap placed African American neighborhoods at a disadvantage in the market for mortgage products and was offered as evidence for the continued practice of redlining. Since the publication of the articles, scholars have paid increased attention to the problem of redlining in American cities. Within this growing body of research, disagreement over the extent to which the racial composition of neighborhoods influences mortgage lending has surfaced. Ross and Yinger (2002) offer a detailed examination of this debate in the research. On one side of this argument, scholars have attempted to forward evidence that race is not a significant indicator of mortgage lending patterns. From this perspective it is argued that other characteristics of a neighborhood's population and housing stock predict mortgage lending patterns. On the other side of this argument, scholars have maintained that redlining based on race remains a component of American housing markets. Although these scholars acknowledge that a variety of factors influence lending patterns, race is believed to be an important aspect of the mortgage process.

In the years following the series in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* scholarship began to emerge which downplayed the role of race in mortgage lending. For example, Hula (1991) studied patterns of mortgage lending using aggregate data at the national level. In his analysis, he examined the effects of various population and housing characteristics on both the number and value of mortgages during the 1980's. Hula concluded that there was weak support for redlining based on the racial composition of neighborhoods. Similarly, Shill and Wachter (1993) examined the disposition of mortgage applications in Boston and Philadelphia. In their analysis they also controlled for neighborhood racial composition and housing characteristics. The results of their research produced evidence that rejected claims that redlining was present in the two cities studied.

Another study of mortgage lending which focused on Detroit, Michigan, a majority-minority city, reached similar conclusions concerning the relationship between race and mortgage lending (Perle et. al., 1994). In this study, Perle and his associates analyzed 1980 HMDA and Census data for the City of Detroit. In their analysis, they presented initial results from linear regression indicating that a statistically significant relationship existed between race and mortgage lending. Yet, they went on to reject those findings. It was argued that the results could not be relied upon due to a lack of "well developed theory" related to redlining. Subsequently, they produced an alternate model using stepwise regression to explain mortgage lending patterns. Based

on the alternate model they concluded that "[r]acial bias in mortgage lending to neighborhoods does not appear to be a significant determinant" (Perle et. al., 1994: 352). Of course, some may be critical of methodological decisions made by Perle and his associates, as well as similar decisions made by Hula (1991). Nonetheless, their study remains part of the literature which questions the existence of redlining. The position of these and other scholars who argue for the absence of redlining in American cities is summed up in a recent review of the literature on mortgage discrimination by Black (1999). In this literature review Black argues that, at best, evidence for mortgage discrimination and redlining is conflicting. He goes on to argue that any systematic bias in mortgage discrimination and redlining that does exist is unlikely to continue due to increased regulation and competition in lending markets.

Despite arguments against the continuation of mortgage discrimination in contemporary housing markets, many scholars have found support for the persistence of redlining in American cities. For instance, Shlay (1988, 1989) found support for redlining in separate studies of Chicago and Baltimore. Her analysis of Chicago (Shlay, 1988) examined the entire six county SMSA and found that race was a significant predictor of mortgage lending. These findings were replicated in a similar study of Baltimore and its suburbs (Shlay, 1989). Likewise, Coffey and Gocker (1998) studied the outcomes of loan applications submitted by blacks and whites in 5 urban counties of Ohio. Their analysis was based on descriptive statistics for individual urban counties as well as selected lenders. The analysis produced evidence of a noticeable credit gap between blacks and whites, as well as a gap in mortgage lending between inner-cities and suburbs. Similarly, Wyly and Holloway (1999) examined the credit gap between white and black neighborhoods in a follow-up study to "The Color of Money" series in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Their findings indicated that in 1992 and 1996 redlining remained an issues in Atlanta. In subsequent analysis Holloway and Wyly (2001) again found support for redlining in Atlanta. Squires and O'Connor (2001) examined redlining from multiple perspectives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In their analysis evidence for a persistent lending gap along the lines of race and income is presented. Most recently, a national study by the National Training and Information Center (NTIC) (2003) indicated that redlining based on race and social class remained a problem in American cities, in part, due to weaknesses in the quality of HMDA data and CRA en-



forcement. These studies, and others like them, add support to arguments concerning the continued role of race in the mortgage lending process.

