

Hiding within Racial Hierarchies: How Undocumented Immigrants Make Residential Decisions in an American City

Published in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.
DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1532787

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, the residential segregation of Latinos from whites has persisted but has begun to fall between Latinos and blacks. Demographers offer the size of the Latino population that is undocumented as one potential explanation for these patterns. However, little work has examined undocumented immigrants' first-hand accounts of their residential decisions. Drawing on 47 interviews with 20 undocumented-headed, Latin American-origin families in Dallas County, Texas, we explore how lacking legal status is related to residential selection processes. We find that some undocumented families perceive certain neighborhoods to be "off-limits," not only because of financial constraints, explicit legal impediments to their tenure, or individual racial preferences, but also because they perceive them as high-risk: Most households in the study agree that law enforcement patrols areas with white majorities in order to exclude Latinos and, specifically, the undocumented. As a strategy to minimize the perceived risk law enforcement poses to their families' stability, some undocumented families report opting into neighborhoods with Latino majorities in order to "blend in," whereas others describe feeling safe in neighborhoods with black majorities where they can "hide in plain sight." We demonstrate how undocumented families' perceptions of law enforcement in neighborhoods with differing racial compositions may partly underlie trends in residential selection and stratification.

KEYWORDS

immigration, legal status, residential selection and stratification, ethno-racial hierarchies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Stefanie DeLuca and Kathryn Edin, the co-principal investigators of the How Parents House Kids Project (HPHK), for their generous leadership; the HPHK researchers for their teamwork and camaraderie; and the John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation and Annie E. Casey Foundation for their financial support. We thank Monica Bell, Matthew Clair, Silvia Dominguez, Matthew Hall, Helen Marrow, Alix Winter, and the anonymous reviewers for helpful conversations or feedback on previous versions of this article. Audiences at the Migration and Immigrant Incorporation Workshop at Harvard University, as well as at the annual meetings of the International Network of Analytical Sociologists (2015) and the Eastern Sociological Society (2016) also provided helpful suggestions. The first author acknowledges additional financial support from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (DGE1144152), as well as the Center for American Political Studies, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University.

Introduction

In the United States, the residential segregation of Latinos from whites has persisted but has begun to fall between Latinos and blacks (Iceland et al. 2014). Demographers offer the size of the Latino population that is undocumented as one explanation for these patterns. Traditional accounts of residential sorting would suggest that some combination of finances, discrimination, and racial preferences underlie undocumented immigrants' residential patterns. A nascent literature posits that how undocumented households perceive their vulnerability to law enforcement in white- and black-majority neighborhoods may also matter (Hall and Stringfield 2014; Iceland 2009). However, little work has examined undocumented immigrants' first-hand accounts of residential decision-making. With approximately 10 million U.S.-citizen children living with either an undocumented parent or family member,¹ studying how lacking legal status enables or constrains householders' real or perceived range of residential choices may uncover overlooked social processes underlying aggregate levels of racial residential segregation and stratification (Bruch and Mare 2006; Krysan and Crowder 2017; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013).

We explore the different ways undocumented status is associated with residential decisions. Drawing on 47 interviews with 20 undocumented-headed, Latin American-origin households in Dallas County, Texas, we show how families perceive certain neighborhoods to be “off-limits,” not only because of financial constraints, explicit legal impediments to their tenure, or individual racial preferences, but also because they perceive them as untenable for households who hope to avoid punitive contact with law enforcement. Most sample households agree that federal, state, or local law enforcement patrols areas with white majorities in order to exclude Latinos and, specifically, the undocumented. We identify two main strategies through which

¹ Source: American Immigration Council (2017). “U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement.” Accessed online March 11, 2018. < <http://bit.ly/2p2AsF7> >

families use residential decisions to minimize potentially-negative interactions with the law: Some opt into areas with Latino majorities in order to “blend in,” and others move to areas with black majorities where they report safety “hiding in plain sight.” We suggest that where some undocumented families live depends in part on their perceptions of where they can avoid punitive encounters with law enforcement officials who pose a threat to their families’ stability.

These findings advance understandings of residential selection, segregation, and stratification. Methodologically, we rely on the experiences of a small number of households from diverse residential environments and underscore the importance of small data as a complement to larger survey- or census-based analyses of residential selection processes. Empirically, we describe in-depth how undocumented-headed households understand and make residential decisions. Although beyond the scope of our analyses, we suggest that these perceptions could concatenate to shape aggregate trends in residential segregation. Theoretically, we highlight the role of perceptions of the law and its enforcement—operating here through householders’ undocumented status—to residential selection processes. We reveal how holding a precarious legal status can not only change undocumented immigrants’ perceptions of the range of neighborhoods available to them but also reconfigure how they understand what constitutes a “desirable” neighborhood. Whereas research on locational attainment tends to view white-majority neighborhoods as the “best” given the disproportionate concentration of economic and social resources in these spaces (Massey and Denton 1993), the undocumented families in our study associate these areas with a heavy presence of law enforcement that they must avoid. They instead situate themselves in close geographic proximity to native-born minorities, leveraging long-existing ethno-racial hierarchies in an attempt to cloak their own vulnerable condition.

How Undocumented Households Select Neighborhoods

Urban sociologists interested in uncovering why people live where they do have long focused on the “Big Three” theories of residential selection: financial resources, discrimination in the housing market, and individual racial preferences (see Crowder and Krysan 2016). Empirical research has found support for each of these theories (see Charles 2003 for a review) but has generally not considered the role of legal status in residential decision-making.

According to the *spatial assimilation* model, financial resources are the primary constraint to individuals’ neighborhood attainment. The theory contends that, while immigrant groups reside in proximity to one another upon arrival to the United States (Massey and Denton 1985), they will “move up” to new neighborhoods with lower poverty and crime rates as they gain financial resources (Logan and Alba 1993: 244; see also Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Mullan 1984). Research highlights how segregation is lower in areas where native-born whites and the foreign-born exhibit earnings parity, as well as where immigrants exhibit greater English-language proficiency (Hall 2013; Iceland and Nelson 2008; White and Glick 2009). Undocumented immigrants face tremendous obstacles to acquiring financial resources by virtue of their precarious legal status, which is negatively associated with income (Donato et al. 2008; Flippen 2012; Hall et al. 2010; Kaushal 2006; Kossoudji and Cobb-Clark 2002) and wealth (Hall and Greenman 2013; McConnell and Marcelli 2007; Paral 2004). These financial constraints are compounded in the context of residential selection, with the undocumented paying higher housing costs (McConnell 2012), and living in lower-quality housing and less-desirable neighborhoods (Cort 2011; Hall and Greenman 2013), than their documented peers.

