



Racial and Ethnic Inequality in Spokane County, Washington and Kootenai County, Idaho

By
Steven Neufeld, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology
Eastern Washington University
Telephone: (509) 359-6027
E-mail: sneufeld@ewu.edu

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I. Executive Summary

This study presents census data on racial and ethnic inequality in Spokane and Kootenai Counties for the major racial and ethnic groups defined in the U.S. Census. It examines racial and ethnic inequality in education, labor force participation, full-time employment and earnings, income, and poverty. It compares the two counties to each other, and it compares them to their corresponding states and to the U.S. as a whole. It also examines residential segregation among the various minority groups, as well as the extent to which racial and ethnic groups are concentrated in low-income neighborhoods. In sum, it presents a complex, multi-levelled analysis of racial and ethnic inequality in the region.

In both Spokane and Kootenai counties, considerable racial and ethnic inequality exists. In Spokane County, the dominant group socio-economically is Whites, while Blacks and American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AIANs) are generally at the bottom of the various indicators, especially for male employment and earnings. Although they rank relatively high in terms of income, Asians appear to be more varied than other groups in their socio-economic characteristics. They are also the only group that ranks worse on all indicators than their counterparts in both Washington and the U.S.

Hispanics, the largest minority group, is the only group that generally fares better than their counterparts in Washington and the U.S. Hispanics have considerably higher educational attainment rates than their counterparts in Washington and the U.S. They are also the only group in Spokane County that fares better than their counterparts in Washington and the U.S., in terms of median

earnings for year-round full-time workers and for family and individual poverty rates. They are also the only group that ranks higher than their counterparts in Washington on measures of income.

In Kootenai County, Asians outrank Whites on a number of indicators, while AIANs do somewhat better in Kootenai County than Spokane County in terms of income. AIANs are also higher than their counterparts in Idaho and the U.S. in terms of full-time, year-round earnings and all income measures except one, which is the best of any group in Kootenai County. As in Spokane County, Hispanics in Kootenai County have considerably higher educational attainment rates than their counterparts in the Idaho and the U.S. They also have higher incomes than their counterparts in Idaho, and higher household income than their counterparts in the U.S. They are also the only group with lower family and individual poverty rates than their counterparts in both Washington and the U.S.

The relative position of Blacks in Kootenai County is far worse than it is in Spokane County, especially in terms of income and poverty measures. The income and poverty figures for Blacks in Kootenai County are also far worse than they are for Blacks in Idaho and the U.S. as a whole. One interesting finding for Kootenai County is that all minority groups have higher labor force participation rates than Whites, as well as higher rates than the corresponding Idaho figures.

In terms of gender inequality, in Spokane County the gap between males and females in median earnings for full-time, year-round workers in Spokane is greatest for Whites, while considerably less for Blacks, Hispanics, and AIANs. In Kootenai County, the gender gaps in median earnings for full-time, year-round workers are roughly the same for all groups, except for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs), where women earn more than men. Excluding NHPIs, which are an

extremely small group, the gender gaps in median earnings are greater in Kootenai County than they are in Spokane County.

The analysis indicates that racial and ethnic segregation exists, but that it varies for the different racial and ethnic groups. In both counties, residential segregation is highest for NHPs, although their small population sizes mean segregation levels can change easily. Apart from NHPs, segregation in Spokane is highest for Blacks, followed by AIANs, Asians, and Hispanics.

In Kootenai County, segregation levels are lower, although this may be influenced in part by the larger census tract populations in Kootenai County. Overall, segregation levels in both counties are relatively low compared to those found in larger urban areas, especially for Kootenai County. Despite their status as the largest racial or ethnic group in both counties, Hispanics are the least segregated, with extremely low segregation levels, especially in Kootenai County.

Significant variation in census tract poverty rates exists, especially in Spokane County, with racial and ethnic groups are differentially distributed across these tracts. Overall, Whites tend to live in less poor neighborhoods, while Blacks, and to a slightly lesser extent AIANs, live in higher poverty areas. NHPs, Asians, and Hispanics live in neighborhoods with less poverty than Blacks or AIANs, with NHPs and Asians showing greater variation in neighborhood poverty than Hispanics. In Kootenai County, less variation in neighborhood poverty exists, and less variation also exists between the racial and ethnic groups in terms of neighborhood poverty. AIANs are more likely to live in higher poverty areas, in part because of their location on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation.
