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Newspaper/Television Cross-Ownership and Local News and Public Affairs Programming on Television Stations: An Empirical Analysis

Michael Z. Yan
Fordham University

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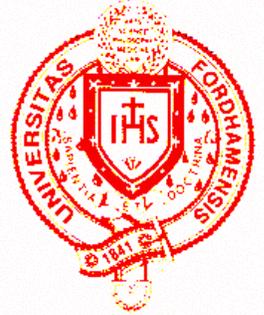
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WORKING PAPER

**NEWSPAPER-TELEVISION CROSS-
OWNERSHIP AND LOCAL NEWS AND PUBLIC
AFFAIRS ON TELEVISION STATIONS: AN
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS**

Michael Z. Yan
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication
University of Michigan

October, 2006

Donald McGannon Communication Research Center
Faculty Memorial Hall, 4th fl.
Bronx, NY 10458
718.817.4195
www.fordham.edu/mcgannon
mcgctr@fordham.edu

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Newspaper/Television Cross-ownership and Local News and Public Affairs
Programming on Television Stations: An Empirical Analysis

Abstract

This study analyzes the relationship between local newspaper/television cross-ownership and the presence and quantity of local news and local public affairs programming on broadcast television. The analyses, based on a two-week constructed random sample of television programming in 2003 for 226 randomly selected, plus 27 cross-owned television stations, show that cross-owned stations did not broadcast more local news than non-cross owned stations that also provided local news. In addition, cross-ownership had no significant relationship with either the presence or the quantity of local public affairs programming on commercial television.

Newspaper/Television Cross-ownership and Local News and Public Affairs
Programming on Television: An Empirical Analysis

Michael Yan
Department of Communication Studies
The University of Michigan

I. Introduction:

The study investigates the following research question: How is cross-ownership related to the provision of local news and public affairs programming on broadcast television? Answering this question has important policy implications as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reconsiders its major broadcast ownership rules, including the cross-ownership rule (FCC, 2006).

The newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule prohibits common ownership of a full service broadcast station and a daily newspaper if the broadcast station's service contour completely encompasses the newspaper's city of publication (FCC, 2006). In 2003, the FCC lifted the ban and allowed for newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership conditional on the size of a market (FCC, 2003). One of the main arguments the FCC used to justify its decision is that newspaper-owned stations actually contribute more to localism by providing more local news and public affairs programming than non-newspaper owned stations (FCC, 2003).

The FCC relied primarily upon one of its own studies (Spavins, Denison, Roberts & Frenette, 2002) as empirical evidence. However, although the FCC study found that newspaper-owned affiliate stations aired more local news and public affairs programming than other affiliate stations in the sample (21.9 hours versus 14.9 hours), no statistical analysis was conducted to test the significance of the difference. In addition, the study did not control for other factors such as market size and station rank that may affect station

provision of local informational programming. Other aspects of the study have also been critiqued as flawed (Napoli, 2004).

Using a two-week constructed random sample of television programming in 2003 for a random sample of 226 commercial television stations, plus 27 cross-owned stations, this study analyzes how cross-owned stations compared with non-cross owned stations in the provision of local news and public affairs programming, controlling for other ownership characteristics and market conditions. The results show that while cross-owned stations were more likely to have local news programming, they did not broadcast more local news than other stations that also provided local news. In addition, cross-ownership had no significant relationship with either the presence or the quantity of local public affairs programming on commercial television.

The next section of the paper describes the method and statistical model used in this study, followed by a presentation of the results. The paper concludes with a summary of the results and their policy implications.

II. Method and variables

The data used in this study are a combination of two datasets. The first is a random sample of 233 television stations that was created for previous studies (Napoli & Yan, 2005; Yan & Napoli, 2004). The sampling frame for these 233 stations is a list of 1,447 full-power, English-language television stations published in the *Nielsen Station Index Directory of Television Stations 2003-2004*. The second is a complete list of newspaper cross-owned television stations (see Table 1). The list was compiled based on the Newspaper Association of America's filing with the FCC (2001). There were 27 such cross-owned stations during the time period analyzed. Seven of these stations

already were included in the larger data set; thus, 20 cross-owned stations were added to the data set. The final data set has 253 stations.