Beyond financial constraints, the *place stratification* perspective suggests that structural forces impede minority groups’ residential opportunities (Logan 1978). These forces historically have encompassed practices such as redlining and racial covenants (Massey and Denton 1993),

but today, factors including landlord behavior, real estate agents, lending practices, and zoning restrictions reinforce residential stratification (Desmond 2012; Massey and Lundy 2001; Turner and Ross 2005; Rosen 2014; Rugh and Massey 2014; Squires and Kim 1995; Varady 2006; Yinger 1995). An emerging literature suggests that legal status confers protective benefits in the housing market (Cahill and Franklin 2013; Kuebler and Rugh 2013), with foreclosure rates among Hispanics highest in areas characterized by a strong local immigration enforcement infrastructure and a larger share of homes owned by undocumented immigrants (Rugh and Hall 2016). Local ordinances denying rental units to the undocumented may also represent a barrier to residential integration (Brettell and Nibbs 2011; see Bell 2013).

The *racial preferences* model posits that residential patterns are due to individual inclinations for particular neighborhood racial compositions. Studies show whites and Latinos eager to exit neighborhoods with growing shares of blacks (Farley et al. 1978; Krysan and Farley 2002), and blacks fear hostility from white neighbors (Harris 2001). Though all groups are open to some degree of integration, whites are averse to living in areas with a substantial minority presence (Charles 2006; Farley et al. 1997; Krysan 2002) and are more open to living among Latinos than blacks (Charles 2001); whites nevertheless prefer living among Asians rather than Latinos (Lacayo 2016; Schachter 2016). Meanwhile, blacks report preferences for racially-integrated, non-poor neighborhoods (Charles 2003; Clark 1992; Krysan and Farley 2002) but are less interested than whites in living among Latinos (Charles 2006). Minor imbalances in groups' preferences can create segregation levels unaligned with any one group's desires (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Bruch and Mare 2006; Charles 2003; Clark 1991; Farley et al. 1994; Schelling 1971). This research privileges broad racial groups and seldom considers the first-hand preferences of immigrant populations of any legal status (but see Schachter et al. 2017).

Undocumented status also appears related to aggregate trends in racial residential segregation. Hall and Stringfield (2014: 71) estimate separate indices of dissimilarity between Mexican-origin immigrants and whites and blacks in the United States. They find that increases in the share of undocumented Mexicans in a metropolitan area are associated with greater segregation between Mexicans and whites; the inverse is true between Mexicans and blacks. Although their results hold primarily for newer immigrant-receiving destinations (i.e., those that are historically black-white areas),² the authors suggest the importance of studying “the underlying micro-level and behavioral processes” that may contribute to their observed associations (Hall and Stringfield 2014: 73). Such micro-level accounts are important for a thorough examination of the relationship between undocumented status and residential selection.

The need for micro-level accounts of residential selection among undocumented immigrants reflects a consensus in urban sociology that researchers must search for new understandings of the processes through which segregation is exacerbated or dismantled (Crowder and Krysan 2016: 19). Recent work highlights how subjective understandings of neighborhoods are tied to broader structures of inequality in the United States (e.g., Hwang 2016; Schachter et al. 2017). We suggest that examining undocumented-headed households’ residential strategies may also be generative for several reasons.

First, the sociology of immigration underscores the stratifying role of holding a precarious legal status (e.g., Gonzales 2015; Massey 2007; Menjívar 2006; Waters and Kasinitz 2015). Menjívar and Abrego (2012) call the marginalization undocumented immigrants face “legal violence,” emphasizing the materially- and symbolically-injurious effects of the law. Importantly, legal violence is based on both objectively-measured acts of exclusion (e.g., laws on

² Traditional immigrant-receiving metropolitan areas include New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, and Chicago. Increasingly, immigrants have been shown to settle in small town and large cities throughout the United States, including in the South and Midwest. See Hirschman and Massey (2008).

the books) and individuals' perceptions of exclusion. Applied to the context of residential selection, the question is not simply whether laws prohibit undocumented immigrants' entry into particular neighborhoods—as the place stratification model might expect—but also whether the undocumented do not enter these spaces because they associate them with a greater perceived risk of exclusion. In addition to objective legal classifications, here we argue for the importance of how legal status is accounted for in immigrants' perceptions of neighborhood risk.

Second, the literature on the disproportionate policing of racial/ethnic minorities suggests that subordinated populations adopt strategies to minimize the perceived risk of punishment in majority-white spaces (Alpert et al. 2007; Gelman et al. 2007; Rios 2011; Tonry 2011; see García 2014 on the case of undocumented immigrants). Profiling from law enforcement is magnified in areas with fewer minorities (Gelman and Hill 2006; Warren and Tomaskovic-Devey 2009). This dynamic may become pronounced in historically-white neighborhoods that have begun to receive immigrants (Marrow 2011; McDermott 2011), with white residents' nativist sentiments leading the charge against newly-arriving undocumented immigrants (Waters and Kasinitz 2014). Research by Rugh and Massey (2014) reveals that Hispanic segregation is greater where there is more anti-Latino sentiment. A shared minority status may thus lead some undocumented immigrants to find shelter among Latino or black neighbors (Telles et al. 2011).

Finally, research in urban sociology describes how neighborhoods may come to adopt certain reputations (Andersen 2008). One reputation is of being “overpoliced” (Bell 2018), a dynamic salient in black-majority neighborhoods in which residents report a primarily-punitive police presence (Goffman 2009; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; but see Bell 2016). Reputations need not be based in an objective reality; they are based on perceptions of what living in a neighborhood entails (see, e.g., Hwang 2016; Permentier et al. 2011; Zelner 2015). How

undocumented immigrants understand the role of law enforcement in neighborhoods with differing racial compositions may thus offer insight into their residential selection strategies.

Data and Analytic Strategy

Families with at least one child between the ages of three and eight were recruited from a racially- and socioeconomically-diverse range of neighborhoods for a MacArthur Network study on how white, black, and Latino families make residential decisions. We selected households from a random sample of all addresses nested in a sample of 18 census block groups stratified by income (<\$25K; between \$25K and \$50K; and >\$50K) and racial composition (white-, black-, and Hispanic-majority). Members of the research team visited each address sampled to determine eligibility. We focus on one subset of these interview data, which include 47 in-depth interviews gathered with the heads of 20 undocumented, mostly-Mexican households in Dallas County, Texas. Of these households, 18 are “currently undocumented” and two are “formerly undocumented;” we describe the experiences of the “formerly-undocumented” households to highlight how undocumented status intersects with other considerations to circumscribe their range of available neighborhoods. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of our sample.

[Table 1 about here.]

Interviews were conducted over three years. The initial interviews in 2013 asked for respondents’ entire life history, focusing on their childhood and transition into adulthood, and their residential history and experiences with housing units, neighborhoods, and schools. A second round of interviews in 2014 probed about respondents’ experiences as immigrants—irrespective of legal status—in the same domains. Interviews in 2015 inquired about how legal status and contact with immigration law and enforcement structured respondents’ everyday lives.

Field notes were written at the end of each interview, which averaged 2.5 hours. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. All names are pseudonyms.

