

A Shameful Reality

By Daniel Denvir, Thu, Aug. 11, 2011

Two new studies show that Greater Philly is one of the country's most separate and unequal when it comes to neighborhoods and schools for blacks, whites, Hispanics and Asians.

"Philadelphia's black population, and particularly its affluent black population, lives in much poorer neighborhoods than comparable whites because they are so highly segregated by race," the studies' author, Brown University sociologist John Logan, wrote in an email to *City Paper*. "In these ways Philadelphia is like a number of older and larger metro areas in the Northeast and Midwest where the historical legacy of segregation in central cities from before the civil rights era seems to be locked into place and continues to be reproduced even as minorities begin to move to the suburbs."

The region's blacks are exposed to poverty at a rate nearly three times higher than whites — the third-highest rate in the country. The average black person lives in a neighborhood with a 24.8 percent poverty rate, compared to just 8.4 percent for whites.

And the Philly area has by far the most extreme gap between Hispanic and white exposure to poverty. Hispanics are more than three times more likely to live in impoverished communities, with an average poverty rate of 25.4 percent. And we have the second-highest ratio of Asian to white exposure to poverty: Asians are more than 1.5 times as exposed, living in neighborhoods with a 13.4 percent poverty rate.

Finally, the area has the largest performance gap between black and white schools nationwide, as measured by elementary school reading scores. The average black kid attends a school that scores below the 21st percentile, while the average white's school scores in the 66th. The same goes for Hispanics and whites: We're No. 1, with Hispanics attending schools that are 3.28 times worse than those whites attend.

In 2011, we still need to be reminded that separate (Lower Merion and North Philly) means unequal. —Daniel Denvir