For each sampled station, a randomly constructed two-week sample of programming schedules from 2003 was obtained from Tribune Media Services (operator of the zip2it.com online television program schedule database). The specific days comprising the constructed two weeks are Jan. 11 (Sat.), Jan. 22 (Wed.), Feb. 17 (Mon.), Feb. 27 (Thu), Mar. 23 (Sun.), Mar. 28 (Fri.), Apr. 22 (Tue.), Aug. 11 (Mon.), Sep. 30 (Tue.), Oct. 18 (Sat.), Nov. 5 (Wed.), Nov. 6 (Thu.), Nov. 9 (Sun.) and Nov. 28 (Fri.), all of 2003. An entire day's program schedule of each station was analyzed for each sampled day.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables of the study are the total amount of local news and local public affairs programming broadcast by a station in the sample over the two-week time period (LOCAL NEWS and LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS in Table 2). In constructing the dependent variables, this study relied primarily on the program type and origination classifications utilized by the commercial data provider. Nonetheless, a verification process also was employed to address potential cases of misclassification. In cases of uncertainty, station web sites were consulted and/or the stations were called directly in order to ascertain the nature of the program.

Independent variables

A full description of all of the independent variables used in the study is contained in Table 2. These variables include station characteristics, including whether a station is cross-owned with a newspaper in the same DMA, transmits in the VHF band, the amount

of its revenues, is affiliated with a big four network, is commonly owned with another local television station, has a local owner, is owned by one of the big four networks, and the national reach of its owners.

These variables were incorporated based on previous research suggesting that station provision of local news and public affairs programming may be a function of a wide range of station characteristics. For example, stations with greater financial resources may be more inclined to run local news or public affairs programming, given the relatively high costs associated with providing locally produced programming – particularly news (relative to the costs of syndicated program options; see Napoli, 2004; Wirth & Wollert, 1979).

Station ownership also may affect station content output. Napoli (2002) found that locally based owners performed better in offering public affairs programming than owners based out-of-market (i.e., group owners). Along related lines, some stakeholders have argued that non-local owners such as broadcast networks are particularly insensitive to community needs and are therefore negligent in serving the public interest (Network Affiliated Stations Alliance, 2001). This insensitivity and negligence may be reflected in these stations' commitment to informational programming (Yan & Napoli, 2004).

Ownership patterns such as station group ownership (and group size), network ownership, and duopoly ownership (in which a company owns two stations in a local television market) may influence content output (including local news and public affairs programming) not only because of their potential relationship with the strength of the owner's ties to the local community, but also because they may affect the cost conditions of the station and the revenue/profit levels that can be expected from the provision of

local news (see Hamilton, 2004). Wirth and Wollert (1979) found no relationship between group ownership and the provision of news or public affairs programming. Yan and Napoli (2004), however, did find evidence that station owner size (in terms of percentage of the national television audience reached) was positively related to a station's decision whether to air local public affairs programming, but was not related to the quantity of such programming aired.

Similarly, it is possible that stations that are owned by a national broadcast network could be better-equipped to provide local news and public affairs programming if the national news and public affairs programming experience and infrastructure that these networks already possess could also facilitate the production of local news and public affairs programming. This latter perspective receives support in the Commission's study (Spavins, et al., 2002), though subsequent reanalysis suggests that this relationship holds true only for news and not for public affairs, suggesting that news and public affairs programming possess very different economic characteristics (particularly in terms of their revenue potential) that affect the extent to which structural and marketplace conditions impact their production (Napoli, 2004). Ultimately, it may be that cross-market economies of scale in the provision of local news are not very pronounced, given the extent to which successful local newscasts may truly need to emphasize locally oriented content with little informational value outside of the local market.

It has, however, been asserted that in terms of local newspaper-television cross-ownership, the economies of scale that the two entities would enjoy in regards to local news gathering and reporting would lead to cross-owned stations performing significantly

better than non-cross-owned stations in terms of their provision of local informational programming (such as local news and public affairs; see FCC, 2003).