Understanding the role of race in mortgage lending is important to community development professionals and grassroots activists. If race is not significantly related to mortgage outcomes as some scholars argue, then the scope of the work done by community development practitioners and activists in their efforts to promote neighborhood revitalization is narrowed. Under such assumptions, community development activities in inner cities would primarily focus on traditional economic development and public finance planning. However if race is significantly related to mortgage outcomes as other scholars argue, then advocacy for social justice becomes a more central component of public finance planning and neighborhood revitalization efforts.

In light of the emerging body of empirical and theoretical inquiry concerning redlining, this article set out to reexamine mortgage lending patterns in the City of Detroit using data collected in 2000. In essence, this article revisits the research site examined by Perle and his associates. This particular focus was selected for four reasons. First, African-Americans constituted 82% of Detroit's population in 2000. As a heavily majority-minority city, Detroit is a critical case study for the importance of race in mortgage lending. In essence, if race is not a significant factor in Detroit's housing market, one must question whether it should be considered as a factor elsewhere. Second, the focus on data collected in 2000 allows for the consideration of the pertinence of inquiry concerning redlining in the contemporary period. Given increased regulation and monitoring of unfair lending practices, this study asks if evidence of redlining is detectable in present-day America. Third, the growth in empirical and theoretical work related to redlining since Perle and his associates initially examined lending patterns in Detroit enhances our ability to examine and interpret results from data analysis. Finally, the analysis of Detroit is used to identify ways in which lending data can be developed further and tied to the social change goals of the community reinvestment movement.

### *Hypotheses Tested*

Two hypotheses concerning the relationship between population characteristics, housing characteristics, and mortgage lending are tested in this analysis. *Hypothesis 1* examines the degree to which race influences the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied in a census tract after controlling for other population and housing characteristics. This hypothesis argues that after controlling for other population and housing characteristics, an increase in the proportion of a census tract's population that is black will be correlated with a decrease in the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied. *Hypothesis 2* examines the degree to which race influences the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied in a census tract after controlling for other population and housing characteristics. This hypothesis argues that after controlling for other population and housing characteristics, an increase in the proportion of a census tract's population that is black will be correlated with a decrease in the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied.

### *Data and Methods*

The data used for this study come from the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council's *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) 2000 Data Reports* and the *2000 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A*. Independent variables were drawn from 2000 Census data for the City of Detroit. Measures of race, educational attainment, poverty, income, housing values, the age of housing stock, and housing tenure were included in the analysis. The independent variables used in this analysis were selected in order to replicate the work of Perle et. al. (1994) and his associates. Descriptions of the independent variables used in the analysis are found in Table 1.



**Table 1: Independent and Dependent Variables Used in the Analysis\***

Variable Name	Variable Description
<i>Independent Variables:</i>	
BLACK	Proportion of the Population that is Black by Census Tract
NOHSEDU	Proportion of the Population 25 yrs and Older with Less than a High School Education by Census Tract
POVERTY	Proportion of the Population with 1999 Income Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract
MDHINC	1999 Median Household Income in Dollars by Census Tract
MDVALUE	Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units by Census Tract
BLTB60	Proportion of Housing Units Built Before 1960
SAME95	Proportion of Population Over 5 Years of Age in the Same House Since 1995
VACANT	Proportion of Housing Units Vacant by Census Tract
OWNER	Proportion of Occupied Housing Units Owner Occupied by Census Tract
<i>Dependent Variables:</i>	
NUMRATIO	Ratio of the Number of Home Purchase Loans Originated to Home Purchase Loans Denied in 2000 by Census Tract (home purchase loans include conventional, FHA, FSA/RHA, and VA)
DOLRATIO	Ratio of the Dollar Value of Home Purchase Loans Originated to Home Purchase Loans Denied in 2000 by Census Tract (home purchase loans include conventional, FHA, FSA/RHA, and VA)

\*Sources: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council. 2000. *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act 2000 Data Reports, Aggregate and Disclosure*. Washington, D.C.:Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council.; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. 2000. *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: Data User Services Division.