The first author conducted most of the interviews, primarily in Spanish.³ Intimate studies with a small number of respondents over an extended time period help to overcome barriers to trust that may plague point-in-time studies, illuminating nuanced meanings and behaviors among vulnerable populations (Foner 2003: 26-27; see also Gonzales 2015: 30). All undocumented-headed households in this study have a baseline and at least one follow-up interview.⁴

We analyzed the data following an iterative analytical strategy (Deterding and Waters forthcoming; c.f. Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 2009 [1967]). First, we coded mentions of what respondents described as a “good” neighborhood in our interview transcripts and field notes. We then developed secondary codes to capture respondents’ residential preferences, including respondents’ (1) descriptions of their preferred and actual neighborhood racial and ethnic composition, (2) reported contact with law enforcement and/or immigration officials, and (3) beliefs about neighborhood quality. We evaluated whether respondents’ demographic and neighborhood characteristics played a part in shaping their perspectives on residential choice. Understanding that the narratives individuals offer are dynamic and reflective of their broader social context (Rosen 2017), we present neighborhood indicators when appropriate, from either the 2000 U.S. Census or the 2009-2013 American Community Survey.

We acknowledge several limitations to our data. Our sample contains primarily Mexican-origin individuals. Relying on the experiences of any one national-origin group to account for residential segregation does not necessarily capture the experiences of other groups (Iceland et

³ Two other researchers, one African-American female (2013) and one Mexican-American male (2014), conducted the other interviews. No differences in the data gleaned across interviewers are apparent.

⁴ The two-year response rate for the full study in 2013 and 2014 was over 80 percent. This response rate reflects the number of interviews relative to the total number of interviews, refusals, and non-response, omitting addresses that were confirmed to be ineligible or vacant.

al. 2014). In addition, our sample size limits the scope of conclusions about the larger population of undocumented-headed households in Dallas. We leverage our data to describe not the prevalence of different social processes in a population but rather the range (Weiss 1995: 24; see also Lareau 2012; Small 2009). Further, our goal is not to evaluate the relative importance of various factors underlying undocumented households' residential decision-making; such claims are better suited for statistically-oriented, or large-sample qualitative, studies. We instead take advantage of our intimate study design to foreground the experiences of a small number of households that illustrate the different ways undocumented status relates to residential selection.

Racial Residential Segregation, Latin American Immigration, and the Enforcement of Immigration Law in Dallas County, Texas

Dallas' histories of racial residential segregation and (undocumented) immigration from Latin America are inseparable. Before 1990, research focused on trends in segregation between whites and blacks, the two largest demographic groups in Dallas until that time. Dallas was "hypersegregated" insofar as it exhibited above-average levels of black-white segregation on five separate indices (Massey and Denton 1993: 65; 76-7). According to one measure, the index of dissimilarity, about 80 percent of blacks in Dallas in 1980 would have had to move in order to be equally distributed with whites; the dissimilarity index was 55.3 for Hispanic-white segregation and 91.9 for Hispanic-black segregation.⁵ Hispanics became the second-largest racial group in Dallas by 2000,⁶ largely due to immigration from Latin America (see Massey et al. 2002 for a review). By 2010, an estimated 23 percent of Dallas' population was foreign born, and about three-quarters of the foreign-born came from Latin America.⁷ In the same year, the black-white

⁵ Source: Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences, Brown University. 2014. "Residential Segregation: City Data." <<https://bit.ly/2gZoXIH>>. Accessed online August 3, 2018.

⁶ Source: Authors' tabulation of 2000 U.S. Census.

⁷ Source: Authors' tabulation of 2006-2010 American Community Survey (five-year estimates).

and Hispanic-white indices of dissimilarity were at a severe 66.1 and 61.1, respectively, and the Hispanic-black dissimilarity index hovered at a moderate 51.5.⁸

At about the same time that the share of Hispanics in Texas surpassed that of blacks, a number of changes to federal immigration law occurred that implicated state- and local-level law enforcement practices (see Golash-Boza 2015; Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan 2015 for a more thorough discussion). The federal government's stance toward noncitizens—especially the undocumented—has trended punitive since the mid-1980s (Asad 2017), moving toward not only greater securitization of the Mexico-U.S. border but also more stringent enforcement through removal across the country (Coleman 2007; Moinester 2018). Through a number of policies and programs, such as a 287(g) Memorandum of Agreement, Secure Communities, and the Priority Enforcement Program, federal immigration authorities and many state- and local-level law enforcement officials began cooperating in an attempt to exclude undocumented immigrants from their local communities (see Armenta 2017).

There is tremendous subnational variation in the enforcement of federal immigration law (Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan 2015). The federal government's punitive stance toward noncitizens manifests to some degree in Texas. Texas lacks omnibus legislation similar to Arizona's controversial SB 1070 (see Michaud 2010), but Governor Greg Abbott and State Attorney General Ken Paxton are vocally hostile to the 38 percent of Texas' 4.3 million immigrants who lack documentation (Singer 2004). In addition, the state has participated in each of the federal initiatives facilitating cooperation between federal immigration authorities and state- and local-level law enforcement officials. This reality imposes added legal risk for everyday actions such as driving, particularly since Texas does not allow its undocumented

⁸ Source: Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences, Brown University. 2014. "Residential Segregation: City Data." <<https://bit.ly/2gZoXIH>>. Accessed online August 3, 2018.

residents to apply for a driver's license. Given that the federal immigration regime seeks to regulate undocumented immigrants through the possibility of removal (Aranda et al. 2014), the convergence of federal- and state-level initiatives that work to exclude the undocumented may contribute to individuals' generalized perceptions that there is a need to avoid law enforcement.

Even as federal and state policies toward the undocumented have trended punitive, undocumented immigrants' experiences in their local context may further amplify or inhibit the perceived relationship between law enforcement and residential selection. On the one hand, Dallas County is somewhat insulated from some of the federal- and state-level policies targeting the undocumented. The county falls outside the 100-mile border zone in which Customs and Border Protection officials are authorized to detain individuals they "reasonably suspect" are in violation of immigration law (e.g., undocumented entry). Furthermore, Lupe Valdez, Dallas' sheriff during the fieldwork period, opposed state-level ordinances requiring her to detain immigrants accused of minor offenses such as driving without a license (Grissom 2015).

On the other hand, some localities within Dallas County reflect the often-hostile federal- and state-level policies and discourse that target undocumented residents. In the majority-white Dallas suburb of Farmers Branch, for example, the City Council passed several ordinances between 2006 and 2008 that prohibited landlords from renting to immigrants without a driver's license—primarily affecting the undocumented (see Brettell and Nibbs 2011). Though the ordinances were overturned in federal court, there remains a widespread sense among respondents that Farmers Branch continues to exclude undocumented residents. And the Farmers Branch ordinances are only one way our undocumented households view themselves as excluded from white-majority spaces (c.f. Bell 2013); other tactics include perceived racial profiling from law enforcement and informal surcharges to rent that landlords impose on undocumented

households for lacking a social security number. As we show below, respondents' views of these policies or practices underlie a generalized perception of how law enforcement works to exclude undocumented residents on behalf of white neighbors. How our households perceive the risk of law enforcement may thus shed light on how an undocumented status relates to residential decisions (see García 2014 on this point regarding patterns of immigrant assimilation).

