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Urban Indian Adjustment

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The past two decades have seen over 200,000 American Indian people migrating from rural areas — primarily reservations — to the nation's cities. This population shift has been so marked that nationally nearly half the Indian population now dwells in cities and the number is increasing daily. Undoubtedly, this urban migration has become a major, if not the dominant, influence determining attitudes, values, and behavior of Indian Americans. The magnitude of this migration suggests that the cultural and social consequences generated by it will in the long run overshadow the consequences of earlier government policy of forced removal to reservations.

The 1970 census documents the migration, but very little is known of the assimilation of this culturally distinct group of people. Government policy makers and the general public have tended to assume that once an American Indian receives vocational training and is relocated in the city he or she is quickly assimilated into middle-class America. In other words, those Indians who "leave the blanket" and go to the city leave their Indianness on the reservation. Bahr (1972), in a review of studies dealing with urban Indians, contends that one unanticipated and

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unintended consequence of federal relocation programs has been the fostering of pan-Indian activities and a *greater* emphasis on Indian identity as a mechanism of adjustment to urban life. In addition, Vogt (1957), in an article summarizing the level of acculturation for groups of Indians in various sections of the United States, argues that the acceptance of white material culture is often *mistakenly* equated with total acculturation. Just because Indians move to the city, live in modern houses, or watch color television does not guarantee that they give up important aspects of their culture, such as native religion, ties to the land, core values, kinship ties, or language. This caution is especially applicable to urban Indians who appear to accept some material aspects of middle-class culture but who may maintain significant portions of their traditional culture. Given the concern about Indian assimilation to urban life, the purpose of this paper is to compare levels of adjustment of samples of Indians and Anglos living in a large metropolitan area (Seattle, Washington) to assess how well Indian migrants have adjusted to urban society.

URBAN ADJUSTMENT

Previous work concerning urban adjustment of Indian people has primarily focused on economic adjustment while limited attention has been directed to social and psychological adjustment. There are a few studies that examine the urban adjustment of Indians and these will be reviewed briefly.

Economic Adjustment

Most investigators agree that economic opportunities are the primary force attracting Indians to the city. Pioneering work concerning the migration of Indians to urban areas was done by Verdet (1959) in Chicago and St. Louis. No sampling was attempted, but she felt those interviewed were representative of the two communities. Respondents reported a great amount of movement back and forth between reservation and city. The majority stated they had to come to the city seeking steady employment, higher wages, and a decent place to live. Verdet defined urban adjustment in terms of finding a job, being a hard worker, trying hard to pay one's bills and providing both material and emotional

support for one's children. She does not present data, but concluded that most Indians were poorly "adjusted".

Ablon (1964) interviewed Indian families who had relocated to the San Francisco Bay area. She found nearly all relocatees had migrated seeking employment, but would return "home" to the reservation if work was available there. To the extent that most urban residents had found at least temporary employment, Ablon felt that they had adjusted economically to the city.

Graves and Van Arsdale (1966), Graves (1970), Weppner (1971), and Graves and Lave (1972) systematically investigated the Navajo Indian's adjustment in Denver. Generally, they found limited economic adjustment and a tendency for most migrants to return to the reservation. Graves and Van Arsdale (1966) as well as Weppner (1971) divided migrants into two groups, "stayers" in the city and "leavers". They found stayers put greater stress on economic goals which they felt could be achieved more easily in the urban environment compared to the reservation. Weppner stressed early economic experiences (i.e., previous wage-earning experience and starting wage) of migrants as the crucial factor in economic adjustment. Using social background characteristics and work experience (years of education beyond 10; highest wage prior to migration; prior vocational training; marital status; and a father as a wage-earner model), the author accounted for 40 percent of the variance in starting wage in Denver.

