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### THE APPEARANCE OF INTEGRATION *AMERICA STILL ISN'T WHERE IT SHOULD BE*

April 8, 2001

WASHINGTON Are we Americans about  
as desegregated as we want to be?

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That question came to mind last week after  
two independent research teams reported  
similar findings--but not the same  
conclusions--about patterns of racial and  
ethnic segregation in the latest census.

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Both studies show racial integration grew fastest in the  
metropolitan areas of the South, which has lured a new black  
middle class to new industrial development, and to military towns  
like Norfolk, Va., and San Diego.

Both studies also found desegregation occurred the slowest, if at  
all, in old, northeastern industrial cities where urban ghettos grew  
under decades of discriminatory practices. More recently, those old  
patterns of segregation have been reproduced in nearby suburbs.

At the Brookings Institution, authors Edward Glaeser of Harvard  
University and Jacob Vigdor of Duke took a tone as sunny as their  
report's title: "Racial Segregation in the 2000 Census: Promising  
News." While a large number of intensely segregated metro areas  
remain, they conclude, at least we're moving in the right direction.

After finding that integration has occurred most effortlessly in parts  
of the country where economic growth has been most rapid, mostly  
in the South and the West, they concluded that "the  
African-American experience is turning out to be quite different in  
the Sun Belt than in the Rust Belt."

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But those signs of hope did not impress John R. Logan as much. The State University of New York at Albany sociologist conducted the other study in cooperation with Harvard's Civil Rights Project. While some African-Americans in some parts of the country are enjoying more relaxed racial boundaries, the progress is too scattered and too slow, he said.

On average, he said, segregation declined only 4 percentage points in areas that saw a decline. "At that rate, in another 50 years we would be at the point where African-Americans would be about as segregated from whites as Hispanics are now. Maybe the rate of change will accelerate, but the underlying prospects do not look promising," he said.

Logan's view will sound too gloomy for many in this age of Oprah Winfrey and Colin Powell and Michael Jordan, an age in which racial attitudes seem to be more relaxed than ever, despite agitators here and there.

But while much progress has been made at the boundaries of race and ethnicity, most whites still live in remarkably separate neighborhoods from most non-whites, the census data show.

Some of the urban and suburban neighborhoods that have opened up to minorities since the anti-discrimination laws of the 1960s have become resegregated. As middle-class blacks moved in, many whites gradually moved out, leaving behind gilded ghettos of middle-class blacks living, in many cases, alongside lower-income white neighbors.

Logan also found, as have several earlier studies, that middle-class blacks are more likely to live in or near areas of concentrated poverty than middle-class whites of equal income. "Los Angeles is exactly like Chicago and New York City," Logan said, "in that the average African-American lives in a community whose income level is about 30 percent less and crime is 30 percent higher than neighborhoods occupied by the average white person of the same income level." Similar disparities tend to show up in school test scores and dropout rates, he said.

If we Americans seem more than ever to be about as integrated as we want to be, I suspect it is because we are not paying enough attention to the persistent class divide that accompanies our racial divide.

It is rough enough to be born in poverty. It is even rougher to grow up in a neighborhood with a high concentration of poverty. Opinion surveys tend to show that most black Americans would prefer to

live in a neighborhood that is integrated by race and socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, few have been able to get their wish.

So, while some are content to say that we Americans are about as integrated as we want to be, we are not nearly so integrated as we ought to be.

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