Source: http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war_room/2011/03/29/most_segregated_cities

Tuesday, Mar 29, 2011 07:55 ET

The 10 most segregated urban areas in America

Slide show: The new census numbers provide a sobering reminder of how separate white and black America still are

By Daniel Denvir

Salon
View the slide show

Decades after the end of Jim Crow, and three years after the election of America's first black president, the United States remains a profoundly segregated country.

That reality has been reinforced by the release of Census Bureau data last week that shows black and white Americans still tend to live in their own neighborhoods, often far apart from each other. Segregation itself, the decennial census report indicates, is only decreasing slowly, although the dividing lines are shifting as middle-income blacks, Latinos and Asians move to once all-white suburbs -- whereupon whites often move away, turning older suburbs into new, if less distressed, ghettos.

We may think of segregation as a matter of ancient Southern history: lunch counter sit-ins, bus boycotts and Ku Klux Klan terrorism. But as the census numbers remind us, Northern cities have long had higher rates of segregation than in the South, where strict Jim Crow laws kept blacks closer to whites, but separate from them. Where you live has a big impact on the education you receive, the safety on your streets, and the social networks you can leverage.

The following is a list of the nation's most segregated metropolitan areas of over 500,000 people. The rankings are based on a dissimilarity index, a measure used by social scientists to gauge residential segregation. It reflects the number of people from one race -- in this case black or white -- who would have to move for races to be evenly distributed across a certain area. A score of 1 indicates perfect integration while 100 signals complete segregation. The rankings were compiled by John Paul DeWitt of CensusScope.org and the University of Michigan's Social Science Data Analysis Network.

View the slide show

- Daniel Denvir is a journalist in Philadelphia. More: Daniel Denvir

No. 10: Los Angeles
Main city population: 3,792,62
Metropolitan population: 12,828,837
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 67.84

Los Angeles is spectacularly diverse, and profoundly segregated. Though black and Latino Angelenos are increasingly likely to live near one another, their separation from white neighborhoods persists. Indeed, L.A. is one of just a few metro areas with such high segregation of Latinos. It is also the only metro area on this list west of the Great Lakes.

