



# Hardly the end of segregation

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A recent study published by the Manhattan Institute, *THE END OF THE SEGREGATED CENTURY: Racial Separation in America's Neighborhoods, 1890-2010*, declares that American neighborhoods are nearing the end of racial segregation. The report has received a flurry of attention especially from those tuned into ongoing housing and education debates regarding racial segregation and disparities in opportunity.

By using census data in this way-- to purport the "end of racism in housing"—we see this report as part of a very troubling trend in which the dialogue regarding race and opportunity is further buried in public discourse. Further concerning is that to some, this report may offer a refreshing take on an emotionally charged issue. Many would welcome the silencing of opposing views that have long emphasized the perpetual racial undertones influencing housing, education, and employment. For those not in the business of analyzing data or assessing housing trends, the media's poorly covered, superficial analysis of studies espousing these views often produce utter hopelessness—conveying the troubling realities of systemic racism, yet offering no tangible solutions to the issues. By glossing over any substantial dialogue about race in this country, we have created a society that too often feels "burnt out" on racism and ready to "move on already." The Manhattan Institute study fills this niche quite nicely.

A dichotomy of opinions related to race relations in the U.S. has erupted since the election of President Obama. There is an overarching tendency, especially among whites wishing to shed residual "white guilt," to herald the end of racism and black disadvantage by pointing to the election of a black president. The Manhattan Study furthers this perception in that it overstates and oversimplifies the gains made in integration over the last century. Although the notion that we may be embarking on an era of race neutrality seems inspiring, it does not reflect the complexities of racial segregation, particularly in housing, that arise out of multi-faceted forces including public policies, private sector investment, and public perceptions about race. Conversely, many fair housing advocates conclude that despite the tremendous achievements of some African Americans in our society, the continued existence of racially concentrated areas of poverty (or ghettos as the report refers to them) negates the supposition that race is no longer a factor in determining one's ability to prosper in our society.

Numerous reports starkly contradict the Manhattan Institute study and specifically cite the continued racial incongruences in opportunities that are inextricably linked to persistent segregation in housing. The Manhattan Institute report utilized two of the most common segregation indexes which are dissimilarity<sup>1</sup> and isolation<sup>2</sup>. However, the Manhattan Institute sorted racial groups in an unusual method, using black and non-black. This placed non-Hispanic whites, Latinos, Asians, and other racial groups into the non-black category. The grouping of all non-black populations is problematic for a number of reasons. First, housing segregation is not only an issue for African Americans. Other minorities experience segregation and combining all non-black populations together glosses over the existence of segregation and discrimination faced by Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans. Secondly, grouping all non-black races inflates the progress of integration. The progress reported can be partially attributed to the integration of two or more minority groups. While inter-minority

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<sup>1</sup> The dissimilarity index measures the evenness of a group's population distribution across a broad region. The resulting number indicates the percentage of the two measured groups' population that would have to change residence for all

<sup>2</sup> The isolation index measures exposure to other groups. The resulting number indicates the extent to which minority members are exposed only to one another.

integration is something to be applauded, this methodology avoids the true segregation between black and non-Hispanic white residents. By using this methodology, the authors were able to artificially reduce the levels of dissimilarity. This black and non-black grouping helps to explain the augmented conclusions of their report.

When housing data is analyzed with dissimilarity and isolation indexes and each race is individually identified, the average African American still lives in a metropolitan housing market, where to achieve complete integration, more than half the black population would have to move. Douglas Massey, Sociology Professor at Princeton University and Gregory D. Squires, Sociology and Public Policy & Public Administration Professor at George Washington University reveal that “More than forty years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, two thirds of all black urbanites continue to live under conditions of high segregation and nearly half live in metropolitan areas where the degree of racial isolation is so intense it conforms to the criteria for hypersegregation<sup>3</sup>.”

The Manhattan Institute reports that American cities are more integrated than they’ve been since 1910 and all-white neighborhoods are “effectively extinct”. This idea is supported by their statistic that only 0.5 percent of neighborhoods are without black people, compared to 20 percent a half-century ago. Although it is less and less likely to come across an all-white neighborhood, the broad assertion that all-white neighborhoods are extinct is misleading since many of these “integrating” neighborhoods have extremely underrepresented minority populations when juxtaposed with the housing patterns that would be seen in a truly free market. Just because a handful of minorities reside in a neighborhood, this does not inherently promise racial integration in that area. Minorities can still be geographically isolated from white residents within the community. William Frey of the Brookings Institution supports this concept, asserting “The average white lives in a neighborhood that is 78 percent white and 7 percent black<sup>4</sup>.”