Dallas' twin histories of racial segregation and (undocumented) immigration from Latin America are not unique. Most undocumented immigrants are concentrated in just 20 U.S. metropolitan areas (Passel and Cohn 2017), many in historically black-white areas (e.g., Marrow 2011). Nor is Dallas' involvement in the multilevel system that regulates the undocumented population unique; it is part and parcel of the state- and local-level law enforcement apparatus nationwide (Károly and Perez-Arce 2016). Accordingly, undocumented immigrants' perceptions of law enforcement are likely to play a role in residential decision-making in other settings as well—possibly even absent laws on the books prohibiting undocumented residents' entry into particular spaces. Dallas thus represents an important window into how perceptions of law enforcement relate to undocumented-headed households' residential decision-making.

Findings

Balancing Preferences for Diversity with Fears of White Neighborhoods

Many households, particularly those with young children, covet neighborhoods characterized by low rates of poverty and violent crime, in close proximity to high-performing schools and well-paying jobs (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2006; Darrah and DeLuca 2014; Owens 2016; Yancey 2003). The undocumented households in our study are no exception. Respondents also report preferences for living in racially-integrated areas. However, many are quick to point out that residence in spaces with too many white neighbors can carry undue risk.

Undocumented households in our sample describe their ideal neighborhoods as containing a racially-diverse mix of neighbors. Eloisa and Manuel, an undocumented couple in their 30s from Mexico, are parents to three U.S.-born boys. Through their jobs—Eloisa as a part-time housecleaner and Manuel as a subcontractor who installs wood flooring—they have explored many Dallas neighborhoods through the passenger seat of their employers’ cars. It is perhaps for this reason that, when asked to describe her ideal neighborhood, Eloisa hesitated before offering a candid response focused on her preferred racial composition of a neighborhood:

Well, the truth is that I’d more than anything like to live in a neighborhood that’s peaceful. But having all my neighbors as Hispanics? Definitely not. Maybe having one or two households, maybe three houses from my own house [would be fine]. Or 40% Hispanics [in my neighborhood] would be fine but not all of them. [...] I wouldn’t say in neighborhoods that are all black either.

Even as they report preferences for racially-integrated neighborhoods, respondents identified white-majority enclaves—such as Farmers Branch, Highland Park, Irving, North Dallas, and Plano—as “high quality.” It is not whiteness per se that our respondents value. Rather, they see that the economic and social resources and amenities they covet happen to be concentrated in Dallas’ white-majority neighborhoods (Sharkey 2013: 55-58).

Eloisa and Manuel live in a majority-black neighborhood but say they would prefer to raise their children in a racially-integrated area. The couple notes how city officials seem to invest in keeping white neighborhoods safe and orderly—unlike in their current one:

...[T]he city gets more involved within the homes, as well as within the apartment complexes. The city is a bit more strict in those areas. [I]f your grass is too long, you get a fine. If your garbage cans are fuller than normal, you get fined. It’s a bit different, but you have to be in that situation to see if it does change or if it’s the same disaster as if you’d live in an apartment.... It has to be different, I think, because you don’t live in a complex [surrounded by people], but in a house where everyone has their own space. But that’s why I’d prefer to live among white people.

The families we studied were nevertheless well aware that predominantly-white spaces were not accessible to them. Eloisa summarized that Latinos “don’t really go into these white neighborhoods. You don’t really see our people there.”

Among the constraints preventing households from entering their “ideal” neighborhoods, affordability is paramount. Marina, 25, cohabits with her long-time partner and three daughters in a predominantly-Hispanic apartment complex that she describes as not “ideal or perfect, but it’s what we can afford.” She told us that she often hears gunshots reverberating throughout the complex and notices a visible underground economy that she worries will negatively impact her daughters: “You hear lots of shots, lots of noise. Sometimes we go to dinner and when we come back there is too much music and too many people walking around, particularly women.” Marina named one of Dallas’ traditionally-white enclaves, Plano, as her preferred area: “I’ve always wanted to live in Plano, but we don’t have the money now to get there.”

We asked Marina to explain why she would prefer to live in Plano. Like Eloisa and Manuel, Marina believes that there are more resources in white enclaves. In Plano, where Marina says “the majority of people who live there are white,” she sees “a city that has better-paying jobs and doesn’t have high levels of crime. You know what I mean? The areas are very nice and look very calm. Everything looks very, very good. I haven’t met a person that lives in Plano who has complaints about it. I would like to live there but, for now, I can’t.” Even with the availability of jobs and a lower crime rate, Marina and her family view Plano as unaffordable.

While money is important for deciding where to live, an undocumented status creates challenges that often render financial constraints moot. First, lacking legal status creates a logistical problem since undocumented immigrants do not have a social security number. Texas, like most states, does not offer a driver’s license to individuals without a social security number. This reality implicates various aspects of an undocumented immigrant’s daily life, including driving, renting an apartment, purchasing a home, and even moving about freely in white spaces.

Take Norma, a 35-year-old mother of three who has lived with her husband in a majority-Hispanic neighborhood of Oak Cliff since arriving in the United States in 1997. Two-fifths of residents in her neighborhood live in poverty. We presented Norma with a map of Dallas and asked which areas she considered when looking for housing. She described a circumscribed neighborhood search as she crossed out white enclaves around the Dallas map, revealing her view that certain areas are off limits to undocumented families such as hers:

I like Irving a lot, but the laws are not comfortable for us. If the policeman stops you and you don't have good insurance, they take your car away. [...] I won't tell you the rest because that's where the rich white people are. We're not going to make it there, like Highland Park. Those are very nice places. [...] I won't go there because I think it might even be suspicious if you are in that area if you don't live there. Those are areas I would like, but I've lived in Oak Cliff my whole life.

Norma's impressions of which areas are "rich" and "white" are mostly true. Whites make up 92 percent of Highland Park residents, and the median household income of the area is more than four times the county average of \$41,978. But the story is more complex in Irving: Whereas whites constituted 48 percent of Irving's population in 2000, they represented only 28 percent of it in 2013. Meanwhile, Hispanics grew from 31 percent to 40 percent of Irving's population in the same time period. Its median household income of \$51,722 is only slightly higher than the county average. While Highland Park remains an elite, mostly-white enclave, Irving has transformed into a working-class, primarily-Hispanic community that might be more accessible to Norma than she realizes. Neither area had any laws on the books prohibiting landlords from renting to undocumented households over the course of our fieldwork. There is nevertheless a widespread perception among our households that white-majority areas—including those perceived to be white—are hostile to the presence of undocumented immigrants.

Norma has never seriously looked for housing beyond her Oak Cliff neighborhood: "Part of it is mistrust in people, because I won't know those people [in those other neighborhoods], and here, in these apartments, I already know them." This mistrust is based on the racial

stereotypes Norma believes whites hold of the undocumented: “Living among whites would be hard because there are white people who don't like us because of the Mexicans that misbehave. But we aren't all the same.” The perceived racial frictions Norma describes matter, as she worries unfriendly neighbors may make her family the subject of a phone call to the authorities.

