

With racial segregation declining between neighborhoods, segregation now taking new form

July 30 2015

Recent research has shown that racial segregation in the U.S. is declining between neighborhoods, but a new study indicates that segregation is manifesting itself in other ways—not disappearing.

"We just can't get too excited by recent declines in neighborhood segregation," said lead author Daniel Lichter, the Ferris Family Professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management and a professor in the Department of Sociology at Cornell University. "The truth is neighborhood segregation still remains high in America, and our study also shows that segregation is increasingly occurring at different scales of geography."

While segregation from neighborhood to neighborhood is decreasing (micro-segregation) within [metropolitan areas](#), segregation from [suburban communities](#) (e.g., towns, villages, and cities) to other suburban communities within the same metropolitan areas and from major metropolitan cities to their suburban communities is increasing (macro-segregation). In other words, instead of people of different races living in distinct neighborhoods in the same major metropolitan cities and suburban communities, these major cities and suburban communities are becoming increasingly racially homogenous.

"Let's look at the community of Ferguson, Missouri, for example," said Lichter, who is also the director of the Cornell Population Center.

"Whites have left Ferguson, mostly for white suburban communities even farther from the urban core that is St. Louis. The racial composition of Ferguson went from about 25 percent black to 67 percent black in a 20 year period. Though one would be correct in saying that segregation decreased between neighborhoods in Ferguson, the change simply reflects massive white depopulation."

Titled, "Toward a New Macro-Segregation? Decomposing Segregation within and between Metropolitan Cities and Suburbs," the study appears in the August issue of the *American Sociological Review*. Lichter and his co-authors, Domenico Parisi, a professor of sociology and director of the National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) at Mississippi State University, and Michael C. Taquino, an associate research professor and the deputy director of nSPARC, analyzed U.S. Census data from 1990-2010 and examined micro, macro, and total [racial segregation](#) across 222 metropolitan areas.

"One of our major findings is that suburban communities are becoming more segregated from each other," Lichter said. "Cities and communities—not just neighborhoods—matter. Over the past decade or so, some suburban communities have become more racially diverse, even as whites have moved out to other growing suburbs farther from the city or have moved back to the city as part of the gentrification process. In the late 1970s, there was a famous study titled, 'Chocolate City, Vanilla Suburbs,' which highlighted that blacks generally lived in large cities while whites lived in suburban communities. Our study shows that minority population growth in the suburbs has fundamentally shifted historic patterns of residential segregation in this country."

Consistent with previous studies, Lichter found that the highest level of macro-segregation is between blacks and whites, the lowest is between Asians and whites, and the level between Hispanics and whites occupies an intermediate position.

"If [segregation](#) is our measure, we have a long way to go before we are truly a post-racial society," said Lichter, who noted that suburban communities use housing, taxation, and zoning laws to include or exclude racial and ethnic minorities.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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