Clinton, Chadwick, and Bahr (1973) studied records of participants in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) Adult Vocational Training Program in the Pacific Northwest. The sample consisted of 245 participants who entered the program between 1964 and 1966. They found income as a measure of economic adjustment increased four times for single individuals and nearly three times for married participants after migration. It was discovered males were significantly more likely to succeed in training and post-migration adjustment than females. A "good" attitude (as rated by a BIA official), age, marital status, Indian ancestry, and type of training were important in predicting successful completion of training and entrance into the urban labor force.

These studies indicate American Indians migrate to the city seeking economic opportunities. There is no doubt occupational opportunities are relatively more plentiful and salaries higher in cities than on reservations, but the costs of housing, food, transportation, and other necessities are significantly increased also. It

may be that while income is higher, the standard of living remains similar to the low level associated with reservation residence. In a follow-up study of the effects of BIA-sponsored relocation programs, it was found for a nationwide sample that three years after relocation a large majority reported their economic situation had improved. In response to a query about standard of living since relocation as compared to previously, 37 percent reported they were living "much better", another 32 percent reported "some better", 27 percent felt they were living "about the same", and only 5 percent reported that things "were worse".

In summary, the literature describing American Indian economic adjustment provides a picture of marginal adjustment. Wages go up but increased costs may leave the urban migrant nearly as economically deprived as prior to relocation.

Social Adjustment

Joan Ablon (1964) used participant observation and interview techniques over an eighteen month period in the San Francisco Bay area to gather data about the social adjustment of 53 families who had migrated from various reservations. Her study focused on the nature of social relationships established by these families in the city. She found that only a small minority of the migrants — 15 percent — were "active" in the urban Indian community. However, even though many were not active in the organized Indian community, most of their social interaction was with fellow Indians. While most respondents indicated they engaged in some white contact, Ablon concluded that it was superficial in nature and that intimate activities such as exchanging home visits or talking over personal problems occurred only with fellow Indians. This led her to conclude that "(i)n the course of my study in the Bay Area, I did not encounter any persons I could consider to be assimilated" (Ablon, 1964:303).

Graves (1970), in a study of Navajo migrants to Denver, Colorado, used arrests for alcohol-related offenses as a measure of social adjustment. Denver police records for 448 Navajo migrants, 139 Spanish-Americans, and 41 Anglos were reviewed for a ten year period. The arrest rate for Indians was 20 times the Anglo rate and 8 times the Spanish-American rate. This extremely high rate of arrest indicated to Graves that Navajos were not well adjusted to life in Denver. Graves, however, rejected cultural con-

flict as the explanation for excessive drinking behavior and argued that Navajo migrants tended to interact with themselves only and that excessive public drinking was the socially acceptable norm for this group. This lack of social integration into the white community resulted in the persistence of behavior that was functional on the reservation but when imported to the city interfered with adjustment.

In contrast to Graves' study, Price's investigation of Indians living in Los Angeles (Price, 1968) found that the level of interaction with whites, including intermarriage, provided strong evidence of social adjustment in urban society. This conclusion was supported also by the respondents' residence preferences. Only 5 percent reported a desire to live in an all-Indian neighborhood. Price also examined several rates of suicide, crime, and admittance to mental hospitals for evidence of social adjustment. A large variation between three major tribal groups in rates of occurrence of these behaviors made it impossible to generalize about all Indians in Los Angeles.

Thus the evidence concerning Indians' social adjustment in urban environments is inconsistent and indicates the need for additional research. While Ablon (1964) and Graves (1970) found a lack of social adjustment, Price (1968) found the level of adjustment to be high. It is clear that the lack of theoretical distinctions between "types" of adjustment and the use of different indices of adjustment have confounded the results.