The dependent variables examined in this analysis were constructed using information from 2000 HMDA data for the City of Detroit. One dependent variable used in the analysis was the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied (conventional, FHA, FSA/RHA, and VA) at the census tract level. The other dependent variable used in the analysis was the ratio of total mortgage dollars originated to total mortgage dollars denied (conventional, FHA, FSA/RHA, and VA) at the census tract level. Using ratios produced a more refined set of dependent variables compared to those found in past research where only mortgage approval rates are examined. This analysis focuses on loans originated rather than the total number of loans approved in order to discount the possible effects of double counting duplicate applications for the same property in the analysis. This decision was made in response to the

organization of HMDA data, which includes categories for loans “approved but not accepted” and “applications withdrawn.” The use of ratios has the advantage of creating standardized measures of institutional lending decisions which control for deviations in the volume of loans across census tracts. Also, the use of two dependent variables allows for an analysis of the number of loans originated to those denied, along with a separate analysis of the dollar value of loans originated to those denied. Descriptions of the dependent variables used in the analysis are found in Table 1.

In addition, maps of the dependent variables used in this analysis are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. These figures show that mortgage disparities are spatially concentrated near the center of the city. It is noteworthy that on average the black population was larger in census tracts where the values of the dependent vari-

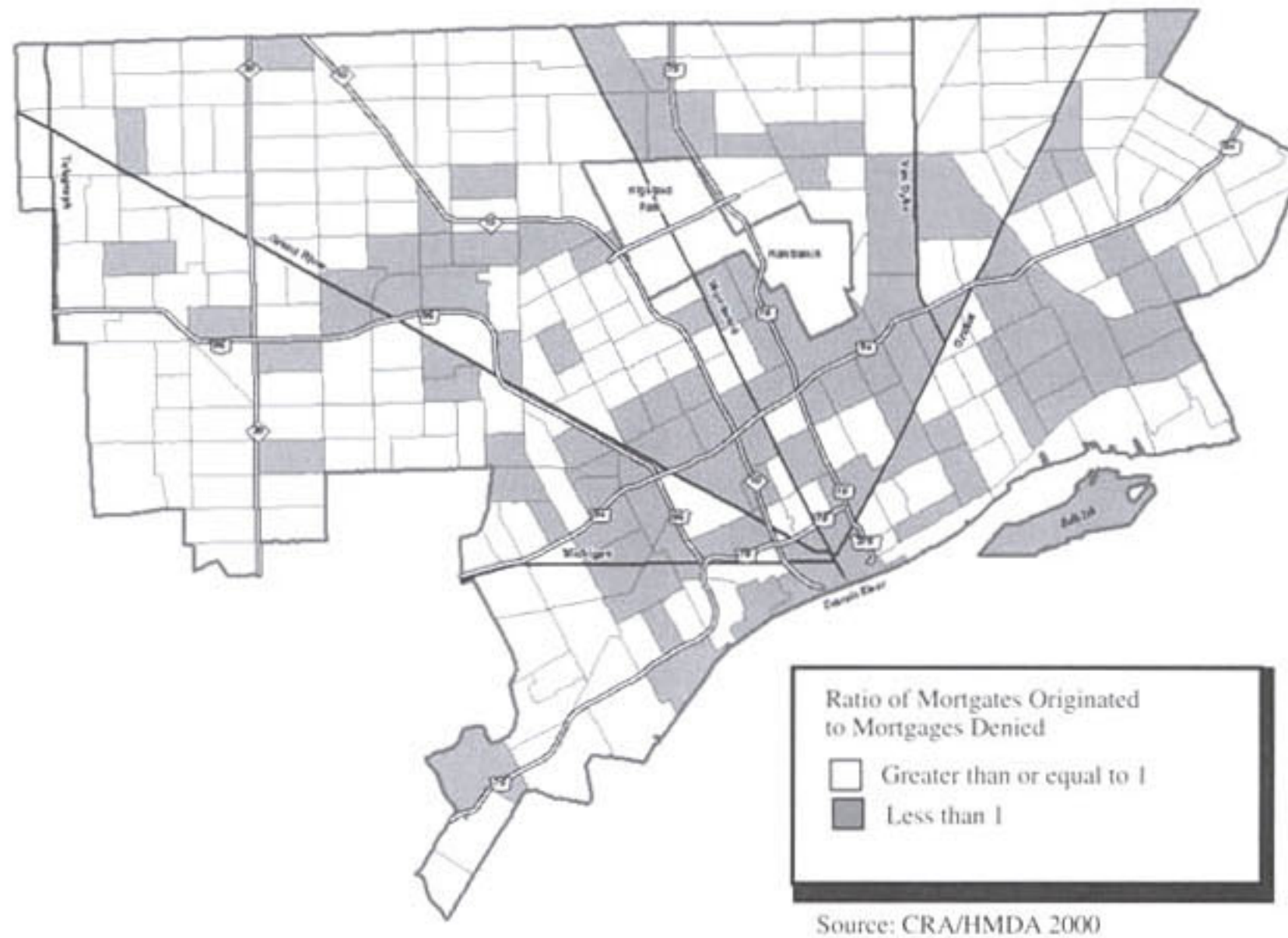


ables were less than 1. For the variable NUMRATIO, these tracts had 5 percent more black residents than tracts where the value of the dependent variable was greater than 1. For the variable DOLRATIO, tracts

where the value of the dependent variable was less than one had 2.6 percent more black residents than other census tracts in the city.

