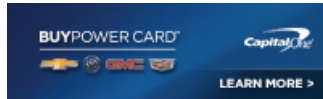


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Life in the suburbs means something very different for whites and blacks



By **Emily Badger** December 10 [Follow @emilybadger](#)

The nation's suburbs have grown much more diverse over the past generation, as blacks and Hispanics have followed whites out of cities and into surrounding areas -- a demographic shift that saw many blacks move from St. Louis to Ferguson, Mo. In fact, the suburbs nationwide are about as diverse today as central cities were in 1980, according to Brown University's [Project US2010](#).

But that diversity is actually misleading, because while minorities have moved into once-white suburbia, the same inequality and isolation they found in inner cities have followed them there. "Suburban diversity," [writes Brown's John R. Logan](#), "does not mean that neighborhoods within suburbia are diverse."

Blacks and Hispanics have moved into the suburbs, but they're still likely to live in neighborhoods there where they're isolated from whites, regardless of income. And those neighborhoods are likely to have

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more poverty and lower-performing public schools than the suburban neighborhoods where whites live, suggesting that old urban forms of inequality are replicating themselves in the suburbs.

These patterns have earned national attention in Ferguson. But Logan's recent analysis of national Census data underscores the broad reality that the suburban dream has come to mean something very different for minorities than for whites.

This chart, for instance, shows that segregation has barely declined between whites and minorities in the suburbs over the last 30 years. It tracks the [index of dissimilarity](#), a commonly used measure of segregation that captures how evenly dispersed two groups are within census tracts across a city. Scores around 30 and below reflect modest segregation; scores around 60 and above reflect high segregation.

John R. Logan. 2014. "[Separate and Unequal in Suburbia](#)" Census Brief prepared for Project US2010.

Segregation between blacks and whites has slightly declined in the suburbs over the last 30 years (thanks, in large part, to Hispanics and Asians moving into their neighborhoods), but suburban segregation between whites and Hispanics has actually ticked up.

Today, this suburban segregation persists, regardless of income. Affluent black families live in neighborhoods where they are no less isolated than poor black families. That also means that suburban blacks who make more than \$75,000 a year live in higher poverty neighborhoods than suburban whites who make less than \$40,000 a year. Similar disparities have long existed in the cities many of these families moved from, as Logan concludes:

As is true in cities, [suburban] blacks and Hispanics live in the least desirable neighborhoods, even when they can afford better. And their children attend the lowest performing schools. This a familiar story in older central cities. Because moving to the suburbs was once believed to mean making it into the mainstream, these disparities are especially poignant, and they puncture the image of a post racial America.

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Emily Badger is a reporter for Wonkblog covering urban policy. She was previously a staff writer at The Atlantic Cities.
