

GROWING APART

August 17, 2001

Gwen Ifill investigates the trend of increasing segregation in American schools and society.

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GWEN IFILL: America is becoming more diverse, but is it also becoming more segregated? A new report from Harvard Civil Rights Project say yes. The study finds 70% of the nation's black students go to predominantly minority schools. 37% of Latino students attend schools where 90% to 100% of the students are also minorities, while white students on average attend schools where more than 80% of the students are also white. What does this mean for education, and what does it do to the ideal of a color-blind society?

We turn for answers to the author of the report, Gary Orfield, a Professor of Education and Social Policy at Harvard; and John Logan, a sociologist at the State University of New York at Albany; Sheryll Cashin, a professor at Georgetown University Law School; Ward Connerly, a regent at the University of California and a leader in the anti-affirmative action movement and Harry Pachon, the President of Tomas Rivera Policy Institute at the Claremont Graduate University.

Gary Orfield, how does this trend toward resegregation really affect our children's education?

GARY ORFIELD: Well, we're becoming a very diverse society. We're only a relatively short time away from a society where half of the school-aged children will be from non-Anglo groups. But our kids are becoming more separate from each other and our minority populations are growing up in increasingly isolated schools, both by race and ethnicity and by poverty, and some of them by language as well. These schools are systematically unequal both in terms of what they offer and in terms of level of competition and the probability that students will go on to college, the teachers that are qualified teaching at them and many other dimensions. So we have more and more separate and unequal schools that are kind of less and less able to prepare us for the multiracial society that is emerging around us.

GWEN IFILL: If we are to assume that the reason this is happening, in part, is because residential segregation has continued to increase in that gulf. People are choosing to live where they want to live. Why is residential segregation necessarily a bad thing?

GARY ORFIELD: Residential segregation is not choice. Only about one-tenth of African Americans, for example, want to live in all black neighborhoods, but many millions of them do. And almost none of them want to live in poor neighborhoods with poor schools, but a great many millions of them do. This is caused by discrimination, by the history of inequality, by unequal resources that have grown out of the inability to get into the home ownership market -- many, many dimensions. But it is not just choice, and it has vicious effects. It produces weaker life chances in terms of education, employment, access to college, success in college, preparation for working in multiracial settings. And it does serious harm, and it's also serious harm to grow up in an all-white suburb and go to all-white schools and then work in a society like California where more than 60% of the young people are not white.

GWEN IFILL: Ward Connerly, Professor Orfield paints a pretty bleak picture; are we talking serious harm when we talk about resegregation?

WARD CONNERLY: I'm not sure how serious the harm is. I concur with his conclusion and I believe that we certainly would have a more desirable society if we were integrated. But I'm not sure that we're forever poisoned by not sitting next to somebody in class that's a different background from us, skin color-wise or whatever. I... Generally, I agree with him. Unfortunately, I think that our country has lost its stomach for pursuing racial integration. I'm not so sure that any longer colorblindness is our objective. I think we're more preoccupied with diversity, and that's desirable, but frequently it's diversity without integration, as I think the study demonstrates.

GWEN IFILL: Sheryll Cashin, let's talk about the whole idea of integration, which for so long was considered automatically to be a good thing. What is perfect integration-- is there such a thing-- and is it a worthwhile goal?

SHERYLL CASHIN: Well, perfect integration does not exist in American society. The trend since the '70s has been one of very modest desegregation of the races, but if you look in the major metropolitan regions with large populations of minorities, most African Americans live in majority black neighborhoods, and Latinos and Asians, interestingly, in those cities where they exist in large populations, they became more racially isolated in the 1990s. So Americans in public opinion surveys overwhelmingly say they support the ideal of integration in the abstract, but we're not living that reality, by and large, at the neighborhood level. So, you know, with current studies it would take another 70 years for our society, at the current levels of desegregation-- rates of desegregation-- to reach perfect integration, and it's not likely to happen.

GWEN IFILL: John Logan, what about the choices we've heard laid out by Ward Connerly and Sheryll Cashin, and that is, precisely, the choice between preferring to live separately and having it imposed upon you?

JOHN LOGAN: Well, I do think that's the crux of the matter in terms of whether we should be concerned with the trends or we should just accept them and say, "that's the way our society works." And, on the whole, I think that for African Americans-- and to a large extent for Hispanics-- the choice is not really

so much the issue. In fact, there was research done on what people's preferences were for where they'd like to live, and then looking at, well, so then where do they actually live? And there's only a very slight difference among African Americans between those who prefer to live in an integrated neighborhood, those preferred... Those who prefer to live in a more predominantly black neighborhood. They live, actually, in the same neighborhoods, because they are not really able to exercise very much choice in where they live. So I do think that's the crux of the question, to what extent members of different groups are able to realize their preferences, and to what extent as a society we're putting up obstacles to that.

