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‘Separate and unequal’: Racial segregation flourishes in US suburbs

New report shows suburban demographics resemble central cities’ of yesteryear, with the same social problems

December 3, 2014 12:01AM ET




by **Haya El Nasser (/profiles/e/haya-el-nasser.html)** - @hayaelna (<http://www.twitter.com/hayaelna>)

America’s suburbs, now as diverse as large central cities were 30 years ago, are repeating the same cycle of racial segregation and inequality that have haunted major cities for decades.

Ferguson, Mo., a stark example of this suburban transformation in the St. Louis area, may well be the first suburb at the epicenter of coast-to-coast demonstrations and a racially charged national debate over the relationship between police and black communities.

Historically, protests that spark rioting have rarely started in suburbia but were almost always begun in major central cities, such as Detroit (1967), Washington, D.C. (1968) and Los Angeles (1992).

But now, in 2014, America’s suburban landscape has clearly changed.

"[Ferguson] isn't a St. Louis ghetto," said segregation expert John Logan of the northwestern suburb with a population of about 21,000 – more than two-thirds African-American. "It's out in the suburbs and it's not the worst neighborhood, so why are people so steamed up?" Logan  . "There is a  high degree of segregation and steering in the housing market and divisions across racial lines."

Logan, a Brown University sociologist, shows just how deep the divisions are in a new report, *Separate and Unequal in Suburbia* (<http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report12012014.pdf>), out Wednesday.

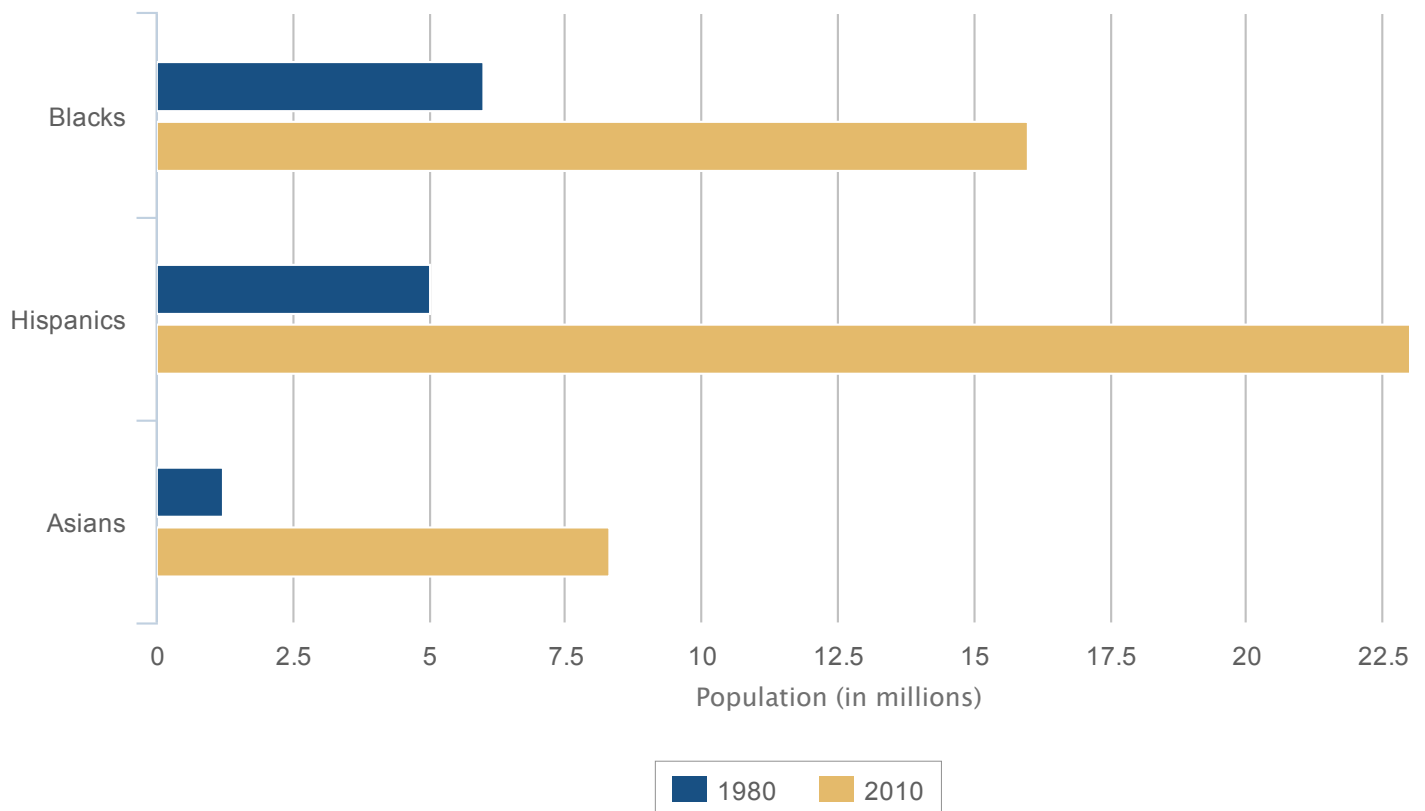
Logan found that, despite a decline in racial segregation and improvements in incomes marked by the rise of the black middle class, blacks and Hispanics continue to live in the least desirable neighborhoods – even when they can afford better – and their children attend the lowest-performing schools.

