

THE SOCIAL AREAS OF CINCINNATI: ESSENTIAL READING FOR URBAN SCHOLARS AND ACTIVISTS

“The Social Areas of Cincinnati” appears to be a daunting work with all its pages of statistics and population charts. Nevertheless, this recent study by urban scholars Michael Maloney and Christopher Auffrey provides a valuable assessment of the social, economic, and demographic trends impacting Cincinnati and the metropolitan region. In fact, it is essential reading for anyone involved with human services or public policies that attempt to assist the diverse residents of this area.

This is the fifth edition of “The Social Areas of Cincinnati,” and this fact allows the authors to compare urban and regional patterns over a five decade time frame. The report analyses the Census data for Cincinnati’s neighborhoods and the seven counties of the metro-area in order to portray trends at the micro and macro levels. It also includes sections that depict the socioeconomic status of women, children, and the elderly, and that reviews statistics compiled about unemployment, poverty, race, health, and education.

The trends depicted in this report will even startle civic activists who are in the know about local issues. For instance from 1970 to 2009, the poverty rate for Cincinnati families grew from 12.8% to 20.1%. During this same period, the percentage of African American families in the city expanded from 27.6% to 41%.

Meanwhile, Hamilton County’s percentage of children in poverty increased from 13% to 21.4% from 2003 to 2009. In contrast, this County percentage compares to the national figure of 18%. These increases in poverty come at a time when safety net programs in areas such as housing assistance and Food Stamps are losing funding.

The most dramatic shift from 1970 to 2009 is the decline of the two parent family in Cincinnati. In 1970, two parent families comprised from 83.1% (high income neighborhoods) to 71.4% (lowest income neighborhoods) of the city’s families. In 2009, most of Cincinnati’s neighborhoods showed percentages of one parent families that ranged well above 50%, while only the highest income sector had a two parent family majority. The authors emphasize the significance of this change, but they also note that not enough research has been conducted to pinpoint the direct results of this shift.

Besides highlighting these major trends, the authors break down population data and other Census information according to Cincinnati’s neighborhoods and the rest of the seven counties in the region. They also review national studies dealing with cities and metro regions across the country in a section of the report that focuses on public policy. Viewing Cincinnati’s trends from 1970 to 2010 as part of the ongoing urban crisis in the U.S., they present recommendations such as greater funding for “safety net” services and programs as essentials for helping families escape from poverty.

This edition of “The Social Areas of Cincinnati: An Analysis of Social Needs,” is published by the University of Cincinnati School of Planning and the United

Way/University of Cincinnati Community Research Collaborative. Hard copies of the study are available, and it is on-line (Google “The Social Areas of Cincinnati”). Maloney and Auffrey are also happy to present their findings to interested organizations and agencies.