GWEN IFILL: Harry Pachon, when we talk about different groups as we saw earlier when we were capsulizing Professor's Orfield's report, we often talk black and white. But it's a really different story for Latinos, at least this report seems to indicate that.

HARRY PACHON: Well, there are important differences between blacks and Hispanics. By the third generation, Hispanics as well as Asians are out-marrying by something like 60%. I mean, they marry somebody other than a Latino, which means there is... This is a snapshot, which we all should be concerned about but there's also some positive trends out there. We have a large Latino immigrant community, and in these communities where they settle is typically in barrios, and that contributes to the segregation index. But that's a generational issue, so that some of it is being offset by the fact of out-marriage, for example.

GWEN IFILL: Let me just follow up on that. Is that a distinction, then, between people who choose to come to the United States, live for a while in segregated societies, and then assimilate, and people who are born here and stay entrenched in segregated areas, enclaves?

HARRY PACHON: Well, no, I mean, it's a mixture of both, really. Both your immigrants as well as your long-term Hispanics who have been here for multigenerations. There's significant poverty levels amongst them and they don't have the choice of moving out. But I guess what I'm trying to say is there is out-marriage going on, and at least in California, there is not one census track, for example, in Los Angeles County that has population that doesn't have a Latino family. Unfortunately, you can't say the same thing for African Americans.

GWEN IFILL: John Logan, is there a difference between what's happened with Latinos and what's happened with other immigrant groups who have come to the United States-- Italians, Jews-- who have settled here and, initially, in their own little communities and eventually moved on?

JOHN LOGAN: Yes. Well, I think there are some similarities, as well as some differences, but I think we should be careful to state correctly what was the experience of the European immigrant groups at the turn of the century. It's true that after 50 to 70 years, they generally did break up those very tight ethnic neighborhoods and move on to new places, but even today in a metropolitan area like New York, there's very clearly Jewish neighborhoods and Italian neighborhoods still as a residue of that old period. So if we were going to just replicate with new immigrant groups the experience of the previous ones, then what we would look forward to is a period of 50 or 70 years of continued segregation. Now, there is a difference between the Hispanics and the Asians as immigrants to the United States. And research that

I've done with Richard Alba at the University of Albany shows that in the third generation, the majority of Hispanic kids, especially Mexican kids, are still growing up in bilingual environments. But the majority of Asian kids in that generation are growing~ up in entirely English-speaking environments. So it's clear that the rate at which groups are assimilating into American culture are quite different, and that's going to have clear effects on where people live.

GARY ORFIELD: It's plain...

GWEN IFILL: I'm sorry, who was that?

GARY ORFIELD: This is Gary.

GWEN IFILL: Go ahead.

GARY ORFIELD: One of the things that's disturbing about the Latino statistics, is that, say, in California, in 1970, the typical Latino student was in the 54% Anglo school. Now they're in a school that's only 22% white on average. And even in the suburbs, there is a very high level of segregation developing, and on top of that, across the country, Latinos are... Only about 55% are actually getting high school diplomas. So we have isolation in high poverty, inferior schools with very low success rates, even by the measure of graduation, and then in the same states where these populations are concentrated, we're abandoning affirmative action in both California and Texas, and a variety of other civil rights policies that are designed to help kids that are in very weak and isolated schools. We're also isolating a lot of kids in schools where there are very few fluent English speakers and then forcing them to abandon bilingual education in a very short period of time. So we've got some really serious contradictions in our policies.

GWEN IFILL: Sheryll Cashin, when we talk about the economic costs, whether it's the educational costs of people who do not get higher degrees or we talk about the economic costs of not being able to earn more to have access to other advantages from being in a mixed or a predominantly neighborhood, how do you balance it against the comfort level, the need to not worry about being conforming with the people around you, I guess?

SHERYLL CASHIN: Well, the preference data shows that most data shows white, black, and Latinos say they would prefer to live in an integrated neighborhood, but one in which their own racial group was in the majority. And I think that's because people feel more comfortable with people like them, but my research has shown that, overwhelmingly-- particularly for African Americans-- racial isolation has cost. Racial isolation, particularly for African Americans, tends to lead to a concentration of poverty in the schools, to higher crime, to more social distress, which results in inequalities of opportunity in education and jobs and the like. One thing I want to stress is although we're improving modestly in racial segregation, we as a nation are becoming more segregated by income with each passing decade, and we are increasingly in a situation where we have a risk of a winner-take-all society where people who have the luxury of living in school districts with very few poor children, low crime and no social distress, have a very different opportunity than people who are relegated to high poverty urban schools, and that's destabilizing for democracy.