The perception that law enforcement actively targets undocumented immigrants in white spaces acts to limit residential opportunities. In 2013, we met Selena, a 34-year-old Mexican who arrived to the United States undocumented in 2003. As we sat at her kitchen table with her husband Samuel and their four U.S.-citizen children, we showed Selena the same map we showed to Norma and asked her to tell us about her neighborhood preferences. Selena began by focusing on areas with the highest concentrations of white residents. She noted that, “If I had my documents in order, I would choose to live in Irving.” Absent regularizing her status, however, Selena viewed residence in Irving as impossible given rumors that law enforcement will stop all Hispanics—U.S.-born citizens and otherwise—in these areas to verify their legal status:

They say that the police [in Farmers Branch and Irving] stop people more often just because of the way they look. In Farmers Branch, they wanted to establish a law so that people would not rent to Hispanics, but I don't think it passed. The same thing in Irving. The police will pull you over if you look Hispanic. It's true. Hispanics here, not all of them but the majority, are very loud, their music and all of that. The police see that, and they assume they are drinking beer and have other things on them.

At this point of the interview, Selena paused and sighed, seemingly resigned to the fact that her family's “life would be different if we all had our documents.”

The specter of removal looms large for undocumented immigrants in our sample when deciding where to live. Of the white enclaves that respondents viewed as resource-rich, only Farmers Branch has sought to exclude undocumented immigrants (see Brettell and Nibbs 2011). Even greater than the legal reality that landlords in Farmers Branch might not rent to them, sample households worried about what might happen should they enter any white-majority area. Having experienced targeting from law enforcement is less critical than the perception that any

Hispanic presence is likely to attract unwanted police attention in white spaces. Undocumented status creates an imperative to avoid these neighborhoods (Waters and Kasinitz 2015).

How Undocumented Households Choose Neighborhoods

Undocumented respondents articulate two residential strategies to avoid law enforcement. Some turn to Hispanic-majority neighborhoods, which they view as offering protection in the form of a co-ethnic community that conceals them from these officials' gaze. Others find shelter in black-majority areas where, even as racial outsiders, they feel invisible to law enforcement.

Safety in Numbers: The Possibilities and Perils of Living among Co-ethnics

The 14 currently-undocumented households in our sample who reside in predominantly-Hispanic neighborhoods believe these spaces to be advantageous along a number of dimensions. A common theme across the interviews is the sense of security many undocumented households report in being surrounded by other Hispanics. Norma says: "I like living with people like me—Latinos. My husband likes it here with all his friends and I have all my family here." Not only would this co-ethnic community be unavailable in majority-black neighborhoods—Norma's only perceived alternative to her current environment—but Norma also feels that she would be uncomfortable in those spaces due to her inability to communicate with her neighbors since she does not speak English. These feelings have anchored Norma in her Oak Cliff neighborhood, where 89 percent of her neighbors are also Hispanic. Marina agrees, adding, "If you need help, you can go knock on their door without fear that they won't understand you."

Living among co-ethnics also often means facing similar obstacles. Although all of our undocumented household heads lack social security numbers—and thus driver's licenses—they do not view their undocumented status as particularly problematic in spaces with co-ethnics.

Since few, if any, undocumented immigrants in the area possess such identification, respondents feel more confident going about their everyday routines with others who share their risk.

Perceived differences in what kinds of behavior are acceptable or tolerated in different neighborhoods are paramount in our respondents' minds when making residential decisions. Respondents articulate a comfort in understanding the neighborhood's unspoken rules and norms better than they could in non-co-ethnic spaces. Fernando, a 38-year-old national of Mexico who arrived undocumented to the United States in 1994, lives with his wife and three children in a pocket of Oak Cliff that is three-quarters Hispanic. Fernando is unsure how many of his neighbors are undocumented, but he feels secure in his community and worries about venturing outside. There are parts of Dallas where "Hispanics just can't go," Fernando told us sternly. His worries stem from a desire to respect the rules associated with navigating everyday life:

I'm scared to go [beyond Oak Cliff] with the family. I am careful about that, to not go far away on the weekends because, well, it's the whole family and I don't know these areas. If I pass through [other areas], it's because it's an emergency, or because I have to go drop off a delivery, but these are areas that I don't like going into. Not because they are bad, but because those of us who don't have good insurance, we can't even rent an apartment, let alone buy a house. It's not a bad area, but each neighborhood has its own rules, you know? You respect that and I avoid going there. Imagine if they catch me over there, if I take my wife to see the city, and I have someone watch my children here, or we all go and they catch us and they take my children away. That would be most catastrophic thing that could happen to my family....

Fernando notes that respecting neighborhood rules is simple when neighbors speak the same language, thus helping to facilitate daily life: "You never know. You might need them to help you out one day, and it's easier to communicate when you're doing it in your own language."

For some undocumented households, venturing outside the co-ethnic community—where the perceived risk of detection is high—feels like asking for trouble. Araceli, a 29-year-old Mexican who first entered the United States at the age of eight, offers one example. When we met her in 2013, Araceli and her partner Rafael were expecting a second child. We sat on their living room sofa, adorned with decorative pillows bearing Texas' lone-star symbol, and asked Araceli to describe Dallas' neighborhoods. Araceli began by warning the first author—whose

complexion often led him to be mistaken as Latino—to drive cautiously in white areas such as Farmers Branch and Irving, where she viewed police as more likely to “stop you for minor things there. They ask you for your license and they know you don’t have a license. So, they’ll give you a ticket for not having a license. Be careful.” Araceli attributes such police behavior to the racial stereotypes these officers hold: “They say that the police stop people more often just because of the way they look. [...] The police will pull you over if you look Hispanic. It’s true.” She thus reports avoiding white areas in order to evade contact with law enforcement: “I hardly ever have a reason to go to those areas, but it’s because of the police I don’t go there.” Given that she does not feel comfortable visiting these areas, Araceli can hardly consider living in one. In this way, Araceli draws on her understanding of U.S. racial hierarchies to inform her residential decisions.

Araceli views residence among co-ethnics as providing her family the best chance at avoiding contact with law enforcement. Similar to Norma, Marina, and Fernando, Araceli places a high premium on the ability to communicate with the 90 percent of her neighbors who are Hispanic: “We like it here among our people because you can communicate better with other Latinos than you can with whites or blacks. [...] But you always get along with Hispanics. [...] I definitely feel better living with Hispanics.” That close proximity to individuals who look and act similarly serves as a source of protection from the law is a sentiment shared by many of the undocumented households in our sample who live in Hispanic neighborhoods.

Some households nevertheless perceive limits to these advantages, particularly in a setting such as Dallas where to be undocumented so often means to be Latino (but not always vice versa). In their perception, when a co-ethnic neighborhood contains too many U.S.-born Hispanics who behave unlawfully, it may attract the attention of law enforcement officials. Eduardo, 41, has cohabited with his partner Beatriz and her three children for over three years.

Both are Mexican nationals who have lived in the Dallas area without documents since 2000.

