

Southern California Public Radio

Separate and unequal: The neighborhood gap for blacks, Hispanics and Asians in metropolitan America



Julie Magro/Flickr

What a quaint house.

PATT MORRISON: It's an ongoing debate in American society whether class or race is a stronger bond. A new study from the US 2010 Project shows that race is still more determinant than class when it comes to where you live.

The study found that in almost every measurement, the affluent black or Hispanic American in a household earning more than \$75,000 lives in a poorer neighborhood than the average white or Asian American living in a household earning under \$40,000.

John Logan, professor of sociology at Brown University and director of the US 2010 Research Project, says that the findings were not a surprise to him. Nevertheless, he said, sociologists continue to study the subject area in hopes for changes in neighborhood trends: "Over the decades, sociologists have kept looking for some sign that there's a breakthrough in the neighborhoods. Logan adds that sociologists are also interested in seeing if "...the civil rights movement would have finally had an impact on housing segregation."

Washington, D.C. and Atlanta were the only two major outliers in the study that looked at 308 metropolitan regions. It didn't account for amenities like schools, parks, libraries, private doctors and grocery stores, or trends like crime rates, but the census data suggests that even highly paid minorities live in communities without the same resources available in communities where their white class-counterparts live.

Logan acknowledges that there may be an element of choice that leads minority families to reside in certain neighborhoods. But he adds that constraint may be just as powerful a force.

“For African Americans, I think there's a very strong historical legacy and continued pattern of constraint where people live,” Logan says.

Some point to the economic crisis that forced the re-segregation shift, as people who moved up and out of their neighborhood had to move back in. But Logan says there are deeper factors at play. Recalling a personal experience in Rhode Island, wherein a real estate agent assumed he did not want to live in a predominantly African American neighborhood, Logan says that he was suddenly made aware of “...how much steering is done by the real estate industry.”

Logan says that ethnic segregation could also be partially attributed to disproportionate lending by banks. “There ends up being a much lower approval rate for Latinos and African Americans than for Whites,” Logan says of bank loans.

Guest:

John Logan, professor of sociology at Brown University and director of the US 2010 research project, a nationwide study of what we've learned about American society in the post-2000 era, based on census and annual data.