GWEN IFILL: Ward Connerly, how do you balance out this notion that people should be able to choose where they live without paying any attention to what these other external factors are, or internal factors, depending how you look at it, and the notion that there is a greater good to be served by forcing integration?

WARD CONNERLY: I don't think you balance out freedom of choice. That should be a given, in my view. I think that the idea that we're going to force people to live together and to work together-- work, possibly-- but to make choices based on what we believe is in their best interest is something that's foreign to most Americans. When this study comes out and says that there is greater segregation, I think a large part of the nations will say, "so what?" It seems to me that the segregation based on race is less of a concern to people than the consequences of that as was recently discussed a moment ago. I think we're terribly concerned about the class inequities and the income inequities, and to the extent that we can focus on at, then I think we can get some consensus.

GWEN IFILL: What do you do...

WARD CONNERLY: One correction....

GWEN IFILL: Well, what about that? How do you focus on the inequities that Sheryll Cashin was just talking about?

WARD CONNERLY: Let's talk the University of California, for example. Professor Orfield said, "we eliminated affirmative action," and we have not eliminated affirmative action. We've eliminated treating people differently on the basis of race and ethnicity, but we're practicing affirmative action by class and income and working with under-performing schools more than we ever have. So I think that we should address how we direct our resources to those neighborhoods that are under-performing, those schools that are under-performing, and worry about that kind of segregation more than we are about racial segregation.

GWEN IFILL: Okay, Harry Pachon, I would like... I would just like to ask Harry Pachon to follow up in this point about economic disparities. One of the arguments made about resegregation or about segregation in its original form, was that it encouraged entrepreneurship in these ethnic enclaves, on 125th Street in Harlem or on Auburn Avenue in Georgia. What do you think about that? Is that a worthwhile goal, worthwhile reason to perpetuate segregation?

HARRY PACHON: I agree with the fact that there should be a freedom of choice, but let me disagree with Ward Connerly insofar as the negative impacts of eliminating affirmative action at the University of California system.

WARD CONNERLY: Preferences.

HARRY PACHON: Our research clearly shows that in the past three years something like less... There

are less than 6,000... Or 6,000 less African American and Latino students attending the University of California system, directly as a result of SP-1 and SP-2, which were the regulations that were passed in correspondence with eliminating affirmative action. So when we say that the University of California has not had any impact, that eliminating affirmative action has not had any impact, that's completely incorrect. I mean, you can just look at the statistics.

GWEN IFILL: But let's not reargue the affirmative action argument. What about the notion that ethnic enclaves can foster minority entrepreneurship?

JOHN LOGAN: I've done research on that question, Gwen.

GWEN IFILL: I'd just like Mr. Pachon to finish. Go ahead.

HARRY PACHON: In certain circumstances, clearly they have fostered entrepreneurship and as well as the development of wealth creation. We take a look at the Cuban American community in South Florida, and that's a classic example where there has been an ethnic enclave economy which has also been helped by U.S. policy that has generated untold wealth in that community, so there are some positive things about the enclave that we shouldn't overlook.

GWEN IFILL: John Logan, you were trying to get in.

JOHN LOGAN: Yes, I didn't mean to interrupt. But I do want to point out that there are a few examples where an ethnic group that has concentrated residentially also develops an enclave economy that provides real job opportunities for members -- and the Cubans in Miami, but actually, not the Cubans in any other place in the country. and Koreans in New York and Los Angeles, and Chinese in some places, also. But, on the other hand, the Mexicans are more residentially concentrated. Dominicans are more residentially concentrated and so are Puerto Ricans and African Americans and afro-Caribbean's. And in none of these places has there developed much of an economic or employment benefit. These groups all predominantly work in the businesses run by others.

GWEN IFILL: Sheryll Cashin, finally, what should we be doing about this, if we think it is a problem?

SHERYLL CASHIN: First, I think we need to have more discussions like this where America becomes honest about the fact that we have persistent segregation in our society that's not likely to go away, and inequality flows from that. Then, I think we need to work on building a consensus. The unfortunate thing is segregation breeds social distance, which makes it hard to build consensus, but I think all Americans can agree on a fundamental principle that we all benefit from living in a society where every child, regardless of their economic or racial circumstances, has a fair shot at a world-class education. And if we can get some consensus on that, then we can begin to pursue some policies that meet that principle.

GWEN IFILL: Okay. Fascinating. Thank you everyone for joining us.



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