One of the ways the report masks the persistence of segregation is to simplify the rise of black suburbanization and immigration as an explanation for the decline in segregation. Although African Americans have the freedom to move into suburbs, they still experience segregation in a number of suburban areas. Segregation is not a static phenomenon restricted to central cities. The containment of black neighborhoods can evolve into new areas and re-segregation can occur, both sub-regionally and within suburban municipalities that may seem diverse as a whole but experience substantial segregation within. Also troubling, studies indicate that whites remain hesitant to integrate, particularly with blacks, due to a fear of higher crime and declining property values. George C. Galster of Wayne State University states “Because we have moved further from attaining this last goal of eliminating minority poverty ghettos, race relations in this Nation continue to be poisoned by stereotypes generalized from ghetto behaviors. Rationalization of these stereotypes provides a basis for justifying continued discrimination and self-segregation by Whites<sup>5</sup>.” The sensationalized media reports of crime and violence in urban ghettos furthers racial stereotypes and heightens fears of racial integration.

Tyrone Forman and Maria Krysan point out in a more recent report that although all racial groups appear to be more committed to racial integration, whites, when actually making housing choices, do not put this

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Gregory D. Squires, “Segregation: The Invisible Elephant in the Foreclosure Debate”, *Huffington Post*, November 1, 2010, accessed February 2, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-s-massey/segregation-the-invisible\\_b\\_777323.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-s-massey/segregation-the-invisible_b_777323.html)

<sup>4</sup> Sam Roberts, “Segregation Curtailed in U.S. cities, Study Finds,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2012, accessed February 2, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/31/us/Segregation-Curtailed-in-US-Cities-Study-Finds.html?\\_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/31/us/Segregation-Curtailed-in-US-Cities-Study-Finds.html?_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss)

<sup>5</sup> George C. Galster, “The Evolving Challenges of Fair Housing Since 1968: Open Housing, Integration, and the Reduction of Ghettoization,” *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 4 (1999): 3.

commitment into practice. This report examined racial segregation in metropolitan Chicago housing and found that, “black-white dissimilarity indices within income groups in the Chicago metropolitan area barely change as income rises: the most affluent blacks are nearly as segregated as their poorest counterparts<sup>6</sup>.” According to this report the Chicago area is ranked fifth among the nation’s most segregated cities<sup>7</sup>. This type of “hypersegregation” is indeed a dynamic force in the Chicago region and reports like the Manhattan Institute’s seriously downplay the severity of segregation and the dramatic role this can play in access to opportunity.

However, the Manhattan Study does point out one important factor that can be agreed upon by fair housing advocates-- that the Fair Housing Act put in place stipulations making discriminatory practices in housing illegal and that this was the cornerstone of integration in the latter half of the last century. Public perceptions seem to be catching up with this critical piece of legislation. Troubling however, are the ideas that the Fair Housing Act has done its job, people are less racist, the housing market is more free, white flight and redlining are things of the past, and therefore there is no longer a need for policy interventions to influence housing practices. While 44 years of individual private enforcement have been instrumental in validating the rights of protected persons, it has proven to be a poor remedy for structural segregation.

If we as a society are ready to free ourselves of the roots of racial segregation and look to a future in which opportunities are not limited by race, we must be willing to have an open and honest dialogue about what this truly means. We need to push for public policies that mirror these changing attitudes—because without them our tainted past will forever influence our future. We must push for policies and practices that affirmatively further fair housing, which will reap benefits beyond an integrated housing market. As neighborhoods integrate they will advance integration in other arenas, including schools and social networks. The integration of our communities will ensure more equitable investment and development across our cities and regions. We must analyze the policies that although seem neutral when taken at face value, produce discriminatory effects that contradict the value of a housing market in which people are truly free to choose where they would like to live. If we want further integration we must lay the foundation for that integration to flourish.

Progressive housing policies can work to reverse historic patterns of segregation that defined the past century. This is especially true in metropolitan areas with seemingly insurmountable barriers to racial equity. Residential segregation has declined; however the conclusion that we are nearing the end of segregation implies that mitigating segregation in American communities is no longer a priority. We must celebrate the progressive strides within racial segregation, but remain honest about the continued geographic separation taking place in our metropolitan regions nationwide.

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<sup>6</sup> Tyrone Forman and Maria Krysan, “Policy Forum: Racial Segregation in Metropolitan Chicago Housing,” *Institute of Government and Public Affairs*, 20 (2008): 3.

<sup>7</sup> “The Chicago metro area ranks fifth, sixth, and ninth in the most residentially segregated metropolitan area in the United States for blacks, Latinos, and Asians, respectively” (Ibid).

## ABOUT CHICAGO AREA FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE

The Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance (CAFHA) is a consortium of fair housing and advocacy organizations, government agencies, and municipalities committed to the value of fair housing, diversity, and integration. CAFHA works to combat housing discrimination and promote integrated communities of opportunity through research, education, and advocacy.

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