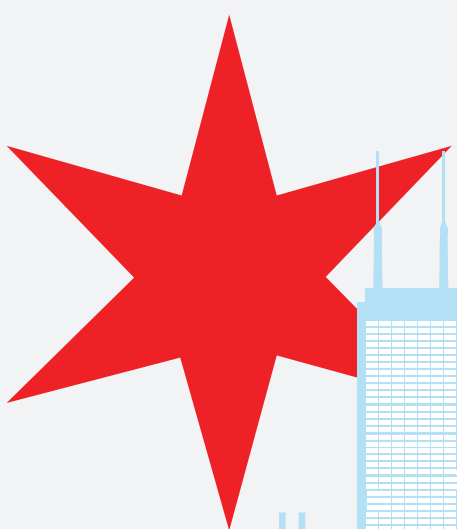


SOCIALIST



Three reports from UIC's Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy document how racial inequalities persist across every facet of civic life

By Steve Hendershot





When IRRPP first decided to pursue its “Tale of Three Cities” report, director Amanda Lewis was thinking of it as the beginning of a series that would produce a new installment every two years. Instead, the Institute has produced three reports in three years and has another three in the works—one on the Arab American experience, one on black Chicagoan out-migration, and one on how middle-class Chicagoans of different races think about wealth.



LLOYD DEGRANE

There's nothing like repetition to drive a point home. So when the leaders of UIC's Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) wanted to illustrate the extent of inequality among Chicago's racial groups, they chose to let the data speak—in statistic after statistic, category after category—until their point gleamed with crystalline clarity.

“For lots of folks who had some sort of vague sense of what's going on, this was really powerful,” says Amanda Lewis, IRRPP director.

Life in the Windy City often looks very different depending on what you look like and where you live. The city is highly segregated, and quality-of-life indicators such as income, education and health are unevenly distributed among ethnic groups. Many have seen random statistics underscoring those inequalities in a given area—rates of incarceration, for example, or home-ownership gaps.

But it's mostly just anecdotal knowledge, the type that's usually too vague to translate into an urgent, civic call to action.

So that's what IRRPP set out to do with a series of reports on the disparate socioeconomic outcomes for Chicago's racial groups. Its latest effort, on Native Americans living in the city, adds to a collection that already has highlighted the disparate outcomes for Asian American,

black, white and Latino Chicagoans. The reports are a collective goldmine for those invested in changing the status quo—or who are really excited by meaningful data.

“Now a community organization can go to a [philanthropic group] and say, ‘Look, this is why our work matters. Here's the data to support our claim,’” says Iván Arenas, associate director of IRRPP and co-author of each report published thus far. “That's not something community groups can always do.”

Many of the findings are eye-popping, sometimes in ways that underscore anecdotal knowledge; other times, they are unexpected. For example: The unemployment rate among Chicago's African Americans hasn't fallen below 15 percent in at least 35 years. Yet perhaps the city's worst economic outcomes belong to its Cambodian population, whose unemployment rate was 24 percent in 2015, with a median household income of just \$21,644.

With each report, the IRRPP team sought to collect data from numerous other studies and aggregate them into something more comprehensive—and instructive—than anything else out there. The real power of the IRRPP reports isn't in specific bombshell findings, but rather in a steady drumbeat of data that reinforce, over hundreds of pages,



The idea for the “Tale of Three Cities” report, which examines social and economic data describing Chicago’s three largest ethnic groups, began with Amanda Lewis (left), director of UIC’s Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP), who saw it as a way for UIC and its faculty to join the citywide conversation on race and inequality. Her colleague, IRRPP Associate Director Iván Arenas, says the report provides data to support the work of community organizations, especially in fundraising. To learn more about IRRPP, visit its Facebook and Twitter pages at IRRPPUIC.

scholarship that are designed to serve as a tool for activists and policymakers as well as academic achievements.

“This isn’t academic research that’s just meant to appear in a dissertation or sit on a shelf,” Johnson says. “The IRRPP is very intentional about wanting the research to be a part of public dialogue, and they’ve made it very user-friendly.”