This study also incorporated a number of market-level independent variables, including market characteristics such as the number of television households, the number of commercial and public stations, the percentage of households subscribing to cable, the audience share for public television and non-broadcast television, and the percentage of whites in the market.

These market characteristic variables were employed to account for the fact that local media markets in the United States differ dramatically across a number of characteristics that may be related to stations' provision of local news and public affairs programming (see Hamilton, 2004), as stations attempt to navigate the distinctive economic and structural conditions of the market in which they operate in order to provide the optimal programming mix that effectively differentiates them from their competition for both audience attention and advertising dollars.

Both theoretical program choice models and applied research have shown the effects on program choices of the above-mentioned market variables (Hamilton, 2004; Waterman, 2005). For example, previous research suggests that the intensity of competition from competing program sources may be reflected in a station's informational programming output as stations respond to the program offerings of their competitors (Napoli, 2001, 2004; Powers, 2001). In the area of local public affairs programming, Napoli (2001) found a weak, though statistically significant, positive relationship between the number of commercial broadcast stations in a market and the provision of such programming. Previous research also has found that market size was

positively related to station provision of local news and public affairs programming, when these types of programming were considered in combination (Federal Communications Commission, 1984; Napoli, 2004), suggesting that stations in larger markets face stronger economic incentives to produce informational programming. However, recent research that focused specifically on local public affairs programming found no such relationship (Yan & Napoli, 2004).

The last two columns of Table 2 reports the mean and standard deviation of all of the variables included in the analysis; or, in the cases of categorical variables, the number of stations in each category. Of particular interest to this study is the cross-ownership variable and how it relates to the provision of local news and public affairs programming on television. The other ownership and market characteristics relevant to the quantity of local news and public affairs information provided by broadcast licensees are included as controlling variables in the study.

III. Results

Descriptive results

Table 3 shows the average amount of local news and local public affairs programming on cross-owned stations and on non-cross owned stations. As shown in Table 3, cross-owned stations provided close to 46 hours of local news and 96 minutes of local public affairs programming during the two-week sample period. Non-cross owned stations, on average, provided about 25 hours of local news and 45 minutes of local public affairs.

These results, however, should be interpreted with extreme caution, as other variables most likely mediate the actual relationship between cross-ownership and the provision of such informational programming. Table 1 reveals that the majority of the cross-owned stations are affiliates of the big four broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) and are highly ranked in their market. These are the types of stations that are most likely to be in the local news business. Multivariate analysis is therefore essential before any substantive conclusions about the relationship between ownership and market characteristics and the provision of local news and public affairs programming can be drawn. The multivariate analyses below seek to control for the influence of a wide range of potential explanatory factors.

Regression results

The regression analysis estimates how station ownership characteristics (including cross-ownership) and market conditions are related to the presence of local news and local public affairs programming on television and, for stations that provide such programming, the quantity they produce. Twelve stations in the sample did not have station revenue data and had to be excluded from the regression analysis. So the total sample size for the regression analysis is 241.

Nearly 22% of the stations in the regression sample (51 out of 241) did not have any local news programming during the sample period. The percentage without local public affairs programming is much higher (57%, or 137 out of 241). To accommodate this “limited” nature of the dependent variables, a sample selection model was used. This involves estimating first the probability that a station selects to provide local news or local public affairs programming, and then the amount of local news or local public

affairs provided conditional on the selection having been made. The two estimation steps correspond to the selection model and the outcome model in Tables 4 and 5.

Results of Regression with Sample Selection--Local News Programming:

Table 4 reports the regression results for local news programming. First, the selection model estimates how the independent variables are related to the incidence of local news on a station (i.e., whether or not a station provides *any* local news). The binary probit results show that cross-ownership, VHF status, big four network affiliation and station owner's national television household reach all increased the probability that a station chose to provide local news. In other words, cross-owned stations, VHF stations, big four network affiliate stations and stations of larger stations groups were more likely to offer local news programming. Other independent variables in the probit model did not have any significant relationship with the stations' decision to offer local news.