Psychological Adjustment

Verdet (1959) defined "Indianness" in terms of where the person lives in the spirit, as contrasted to the flesh: self-identification as an Indian (regardless of blood), and acceptance of traditional Indian values. While she did not present empirical data, she did indicate most urban Indians possessed considerable Indianness qualities. She was impressed that this Indianness was frequently manifested in the Indian communities' solidarity, as evidenced by assistance given to fellow Indians. Verdet also argued that, in analyzing acculturation of Indians who have migrated to the city, one must realize white ways are not new to the Indian migrant. American Indians have attended white-controlled schools, and were taught by white teachers teaching white culture. They constantly have had to deal with a white bureaucracy — the Bureau of

Indian Affairs — and many reservations have been checkerboarded with white neighbors. A white army has used the Indian male's services. Thus, the white man's world of ideas and ways are not entirely new. What is new, however, are the pressures of city life. Verdet concluded that, despite their utilization of white material culture, there was a strong psychological resistance of Indians to become "westernized".

Ablon (1964) discovered a widespread acceptance of pan-Indianness in San Francisco and argued that it was an attempt to preserve a threatened Indian identity. She found that Indian migrants became more positive of their Indianness after migrating to the Bay area. But in a different paper, Ablon (1965) focused on some of the consequences of urban relocation on the individual psyche. The question she sought to answer was whether "learning to cope with an urban environment meant the individual *must* necessarily abandon Indian ways and identity?" She concluded:

I would suggest that the fact of active mastery of one's everyday situation on a daily operational level is the functional definition of success for a family. Are persons who have developed this control the less Indian for it? On the basis of my observation and interviews which almost universally encountered an ever-present psychological and social awareness of Indian identity, I would suggest that these persons are not less Indian but are Indians of a little different quality — an urban neo-Indian type (Ablon, 1965:370).

Finally, Weppner (1971) had Denver employers rate Navajo employees on personal qualities such as dependability, ambition, and flexibility, and found they rated Navajo workers significantly different from white workers in four of five dimensions. The Navajo workers were rated less dependable, not as ambitious, unable to accept change easily, and more lax in planning for the future.

The three studies above, then, are clearly unanimous in their conclusion that a resistance to psychological assimilation is manifest in pan-Indian activities and strong Indian self-identity.

But given the limited and often inconsistent research findings concerning urban adjustment of Indian migrants, the first object of this paper is to assess the degree of economic, social and psychological adjustment of a random sample of urban Indians.

It is generally assumed that adjustment in any one of these three areas is highly related to adjustment in the other two. The commonly accepted notion is that economic adjustment eases social

adjustment and vice versa and that both result in a change in self-identity. There is some very limited support for this idea as Graves (1970) reported that economic adjustment was highly related to arrest for alcohol offenses, a measure of social adjustment. But, as mentioned by both Verdet and Ablon, adjustment in these three areas may occur independently. Thus it may be possible for an Indian to obtain the education required for steady employment in a given occupation along with the necessary social skills to compete and yet retain his Indian self-identity. Therefore, the second objective of this paper is to test the hypothesis that economic, social and psychological adjustments are highly correlated.

Another popular and logical assumption concerning urban adjustment is that the longer an individual lives in the city the greater his adjustment. The idea is that the greater a person's exposure to the forces of an urban environment, the greater will be his adaptation to the city. Those who can't make it move on. Some support exists for this hypothesis as Chadwick and White (1973) found for Spokane Indians living in Spokane, Washington, that self-identification as a white was significantly related to the percent of adult life lived in an urban environment. Consequently, the third objective of this paper is to test the hypothesis that the length of time in an urban environment is related to urban adjustment.

A final objective concerns the relationship between various characteristics of "Indianness" and urban adjustment. It is assumed that if the Indian migrant accepts a white religion, marries a white spouse, speaks good English, and looks less Indian, that his adjustment to an urban environment would be more rapid and complete than the adjustment of an individual without these characteristics. These characteristics give the migrant a head start or partial entrance into an urban lifestyle which, once set in motion, results in greater adjustment. Therefore, the fourth objective is to test the hypothesis that "Indianness" is related negatively to urban adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from separate Indian and white samples in the spring and summer of 1973 in Seattle, Washington. While Indian leaders estimate the Seattle Indian population at 12,000, the 1970 census enumerated 8,000 Indian residents in the greater Seattle area.