**Figure 1: 2000 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data**

by Detroit Census Tracts



**Figure 2: 2000 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data**

by Detroit Census Tracts





Along with mapping the spatial distribution of the dependent variables, descriptive statistics were generated for each of the variables used in the analysis. This information is summarized in Table 2. The values found in this table represent the characteristics of the 314 census tracts located in the City of Detroit in 2000.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis (N = 314)\***

Variable Name	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Independent Variables:</i>		
BLACK	.8177	.1241 .2449
NOHSEDU	.3147	.1236
POVERTY	.2784	
MDHINC	\$28,928	12,490
MDVALUE	\$60,457	44,528
BLTBEP60	.8150	.1506
SAME95	.5922	.1101
VACANT	.5216	.0794
OWNER	.1113	.2074
<i>Dependent Variables:</i>		
NUMRATIO	1.80	1.57
DOLRATION	2.19	3.02

\*Sources: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council. 2000. *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act 2000 Data Reports, Aggregate and Disclosure*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council.; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. 2000. *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: Data User Services Division.

After generating maps and descriptive statistics, multivariate regression models were run comparing the independent variables to each of the dependent variables used in the analysis. The results of this analysis are discussed in the next section of this article.

## Results

The results of the multivariate analysis comparing

population and housing characteristics to each of the dependent variables are shown in Table 3. The unstandardized and standardized multivariate regression coefficients for the effects of population and housing characteristics on each of the dependent variables are reported. Two multivariate regression models are found in this table. The first model focuses on the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied. The second model examines the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied.