The outcome model in Table 4 focuses on the *quantity* of local news provided by those stations that produced *any* local news. It is this level of analysis that provides a more robust assessment of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (in this case local news provision) given that the focus is no longer on a binary dependent variable and given the greater ability to make apples to apples comparisons between stations in the local news business. The results show that VHF status and big four network affiliation had a significantly positive relationship with the amount of local news programming, as they did in the selection model. Cross-ownership, however, did not have any significant relationship with the amount of local news programming. Thus, while cross-owned stations appear more likely to be in the local

news business, such stations do not provide more news than other stations in the local news business. Perhaps the most likely interpretation of these results is that cross-ownership situations are most likely to arise amongst stations already in the news business, but that cross-ownership does not contribute to news programming performance beyond that of the typical news-providing station. Longitudinal data would be needed to investigate this issue further, in order to better isolate possible cause-and-effect relationships.

Big Four ownership, while not significantly related to the probability that a station decided to provide local news, was positively associated with the amount of local news provided by those stations in the local news business. In addition, duopoly ownership had a significantly negative relationship with the amount of local news programming, suggesting that co-owned stations actually perform worse than other stations in the provision of local news. Again, longitudinal data would be necessary to explain this relationship further. Finally, two market-related independent variables showed significant relationships with the quantity of local news provision - the number of commercial stations and public stations available in a stations' market. Specifically, the number of commercial stations in a station's market was associated with an increase in the amount of local news aired by those stations in the local news business (suggesting that competition promotes local news production); the association was negative for public stations (suggesting that stations cede their local news function somewhat in markets with more public television stations).

Results of Regression with Sample Selection –Local Public Affairs Programming

Regarding local public affairs programming, results from the selection model in Table 5 show that VHF status, station revenues and station owner national reach increased the likelihood that a station chose to provide local public affairs programming. In addition, big four network ownership significantly decreased the probability of local public affairs programming being available on a station; whereas local ownership significantly increased that probability. Notably, cross ownership did not have a significant relationship with the presence of local public affairs programming on television.

Once again, the more important results can be found in the outcome model, which in Table 5 show that cross-ownership did not have any significant relationship with the quantity of local public affairs programming provided. The only independent variable that had any significant relationship with the amount of local public affairs programming is duopoly ownership. As in the case of local news, duopoly ownership was associated with a decrease in the amount of local public affairs programming, again raising questions about the relationship between local co-ownership and station performance in terms of the provision of local informational programming.

IV. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the relationship between newspaper/television cross-ownership and the supply of local news and public affairs programming on television. The central research question is: Do newspaper cross-owned television stations provide more local news and local public affairs programming than non-cross-owned stations,

controlling for market size, station ownership and other relevant factors? The answer is *no*, based on the results of the study.

The regression analysis results show that while cross-owned stations were more likely to be in the local news business, they did not air more local news than non-cross-owned stations that also provided local news. This latter apples-to-apples comparison of stations that are in the local news business would seem to be of greater significance, given that the cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to determine whether cross-ownership caused stations to be more likely to provide any news – as opposed, for example, to newspaper-TV combinations taking place amongst stations already in the local news business. In addition, cross-ownership did not have any significant relationship with either the presence or the quantity of local public affairs programming on television. Future research should examine changes in ownership patterns and programming behavior over time in order to better isolate the possible effects of ownership changes such as moves to cross-ownership or duopoly ownership.

In sum, one central issue in the cross-media ownership debate is whether or not cross-owned television stations provide their communities with more and better local informational programming. For example, in deciding to relax the cross-media ownership restrictions in its 2003 report, the FCC concluded that “newspaper-owned television stations tend to produce local news and public affairs programming in greater quantity and of a higher quality than non-newspaper-owned stations” (quoted in FCC, 2006, para. 24). Findings of this study, however, suggest that cross-ownership is not associated with any meaningful improvement (in terms of program quantity) in station performance, relative to comparable stations, in the local news and public affairs arenas.