The findings come as unrest continues from New York to Los Angeles over last week's decision by a grand jury not to indict Darren Wilson, a white Ferguson Police officer, in the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, last August.

Logan's research further dashes hopes of a post-racial America.

"Moving to the suburbs was once believed to mean making it into the mainstream," he said. "There is something to this idea that moving on out is moving up ... Yet minorities are not finding equal access to the American dream." When neighborhoods where blacks live are compared to those where whites or Asians live, "the inequality is quite stark," he said.

GROWTH OF MINORITY POPULATIONS IN AMERICAN SUBURBS, 1980 TO 2010



Source: US2010 Project (<http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report12012014.pdf>)

The study shows that suburban blacks and Hispanics live in more-impooverished neighborhoods than whites and Asians, even when they earn the same incomes. In fact, lower-income whites live in neighborhoods with a lower poverty rate than affluent Hispanics or blacks.

The nation's suburban black population was under 6 million in 1980 but now has hit 16 million. Hispanics in the suburbs have soared from 5 million to 23 million in that time, and suburban Asians from 1.2 million to 8.3 million.

But suburban diversity clearly does not equal racial integration. Just over 10 percent of the suburban population was black in 2010, but the average black suburbanite lived in a neighborhood that was more than 35 percent black. And although about 69 percent of suburban residents were white, fewer than 45 percent of the average black suburbanite's neighbors were white.

The report finds that black and Hispanic households earning over \$75,000 live in neighborhoods with a higher poverty rate than do white households earning less than \$40,000.

Poorer neighborhoods tend to have poorer-performing schools, even in the suburbs. The average suburban black or Hispanic elementary student attends a school that ranks below the 45th percentile in the state.



Flashpoint Ferguson

Follow our in-depth coverage of protests after the nonindictment of police officer Darren Wilson

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“One of the things it says is that the ghetto has moved,” said Elijah Anderson (<http://www.elijahanderson.com/Home.html>), a Yale University professor of sociology and a leading urban ethnographer. His latest book on urban black life, “The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life,” focuses on the varying levels of discomfort that exist among the ghettos, suburbs and ethnic enclaves where segregation is the norm.

“Of course, the civil rights movement is long gone, but segregation persists,” and America has continued to isolate poor black people in economically depressed neighborhoods under increasingly oppressive police tactics that breed distrust and hostility, he said.

“Thirty years ago, it would’ve been in the city of St. Louis, but blacks moved out of St. Louis to this place [Ferguson], and whites fled,” Anderson said. “The ghetto has moved to the suburbs. It’s happening to many places in the country.”

St. Louis’ suburban ring is the fourth-most-segregated in the nation, tied with the Nassau-Suffolk area east of New York City. (Only Newark, New Jersey; Miami; and Cleveland are ranked higher.) And segregation has not declined by much in 30 years, according to Logan’s report for the US2010 Project, which examines changes in American society.

On average, suburban whites in the St. Louis area live in neighborhoods with a 6.2 percent poverty rate, while blacks average 16.4 percent. Even affluent blacks earning more than \$75,000 live in poorer neighborhoods (10.6 percent poverty rate) while poorer whites who earn less than \$40,000 are surrounded by less poverty (7.8 percent).

The average white student in St. Louis suburbs attends a school at the 59th percentile on the fourth-grade reading test. The average black student’s school is at the 25th percentile.

“This is a familiar story in cities,” Logan said. “Now it’s something we have to recognize in suburbia too.”

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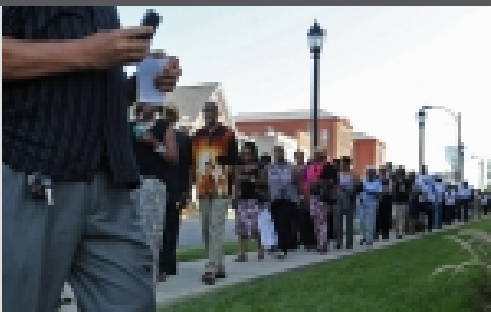


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