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Even When Minorities Do Well in the Suburbs, Racial Inequalities Follow

By Neil Shah



Ferguson, Mo., where a black teen's death by a white police officer in August triggered protests, exemplifies suburban segregation, says Brown University researcher John Logan. "Blacks are much more highly segregated in St. Louis suburbs than in most of the country," he said.

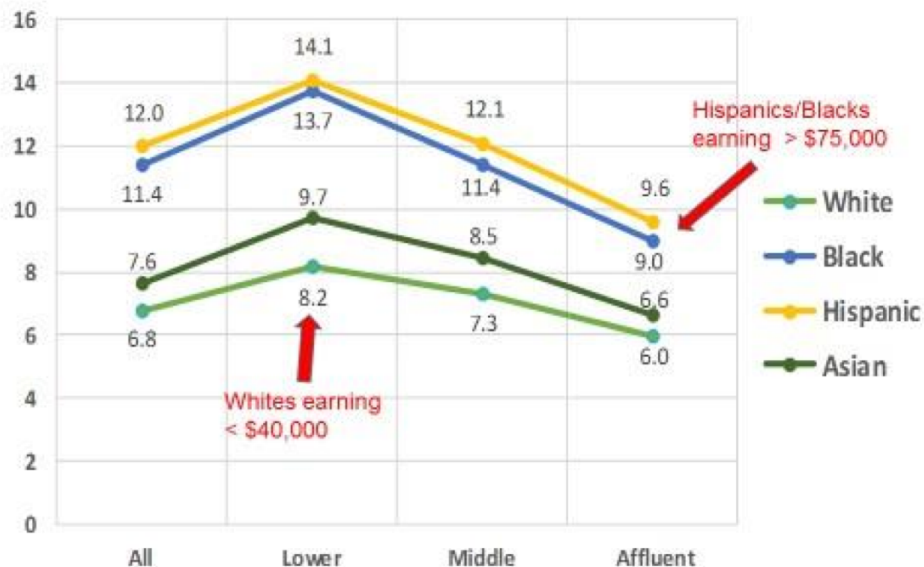
Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Suburbia is more diverse than it used to be, but many of the divisions that exist in urban settings are now spreading to outer-lying communities.

A new study by **Brown University** researcher **John Logan** finds [suburban blacks and Hispanics live in much higher-poverty neighborhoods](#) than non-Hispanic whites and Asians—even when they earn the same or even more. Mr. Logan analyzed Census data on Americans in metropolitan areas through 2010 along with figures from the **National Center for Education Statistics**.

Black and Hispanic households making over \$75,000 a year, the study found, live in neighborhoods with a higher poverty rate than white households earning less than \$40,000.

Figure 5. Poverty exposure by income:
 % poor neighbors of the average group member

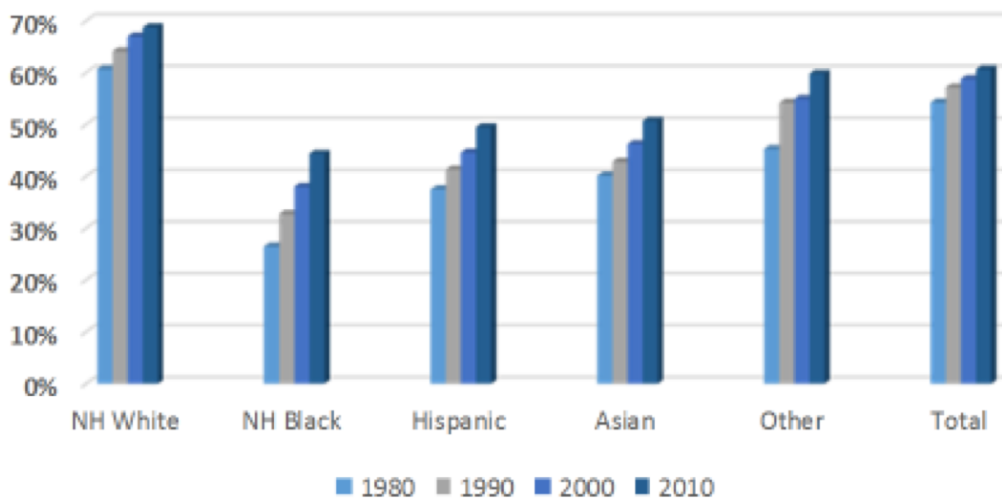


The findings suggest that even when blacks and Hispanics do better on the job front, they confront persistent racial divisions and disadvantages. That pours some cold water on hopes that suburbia—where public services are often better—is helping minorities get a leg up.

“Minorities confront boundaries in suburbia that are very similar to those they live with in cities,” Mr. Logan says.