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Table 1 Newspaper/Television Combinations

DMA	DMA Rank	Cross-owned Stations	Net Affil.	Station Rank	Station Owner	Newspaper
New York	1	WPIX	WB	4	Tribune Bcstg Co.	Newsday
New York	1	WNYW	Fox	5	Fox Television	New York Post
New York	1	WWOR	UPN	7	Fox Television	New York Post
Los Angeles	2	KTLA	WB	6	Tribune Bcstg Co.	Los Angeles Times
Chicago	3	WGN	WB	4	Tribune Bcstg Co.	Chicago Tribune
Dallas-Ft. Worth	7	WFAA	ABC	1	Belo Corp	Dallas Morning News
Atlanta	9	WSB	ABC	1	Cox Broadcasting	The Atlanta Journal & Constitution
Tampa-St Petersburg	13	WFLA	NBC	1	Media general Bcst	The Tampa Tribune
Phoenix	15	KPNX	NBC	1	Gannett Co Inc	The Arizona Republic
Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	17	WDZL	WB	5	Tribune Bcstg Co	Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel
Hartford-New Heaven	27	WTIC	Fox	4	Tribune Bcstg Co	Hartford Courant
Cincinnati	32	WCPO	ABC	2	Scripps Howard Bcstg	The Cincinnati Post
Milwaukee, WI	33	WTMJ	NBC	1	Journal Comm	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Columbus, OH	34	WBNS	CBS	1	Dispatch Printing Co	The Columbus Dispatch
Dayton, OH	59	WHIO	CBS	1	Cox Broadcasting	Dayton Daily News
Paducah	76	WPSD	NBC	2	Paxton media	The Paducah Sun
Spokane, WA	80	KHQ	NBC	1	Cowles Publishing	The Spokesman Review
South Bend, IN	87	WSBT	CBS	2	Schurz Comm	South Bend Tribune
Cedar Rapids, IA	88	KCRG	ABC	2	The Gazette Co	The Gazette
Tri-Cities, TN-VA	91	WJHL	CBS	2	Media general Bcst	Bristol Herald Courier
Waco	92	KCEN	NBC	2	Frank Mayborn Enterp	Temple Daily Telegram
Baton Rouge	95	WBRZ	ABC	2	Manship Stations	Baton Rouge Morning Advocate
Youngstown	101	WFMJ	NBC	1	Vindicator Printing	The Vindicator
Fargo-Valley City	118	WDAY	ABC	2	Forum Publishing Co	The Forum
Columbus-Tupelo	131	WCBI	CBS	2	Morris Multimedia	Commercial Dispatch
Idaho Falls-Pocatello	164	KIFI	ABC	3	Post Company	The Post Register
Quincy	166	WGEM	NBC	1	Quincy Newspapers	Quincy Herald-Whig

Notes: 1. Cross-owned television stations and newspapers from FCC filing by Newspaper Association of America (NAA, 2001).

2. DMA rank, station network affiliation, viewing share rank, and ownership information from *Investing in Television Market Report* (BIA, 2003).

Table 2 Variable Names and Descriptions

Variables	Definitions	Mean	Std. Dev.
		Yes	No
<u>Dependent Variables:</u>			
LOCAL NEWS	Amount of local news programming broadcast by a station during the two-week sample period (in minutes)	1663.30	87.82
LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS	Amount of local public affairs programming broadcast by a station during the two-week sample period (in minutes)	48.9	7.77
<u>Independent variables:</u>			
Station and ownership variables:			
CROSS OWNED	Whether a station is cross-owned with a newspaper (1=yes, 0=no)	27	214
VHF STATUS	Whether a station is a VHF or UHF station (1=VHF, 0=UHF)	119	122
STATION REVENUES	Station annual revenues in 2002 (mil)	24.43	2.50
BIG FOUR AFFILIATE	Whether a station is a Big Four (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC) affiliate (1=yes, 0=no)	173	68
DUOPOLY	Whether a station is a local duopoly station (1=yes, 0=no)	40	201
LOCAL OWNER	Whether a station is owned by a local media company (1=yes, 0=no)	49	192
BIG FOUR OWNER	Whether a station is owned by the Big Four (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC) (1=yes, 0=no)	25	216
NATIONAL REACH	Percentage of national television households reached by a station's parent company	13.58	1.13
Market variables:			
TVHH	Number of television households in a station's market (000)	908.89	82.57
COMMERCIAL STATIONS	Number of commercial television stations in a station's market	5.17	0.08
PUBLIC STATIONS	Number of public television stations in a station's market	2.25	0.10
CABLE %	Percentage of households in a station's market subscribing to cable television (%)	68.59	0.61
% PTV VIEWING	Percentage of public television viewing in a station's market (%)	1.87	0.09
% OTHER VIEWING	Percentage of non-broadcast television viewing in a station's market (%)	50.38	0.61
% WHITE	Percentage of white population in a station's market (%)	77.98	0.83

