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FRACTIONAL NUMBERS

The Census says a lot about who we are--and New York is now one of the most segregated cities in the nation. > *By Annette Fuentes*

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When John Logan started crunching numbers generated by the 2000 Census, he had his fingers crossed that they would yield meaningful signs of racial and ethnic integration in America's communities. "I had hoped there would be more change in segregation. There had been glimmers from 1980 to 1990," says Logan, a sociologist and director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the University at Albany.

The Census did what demographers had been saying over the last decade: that the U.S. population was becoming more and more diverse as the numbers of Asians, Latinos and people of the African diaspora continued to climb. The Latino population alone increased by more than 50 percent, according to Census numbers, and in six states, whites are now a minority. In New York City, whites were bumped down to minority status during the 1990s, as the combined population of black, Latino and Asian residents swelled to majority status.

But Logan's hopes for progress came up against the reality of deeply entrenched patterns of residential segregation across the country, and Gotham was no better. Indeed, it is arguably worse. In New York City, the ostensible capital of diversity, the segregation of Asians, Latinos and black residents from white households is at virtually the same level

today as it was in 1960.



Indeed, it's just about the worst in the country. Logan found that of 331 metropolitan areas he scrutinized, New York now ranks first for both Latino-white segregation--up from second place in 1990--and Asian-white segregation, up from seventh place 10 years ago. For black-white segregation, long the yardstick of racial integration in neighborhoods, New York City ranks third in the country, up from seventh place at the time of the 1990 Census. Detroit and Milwaukee rank first and second respectively.

If those statistics weren't troubling enough, Logan applied his methodology to Census numbers on children and discovered that segregation is in fact growing. In metropolitan areas around the nation, black, Asian, and Latino children are growing up in neighborhoods increasingly separated from white children. "When I did the analysis on children--I don't think anyone has done it before--I didn't know what I'd find," he says. "I was startled that areas with high levels of segregation had even higher levels for children." Segregation among children is of particular concern, Logan notes, because young people are so strongly shaped by the environments in which they grow up. In segregated neighborhoods, schools, clubs, sports teams and friendship networks, they end up underexposed to peers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Logan attributes the overall trend to concentrated growth of Latino and Asian populations in the Northeast, Sunbelt and West Coast. But it holds true in New York City, too--here, segregation among children has increased 6 percent since 1990. The Big Apple now ranks third nationwide for the level of segregation between black and white children.

"For people who think we've seen change, the news is that it's the same," says Angelo Falcon, director of the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy at the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. "There was some media coverage of the Census analysis, but no sense of outrage or a need to do something about it. Look at the mayoral race. There is no discussion of segregation. You don't have the mayoral



candidates saying, 'I want to integrate New York City.'"

Segregation is measured by several indices that assess residential patterns within census tracts, which contain from 4,000 to 6,000 people. The key measure is called the index of dissimilarity, which indicates how evenly groups are spread within a neighborhood, based on their representation among the city's overall population. Two additional measures--the index of exposure and index of isolation--gauge the concentration of different racial and ethnic groups within their neighborhoods.

Logan's analyses found sharp differences in the composition of neighborhoods where whites live as compared to blacks, Asians and Latinos. Nationally, on average, whites live in neighborhoods that are 83 percent white, 7.1 percent black, 6.2 percent Latino, and 3.2 percent Asian. Blacks live in neighborhoods that are 54 percent black, 33.2 percent white, 9.4 percent Latino, and 2.6 percent Asian. Latinos' neighborhoods are 42.1 percent Latino, 40 percent white, 13 percent black, and 4.2 percent Asian. Asians' neighborhoods are 19.3 percent Asian, 58 percent white, 9.7 percent black, and 11.7 percent Latino.

The numbers for New York City reflect that same pattern of segregation, but even more so. Latinos are an average of 46.3 percent of their neighborhood's residents; Asians are 26.5 percent; and blacks make up 60.4 percent of their neighborhoods.

What it means, says Logan, is that in spite of the growing population diversity in New York City overall, blacks, Latinos, and Asians live in closer proximity to one another than they do to whites.

The reasons for New York's segregation--as for any city's racial and ethnic divides--boil down to several factors, which can vary for the

different groups. Apologists for persistent segregation like to say that choice, not racial or economic barriers, determines where people live.