The family of five lives in a corner of Northeast Dallas that is 66-percent Hispanic and, despite tight quarters in their one-bedroom apartment, has no intention of moving.

We asked Eduardo to tell us about the neighborhoods in which his family would like to live. Almost immediately, Eduardo described his preference for “good environments” where neighbors “don’t make a mess,” “don’t get involved with one another’s problems,” and “where there’s no violence.” Eduardo continued that, in an ideal world, he would live in North Dallas, where 80 percent of residents are white, “because it seems more peaceful.” Eduardo shared that financial constraints make this possibility cost prohibitive. He also worries that Hispanic residents’ behaviors would be policed in this white space more than in his current one.

Despite feeling comfortable around many of his Hispanic neighbors, Eduardo qualifies later in the interview that, in fact, not all Latinos are the same. In particular, he notes that many of his neighbors are Chicanos, U.S.-born individuals of Mexican descent, many of whom he says are “in gangs, with lots of drugs and everything.” As U.S. citizens, Eduardo’s neighbors cannot be prosecuted for immigration violations; as an undocumented immigrant, Eduardo is aware that he may be were he to engage in what he describes as “messy” behaviors:

You have to be careful with the mistakes you make. The problems are if the cops get you. [...] If they catch you drinking or with drugs... But undocumented people know that if they’re caught [the police] won’t say, “Oh, we’re going to lock you up.” Like a lot of people here do those things, but they’re “chicanillos” [American-born individuals of Mexican origin]. Since they are citizens, they do these things and they remain here, but if we do things like that, they send us back. The Chicanos get another chance. We don’t. They grab you, they cuff you, and you know you’re going directly back to Mexico.

For some of our respondents, these “messy” behaviors, in Eduardo’s words, may attract too much police attention and therefore diminish the protective power of the “safety in numbers” that Hispanic-majority neighborhoods are thought to proffer.

Hiding in Plain Sight within African-American Neighborhoods

While many found safety living among their co-ethnic community, a small but substantial subset of our currently-undocumented households (n = 4) sought refuge from the precariousness of their status by “hiding in plain sight” in majority-black areas where there were few Latin American residents (c.f. García 2014). Our families described their belief that moving into neighborhoods with large proportions of black residents renders them less visible to law enforcement.

Elizabet, for example, lives with her husband Pedro and their four U.S.-citizen children in a neighborhood that is 94-percent black in South Dallas. Both Elizabet and Pedro are undocumented and have lived in the same neighborhood since 2003, when Elizabet joined Pedro in the United States from Mexico. Elizabet explains that the desire to separate from her co-ethnic community is what led her family to their current neighborhood: “What did we like about this neighborhood? It was calm. There weren’t many Mexicans. Mostly black people live here, so it was calm and we didn’t have to worry about getting into trouble with Hispanics....” Elizabet clarifies that she has avoided living where “there are so many Hispanics” because she believes that some of her co-ethnics are “up to no good”: “In some neighborhoods, it’s all Hispanics. You could tell they stole and you heard a lot of violence from them, so I said no, I don’t want to live there. I wasn’t going to be like that.” But even more than the violence itself, Elizabet fears the attention violence in the neighborhood can draw from law enforcement. Even though there is violent crime in her current neighborhood, Elizabet reports not worrying too much about it: “You hear gunshots back there [behind our home] sometimes and, like, screaming, ambulances, stuff like that. But my family doesn’t get involved in all that.” In a poor, black-majority neighborhood, Elizabet feels protected by her assumption that the police are more interested in pursuing her African-American neighbors than they are in checking her legal status.

Elizabeth's belief that black-majority neighborhoods serve a protective function for her family is complex. On average, law enforcement officials police areas with large concentrations of blacks most heavily, but it is also the case that neighborhoods with large proportions of Hispanics are over-policed relative to mostly-white areas (Tonry 2011). Yet, Elizabeth draws on her understanding of the U.S. racial hierarchy to note that African Americans—not Hispanics—are the primary targets of policing in the United States:

I respect black people. They're very tough but it's because of how the police used to treat them. That's what I think—the police made them that way. They are always in defensive mode. I'm really interested in the history of this country. I've asked my kids, "Sweetie, what was this country like when there was a lot of racism? When they made blacks get out of their seats or when they wouldn't let them drink water?" It's the police's fault ... I only have respect for them [African Americans].

Elizabeth's recognition of law enforcement's fraught relationship with black communities helps to explain why she prefers to live within these spaces. This preference is practical, according to Elizabeth: Unlike her neighbors whom law enforcement actively targets, Elizabeth says her family "hasn't been bad. I mean, imagine, some of our neighbors commit crimes and that's what the police are after. Our only crime is being here without papers."

The notion that living in black neighborhoods offers some undocumented households protection from law enforcement is not limited to Elizabeth and her family. Tina, a 37-year-old born in the United States to a Mexican father and a white American mother, offers a similar explanation of how her family ended up in South Dallas. Tina is married to Alex, a 37-year-old undocumented Mexican who settled in the United States in 1998. Tina reports that when it came time to look for a place to live for her growing family, Alex's understanding of policing led them to avoid Hispanic areas in favor of African-American neighborhoods:

Alex's theory was to avoid places with tons of Hispanics. [...] My aunt lives [nearby in a neighborhood with a lot of Hispanics], my dad's sister. It's like nothing but Hispanics all over. You don't see black people there. [...] I was telling Alex, "It's pretty nice over there. It's a bit Mexican. We can hang out. We don't have to really worry. [...] It's all Mexicans." He was like, "No, no. If Immigration comes, this [Mexican neighborhood] is going to be the first place they look." [...] He's like, "There's too many

Mexicans. Too many Mexicans.” I was like, “You got a point.” [...] A lot of [undocumented people] say don’t live with a lot of [people of] the same race.

The desire to avoid contact with law enforcement outweighs even tightly-held racist views about African Americans among some of our respondents. Maritza, 33, lives with her husband, mother-in-law, and three U.S.-born children in the majority-black neighborhood of South Oakley. She told us that she “hates” living in this neighborhood, assuring us that, were it not for financial and legal constraints, she would live in an area that did not have “so many black people,” such as Irving, North Dallas, or Plano. Maritza continued that her own legal status, as well as that of her husband and mother, plays a key role in keeping her family in their neighborhood. She has heard rumors that the police in her preferred areas may attempt to deport anyone who even looks Hispanic: “[I]f the police see that you are Hispanic, they stop and deport you. I have a friend there and she told me that once the police stopped her but only because she is a Hispanic woman, but she has papers. It was just because the policeman saw that she was Hispanic. That is why we do not want to go there.”

Maritza believes many amenities are lacking in her neighborhood—from restaurants to shopping malls—but she is above all concerned for her middle child, Nena, who has special needs. Her daughter requires speech, occupational, and physical therapies and has not received these treatments for years because, according to Maritza, “the therapists don’t like to come around here.” She reasons that this is partly due to her unsafe neighborhood. Despite her desire to leave the neighborhood, Maritza remains because she believes it is the safest place for her given her undocumented status: “There are many police officers that do not like Hispanic people, but where we live is for black people. The police don’t think about us here.”