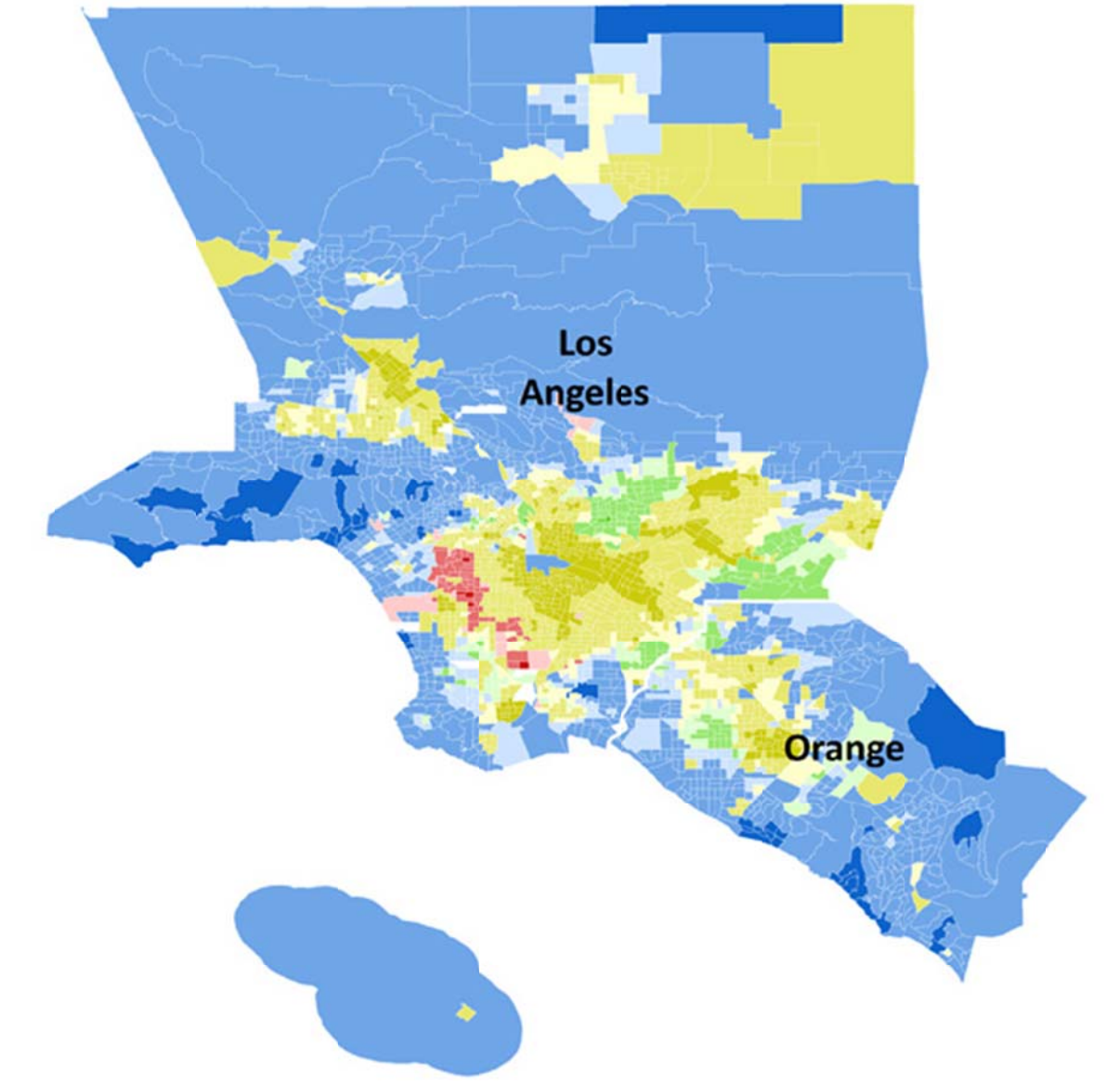
"The interesting thing is that the places where we've seen lower segregation historically tend to be smaller and medium-size metro areas, with smaller black populations," says sociologist Camille Z. Charles, author of "Won't You Be My Neighbor: Race, Class and Residence in Los Angeles." "So I think to some degree that is how L.A. ends up being this outlier. There have only been black people in Phoenix since 1990 in any meaningful number. You've had large numbers of blacks in Los Angeles for over 100 years."

Like other cities in the North and West, blacks migrated to Los Angeles for jobs. At the Port of Los Angeles, shipyards and the booming war industry provided opportunities for employment in positions that were previously reserved for white men. But the enclaves that blacks moved into after World War II have hardened, and segregation continues to confine blacks to the region's most dangerous neighborhoods (which also contain its worst schools).

"We will probably never get to the point where the index is zero and everyone is singing kumbaya and intermarrying," says Charles. "What is problematic about segregation is primarily about the concentration of poverty, and all of the negative aspects of material life that result from concentrating poverty in that way. If you concentrate poverty, you're going to have more crime, more people with poor health – areas where the rest of the community and city is less invested in not only the people, but the streets and the schools."

Charles says that if black segregation were comparable to that of Asians, there would be "huge improvements in blacks' quality of life." Asian-white segregation is about 20 points lower, and much of it reflects the temporary segregation of immigrants living in ethnic enclaves.

In the late 1960s, riots – or, depending on how you parsed this politicized vocabulary, rebellions or uprisings – in many cities briefly forced white society to face the concentrated poverty of the black ghetto, with the Kerner Commission famously noting that "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."



The L.A. riots of 1992, like the 1965 Watts riot, were sparked by police brutality, a steady concern in besieged neighborhoods like South Central. Nearly 20 years later, the jobless ghettos of black and Latino Los Angeles remain. Greater Los Angeles has been so big for so long – legion nodes connected by extensive highways – that it's hard to say exactly what its borders are. Safe in their cars and behind their gates, most white people have gone back to not paying attention.

