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07/08/2001 - Updated 11:49 PM ET

Minorities make choice to live with their own

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY

Segregation is a loaded word. The dictionary defines it as forcing racial groups to live apart.

But as more minorities move into white suburbia, segregation is taking on less sinister overtones. For many, segregation is a choice they can finally afford to make. For others, living with their own is a comfort zone.



By Michael A. Schwarz, USA TODAY
Benjamin and Pamela Holmes, with their son Trey, out for a morning walk in their DeKalb County, Ga., neighborhood, stop to speak with neighbor Robbie Griffith.

A new analysis of Census 2000 shows that more blacks, Hispanics and Asians are living in the suburbs — areas still largely dominated by whites. But they're continuing to live apart from whites, forming suburban versions of the racial and ethnic enclaves that have shaped cities for much of the past century.

To John Logan, a sociologist at the University at Albany in New York who analyzed the data, these patterns are troubling because poorer and less educated people tend to cluster in segregated neighborhoods. As a group, they tend to generate less funding for schools and services.

But the study of suburban segregation revealed something else: More affluent minorities are choosing to live among themselves.

"Segregation doesn't necessarily speak to bias and discrimination in all cases," says William Boone, political science professor at Clark Atlanta University. "Sometimes, people make a rational choice."

Choice is what created many black suburban enclaves around Atlanta. Some of them are among the most affluent black neighborhoods in the country. In DeKalb County, subdivisions of million-dollar homes are being developed by blacks for blacks.

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"People say in code when they come, 'I want to go where people look like me,' " says Pamela Holmes, a real estate agent and chief of staff for DeKalb County's chief executive. "In Atlanta, they can get a \$200,000 or \$300,000 home or million-dollar home and still be with people who look like them. And that's an asset."

Holmes and her husband, Benjamin, live in the suburbs. Their subdivision in Stone Mountain, which has 175 homes, was built in 1994. They were the third black family to move in. "We had no idea which way it would go," she says. The subdivision is now 85% black, 10% Hispanic and 5% Asian. The Holmes' neighbors are athletes, doctors, teachers and executives.

Boone, who is black, also lives in a predominantly black suburb. He says that as blacks gain financial and political clout, the need to integrate decreases. In the past, blacks had to move to white neighborhoods to find good homes, good schools, low crime and better public services, he says.

Now, blacks are more influential and can get the same types of services in black neighborhoods. "We have to rethink this whole question of who wants integration and why we want integration," Boone says.

But Logan says many segregated neighborhoods in the suburbs remain poor. As inner-city neighborhoods gentrify and as more housing projects are demolished, poor blacks are settling in older suburbs where housing is affordable. Logan calls it the "ghettoization" of the suburbs.

In metro areas where there are few affluent blacks, for example, blacks who want to live in black neighborhoods end up having to live in less affluent areas, he says.

"On the whole, upper-middle-class blacks live in much less affluent communities than equally upper-middle-class whites," Logan says. "They're being pushed down the hierarchy."

Choice can play a role in where Hispanic and Asian immigrants live as well. When they first arrive in the USA, they often gravitate toward neighborhoods where friends and relatives who came before them live.

"You can't force integration," says David Yu, chairman of Summit National Bank, an Atlanta-based institution that caters to the Asian community. Asians in particular, he says, want to be close to people who speak their language.

They also are less segregated than other minorities because there are



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fewer of them. Their numbers are often too small to dominate neighborhoods.

Similar trends can be seen in Hispanic settlement patterns. But because their numbers are so large, there are more pockets of Hispanics. Perth Amboy, a community in the Middlesex, N.J., metropolitan area, is 70% Hispanic. In the 1950s and 1960s, Perth Amboy was dominated by Puerto Rican immigrants. In the '70s, it was Dominicans. Now, it's mostly Mexicans, Peruvians and Colombians.

The fact that new immigrants are replacing the old is an indication that minorities eventually move out of these clusters, demographer William Frey says.

"There is an initial period where minorities are going to be segregated," he says. "But that eventually breaks down, even more so in melting-pot areas."

Maria Mora is Puerto Rican. She has lived in New Jersey suburbs for more than 20 years, first in New Brunswick and then in Perth Amboy. But last year, she moved out of a mostly Hispanic community in search of better public schooling for her son. She's now in Metuchen.

"In the neighborhood where I now live, there are only 500 Hispanics out of 13,000 people," says Mora, director of the Perth Amboy Center of Middlesex County College. "I'm surrounded by white people."

She misses Perth Amboy. "I have mixed feelings, but I want my son to get a better education."

Suburbs are attracting more minority families

BLACKS

	Percentage of suburbanites who are black		The typical black suburban resident lives in a neighborhood that is this percentage black	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Atlanta	18.8%	25.6%	52.1%	56.2%
Washington	18.8%	22.9%	48.1%	50.8%
Richmond-Petersburg, Va.	17.9%	21.3%	39.9%	40.7%
New Orleans	17.7%	21.0%	49.3%	49.5%
Fort Lauderdale	13.3%	20.6%	52.4%	50.1%

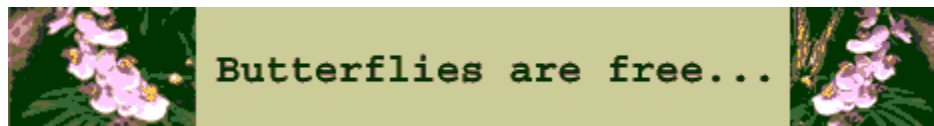
HISPANICS

	Percentage of suburbanites who are Hispanic		The typical Hispanic lives in a neighborhood that is this percentage Hispanic	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Miami	46.0%	55.8%	64.6%	69.5%
Los Angeles-Long Beach	37.8%	44.7%	59.2%	64.9%
Riverside-San Bernardino	26.2%	38.3%	38.2%	50.6%

San Diego	19.8%	27.0%	30.4%	40.4%
Houston	14.7%	22.8%	27.3%	38.7%
ASIANS				

	Percentage of suburbanites who are Asian		The typical Asian lives in a neighborhood that is this percentage Asian	
Oakland	12.1%	18.9%	19.9%	29.6%
San Francisco	13.5%	18.6%	28.2%	33.9%
Orange County, Calif.	10.1%	14.9%	16.8%	26.0%
Los Angeles-Long Beach	11.5%	14.6%	25.2%	33.7%
Middlesex-Somerset-Hunterdon, N.J.	5.6%	11.8%	12.0%	23.3%

Source: The New Ethnic Enclaves in America's Suburbs, Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, University at Albany (www.albany.edu/mumford/census)



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