Note: Data are for 2003, unless otherwise indicated. Summary statistics are based on 241 commercial stations included in the regression analysis.

Table 3: Average Amount of Local News & Local Public Affair Programming

	Local News (Hours)	Local PA (Minutes)	N
Cross-owned stations	45.79	95.56	27
Non cross-owned stations	24.35	45.16	226
Total sample	26.64	50.53	253

Table 4 Results of Regression with Sample Selection - Local News Programming

Maximum Likelihood Estimation

	Selection Model				Outcome Model			
	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z		Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	
INTERCEPT	-3.889	2.153	-1.81		-295.488	578.61	-0.51	
CROSS OWNERSHIP	7.031	1.107	6.35	***	242.176	203.34	1.19	
VHF STATUS	2.327	0.566	4.11	***	558.448	193.14	2.89	***
BIG FOUR AFFILIATE	1.658	0.321	5.16	***	731.013	238.89	3.06	***
BIG FOUR OWNER	-1.134	0.700	-1.62		535.563	228.96	2.34	**
LOCAL OWNER	0.764	0.421	1.81		-131.392	185.1	-0.71	
DUOPOLY	0.459	0.360	1.28		-461.739	188.77	-2.45	**
STATION REVENUES	0.036	0.019	1.91		11.260	2.6696	4.22	***
NATIONAL REACH	2.706	0.878	3.08	***	-449.606	502.84	-0.89	
TVHH	0.000	0.000	1.34		-0.129	0.1023	-1.26	
COMM. STATIONS	-0.159	0.179	-0.89		248.347	63.463	3.91	***
PUBLIC STATIONS	0.040	0.125	0.32		-87.632	44.133	-1.99	**
CABLE%	0.007	0.016	0.45		4.304	6.4895	0.66	
% PTV VIEWING	0.201	0.150	1.34					
% OTHER VIEWING	0.039	0.028	1.35					
% WHITE	0.002	0.012	0.15					

*** Significant at the .01 level

** Significant at the .05 level

Table 5 Results of Regression with Sample Selection - Local Public Affairs Programming

Maximum Likelihood Estimation

	Selection Model				Outcome Model			
	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z		Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	
INTERCEPT	0.067	1.477	0.05		-94.443	152.376	-0.62	
CROSS OWNERSHIP	-0.323	0.318	-1.02		83.558	110.535	0.76	
VHF STATUS	0.545	0.223	2.45	**	39.693	25.274	1.57	
BIG FOUR AFFILIATE	-0.242	0.245	-0.99		-1.640	23.841	-0.07	
BIG FOUR OWNER	-1.198	0.370	-3.23	**	-6.565	64.674	-0.10	
LOCAL OWNER	0.524	0.246	2.13	**	27.489	31.933	0.86	
DUOPOLY	0.355	0.246	1.44		-57.061	23.230	-2.46	**
STATION REVENUES	0.008	0.004	2.24	**	-0.903	0.811	-1.11	
NATIONAL REACH	1.879	0.714	2.63	***	-16.041	93.426	-0.17	
TVHH	0.000	0.000	-1.70		-0.002	0.016	-0.10	
COMM. STATIONS	-0.009	0.113	-0.08		23.912	20.339	1.18	
PUBLIC STATIONS	0.019	0.077	0.25		-0.560	12.632	-0.04	
CABLE%	0.003	0.010	0.30		1.658	1.608	1.03	
% PTV VIEWING	0.101	0.087	1.16					
% OTHER VIEWING	-0.004	0.018	-0.20					
% WHITE	-0.010	0.009	-1.16					

*** Significant at the .01 level

** Significant at the .05 level