Client and membership roles from the Indian-oriented social service organizations were combined with public records such as school records and arrest records to generate a sampling frame of approximately 4,000 Indian adults from which a random sample was selected. Trained Indian interviewers collected the data from the Indian sample. Each respondent was paid a \$4.00 honorarium to complete the interview, which took approximately 90 minutes.

The Indian random sample comprised 355 names of which 28 percent (99) were located and interviewed. The refusal rate was only 7 percent, which is quite low. The remaining potential respondents could not be located.

A random sample of Seattle metropolitan area residents was selected from the telephone directory and mailed a questionnaire. 60 percent returned a completed instrument, 16 percent refused, and 24 percent did not respond despite three follow-up contacts.

Measurement of Variables

Economic adjustment was indicated by a composite score based on each individual's income, education, occupation, and current employment versus unemployment. Occupation was assigned a status score utilizing an index developed by Siegel (1971). *Social adjustment* was determined by combining the number of friends, number of memberships in social organizations, degree of political activity, number of arrests, number of legal problems (both civil and criminal), and marital stability (current marital status and duration of marriage). *Psychological adjustment* was measured by summing responses to four standardized personality scales. These included a four-item self-esteem scale developed by Bachman, *et al.* (1967); a nine-item anomie scale from McClosky and Schaar (1965); a ten-item personal control scale from Gurin, *et al.* (1969); and the fifty-item mental health section of the Cornell Medical Index (Brodman, *et al.*, 1956).

Length of urban residence was determined by asking the respondent how long he or she had been living in the Seattle metropolitan area prior to being interviewed. *Degree of Indianness* was a composite of the respondent and spouse's degree of Indian ancestry; Native American religious affiliation; self-identity as an Indian; frequency of attendance at pow wows; and the interviewer's rating of the respondent's physical appearance as an Indian.

FINDINGS

The degree of economic, social, and psychological adjustment of random sampled Indians and whites living in Seattle is presented in Table 1. A tremendous disparity in the economic adjustment of Indians and whites living in Seattle is apparent. Indians possess significantly less education, earn only half as much income, evidence over three times as high unemployment rate, and have only half as high occupational status. All of these differences are statistically significant at the .001 level which strongly indicates that the Indians are not as well-adjusted economically as their white peers.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT BETWEEN
INDIANS AND WHITES LIVING IN SEATTLE

Indicator of Adjustment	Indian (N = 96)	White (N = 533)	t	P
Economic Adjustment				
Education				
Percent Some Grade School	3	1		
Percent Completed Grade School	2	3	52.0*	.001
Percent Some High School	46	8		
Percent Completed High School	24	23		
Percent Some College	20	35		
Percent Completed College	1	20		
Percent Advanced Degree	3	9		
Average Income	\$4,800	\$9,200	6.9	.001
Percent Currently Unemployed	26	8	12.0	.001
Occupational Status	20	36	6.7	.001
Social Adjustment				
Number of Friends	12.1	24.3	4.3	.001
Number of Organization Memberships	1.0	1.4	2.6	.001
Political Activity	3.0	3.9	4.0	.001
Marital Stability	15.1	17.2	4.4	.001
Self-reported Legal Problems	20.1	37.5	7.3	.001
Psychological Adjustment				
Self Esteem	2.6	2.8	3.5	.001
Anomy	2.8	2.6	2.4	.05
Personal Control	3.0	3.1	1.7	NS
Mental Illness (Cornell Medical Index)	8.1	---	---	---

*chi-square was used because of level of measurement.

While it is not surprising that Indians tend to be less educated and thus hold jobs on the lower end of the occupation distribution with limited income, the magnitude of the disparity is surprising and should be noted. Previous literature has indicated the increased income of Indian migrants, but this increase must be viewed in comparison to other urban residents. Given the low level of economic adjustment by urban Indians, it is understandable why many Indians view the city as a "concrete desert" and desire to return to the reservation. Also, the fact that a population experiencing the poverty described in Table 1 feel they are economically better off in the city than back on the reservation illustrates the extreme poverty existing on most reservations.

