Topic to be Studied

There is considerable public policy interest in the question of whether visible minorities do better in Canada than in the United States. Given the two countries' very different legacies of slavery and of migration there is much room for scholarly debate. For example there are potentially complex relationships between visible minority status and such factors as race, religion, ethnicity, migration status and national origin as well as gender. There is also considerable theoretical and public policy interest in the relationship between visible minority status and "means of living", where that phrase is taken to include whether or not an individual is gainfully employed, occupational status, wages and other aspects of income. Most current research strives to use the most recent data and therefore risks losing the historical context of social and economic inequalities linked to visible minority status. This paper uses large samples from the US Censuses of 1900 and 2000 and the Censuses of Canada for 1901 and 2001 in order to focus upon the economic position of three visible minority groups enumerated in both Censuses at both time periods. These visible minority groups are Black, Oriental and Aboriginal. We compare the occupational status and other "means of living" outcomes achieved by these visible minority groups, in comparison with the numerically dominant White population of the time.

Theoretical Focus

A comparative-historical and socio-demographic perspective improves our understanding of contemporary public policy issues. For example, in explaining the circumstances that led to the increasing concentration of poor blacks in inner-city areas in the US, William Julius Wilson takes into account a number of historical changes in that country. First, the flow of black migrants to the urban North during the early part of the twentieth century was substantial and much more intense than that of Asian or European migrants. Both of these latter groups were limited by restrictive immigration policies. The vast flow of black migrants to cities in the North also brought about a lowering of the average age of this group. This means that the proportion of young individuals in inner-city neighbourhoods grew substantially thus increasing various forms of deviance in these areas. "In short, much of what has gone awry in the inner city is due in part to the sheer increase in the number of young people, especially young minorities" (Wilson 1987: 37).

A different set of macro-historical factors concern a significant shift in the foundation of the American economy, namely from goods-producing to knowledge-producing industries. This shift affected mostly lower-educated individuals. Given that blacks had lower levels of completed education, the increasing emphasis placed on higher educational credentials worked clearly to their disadvantage (Wilson 1987: 39, 41). Finally, Wilson discusses the increasing concentration of poor blacks in the inner city. During the 1940s and up to the early 1960s, inner-city neighbourhoods had a significant vertical integration with middle-, working- and lower-class individuals residing more or less in the same neighbourhood. Once the working-class and middle-class blacks left the inner city, only the very poor segments of the black population were left behind and formed the "ghetto underclass" (1987: 49).

The Canadian experience with aboriginal and visible minority groups has been very different and changes over time have been largely linked with the history of immigration policy. There were small but significant communities of Blacks and Orientals in Canada at 1901 but they had very different social origins and economic experience as compared both with their counterparts in the US at 1900 and with their successors in Canada at 2001.

Data and Research Methods

Census data from the United States have been obtained from the International Public Use Microdata Series project (IPUMS) at the University of Minnesota. Census data from Canada have been obtained from the Canadian Families Project at the University of Victoria and from the Public Use Microdata version of the 2001 Census of Canada. We report upon how we have analyzed the instructions to enumerators in order to resolve inconsistencies between the conceptualizations of visible minority status used in the US and Canadian Census data at the two time periods. We also report on how we have resolved the considerable incompatibilities between the occupational coding schemes used in the US and Canadian Census data. Our substantive findings draw conclusions from data analysis that compares the impact of visible minority status upon occupational status attainment in the US and Canada at the beginning of the 20^{th} and 21^{st} centuries. The Canadian data permit us to examine the role of religion as well as that of visible minority status. We carry out data analysis using appropriate regression techniques with SAS and SPSS and we present our results using charts prepared with Excel.

Expected Findings

Following Blau and Duncan's *The American Occupational Structure* we expect to find a very high degree of economic inequality between visible minority groups in the US at 1900, with Blacks doing much worse than the dominant White population. A very large proportion of economically active people will, of course, be working in the agricultural sector at that time. Given Canada's different legacy of slavery we expect to find a lesser degree of economic inequality between visible minority groups in Canada at 1901 though Whites should still be doing better than Aboriginals, Blacks or Orientals. One hundred years later we expect that visible minority groups will continue to do worse than the dominant White population but we expect that the Black/White differential will be higher in Canada than in the US.