



We Can't Afford to Ignore Neighborhood Segregation



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Earlier this month, new research on racial and ethnic segregation (by John Logan of Brown University) received a brief flurry of press coverage. Using the latest Census data, Logan shows that blacks and Hispanics live in much poorer neighborhoods than whites with comparable incomes. In fact, middle- and upper-income black and Hispanic families (with incomes over \$75,000) typically live in poorer neighborhoods than do *low-income* white families. So even if their parents earn middle-class incomes, black and Hispanic kids grow up in communities with weaker schools, fewer parks and recreation facilities, higher crime, and more limited after-school enrichment opportunities than their white peers enjoy. Because neighborhoods matter in the lives of kids and families, these disparities pass on inequality in education, employment, income, and wealth to the next generation.

At a time when the federal deficit, a wildly fluctuating stock market, and the threat of a double-dip recession dominate the national policy debate, some might argue that we can't afford to tackle neighborhood segregation or the persistence of racial and ethnic disparities. I disagree.

The US is fast becoming a majority-minority nation in a competitive global economy. Today's black and brown children will grow up to be the workers, taxpayers, entrepreneurs, and homebuyers upon whom our nation's prosperity depends. Barriers that limit these kids' opportunities and sustain gaps in education, earnings, and wealth accumulation will ultimately hurt us all. So in my view, the persistence of racial and ethnic segregation – and the accompanying disparities in neighborhood quality – pose just as serious a threat to our country's future as the federal deficit.

What can we do about it? The solutions aren't especially complex or even costly, but they do require some courage. Over the next decade, we could make real headway with this four-part strategy:

1. Vigorously enforce laws that prohibit housing discrimination so nobody is blocked from neighborhoods of their choice.
2. Help both white and minority home-seekers find homes in mixed neighborhoods – neighborhoods that may be unfamiliar to them.
3. Expand affordable housing options in opportunity-rich neighborhoods where the schools, parks, and services are all top-notch.
4. Improve the schools, safety, and neighborhood services in mixed and minority neighborhoods so they offer opportunities comparable to white neighborhoods.

Many Americans of all races, ethnicities, and incomes want more diverse neighborhoods. And we all need the economic vitality that can spring from more equal opportunity. Separate and unequal neighborhoods hurt all of us and dim our shared future.