

89.3 KPCC-FM / Southern California Public Radio

Why do well-off minorities live in poorer neighborhoods?

August 4, 2011 | 11:19 AM | By Leslie Berestein Rojas



Photo by Todd Lappin/Flickr (Creative Commons)

Earlier this week, outlets including USA Today and BET ran short pieces on a fascinating and troubling social dynamic: How affluent minorities tend to live in poorer neighborhoods than affluent whites.

The data came from a new census-based report released by Brown University titled “Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics and Asians in Metropolitan America.” The residential segregation it documents is startling. From the report:

With only one exception (the most affluent Asians), minorities at every income level live in poorer neighborhoods than do whites with comparable incomes. Disparities are greatest for the lowest income minorities, and they are much sharper for blacks and Hispanics than for Asians. Affluent blacks and Hispanics live in poorer neighborhoods than whites with working class incomes.

There is considerable variation in these patterns across metropolitan regions. But in the 50 metros with the largest black populations, there is none where average black exposure to neighborhood poverty is less than 20 percent higher than that of whites, and only two metros where affluent blacks live in neighborhoods that are less poor than those of the average white.

Among other things, black and Latino families earning more \$75,000 a year tend to live in generally lower income neighborhoods than non-Hispanic white families earning less than \$40,000 a year, according to the research.

Why does this happen? The report raises several questions, and attempts to answer some. According to one finding, “blacks’ neighborhoods are separate and unequal not because blacks cannot afford homes in better neighborhoods, but because even when they achieve higher incomes they are unable to translate these into residential mobility.”

Latinos are slightly better off in terms of poverty rates, but like more affluent black Americans, “affluent Hispanics live in higher poverty neighborhoods than do whites with working class incomes.”

As for Asians, on average they are “disadvantaged compared to whites except at the higher-income range.” Much depends on the metropolitan area they live in, according to the report. In some, Asian residents have lower incomes than whites, while in others, “they enjoy higher income but live in neighborhood of lower quality.”

Possible factors affecting this residential segregation range from language to a preference for living in an ethnic community, a possibility raised in the section addressing Asian residents. But what this translates into in part, according to the report, is minorities raising families in neighborhoods with fewer resources.

“We cannot escape the conclusion that more is at work here than simple market processes that place people according to their means,” the report concludes.

The entire report, a product of Brown University’s US2010 Project, can be downloaded [here](#).

About Multi-American



In Southern California, generations of immigrants are creating a new fusion of cultures, expanding and evolving the definition of "American." **Multi-American** is your source for news, conversation and insight on this emerging regional and national identity. The site's curator is KPCC's Leslie Berestein Rojas, an award-winning journalist with several years' experience reporting on immigration issues.

© Southern California Public Radio | 474 South Raymond Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105 | 626-583-5100