

Race is Still Leading Line of Demarcation

by Paul A. Jargowsky

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New Jersey is one of the most diverse states in the nation, with higher than average percentages of African-Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants from many nations. That diversity at the state level, however, is often not reflected at the neighborhood level. Families sort themselves out into very different cities and neighborhoods, so that for many residents the diversity of the state is lost in the homogeneity of daily life.

Even decades after the passage of the landmark Civil Rights and Fair Housing Acts, the primary dividing line between New Jersey's citizens is still race. Whites and blacks for the most part still live in separate worlds. The Index of Dissimilarity, a measure of the evenness of the distribution of two groups across residential space, indicates that 68 percent of all blacks (or all whites) would have to move from one neighborhood to another to achieve complete integration.

This level of segregation is extremely high, both in comparison to other groups and compared to other states. For example, Hispanic-white segregation is 59, and Asian-white segregation is 49. New Jersey ranks 11th out of 50 states, although the neighboring states of New York and Pennsylvania rank even higher. The only good news is that the segregation of blacks from whites has declined modestly—the black/white Index of Dissimilarity was 73 as recently as 1990. While the decline is a positive development, this pace of change will not produce meaningful integration for many decades.

While race is the primary dividing line in New Jersey's neighborhoods, people are also segregated along social class lines. New Jersey is second in the nation in the segregation of the poor, behind only Connecticut. The Index of Dissimilarity is 41 for the poor, as defined by the federal poverty line, compared to the nonpoor. While the level is quite a bit lower than the black/white figure, a direct comparison is hard to make. Income is continuous, so that someone just above the poverty line is hardly distinguishable from some just below it. Interestingly, there is a high degree of poor/nonpoor segregation within racial groups. Among whites, it increased from 30 in 1990 to 35 more recently. Among blacks, it increased from 39 to 42, and among Hispanics it increase from 36 to 38.

How can New Jersey combat stubbornly high racial segregation and rising economic segregation? The key issue is the pattern of new housing construction, especially affordable housing. Following World War II, the state suburbanized rapidly. If the new housing construction had included a mix of housing types within each suburban community, and if there

had not been racial discrimination in the housing market, the state could have achieved a substantial degree of integration by now. Instead, we are saddled with onerous racial divisions and devastated high-poverty neighborhoods in places like Camden and Newark.

The segregated pattern of residential life has implications for everyone in the state. The crime and violence that arises in segregated areas harms the residents of those neighborhoods and ends up spilling out into other communities. The increased costs of policing, security, and incarceration are paid by all citizens through higher prices and taxes. Moreover, the segregation of neighborhoods results in segregation within public schools. The concentration of poor kids in high-poverty schools contributes to the breakdown of public education in urban areas, which then sustains poverty across generations.

Housing segregation is not a market-driven outcome, but to a substantial degree is the result of explicit policies, such as exclusionary zoning, that determine how cities and neighborhoods are constructed. The current segregated pattern cannot be changed overnight, but when you are in a hole, you should stop digging. We need to begin now to reshape the way neighborhoods are developed so that the full range of housing types is available in every city. Only if segregation is reduced over time will all New Jersey residents be able to access economic opportunities, safe neighborhoods, and high-quality education.

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