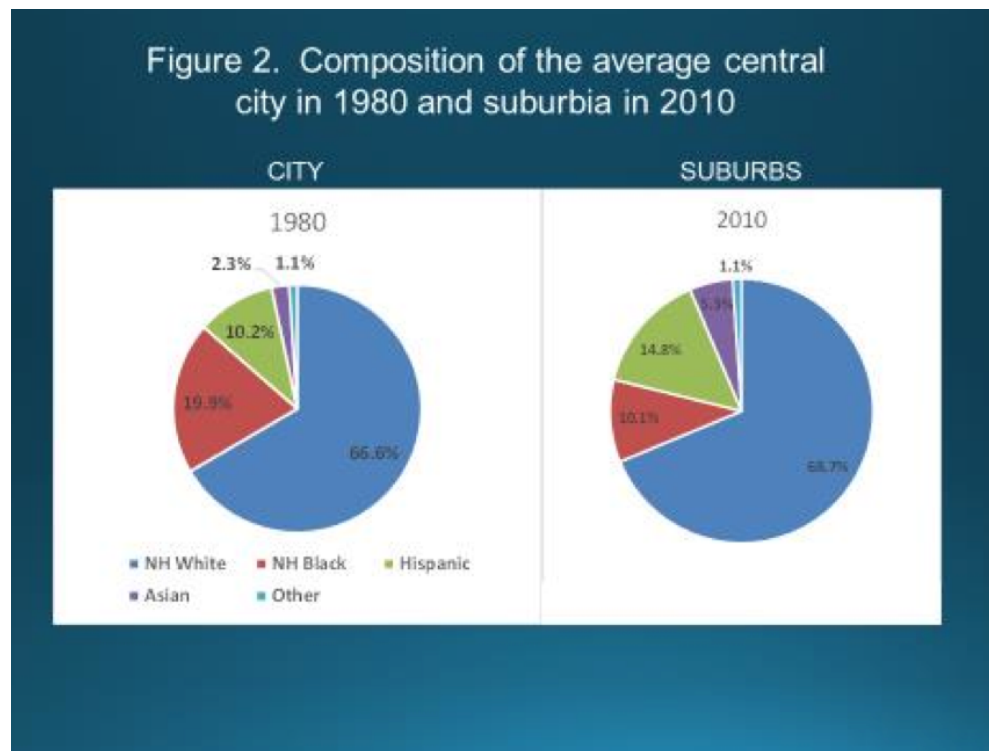
Suburbs have grown much more than core cities over the past three decades. Some 60% of metropolitan-area residents now live in suburbs, which often have more community resources and better schools than central cities.

Figure 1. % of metro residents living in suburbia



As they grow, suburbs are becoming more diverse. In fact, suburbia in 2010 was roughly as racially and ethnically diverse as the nation’s central cities were in 1980, Mr. Logan says. Back in 1980, the suburbs were nearly 90% white. The suburban black population was under 6 million in 1980, but has now reached

about 16 million. For Hispanics, this figure is now around 23 million, up from 5 million in 1980, thanks to fast population growth. While the share of whites living in suburbs isn't growing as it once was, it's still rising. And residential segregation has moderated somewhat.



Still, research shows minorities often enter suburban areas with limited public services that are no longer attractive to whites. While suburbia in aggregate is more diverse, minorities remain fairly segregated among neighborhoods within suburbia—and not just because they have lower incomes.

Demographers and sociologists generally think one group's isolation from others depends on population growth and income. Higher-income minorities, the logic goes, will live in less segregated settings.

But Mr. Logan says the importance of income applies only to Hispanics. For whites, blacks and Asians, "isolation was unrelated to their income. Suburban residential boundaries for them are mostly based on race."

Table 2. Achievement of schools attended by race/ethnicity
[Elementary reading score percentiles in 2010]

	<u>City</u>	<u>Suburban</u>	<u>Non-Metro</u>
White	54.1	63.8	51.9
Asian	48.2	62.7	53.2
Black	27.8	43.3	38.2
Hispanic	31.4	44.9	41.9

Black and Hispanic children in suburbs attend schools that are well below average in terms of test performance, for example, while white and Asian kids attend much better-performing schools. Yes, some of this is due to minorities living in higher-poverty areas, but Mr. Logan found that even after controlling for differences in poverty, the suburban schools that black and Hispanic kids attended still fared somewhat worse.

Table 3. Achievement of schools attended by race/ethnicity
[Elementary reading score percentiles in 2010]

	<u>High Poverty</u>			<u>Medium Poverty</u>			<u>Low Poverty</u>		
	<u>City</u>	<u>Suburb</u>	<u>Non-Metro</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Suburb</u>	<u>Non-Metro</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Suburb</u>	<u>Non-Metro</u>
White	32.5	40.4	43.7	57.2	54.4	54.0	76.7	72.3	63.2
Asian	26.5	29.1	40.5	55.5	50.8	54.5	80.2	74.3	70.6
Black	22.2	28.4	34.1	52.9	48.2	55.6	66.2	66.1	66.5
Hispanic	27.2	31.4	37.4	51.3	49.1	50.2	47.0	63.2	51.9

The suburbs of St. Louis, and in particular, Ferguson, exemplify these trends. “Blacks are much more highly segregated in St. Louis suburbs than in most of the country,” Mr. Logan says. “They face similar disparities in the class composition of their neighborhoods, and this result holds even when taking into account their own incomes. Their children attend worse performing schools than whites in nearby suburbs.”

Nationally, such inequalities “puncture the image of a post-racial America,” he says.

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