The Intersection of Financial Concerns and Legal Status

Here we examine the cases of two households whose legal status changed, and how this change relates to their residential decisions. These two cases provide evidence that respondents are not merely offering legal status as a post-hoc justification for their residential immobility, while minimizing the financial and other constraints that bear on their situation.⁹ Rather, the cases emphasize the important ways law enforcement practices intersect with other concerns in undocumented immigrants' residential selection processes.

We met Teresa, 30, in 2013 while she and her husband Gerardo lived with their young sons in a two-bedroom apartment along Dallas' Northwest Highway. Both Teresa and Gerardo were born in Mexico but had come to the United States undocumented at the ages of seven and 15, respectively. Both completed high school in the United States. Teresa went on to become a legal permanent resident through her mother—who is married to a U.S. citizen and was thus able to sponsor her application for a green card—and later naturalized.

In our first interview, we asked Teresa to explain how she determines a neighborhood's quality. Like other respondents, Teresa considers a neighborhood's racial composition carefully, noting that she believes mostly-Hispanic and –black areas are dangerous because they have “lots of bad things” happening in them, including a heavy police presence: “There is a lot of bad things like cops, strip clubs, drugs, and people in the street begging and stuff like that, so that is an environment that I try to keep away from.”

Teresa nevertheless admitted in 2013 that her family lives in precisely this kind of “bad” environment, which can be risky for her undocumented husband. She often warns Gerardo not to attract police attention: “You always have to be watching out for police, especially if you live in bad neighborhoods like ours where there's a lot of police going around.”

⁹ See Jerolmack and Khan (2014) on this broader criticism of interview-based methods (c.f. Lamont and Swidler 2014).

The couple's situation began to change in 2014 when Teresa submitted paperwork to legalize Gerardo. By the time we reconnected with the family in 2015, Teresa and her children had moved to the Dallas suburb of Plano with her mother and stepfather, where "I never would have lived with Gerardo if I hadn't started making him legal first." Teresa explained that since Gerardo had entered the United States undocumented, immigration law required that he return to Mexico to await his interview for his green card. Instead of paying rent for their apartment along Northwest Highway, Teresa moved in with her parents to preserve her family's savings because they did not know how long Gerardo would be gone. After just two weeks in Mexico, Gerardo's green card was approved in early 2015, transitioning the household from "undocumented" to "documented." As the couple explains, Gerardo's legalization alleviated many of the worries they used to hold about navigating Dallas' different neighborhoods while undocumented:

Gerardo: I used to think, "What if I get pulled over and they check my legal status and send me to Immigration [and Customs Enforcement]? I'll have to leave the country."

Teresa: I was pregnant at the time, and I had a small child. That was really hard and it made me worry. But now he can go out. He feels comfortable where he's not worried about it so much. He doesn't have to worry about getting deported, or things like that.

Legalization not only changed how Teresa and Gerardo moved about Dallas but also improved Gerardo's employment prospects. Before securing his green card, Gerardo worked a number of odd jobs delivering fast food. He now works as a technician changing oil for an auto-body shop in the area, where Teresa reports he is making enough money that they can afford to move into a "nicer" area of Dallas County such as Plano, where her mom is. Although the couple cannot yet afford to purchase a home like the newly-renovated one Teresa's mom owns, they plan to move into an apartment in the area and save money for a smaller home nearby. Once the couple had overcome the legal constraints to their residential decision-making, then, moving into a neighborhood that they preferred became possible, financial constraint notwithstanding.

Whereas shifting from an undocumented to documented status ultimately allowed Teresa and Gerardo to enter their preferred neighborhood, legality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for residential mobility. Lucero, 67, lives with her 61-year-old husband, Humberto, in South Dallas. Both were born in Mexico. Lucero arrived to the United States in 1969 as a legal permanent resident, which she secured through her mother; Humberto arrived undocumented in 1976. They later met and married, and have since lived in the same black-majority area.

While cost played a role in attracting her family to the neighborhood, Lucero explains how Humberto's undocumented status was the primary factor:

We got here because he [Humberto] was undocumented. *La Migra* [immigration officials] didn't come through here much because it was a black neighborhood. Since they wouldn't come here that much, we thought this area would be good for those who didn't have documents.

Asked to explain how she knew that immigration officials would not pass through a black neighborhood, Lucero offered that, even back then, she and Humberto felt that authorities would not be on the lookout for undocumented immigrants a neighborhood filled with U.S. citizens:

Since my husband was illegal, he felt safer in this zone because it's full of black people, so *La Migra* didn't come here. [They would go] to... "bolillo" [white] neighborhoods, right? And there weren't so many black people there. But this neighborhood was for black people. [Interviewer: *Why doesn't La Migra come here?*] Because they knew black people were here, and they are from the U.S. Why would *La Migra* check this neighborhood if there was no chance they would find an undocumented person?

Lucero and Humberto thus felt protected. The couple went about applying for Humberto's green card, which he received in 1982.

By the time Humberto became a legal permanent resident, both he and Lucero were in their 30s. Neither had finished more than five years of schooling in Mexico. In the United States, the couple had only ever worked low-wage jobs, Lucero as a seamstress and Humberto as a window repairman. Despite having overcome what they described as the primary constraint to their residential attainment—Humberto's undocumented status—they still could not afford to leave their neighborhood. Lucero laments that the area is “anything but ideal,” observing how a

household poverty rate of 46 percent has made the underground economy more visible than she would prefer. Once a perceived sanctuary for her undocumented husband, Lucero describes how the couple is now “stuck” in the neighborhood:

We have nowhere else to go. I have to be here in this neighborhood. If we had money, we'd live somewhere else.... What else can I do? I can't do anything.... I'll be here until God remembers me. There's no other way.... Everyone chooses where to live as we did here, because it was the cheapest one, the less dangerous one when someone was afraid of the law. I'm not afraid of the law anymore, but I still live in this abandoned neighborhood. The forgotten ones live here.

Unlike Teresa and Gerardo, even when Lucero and Humberto overcame the legal constraints to residential mobility, financial limitations kept the couple stuck in place.

Discussion and Conclusion

Segregation between whites and Hispanics persists, but it has begun to decline between blacks and Hispanics. Researchers offer legal status—specifically, how undocumented-headed, Latin American families perceive their vulnerability to law enforcement in neighborhoods with differing racial compositions—as one explanation for these patterns (Hall and Stringfield 2014; Iceland 2009). But this emerging literature has yet to examine undocumented immigrants’ first-hand accounts of their residential decision-making.

Through in-depth interviews with undocumented-headed households in Dallas County, we uncover several pathways through which undocumented status can contribute to residential selection. Most respondents reported desires to live in racially-integrated neighborhoods with low rates of poverty and violent crime. But, given that these spaces tended to have a large share of white residents, living there was often untenable, related not only to issues of affordability but also to perceptions of scrutiny from law enforcement. Of the currently-undocumented households in our sample, all reported opting into either a predominantly-Hispanic or –black neighborhood in an attempt to evade punitive contact with law enforcement officials. Each type of neighborhood entails its own perceived set of benefits and drawbacks for our respondents,

pointing to a complex negotiation in how they weigh coveted neighborhood qualities (e.g., low poverty) against more seemingly-urgent matters of risk posed by lacking legal status.