**Table 3: Fully Specified Regression Models for the Effects of Population and Housing Characteristics on NUMARTIO and DOLRATIO\***

Variable Name	Numratio	Dolratio
BLACK	-1.866*** (-.287)	-2.033* (-.160)
NOHSEDU	-2.838* (-.219)	-3.731 (-.150)
POVERTY	-1.524 (-.117)	-.808 (-.032)
MDHINC	2.074 (.016)	-2.521 (-.100)
MDVALUE	-1.076 (-.031)	9.303 (.138)
BLTBEF60	-2.144** (-.196)	-1.457 (-.069)
SAMHM95	.168 (.011)	-.250 (-.009)
VACANT	1.257 (.104)	2.158 (.046)
OWNER	1.503 (.190)	1.589 (.105)
CONSTANT	5.241***	5.671**
R <sup>2</sup>	.195***	.071**

Note: Standardized coefficients (\$) are in parentheses below unstandardized coefficients.

\*Sources: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council. 2000. *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act 2000 Data Reports, Aggregate and Disclosure*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council.; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. 2000. *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: Data User Services Division.

\*p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

A few characteristics of the first model in Table 3 should be highlighted. First, the proportion of the population that was African American remained a significant predictor of the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied in a census tract after applying statistical controls. After controlling for other factors, the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied declines as the proportion of African Americans increases. Second, the only other variables that significantly affect the number of mortgages in a census tract are measures of educational attainment and the age of housing stock. Third, the standardized coefficients for this model indicate that

race is the strongest predictor of mortgage outcomes. Finally, an R-square value of .195 was reported for the first model. This indicates that a noticeable proportion of the variance in the number of mortgages received across census tracts can be attributed to the variables used in this model. It should also be noted that after applying statistical controls population characteristics, rather than housing characteristics, appear to explain much of the variance in the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied.

The unstandardized and standardized multivariate regression coefficients for the effects of population and housing characteristics on the ratio of mortgage dollars



originated to mortgage dollars denied are reported in the second model of Table 3. One characteristic of this model should be highlighted. After applying statistical controls, only the proportion of the population that was African American remained a significant predictor of the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied in a census tract. In essence, after controlling for other factors, the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied declined as the proportion of African Americans increased. An R-square value of .071 was reported for this model, indicating that a small but noticeable proportion of the variance in the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied can be attributed to race after applying statistical controls.

The models in Table 3 indicate that factors independent of population and housing characteristics weight more heavily on total dollars loaned in a neighborhood than is the case with the total number of loans. Put another way, the linear regression analysis suggests that population and housing characteristics have a

greater effect on the number of loans in an area, while these characteristics have less of an impact on the dollar amount loaned in a neighborhood. In order to determine if these general conclusions were valid, a separate analysis of the variables was conducted using stepwise regression. In essence, stepwise regression identifies the independent variables which best describe change in a dependent variable. As a result, this statistical technique will assist in specifying which variables used in the analysis are most useful in explaining mortgage lending patterns in Detroit.

All of the independent variables were entered into stepwise regression models for each of the dependent variables examined in this research. The results from this analysis indicated that significant relationships existed between each of the dependent variables and some of the independent variables measuring population characteristics. However, none of the independent variables measuring housing characteristics were identified as significant in the models using stepwise regression. The results from this analysis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Stepwise Regression Models for the Effects of Population and Housing Characteristics on NUMRATION and DOLRATIO\***

Variable Name	Numratio	Dolratio
BLACK	-1.739*** (-.267)	-2.322** (-.185)
NOHSEDU	-3.773** (-.214)	-5.550*** (-.223)
POVERTY	-2.293* (-.176)	
CONSTANT	4.739***	5.848***
R <sup>2</sup>	.172***	.061***

Note: Standardized coefficients (\$) are in parentheses below unstandardized coefficients.

\*Sources: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council. 2000. *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act 2000 Data Reports, Aggregate and Disclosure*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council.; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. 2000. *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A*. Washington D.C.: Data User Services Division.

