

# THE BLADE

## Tale of two Toledos shouldn't comfort anyone

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During this year's dust-up over Issue 2, Ohio's public-employee unions argued incessantly -- and rather grandiosely -- that keeping all their rights and benefits was essential to preserving the middle class in communities such as Toledo.

But what if it's too late for that? What if middle-class neighborhoods in Toledo, both the core city and its suburbs, are already gone, or at least on their way out?

That's the troubling implication of a new study by US2010, a nonpartisan research project sponsored by Brown University and the Russell Sage Foundation, which examines recent changes in American society. The report concludes that between 2000 and 2007, Toledo trailed only Detroit and Oklahoma City among major U.S. metropolitan areas in its growth of residential segregation of families by income.

Stated less academically: Metro Toledo has more poor neighborhoods than it did a decade ago, and a greater concentration of wealth in its affluent neighborhoods. But it has fewer middle-income neighborhoods, as well as fewer mixed-income neighborhoods where prosperous and poorer families live near each other. There seems no reason to think the trend has reversed itself greatly, if at all, since the collapse of the U.S. housing market and the recession that followed and won't go away.

Why does this matter? Because where we live largely defines how we live. The study's authors note that a growing concentration of income and wealth in a relatively small number of neighborhoods gives these areas greater access to better schools, parks, and other public services. That can come at the expense of neighborhoods where poor and middle-income families live, the researchers say.

When we don't live near people whose income levels are different from ours, we're less likely to encounter them routinely. As the study concludes, affluent families are more segregated from other Americans -- and Toledoans -- than poor families are. Such isolation makes it easier to believe that "their" concerns aren't "our" concerns.

"If those with more money look around and think everyone's doing fine, they're less likely to want to invest in resources that might benefit everyone," says Sean Reardon, the study's principal

author and a professor of education and sociology at Stanford University. "That has a polarizing effect on society."

Toledo's economic recovery and progress, and its social mobility, depend on regional cooperation on a broad range of issues, both private and public. That requires a strong sense of community, but the study suggests we're moving in the opposite direction.

The growth in poverty in northwest Ohio is largely a result of the decline in the number of the area's good-paying manufacturing -- notably auto-industry -- jobs, and the middle-class incomes they provided. It's essential that poor and unemployed workers have a reliable way to get to where the jobs are, often outside their neighborhoods. But declining support for public transportation in affluent communities that feel they don't need it will work against that goal.

Similarly, living in a severely disadvantaged neighborhood lowers high school graduation rates and can deprive a child of the equivalent of a year's worth of learning in school, the study observes. That could help condemn another generation of low-income young people in this region to poverty. If an expanded voucher system drains even more resources from public schools and shifts them to schools in better-off areas, the disparities will accelerate.

Professor Reardon, who grew up outside Cincinnati but says he's never been to Toledo, told me that income segregation has grown substantially in the past four decades, even as racial segregation has declined nationwide.

"If higher-income families live in the same communities with middle-class and working-class and poor families, they're more likely to support the use of public funds," he says. "Poor and working-class people don't have the same resources or tax base or political clout, especially if they're far away and largely invisible" to richer folks.

The US2010 report confirms disturbing trends about this region's economy cited in other recent studies. This month, the Brookings Institution reported that over the past decade, Metro Toledo ranked first among the largest U.S. metropolitan areas in growth of concentrated, extreme poverty.

The ProPublica journalism Web site reported recently that income inequality in Lucas County is among the worst in the nation. And a special report in The Blade last month described the descent into poverty of a number of formerly middle-class families in Toledo's suburbs.

Although the trends are more pronounced in Toledo than elsewhere, the US2010 study makes clear that the same sorts of things are happening across the country. The percentage of Americans in the largest metropolitan areas who live in either the poorest or most-affluent neighborhoods has doubled since 1970, to nearly one-third.

In the same period, the share of families living in middle-income neighborhoods has dropped from nearly two-thirds to less than half. And between 2000 and 2007, income segregation among African-Americans and Hispanic families grew four times faster than it did among non-Hispanic white families, the study concludes.

Toledo hasn't split into the 1 percent and the 99 percent, the division cited by the Occupy movement. But increasingly, the studies show, there are two Toledos -- one getting richer, one getting poorer, with far fewer families in between.

That polarization of our community is an invitation to social turmoil.

*David Kushma is editor of The Blade.*