

The Emergence of Crack Cocaine, the Nature of Violence, and Enduring Effects on Suburbanization

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Abstract

Crime often traps disadvantaged minorities in high-crime cities and induces whites to suburbs. This paper studies the emergence of crack cocaine and suburbanization by race and class, using decennial Census data from 1970 to 2010 and exploiting crack emergence by space and time. Results suggest that the emergence of crack increased black, especially middle-class black, but not white, suburbanization. There is suggestive evidence that black lethal violence that involves a great level of uncertainty—violence associated with guns, strangers, and robberies—helps explain black flight. Lastly, black suburbanization is still higher two decades after in metropolis that experienced crack emergence. The study highlights how a race-specific drug epidemic can have enduring effects on race-specific residential outcomes.

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