No. 9: Philadelphia
Main city population: 1,526,006
Metropolitan population: 5,965,343
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 68.41

According to University of Pennsylvania historian Thomas Sugrue, just 347 of the 120,000 homes constructed in the Philadelphia area between 1946 and 1953 were open to blacks. In the postwar years, working-class whites violently policed the boundaries of their neighborhoods, while the middle and upper classes fled to the suburbs well into the 1990s. Today, Puerto Rican neighborhoods divide working-class white and black neighborhoods in North Philadelphia and Kensington.

"The patterns of housing segregation in metropolitan Philadelphia are the legacy of discriminatory public policies and real-estate practices that played out for most of the 20th century," says Sugrue, who chronicled the area's open housing movement in "Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North." "Though discrimination is now illegal, those patterns of segregation were so deeply entrenched that many people came to see them as 'natural.'"

According to census data, the level of segregation between blacks and whites in the Philadelphia area is declining at a slower rate than during the 1990s. And just as white city-dwellers fled neighborhoods when black families arrived after World War II, suburban whites are fleeing to exurbs as blacks and Latinos move to older suburbs.

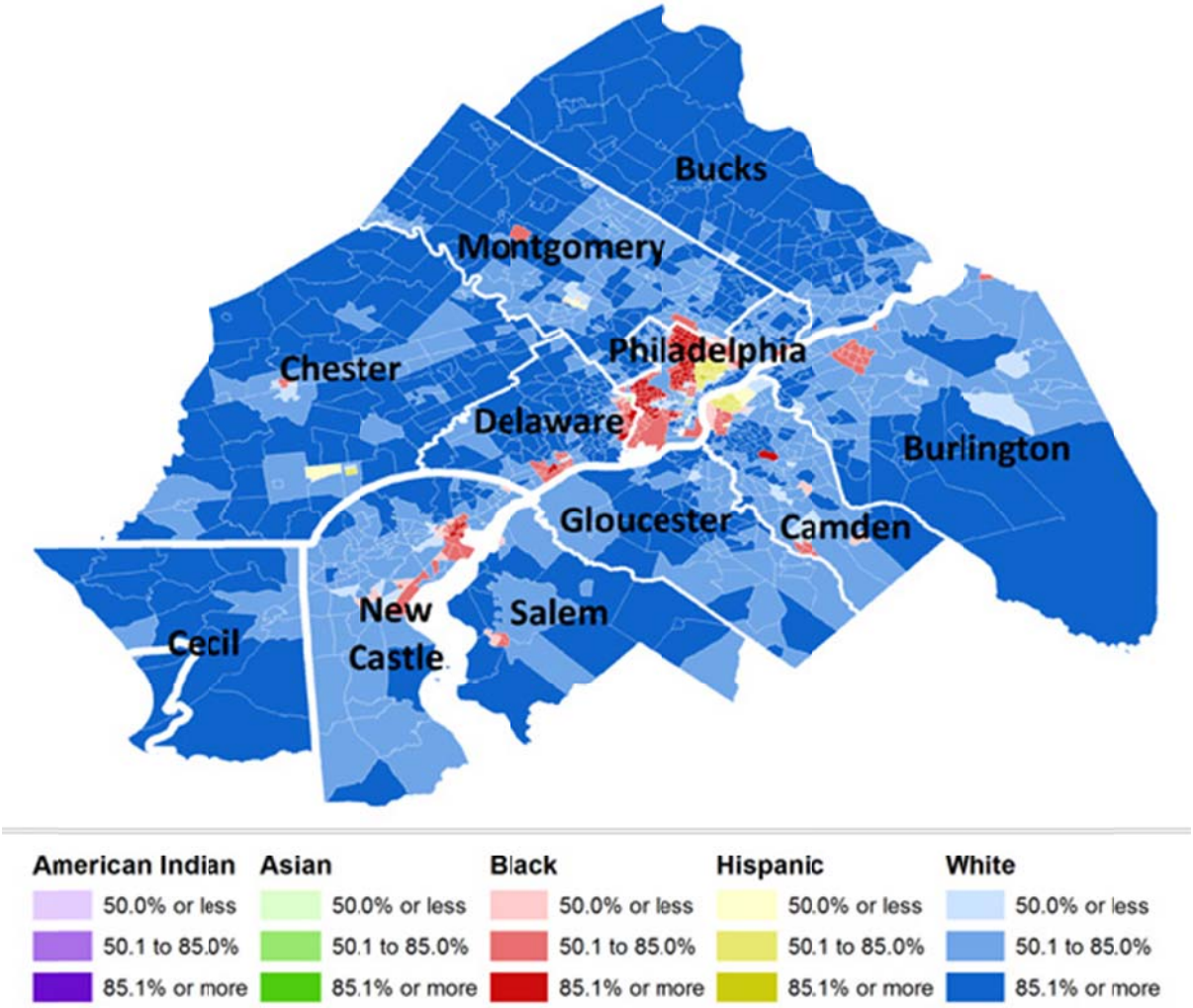
Local media coverage of the 2010 census data has emphasized that Philadelphia grew for the first time after 50 years of decline, thanks laregly to growing Latino and Asian populations. The persistence of segregation, however, has gone unmentioned, but the warning signs are clear: Whites led growth in far-flung counties like Chester in Pennsylvania, Gloucester and Ocean in New Jersey, and Cecil in Maryland; white population declined everywhere else as blacks, Latinos and Asians moved to resegregating older suburbs.