The same lack of adaptation holds true for social adjustment, although the difference is not as great. Our findings confirm those of Ablon (1964) and Graves (1970), and like theirs are at variance with Price (1968). Indians have half as many friends, belong to fewer organizations, are less active in political affairs, and experience greater marital instability. It should be noted that this trend is reversed concerning legal problems as whites reported nearly twice as many such problems in the past five years. This finding came as a surprise given the Indian's high arrest rate. It is suspected Indian respondents were not aware of consumer, credit and similar types of exploitation they had experienced and thus reported a lower overall rate of legal problems. This conclusion is supported by examining individual types of legal problems as whites reported many more acts of having been charged too high a price, sold faulty goods, or had merchants refuse to honor guarantees. The sampled Indians had received nasty letters from creditors, had goods repossessed, had paychecks garnished, had belongings held by a landlord, and had been evicted from housing significantly more frequently than the white sample. Whites perceived they had experienced greater exploitations by merchants, but when examining direct action against the individual the Indian reported a much higher rate of incidence.

The low level of social adjustment of urban Indians in Seattle may be the consequence of Indians desiring to make a living in the city while at the same time retaining their Indian way of life. Because of identification with reservation life, they did not participate in the white social system any more than necessary. There was some evidence supporting this argument as only three percent of the Indian sample responded positively to the item, "If I had the

chance I would pass for white and forget my Indian identity". Also, over 80 percent of the sample argued that "even after living in the city for a long time, most Indians still think and feel as Indians". There appeared to be a very strong emphasis on maintaining and enhancing Indian identity and practice of Indian ways, despite living in the city. Given the strong identification with Indian values and ways, it is not surprising that the Indian sample tended to be only marginally involved in the white social system.

On the other hand, it may be that the Indians did not interact more with whites because of discrimination by white neighbors, employers, police and political leaders. Support for this hypothesis was reported in an earlier paper (Bahr, Chadwick & Stauss, 1972) as over 70 percent of the Indian sample had reported being the victim of discrimination in seeking housing, employment, medical care, social assistance, or at the hands of the police. Thus it seems that the urban Indian's low level of social integration was a consequence of both a desire to maintain Indian ways and of discrimination and rejection at the hands of whites.

The results for psychological adjustment reveal the same low level of adjustment as reported for economic and social adjustment. Our findings support the past literature that there is a difference in psychological adjustment between Indians and whites. The Indian sample evidenced significantly lower self esteem and experienced greater feelings of anomy. The one important exception is that there was no difference between Indians and whites concerning feelings of powerlessness (personal control). This finding is at variance with the Coleman Report (1966) which found that minority students tended to feel that fate, not the individual, controls one's adjustment to his environment. Coleman also reported that such feelings were significantly related to academic failure for minority students but not for whites. Indians in Seattle feel that they can control their own destiny as strongly as do whites and thus this cannot be offered as a partial cause for the low level of urban adjustment.

The mental illness section of the Cornell Medical Index Questionnaire was administered to the Indian sample only. Developers of this scale contend that agreement with three or four of the fifty items is indicative of emotional problems. Applying this standard, nearly half of the Seattle Indian population was experiencing emotional problems as they averaged eight agreements. This emotional stress probably interfered with other aspects of urban adjustment.

Overall, the Indian-white difference in level of psychological adjustment, while significant, was not as great as for economic and social adjustment.

