

Study: Residential Segregation Still a Problem in U.S.

Relatively Few Black, White Families Moving into Multiethnic Neighborhoods

WASHINGTON, DC, May 29, 2012 — Despite increasing numbers of multiethnic neighborhoods in the United States, relatively few black or white families are actually moving into these types of communities, according to a new study in the June issue of the *American Sociological Review*.

“We pay a lot of attention to this proliferation of multiethnic neighborhoods, but they are still only a small part of the overall inter-neighborhood mobility picture for blacks and whites,” said Kyle Crowder, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Washington and lead author of the study. “Blacks tend to originate in neighborhoods with very high concentrations of blacks and, when they move, they tend to move to other places that have very high concentrations of blacks. Their typical destination is not a multiethnic neighborhood. The same is even more true for whites.”

Titled, “Neighborhood Diversity, Metropolitan Constraints, and Household Migration,” the study considers mobility patterns of 44,808 black families and 57,415 white families, some of whom moved several times between 1977 and 2005, the period covered by the analysis. The study, which looks at moves families made from one neighborhood in a metropolitan area to another neighborhood in the same metropolitan area, relies on multiple sources of data, including the Panel Study of Income Dynamics—a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of U.S. residents—and the 1980, 1990, and 2000 U.S. Censuses.

According to the study, of the 9,940 moves that black families made between 1977 and 2005, 43.7 percent (4,340) were to predominately black neighborhoods, 5 percent (494) were to predominately white neighborhoods, 17.7 percent (1,763) were to multiethnic neighborhoods (whose populations were at least 10 percent black, at least 10 percent Hispanic or Asian, and at least 40 percent white), and 33.6 percent (3,343) were to other types of neighborhoods detailed in the analysis. By comparison, of the 8,823 moves that white families made during the same time period, 56.8 percent (5,008) were to predominately white neighborhoods, 2 percent (179) were to predominately black neighborhoods, 5.6 percent (493) were to multiethnic neighborhoods, and 35.6 percent (3,143) were to other types of neighborhoods.

“Our study tells a somewhat pessimistic story, but it’s also a realistic story,” said Crowder, who coauthored the analysis with Jeremy Pais, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Connecticut, and Scott J. South, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Albany, SUNY. “It’s a story that counters this idea that we should stop paying attention to residential segregation. The truth is, when it comes to eliminating residential segregation, we still have a long way to go. This becomes particularly clear when we look at the high percentage of black families from predominately black neighborhoods and the even higher percentage of white families from predominately white neighborhoods who wind up in homogeneous communities when they move.”

The study found that of the 3,684 moves that black families made from predominately black neighborhoods between 1977 and 2005, 60.9 percent (2,245) were to other predominately black neighborhoods, 2 percent (74) were to predominately white neighborhoods, 18.9 percent (696) were to multiethnic neighborhoods, and 18.2 percent (669) were to other types of neighborhoods. By comparison, of the 4,987 moves that white families made from predominately white neighborhoods during the same time period, 74.9 percent (3,734) were to other predominately white neighborhoods, 1.5 percent (73) were to predominately black neighborhoods, 2.4 percent (120) were to multiethnic neighborhoods, and just over 21 percent (1,060) were to other types of neighborhoods.

Crowder said it is important to note that—after controlling for other factors—the year in which black and white families moved had little or no impact on the kinds of neighborhoods to which they moved. “For black families, year of move is statistically non-significant and for white families it has a minimal impact,” Crowder said. “So, by itself, year doesn’t seem to be a very important indicator of where blacks and whites moved—and there wasn’t much change in where blacks and whites moved over time, once we account for other factors that affect destinations.”

Interestingly, the study also found that the tendency for white and black families to move between neighborhoods dominated by their own racial group varies significantly across metropolitan areas. “The mobility of black and white families into more integrated neighborhoods is shaped substantially by demographic, economic, political, and spatial features of the broader metropolitan area,” Crowder said.

According to the study, metropolitan area characteristics likely to limit residential integration for blacks and whites include: high levels of existing residential segregation and poverty as well as a significant percentage of the population living in the suburbs. “Lower levels of these characteristics promote integration,” Crowder said. “Additionally, mobility into more diverse neighborhoods is more common in metropolitan areas with large supplies of new housing and relatively large concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities.”

In terms of policy implications, Crowder said the study highlights the need for policymakers to continue working on ways to address residential segregation. “Residential segregation influences such things as the concentration and the propagation of crime as well as racial disparities in health and in exposure to pollution,” Crowder said. “When people say, ‘Segregation is going away’ and ‘We don’t need to worry about it anymore,’ those are messages that people will latch onto quickly. Unfortunately, those types of statements are just untrue.”

Full article available as Reading no RG20(a)