

THE HARD NUMBERS: SEGREGATION REMAINS REAL, WIDESPREAD

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Though many Boston neighborhoods became more diverse during the past decade, and people of color increasingly realized the dream of suburban home ownership, 2000 US Census figures show that segregation and racial isolation persist throughout the city and its suburbs.

The poorer quality of neighborhoods densely populated by blacks and Latinos suggests that segregation is not simply a matter of choice, but a combination of discriminatory housing practices, a lack of adequate affordable housing choices, and the lingering perception that people of color are unwelcome in many neighborhoods. . "There is a very strong cost to segregation for blacks and Hispanics," said John Logan, director of the Lewis Mumford Center at the University at Albany, which studied segregation patterns of Greater Boston. Neighborhoods with densely concentrated black and Latino populations tend to be less desirable places to live, with higher poverty levels, struggling schools, and more crime, the Mumford Center found.

"That undercuts the idea that for these groups segregation is a matter of choice," Logan said. "The option of living in segregated but well-served neighborhoods, for the most part, does not exist for these groups."

Census data for Boston and its suburbs, analyzed by the Globe, shows that blacks are particularly segregated - 43 percent of the state's black population is in Boston. More strikingly, that population is almost entirely in three neighborhoods: Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan, all of which have black populations exceeding 50 percent. Conversely, in Charlestown, East Boston, Beacon Hill, the Back Bay, South Boston, and the North End, less than 5 percent of residents are black.

The strong patterns of segregation of black residents extend to the suburbs. For example, blacks represent 10 percent of Milton's population, giving the town the sixth-largest percentage of black residents in the state. But nearly the entire population is confined to an area of less than 2 square miles along the Mattapan border. East of Canton Avenue, blacks make up less than 5 percent of Milton's population.

While less segregated than black communities, Latino communities in the Boston area tend to be more concentrated. About 60 percent of Lawrence's population is Latino, the largest percentage in the state. In Chelsea, Latinos make up 48 percent of the population. But no city or town in the state has a black population of more than 26 percent or an Asian population of more than 17 percent.

Suburban communities with more balanced distribution of minority residents still tend to be segregated

along town lines. Randolph is one of the most integrated communities in the state, with much of its 38 percent minority population evenly distributed. Yet most of its border towns - Braintree, Holbrook, Avon, and Canton - are more than 90 percent white.

Brockton, which has a minority population of nearly 42 percent, is bordered by towns such as Abington, Whitman, East Bridgewater, and West Bridgewater, each of which is more than 95 percent white. Lawrence, which is 66 percent nonwhite, is bordered by Methuen, Andover, and West Andover - each with minority populations of 10 percent or less.

Housing officials and researchers who have studied segregation patterns in the area say the commonly cited causes - lower income and personal choice - don't tell the whole story.

"We think that some of it has to do with choice, and some of it has to do with opportunity, but opportunity is often constrained by steering," said David Harris, executive director of the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston. "Realtors and landlords tend to point people toward neighborhoods and exclude them from other neighborhoods."

In 2001, the center released a report detailing discriminatory rental practices in Boston and 12 border communities. It revealed that more than half of the people of color seeking apartments in a test group were discriminated against. A study of practices in home sales is underway.

But while blatant practices such as steering still exist, most forms of discrimination are subtle, such as higher rent price quotes and stricter leasing terms and conditions imposed on minorities.

"These events, while less blatant than steering, can make people feel like the community is less welcoming," Harris said.

In general, Asians are more evenly distributed in and around Boston, but some Asian groups are clustered. Lowell, which has the state's largest Asian population, is predominantly made up of Cambodian immigrants and their families who were drawn to factory jobs in the area in the 1980s and 1990s. The large population of Chinese residents in north and central Quincy, many of whom moved from Chinatown in the '80s and '90s, gives the city the second-largest Asian population in the state. The large percentage of Indians in Burlington (they were drawn to high-tech companies dotting Route 128) gives the town the state's seventh-largest Asian population.

Within the Asian population,

language and cultural differences create segregation, said Kao Li, executive director of Quincy Asian Resources Inc.

He said organizations like Quincy Asian Resources are needed to act as magnets, to give Asians in the area better access to housing and other resources, as well as to foster a sense of pan-Asian community.

Boston is making gains in diversity, the Census data shows. Neighborhoods such as Hyde Park and Roslindale became much more racially mixed during the last decade, and the black population in

Roxbury and Mattapan decreased as more residents bought homes outside the city. Also, more whites are moving into neighborhoods with large minority populations such as Jamaica Plain.

"There is less marked segregation than ever before," said Robert W. Consalvo, director of policy development and research for the Boston Redevelopment Authority. And in areas like South Boston, where only a handful of people of color live outside of housing developments, there are other market factors at work.

"Whites aren't moving into South Boston either, because it's so expensive," Consalvo said.

Some suburbs, such as Randolph, have also become more diverse in the last 10 years. Yet the perception that mostly white communities may be unwelcoming is enough to keep minority groups away, even in communities striving to become more diverse.

"There is always a gap between actual changes and perceptions of change," said Harris. "Even in communities where people want to be more welcoming, sometimes that is hard to see. And when you are talking about [minority groups] potentially putting their families at risk, they may be a little more cautious."

Consalvo said part of the reason minorities remain concentrated in Boston and other urban areas is the lack of available affordable housing in suburbs. While the state's affordable housing law, Chapter 40B, is meant to give lower-income residents better access to housing, many communities have been resistant to change because they fear overdevelopment. In communities where less than 10 percent of housing stock is categorized as affordable, the law allows developers to bypass most zoning regulations if 25 percent of a development's housing units are classified as affordable.

Most of the communities with the highest minority populations also had a stock of affordable housing units well above the state's target of 10 percent. In 2001, nearly 20 percent of Boston's housing units were in 40B developments. And 40B units make up more than 10 percent of housing in Chelsea, Cambridge, Lawrence, Lowell, and Brockton.

"It does appear that there is a correlation between the strength of a community's resistance to 40B and the lack of diversity in those communities," Harris said.

Researchers also say income, long thought to be a primary factor in keeping minorities out of some communities, is only a minor part of the equation. Harris and Logan said their research reveals that while the average incomes of blacks, Latinos, and Asians lag behind that of whites, by and large even poor whites have more options when it comes to choosing where to live.

"The average black person who earns more than \$60,000 [annually] lives in an area with almost double the poverty rate as the average white person earning less than \$30,000," he said. "Clearly, race has a big impact in what kind of neighborhood you have access to."

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SIDEBAR:

A DECADE OF CHANGES

Racial and ethnic concentrations by census block group, according to the 2000 census
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