Here’s a closer look at IRRPP’s first three reports and a look at what’s next.

how racial inequalities persist across every facet of civic life: housing, health, education, income, wealth and interactions with the justice system.

“These [findings] are things that we knew were true, but sometimes you need that credible, verified stamp of approval from a trusted source,” says Jennifer Johnson, chief of staff for the Chicago Teachers Union. The Union has distributed hundreds of copies of the reports to its members to help them better understand the communities in which they work.

The reports were the brainchild of Lewis, who joined IRRPP as director five years ago. The Institute had been around 20 years at that point, but mostly worked in the background, facilitating faculty research. Lewis saw the reports as an opportunity to join a citywide conversation about race and inequality, while highlighting the work of UIC faculty whose research could add perspective to the reports’ findings.

The reports themselves are mostly diagnostic, with page after page of statistics, often presented through infographics that describe the state of racial gaps while seldom straying into causality or potential solutions. The end of each section features an essay by an expert—often from UIC’s faculty—that adds context to the data.

The results are three accessible works of



A NORTH SIDE, WEST SIDE AND SOUTH SIDE STORY

Chicago is a segregated city—that much is common knowledge, not only in the city, but around the nation. Plenty of people know the stereotypes of the city’s North and South Sides.

But the 2017 IRRPP report, “A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago,” adds powerful context, starting with data that demonstrate that Chicago is the nation’s single

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most segregated city in terms of black-white separation, and the second-most segregated in terms of black-Latino segregation. (White-Latino segregation is present but much less pronounced than either black-white or black-Latino segregation, according to the report.)

This initial report focuses on the three largest ethnic groups in Chicago (black, white and Latino residents), each of which comprises about a third of the city's population. While many of the findings aren't unexpected, it can still be unsettling to see the ways in which racial gaps persist in nearly every aspect of life—and how problems in one area can affect another.

For example, about half of black and Latino homeowners in Chicago spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing costs, compared to a third of white homeowners. That housing stat correlates directly with an economic one: a third of black and Latino households in Chicago have no or negative net worth, twice the rate of white households. And the economic pressures extend to education: Nonwhite students are far more likely than white students to enroll in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and CPS schools with a majority black population are overwhelmingly more likely to be on district probation than those with majority Latino or white populations.

"When you see all the data together, they provide a really stark view of the work that we have left to do," says Caronina Grimble,

a program officer at Woods Fund Chicago, a foundation that provides financial support to local groups pursuing racial, social and economic equality.

Grimble says the report has been useful in helping community groups make their case for funding, noting, "It provides them with some concrete things to point to and say, 'These are the things that are happening and that we should be focusing on, and these are the reasons why.' To have that information has been invaluable, especially coming from an academic institution with the gravitas of UIC."



A GROUNDBREAKING STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN CHICAGO

IRRPP released "A Tale of Three Cities" to substantial media attention in the spring of 2017; the report was covered by local media such as the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Crain's Chicago Business*, as well as national outlets such as *U.S. News & World Report*. Lewis

was happy with the coverage but noticed that the Associated Press headline began "UIC Releases Lengthy Report ..."

She decided the next report needed to be more compact in order to be more accessible to casual readers. But that proved to be a challenge for 2018's "A Tale of Diversity, Disparity and Discrimination: The State of Racial Justice for Asian American Chicagoans" because of the daunting task of covering all of Chicago's divergent Asian American populations in a single report.

The IRRPP team, led by doctoral student William Scarborough, MA '15 LAS, PHD '19 LAS, found that the city's Asian American population was larger than expected—160,000 people, comprising 6 percent of Chicago's residents.

"It's a huge community, but because Chicago is so big in terms of population, the Asian American population often gets overlooked" in citywide demographic studies, says Scarborough, now a faculty member at the University of North Texas.