TABLE 2

CORRELATION MATRICES FOR INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

Economic Adjustment					
	Economic Adjustment	Education	Income	Unemployment	Occupational Status
Economic Adjustment	1.000	.493	.651	.607	.428
Education		1.000	.300	.211	.111
Income			1.000	.257	.285
Unemployment				1.000	.394
Occupational Status					1.000

Social Adjustment						
	Social Adjustment	Number of Friends	Number of Organizations	Legal Problems	Political Activity	Marital Stability
Social Adjustment	1.000	.369	.393	.044	.468	.135
Number of Friends		1.000	.223	-.072	.178	.151
Number of Organizations			1.000	-.151	.541	.166
Legal Problems				1.000	-.153	-.007
Political Activity					1.000	.279
Marital Stability						1.000

Psychological Adjustment					
	Psychological Adjustment	Self Esteem	Anomy	Mental Illness	
Psychological Adjustment	1.000	.200	-.047	-.286	
Self Esteem		1.000	-.147	-.215	
Anomy			1.000	.115	
Mental Illness				1.000	

$r = .196$ significant at .05 level.

In order to assess the relationship between economic, social and psychological adjustment and their relationships with length of urban residence and Indianness, composite scales for the three types of adjustment and Indianness were computed. Table 2 presents the intercorrelations between the indicators used to compute the composite scales. The economic adjustment scale strongly correlated with all four of the indicators. Also, all four of these correlations are larger than any of the intercorrelations between the indicators. The social adjustment scale is not as strong as two of the five indicators did not produce significant correlations with the composite score. The number of friends, the number of organizational memberships and political activity hang together to produce a scale emphasizing involvement in social relationships while the two indicators of problem behavior (legal problems and marital instability) are not related. The psychological adjustment composite scale also was less consistent than the economic as one of the three indicators, anomy, was not significantly related to the composite scale.

The Bivariate correlations between the three types of adjustment are presented in Table 3. None of the three correlations are statistically significant which indicates quite convincingly that adjustment in any one of the three areas can occur independent of the other two.

TABLE 3
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COMPOSITE
MEASURES OF SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
ADJUSTMENT URBAN RESIDENCES AND
INDIANNES FOR SEATTLE INDIANS

VARIABLES	ADJUSTMENT		
	Economic	Social	Psychological
Adjustment			
Economic	1.000	.139	.171
Social		1.000	.014
Psychological			1.000
Length of Urban Residence	.122	.078	.006
Indianness	-.010	-.038	.121

$r = .196$ significant at .05 level ($N = 100$).

The correlations in Table 3 also reject the hypothesis that the longer the Indian migrant remains in the city, the greater the adjustment. None of the correlations between length of residence and adjustment are significant. The length of residence in Seattle varied from less than one year to over sixty years with the median being eleven years. Those who had been in Seattle for long periods of time were not any more adjusted than those who had been there only a short time.

The hypothesis relating Indianness to a retarded level of adjustment was not supported either (see Table 3). Those Indians who had a high degree of Indian ancestry, were married to an Indian, practiced an Indian religion, spoke a native tongue, attended pow wows frequently, and who looked Indian evidenced just as much adjustment as did those who had white ancestry, were married to a white, had a white religious affiliation, spoke only English, did not attend pow wows, and who looked white.

DISCUSSION

The strong evidence of lack of urban adjustment by Indian people revealed in this study calls into question urban migration as a panacea for reservation poverty. Public officials and administrators who have assumed that urban Indian migration results in an assimilation into American middle-class society need to re-assess the accomplishments of urban relocation programs. The Indian who has lived his entire life in Seattle, as well as the migrant, does not surrender his Indianness and blend into white society. It is time that officials, concerned individuals, and Indians themselves examine both the short and long range consequences of the massive migration from the reservation to the city. This study suggests that while economic improvement does result, most migrants live a fairly marginal existence in the city while clinging to most of their traditional values.

The lack of adjustment evidenced by Indians in all three areas indicate that the BIA relocation programs and others concerned with assisting the Indian migrants to adjust to city life need to provide assistance in all three areas and not just in job skills training. This diversification of relocation emphasis is especially important in light of the finding that adjustment in the different areas occur independently. We are not suggesting that scholarship, vocational training or direct employment programs be de-empha-

sized, but rather that greater attention be directed to social integration and to psychological well-being. Given the finding that length of urban residence is not related to adjustment, it is also suggested that programs designed to ease adjustment be made available to all Indians in cities no matter how long they have lived there.

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