It's true that Latino and Asian immigrants are often drawn to neighborhoods populated by others from their nations of origin, just as waves of immigrants before them were. Cultural and language similarities are strong magnets. Logan found that many Latino immigrants gravitate to communities of Spanish speakers, even if they are not from the same country. So, for example, Mexican immigrants have boosted the Latino population of Sunset Park and East Harlem, established Puerto Rican enclaves. For Latinos, limited income and newcomer status help perpetuate their segregated residential patterns, says Logan; for most Asian groups, segregation is driven by preference and their immigrant status.

For African-Americans, though, segregation is the direct consequence of racial discrimination, plain and simple. "The basic underlying grid is black-white segregation," says John Mollenkopf, co-director of the Center for Urban Research at CUNY Graduate Center. "But over that is being applied a spatial differentiation driven by immigrant groups who are not black or white. As these groups establish themselves in different areas, segregation will go down. Exclusively white neighborhoods will be less so and more Asian or Latino. But not black."

Racial segregation for blacks, however, has little to do with preference, says Karen Webber, executive director of the Open Housing Center, an agency in New York City that works to enforce laws barring discrimination against homebuyers and renters. "There's the notion that people are clustered together by choice," says Webber. "If you're talking about African-Americans, we're not looking to cluster together because we want to speak the same language. People want the best space for the best price. But choices are not freely being offered to us."

The mechanisms of housing discrimination, like the segregation they foster, haven't changed much over the decades. Discrimination operates in two ways. One is racial steering--the practice of showing certain apartments to some people but not to others--and differential access to information about available apartments and homes. "The

other is that whites still are moving out of neighborhoods they perceive as changing,” says Mollenkopf. “That’s what happened in Canarsie. Today, it is pretty much a West Indian neighborhood.”

Real estate agents especially can determine the choices home-seekers have and, in great measure, the complexion of a community, adds Webber. “The gatekeepers are the brokers who decide who lives where and what the ethnic composition of a neighborhood will be,” she says, and skin color still plays a role. Webber’s agency has filed suit on behalf of a Latino couple who were turned away from an apartment after the broker met the wife, who was dark-skinned. Her husband was not. And in an overheated real estate market, in which landlords and sellers have their pick of who lives in their homes, “the likelihood of discrimination increases.”

The tenacity of segregation is a testament to decades of policies, both official and unwritten, that fostered white privilege in housing choice. Federal housing subsidies and loan programs, local zoning laws and racially restrictive covenants attached to home deeds laid the foundation for segregated cities before and after World War II. From the 1950s on, public housing projects, discriminatory mortgage practices and urban renewal projects all helped ghettoize African-Americans, building on that early legacy of residential segregation.

“Segregation is caused by racism, but it can’t be interpreted as simple acts of racism by whites,” says Nancy Denton, associate professor of sociology at SUNY Albany and co-author of *American Apartheid: The Making of the Underclass*. “It’s the segregated pattern established years ago, and now it determines how people live. Segregation of a group over a long time becomes self-perpetuating.”

Many whites who fled to suburbia during the postwar years were abetted by loans from the Veterans and Federal Housing administrations, which thanks to discriminatory practices were not equally available to African-Americans. “People who got to move to

Levittown, got to accumulate all that wealth,” says Denton. “Their homes are now worth 10 times what they paid. And blacks weren’t able to move to Levittown and accumulate that wealth.”

Even efforts in subsequent decades to redress inequities in lending practices failed to substantially alter the dynamic of segregated neighborhoods. The Community Reinvestment Act, which compelled banks to make home loans in formerly redlined areas, and the expansion of FHA loans to minority residents of the inner cities were a matter of too little, too late, Denton explains. “These initiatives came after the segregation was already in place,” she points out. “The FHA gave loans to inner city areas but the suburbs still discriminated, so the loans basically financed the flight of white homeowners.”

Denton says the federal Fair Housing Act of 1968 was toothless until amended in 1988 to give the Justice Department jurisdiction to prosecute discrimination cases and to create an administrative law procedure at the Housing and Urban Development Agency (HUD). But by then, the indelible pattern of segregated housing was well established.

For some African-Americans, integration is no longer a goal, Denton believes, because the personal price of confronting racism has been too steep. “We’re seeing that with African-Americans in Harlem,” Denton says. “It comes down to being sick and tired of dealing with discrimination. Integration has gotten a bad reputation. It’s been equated with a one-way process: Blacks should live like whites. Whites love this because if we say that these groups prefer to live among themselves, it’s very convenient.”

Even as increased incomes for some African-Americans and Latinos should have provided wider access to housing choices in the city and suburbs, fair housing laws have done little to attack segregation. Historically, federal enforcement of fair housing laws by HUD and the Justice Department has been anemic. In 1998, the Justice Department filed just 64 fair housing cases nationally, only about half for discrimination on the basis of race or national origin. Such numbers hardly approach the kind of serious campaign needed to discourage

discriminatory practices in the housing market.

