

John Forest Kain (1935–2003)

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Article

John Kain was an empirical economist who significantly changed analysis and modeling in urban economics. Modern urban economics was extensively developed during the 1960s, and Kain's contributions were particularly important in several key areas. His most famous line of inquiry revolved around the interactions of race and urban location and the importance of housing segregation for black welfare. He was also one of the early pioneers in developing general equilibrium urban simulation models that were capable of addressing interesting and important policy questions. His analyses of urban transportation policies have been influential in both developed and developing countries (Meyer, Kain and Wohl, 1966). A fourth significant endeavour, while having some of the same underpinnings, went to the issues of educational achievement.

His influential paper on the spatial mismatch hypothesis started a large line of inquiry (Kain, 1968; 1992). The innovative idea was that housing segregation kept blacks in areas that were increasingly farther from jobs (which were rapidly decentralizing from more central locations). As commuting to work became more costly, black employment suffered. Kain's connection of urban location, housing, and labour markets was a true innovation. A second important inquiry was the investigation of how segregation affected black housing costs and home ownership (Kain and Quigley, 1972). His early urban simulation models were developed to permit investigation of how multiple housing and job locations interact with a variety of housing policies and urban dynamics (for example, Ingram, Kain, and Ginn, 1972).

These urban studies derived from his intense interest in the intersection of geography, schools and race. In a different direction, he originated the use of large-scale administrative databases on school achievement to study the elements of human capital formation (Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2005). But, again, he emphasized the fundamental influence of race on opportunities and outcomes (Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin, 2004).

Ultimately, one of his most important and lasting influences was legitimizing the study of the economics of race through showing its fundamental importance to a range of social issues. Before his systematic work, few

economists considered the economic influence of race and segregation.

He received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Most of his career was spent in the Department of Economics at Harvard University, although he also taught at the US Air Force Academy and the University of Texas at Dallas. His last position at the University of Texas at Dallas led to his development of the extensive stacked panel databases on school performance.

See Also

- housing policy in the United States
- urban economics

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