\*p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001



Two dimensions of the results from stepwise regression should be noted. First, race and educational attainment had significant independent effects on both of the dependent variables used in the analysis. This finding differs from past research where stepwise regression was used to examine mortgage lending (Hula, 1991; Perle et. al., 1994). This finding also suggests that at the neighborhood level lending is more strongly affected by racial discrimination and human capital than financial capital. Second, the models from the analysis using stepwise regression had smaller R-square values when compared to the earlier models presented in this article. This is a product of the stepwise regression procedures which remove intercorrelated variables from the analysis. In essence, the stepwise regression models show that race and other aggregate population characteristics appear to be better predictors of mortgage lending performance than aggregate housing characteristics.

### *Discussion and Implications for Community Development*

The results from this analysis support the two hypotheses examined in this article. The models in Tables 3 and 4 support the hypothesis which argues that after controlling for other population and housing characteristics, an increase in the proportion of a census tract's population that is black will be correlated with a decrease in the ratio of mortgages originated to mortgages denied. Likewise, the models in Tables 3 and 4 support the hypothesis which argues that after controlling for other population and housing characteristics, an increase in the proportion of a census tract's population that is black will be correlated with a decrease in the ratio of mortgage dollars originated to mortgage dollars denied. These findings have particular bearing on earlier research on redlining which focused on the City of Detroit (see Perle et. al., 1994). In sum, the results from this analysis indicate that the racial composition of neighborhoods remains a significant factor in the lending process. Despite the identification of other significant factors, such as educational attainment, the presence of independent effects associated with race demonstrate that in the City of Detroit redlining occurs in the contemporary period. It is also notable that other than the age of housing stock, housing characteristics were not significant predictors of mortgage lending. In light of these findings, it is arguable that public finance strategies which lack an advocacy and social justice dimension will fail to adequately address disparities in

mortgage lending, particularly in urban centers. This corresponds with the conclusions reached by Ejigiri (1996) in his analysis of mortgage lending in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In light of these findings, community activists and scholars should advocate more aggressively for expanded HMDA reporting requirements related to three types of data. One involves the scope of data related to neighborhood characteristics, such as census tract level data linking the race of mortgage applicants to individual applications. Another type of data important for future advocacy and research would include more detailed information about the underwriting processes of lending institutions which could be linked to the census tract level for analysis. The third type of data involves information on interest rates and refinance fees associated with mortgage lending. In essence, it is not enough to know if disparities exist in the number of loans granted to minority and non-minority communities, we also need to know if disparities exist in the cost of individual loans. As they have in the past, community activists can play an important role in advocating for laws that require financial institutions to report additional information related to lending practices and outcomes.

At a minimum, community activists and scholars need to emphasize two strategies in their efforts to address redlining and promote inner city revitalization. First, they need to utilize existing lending data, like that found in HMDA reports, to educate financial institutions and the public about lending discrimination. Examples of this type of advocacy are found in work done by groups like the Fair Lending Coalition in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Nyden et. al., 1997; Feagin and Vera, 2001). Second, community activists and scholars need to advocate for the development of lending policies and products that are accessible to inner city residents. For instance, they should assist in the development and expansion of mortgage counseling and application procedures that target minorities and other groups at risk of discriminatory treatment. Organizations like the National Training and Information Center (NTIC) and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), provide models for how research and advocacy can be combined to promote community reinvestment.

A number of lessons can be learned from the community reinvestment movement which will strengthen efforts to address housing discrimination in the future. In terms of legislation, it is important to institutionalize requirements for financial institutions to report on



their lending practices and outcomes. These requirements are included in HMDA and CRA legislation; however, their scope is relatively weak. Housing advocates should learn from past experiences and begin advocating for more comprehensive reporting and regulatory requirements to ensure that housing discrimination is reduced in low-income and minority communities. Likewise, it is important for future community reinvestment campaigns to focus on strengthening the link between community advocacy and researcher. In the

past, the development of such a link has been a slow process characterized by ad hoc arrangements. For the community reinvestment movement to grow, the connection between advocacy and research needs to be strengthened and further institutionalized in public policy. This means that a new wave of governmental policies which encourage and support collaborative activities between community-based organizations and researchers need to be developed.

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