Fourteen of the currently-undocumented households in our sample lived among members of their co-ethnic communities, where they believed lacking documentation was less risky. In addition, shared cultural expectations about what does and does not constitute a crime assuage respondents in our sample that neighbors will be less likely to call the police. Nevertheless, these neighborhoods offer some risks, and undocumented households are cautious as they go about their daily routines to “respect the law” and not attract the attention of law enforcement officials.

Alternatively, four of our currently-undocumented households lived independent of members of their co-ethnic group in predominantly-black neighborhoods. Two narratives undergirded these feelings of increased safety: First, respondents posit that immigration officials will not think to look for them in majority-black areas, thus concealing them from these officials’ gaze. Second, respondents believe that local police are too preoccupied targeting black neighbors to worry about their own precarious legal standing. Though these neighborhoods are not always ideal in terms of access to jobs, quality schooling, and crime rates, for the households we studied, protection from legal authorities became a valuable neighborhood resource in and of itself.

The situation of two formerly-undocumented households in our sample texturizes how undocumented status intersects with other considerations in residential decisions. One household, which transitioned into legality well into adulthood, grappled with financial constraints that, in turn, limited their access to well-paying jobs. As a result, Lucero and Humberto were unable to leave their “forgotten,” majority-black neighborhood. By contrast, when another household, Teresa and Gerardo, transitioned into legality as young adults, they were able to take advantage of their relative human capital to secure better-paying jobs. The family moved out of what they

described as a “bad” majority-Hispanic neighborhood and into a “nicer,” majority-white area. Together, these two cases highlight how undocumented status intersects with other financial and human capital considerations to circumscribe the range of available neighborhoods.

The residential decision-making processes described in this article contribute to theories of residential selection and stratification. In addition to real financial constraints, discrimination in the housing market, and individual racial preferences, the undocumented-headed households in our study underscore how perceptions of the law and its enforcement—operating here through householders’ undocumented status—also matter. Undocumented immigrants must make important tradeoffs between neighborhood quality and legal risk. We show how respondents engage in a calculated strategy to sacrifice traditional locational “attainment” for perceived safety from authorities that threaten to dismantle their U.S.-based families.

Our findings qualify each of the “Big Three” theories of residential selection. Building on the spatial assimilation and place stratification theories, we highlight one case in which commonly-desirable neighborhood characteristics paradoxically pose both real and perceived risks to undocumented households, leading some to avoid neighborhoods thought to be unfriendly to their presence. Qualifying the individual racial preferences theory, we reveal how most of the undocumented households in our study live in neighborhoods that do not always correspond to their preferences. We show that lacking legal status can also shape residential decisions by reconfiguring how the undocumented define a “good” neighborhood. Specifically, these families’ understandings of and experiences with racial/ethnic and legal discrimination in the United States contribute to their residential outcomes.

Our examination of how undocumented households think about where to live is a first step in understanding how a precarious legal status conditions residential decisions. But in order

to fully understand the role of legal status, more work is needed that interrogates the experiences of households in which members are “documented.” Systematizing the spillover consequences of residential selection processes on other household (Menjívar et al. 2016) and community members (Aranda et al. 2014), including U.S.-born Latinos (Getrich 2013) and those whose legal status is racialized and thus inferred (Asad and Clair 2018; Flores and Schachter 2018), should be a priority for future work.

A history of racial and legal exclusion in the United States has kept certain groups—especially African Americans—from fully participating in civic life (Waters and Kasnitz 2015). That undocumented immigrants’ perceptions of law enforcement shape their residential choices highlights the need to consider how the law affects inequality. Waters and Kasnitz (2015) call for the addition of a “legal lens” to the long relied-upon “racial lens” on stratification, outlining the legal mechanisms through which marginalized populations are dominated. Our findings extend this interpretation: In the context of undocumented immigrants in the United States, individual experiences of discrimination appear to be less salient than structural systems and how they are perceived. Without a change in legal status, patterns of residential sorting suggest that the undocumented are likely to be blocked from ascending the social ladder. This finding likely extends to individuals holding other discredited legal statuses, such as those with criminal records, in and beyond the residential context (Schachter 2016: 1009; see Asad and Clair 2018).

More broadly, our findings support a central premise of work on the racial color line: The divide between blacks and non-blacks continues to be a salient demarcation in the United States (Gans 1999; Lee and Bean 2010; Vargas 2014; Yancey 2003). While growing immigrant populations from Asia and Latin America have raised the question of a tri-racial structure (Bonilla-Silva 2004), the residential patterns we observe in our study suggest that undocumented

immigrants may be absorbed into the existing black-nonblack binary. Respondents' residential choices are based in part on how they understand the U.S. racial hierarchy through the eyes of law enforcement. It is precisely because of the location of the black-nonblack boundary that some undocumented immigrants are able to use it to their perceived advantage. By retreating to what they perceive to be the lowest echelons of American society—the poor neighborhoods inhabited primarily by native-born blacks and co-ethnic Hispanics—the stigma of their undocumented status is thought to fade into the background. For some undocumented immigrants, unlike most of the rest of society, living near those lowest on the status hierarchy can offer protection from the law. These residential decisions demonstrate the persistent reality of the U.S. racial hierarchy where race, ethnicity, and legal status intersect to keep undocumented immigrants stuck in “forgotten” neighborhoods.

Table 1. Demographic and Immigration Characteristics of Currently- or Formerly- Undocumented Households of Latin American Origin in Dallas County, Texas (N = 20)

<i>Demographic Characteristics of Household Head</i>	
<i>Age</i>	
Range	22-67
Median	35
<i>Sex</i>	
Female	11
Male	9
<i>Marital Status</i>	
Married	11
Unmarried Partner	6
No Romantic Partner	3
<i>Number of Children</i>	
Range	1-4
Median	3
<i>Employed</i>	
	16
<i>Median Household Income (2015)</i>	
	\$28,560
<i>Receiving Public Assistance</i>	
	19
<i>Educational Attainment</i>	
Less than High School	12
High School Graduate	7
Some College	1
<i>Immigration Characteristics</i>	
<i>Year of Last Migration</i>	
Range	1969-2007
Median	2001
<i>Country of Origin</i>	
Mexico	19
El Salvador	1
<i>Neighborhood Characteristics</i>	
<i>Households' Residential Environment</i>	
Majority-white Block Group ^a	4 ^b
Majority-Hispanic Block Group	11
Majority-black Block Group	5 ^b

^a While the U.S. Census assigns two of the three block groups represented here a slight white majority, the three households living within these two block groups identify these areas as majority-Hispanic.

^b Includes one formerly-undocumented household.

Source: Author's tabulations of 2015 interview data. All values are counts unless otherwise indicated.

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