

# Researcher focuses on US suburban housing equity

March 26 2015

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Recent research by ASU professor Deirdre Pfeiffer suggests that improvements in neighborhood conditions and racial equity are strongest in suburbs that developed after the Civil Rights era. Credit: Nelson Minar

Since the 1968 Fair Housing act was passed, have housing opportunities for people of color improved? Did the Great Recession beginning in 2007 stop or slow progress toward better housing for people of color?

Some researchers have described a phenomena called "slumburbia" – that as families of color have moved from U.S. inner cities to the suburbs, the subprime mortgage crisis and [global recession](#) stalled or even pushed backward these families' progress toward social and economic mobility. The problems of the inner city followed these families to the suburbs, the argument goes.

In research published in the journal *Urban Studies* and reported in the *Atlantic*, ASU professor Deirdre Pfeiffer took a new look at the "slumburbia" story. Her study showed that conditions for minority households are actually improving in certain suburbs – in particular, in suburbs that were built in the post-civil rights era, after the passage of the Fair Housing Act.

Pfeiffer used U.S. census data to compare [neighborhood conditions](#) in 2000 and 2012 in 88 U.S. regions. She looked at how the neighborhood conditions of similar-income households varied, depending on whether or not the residents were people of color and whether the households were located in central cities, older suburbs or post-civil rights suburbs. She compared factors such as poverty rate, college education attainment and home-ownership rate in the three types of communities, for African Americans, Latino, Asian and non-Hispanic white households.

"Living in the post-civil rights suburbs during the 2000s and early 2010s usually meant having better and more racially equitable neighborhood conditions than living in the central city or older [suburbs](#)," Pfeiffer found. With few exceptions, these gains persisted over time – contradicting the picture of a decline beginning in the recession years.

These findings present a brighter picture than the "slumburbia" theory. They also suggest important insights on strategies for continuing to improve housing equity.

"This research suggests the importance of allowing for large-scale housing growth within regions," writes Pfeiffer. New [housing](#) construction may open opportunities for the emergence of more racially integrated, equitable places in a way that small-scale infill development may not.

**More information:** "Racial equity in the post-civil rights suburbs? Evidence from US regions 2000–2012." *Urban Studies* 0042098014563652, first published on December 19, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/0042098014563652](#)

Provided by Arizona State University

Citation: Researcher focuses on US suburban housing equity (2015, March 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-focuses-suburban-housing-equity.html>

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