“We have laws on the books but they mostly sit on the books,” says John Logan. “We’ve done very little prosecution in discrimination in housing. Typically, housing discrimination is treated as a civil law matter, and puts a great deal of responsibility on minorities to prove discrimination, not an easy thing to do.” Logan argues that fair housing groups need more funding to scout out discrimination, and that local prosecutors should file criminal charges against landlords, realtors and builders if settlements can’t be reached.

Spokespeople for HUD’s New York area office defend the agency’s record of fair housing enforcement, stating that they had cut HUD’s backlog of complaints in the last several years. They also note that HUD’s national fair housing budget has increased since 1993 from \$15 million to \$46 million. In the past year, the office had nearly 400 complaints under the Fair Housing Act, and 190 of those were based on race or national origin. Of those, 137 involved blacks, 20 involved Latinos, four involved Asians and 18 were listed as “other.” The disposition of all housing discrimination cases this year as of August found 77 cases settled with relief for plaintiffs and 37 going to trial. But in the vast majority--205 cases--no probable cause was found.

In New York City, the Open Housing Center conducts 200 tests annually for discriminatory practices by landlords and realtors and files suit when it can prove illegal practices, says Webber. About half of the center’s testing is for discrimination based on race or color and national origin. The agency’s \$400,000 budget from HUD keeps its doors open, but it doesn’t provide the funding needed to launch a frontal assault on housing discrimination that underlies segregation.

The worsening segregation of children is easily detected in a public school system that offers wildly differing quality and resources depending on neighborhood. Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, authored a report released this July called *Schools*

More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation. Orfield paints an alarming picture of worsening segregation among students, especially Latinos, whose enrollment in public schools has ballooned in several key states. “New York is the most segregated for black and Latino students,” Orfield says. “For Latinos, it’s been the most segregated since the 1970s.” Residential segregation is the simple cause of this skewed system, he says. “Just pick any random black or Latino classroom. Then look at a white suburban school. The difference hits you like a ton of bricks,” Orfield says.

Residential segregation goes hand in hand with income disparities between whites on the one hand and blacks and Latinos on the other, especially in a city where housing costs are skyrocketing and options shrinking for all groups. In a recent Russell Sage Foundation report, *Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality*, researchers found that the racial profile of a person’s neighborhood is a strong predictor of earnings. African-Americans are concentrated in central cities, while employment opportunities have spread beyond urban areas. Racism, transportation barriers and limited information about job markets combine to narrow employment possibilities and earning potential for blacks, even when their educational levels are the same as whites.

In New York City, the economics of segregation is the most formidable challenge, according to Orfield. “Residential segregation is a huge economic threat to communities. When housing is moved out of white control to blacks and Latinos, there is disinvestment in jobs and infrastructure.”

Making segregation the focus of public discussion and policy might seem farfetched at a time of retrenchment on an array of civil rights gains, such as affirmative action in employment and higher education. Few issues cut more directly to the heart of white privilege than maintenance of color-coded neighborhoods and the phenomenon of white flight to resist integration. Ultimately, segregation is about disenfranchisement of a swelling population of city residents. Because

segregation is so inextricably tied to other critical aspects of people's daily lives--schools, transportation, jobs--challenging it is like fighting a many-headed Hydra. But first, there would have to be widespread recognition that segregation exists and demands resolution.

"Is the high level of segregation acceptable to the public? How integrated do we wish to be as a city, as a metropolis, as a nation?" asks John Logan. He believes that high levels of segregation will persist into the foreseeable future, but that public policy must offer remedies for minorities, such as improving public education and the character of law enforcement. For Orfield, the real challenge is not in the city, but in the suburbs. "The big question is if we'll replicate the same segregation," Orfield says. "Long Island had an 80 percent growth of Latinos and 20 percent growth of blacks. There are going to be big sections of ghettoization if we don't do anything about it."

The Census analyses and their alarming portrait of a city segregated could ignite political activism among new groups coming to political maturity as well as long-time progressives, says Angelo Falcon. "During the civil rights movement, the idea of integration was a pained kind of ameliorist approach," he says. "Now it strikes me that it is one of the most revolutionary demands. The persistence of segregation raises the issue of how changing demographics mean people of color should be challenging white privilege. Integration could be a much more radical and powerful tool than how people saw it back then. It's the basis of a new civil rights issue."

Annette Fuentes edited City Limits from 1985 to 1987.

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