Scarborough dug in, pulling together disparate data sources to create an in-depth yet concise portrait of the diverse group. Not only are there more than 15 distinct Asian American ethnic groups in Chicago, they also cover a wide range of social stratification, because of selective-immigration mechanisms such as the H1-B visa, which allows employers to temporarily hire foreign workers in specialty occupations. As a result, Chicago's foreign-born Asian American population—which comprises two-thirds of the city's Asian Americans—tends to be highly educated.

Indeed, median incomes for Asian American Chicagoans vary substantially by their country of origin. Indian, Filipino and Taiwanese households earn more than \$75,000 per year on average, while it's more typical for the household incomes of other Asian American subgroups to come in between \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year.

Those differing outcomes, along with insights into the selectivity of Chicago's foreign-born Asian American population, helped debunk what the report calls the "model minority" stereotype—that Asian Americans are high achievers who don't need assistance in order to thrive.

By telling the story of Asian American

The real power of the reports isn't in specific bombshell findings, but rather in a steady drumbeat of data that reinforce how racial inequalities persist across every facet of civic life.

THE REPORTS IDENTIFY...

Chicago is a notable population center for Native Americans, representing the largest population of Native Americans in the Midwest.

Chicago's median family income is \$36,720 for blacks, \$47,308 for Latinos and \$81,702 for white families.

Despite making up a minority of Chicago residents (6 percent), the Asian American population comprises 160,000 people, large enough to make up a small city in itself.

Standing at nearly 20 percent, Chicago's black unemployment rate is more than four times its white unemployment rate.

Chicagoans both in the aggregate and based on their countries of origin, the report is a first-of-its-kind achievement.

"Asian Americans aren't often included in these large studies. We're often tacked on as 'other,'" says Brandon Lee, '09 LAS, communications director at the Chicago office of Asian Americans Advancing Justice. "This [report] is an incredible resource and something that will guide our advocacy for several years."



CHI-NATIONS YOUTH COUNCIL

SPOTLIGHT ON CHICAGO'S NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Before Lewis committed to IRRPP's 2019 report on Native Americans in Chicago, she had a message for the community groups that had asked to be featured: "I said, 'We're going to do it, but it's going to be hard, and we're going to need your help.'"

The difficulty came from the paucity of available data and the relatively small size of Chicago's Native American population: About 39,000 Cook County residents identify as

Native American, which makes the county the 19th-largest Native American community in the U.S. and one of only two counties east of the Mississippi River to rank among the top 20. There were also population discrepancies because the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs' database of enrolled tribe members is much smaller than the number of citizens who self-identify as Native American in the U.S. Census.

With community help, IRRPP published, "Adversity and Resilience for Chicago's First: the State of Racial Justice for American Indian Chicagoans." The report documents the Chicago neighborhoods where Native Americans live (there are large groups on the Northeast and Southwest Sides); which tribal groups are most represented (Mexican American Indians top the list, followed by the Cherokee and the Sioux); the issues they face, such as the gentrification-driven breakdown of a long-time community nexus in Uptown; and the high rate of incarceration among Native American women.

The "Adversity and Resilience" report differs from previous IRRPP racial-equity reports in that it devotes more space to historical background, including how the federal Indian Removal Act of 1830 preceded Chicago's incorporation in 1837. The report also showcases the positive impact and activities of the city's Native American community, rather than focusing exclusively on discrimination and inequality. That

emphasis came from community feedback: Local Native American leaders hope to use the report to raise their overall profile, not just underline their struggles.

The report "highlights that we've always been here in Chicago, and that there is still a vibrant community here now," says Cynthia Soto, director of UIC's Native American Support Program and a current student. "Our students often feel that they're invisible, so it's important for them to see themselves being reported in the data—the good and the bad. Visibility is important."

UP NEXT

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In other words, these reports are increasingly taking center stage for IRRPP's staff of nine.

They don't seem to mind, however. Lewis says she remains motivated to "help shape a conversation about the city that's more complex and more accurate, and that has a sense of the history of how we got to where we are." 