During the 1950s and '60s, Philadelphia was a center of open housing activism. Civil rights activist and housing developer Morris Milgram, the Jewish son of left-wing garment-worker activists, was at the lead of the nationwide movement, building his own integrated neighborhoods in the 1950s and '60s. The first development was Concord Park, built as a near replica of the then-whites-only subdivisions in Levittown.

Desegregation has also been contentious across the Delaware River in South Jersey, where suburbs are deeply fragmented, with miniature tax fiefdoms for the rich and white just minutes from crumbling warehouses for the poor like Camden.

Discussions about race in Philly are usually met with a deafening backlash from local whites, and the comments sections of the Philadelphia Inquirer are locally infamous for the bigotry. Witness the letter to the editor written in response to this reporter's recent article on regional segregation for Philadelphia Weekly:

"Between my wife and I, we work 3 jobs in one household so we can live as far as possible from Section 8 housing. Keep your brave new

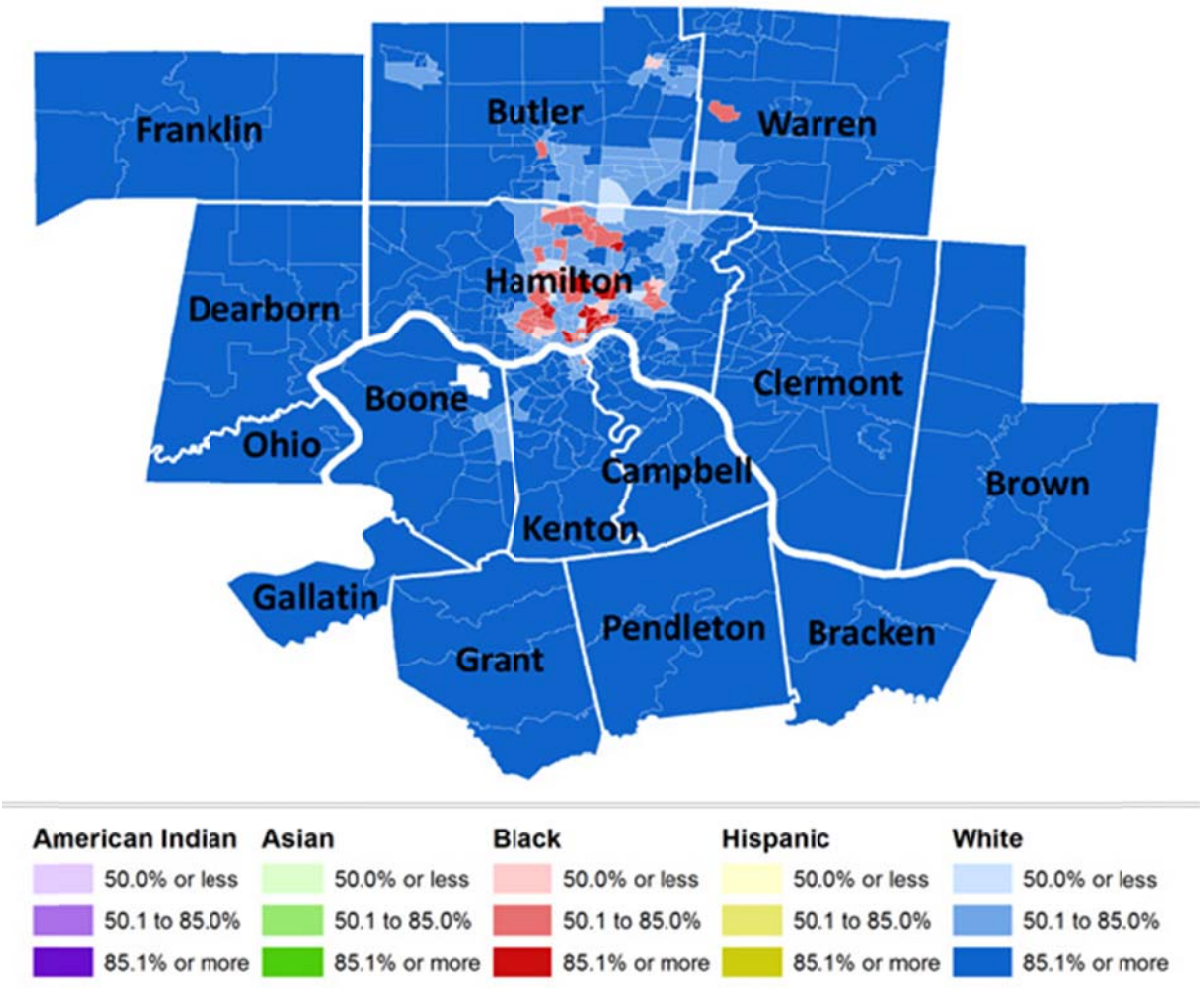


world, liberal views to yourself. I don't want section 8 anywhere near me. I don't want anyone receiving any type of government assistance living near me," wrote Steve Arlo. "I pay THOUSANDS of dollars a year in Federal, State, City and property taxes to keep it away from my neighborhood. I'll say it. They don't deserve to live in or near my neighborhood. When are we going to stop this 'free money' mentality? I don't care how horrible their neighborhood is. You made your bed now sleep in it. Remember, neighborhoods are made up of those that live in them."
For the besieged white subdivision dweller, the American dream means freedom from society's poor and black.

No. 8: Cincinnati

Main city population: 296,943
Metropolitan population: 2,130,151
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 69.42

Before the Great Migration and the rise of exclusively white mass homeownership, Cincinnati blacks lived alongside white ethnics. The first black ghetto emerged in the city's West End during the 1930s as whites began to move out, spreading as white flight picked up. Over-the-Rhine, a historic 19th-century neighborhood built by German immigrants, later became one of the city's iconic black ghettos.
"In the '30s and '40s, as migration starts, [white] people start to move out of the basin," says Henry Louis Taylor Jr., a history professor at the University at Buffalo and the author of "Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970." "As they move out of the basin into these hilltop neighborhoods, you get the first legitimate wave of segregating communities ... In the 1950s, '60 and '70s, as they leave Cincinnati, the patterns of racial residential segregation intensify."
The black share of the city's population has risen from 34 to 46 percent since 1980, while that number has stayed stable around the metro



region.

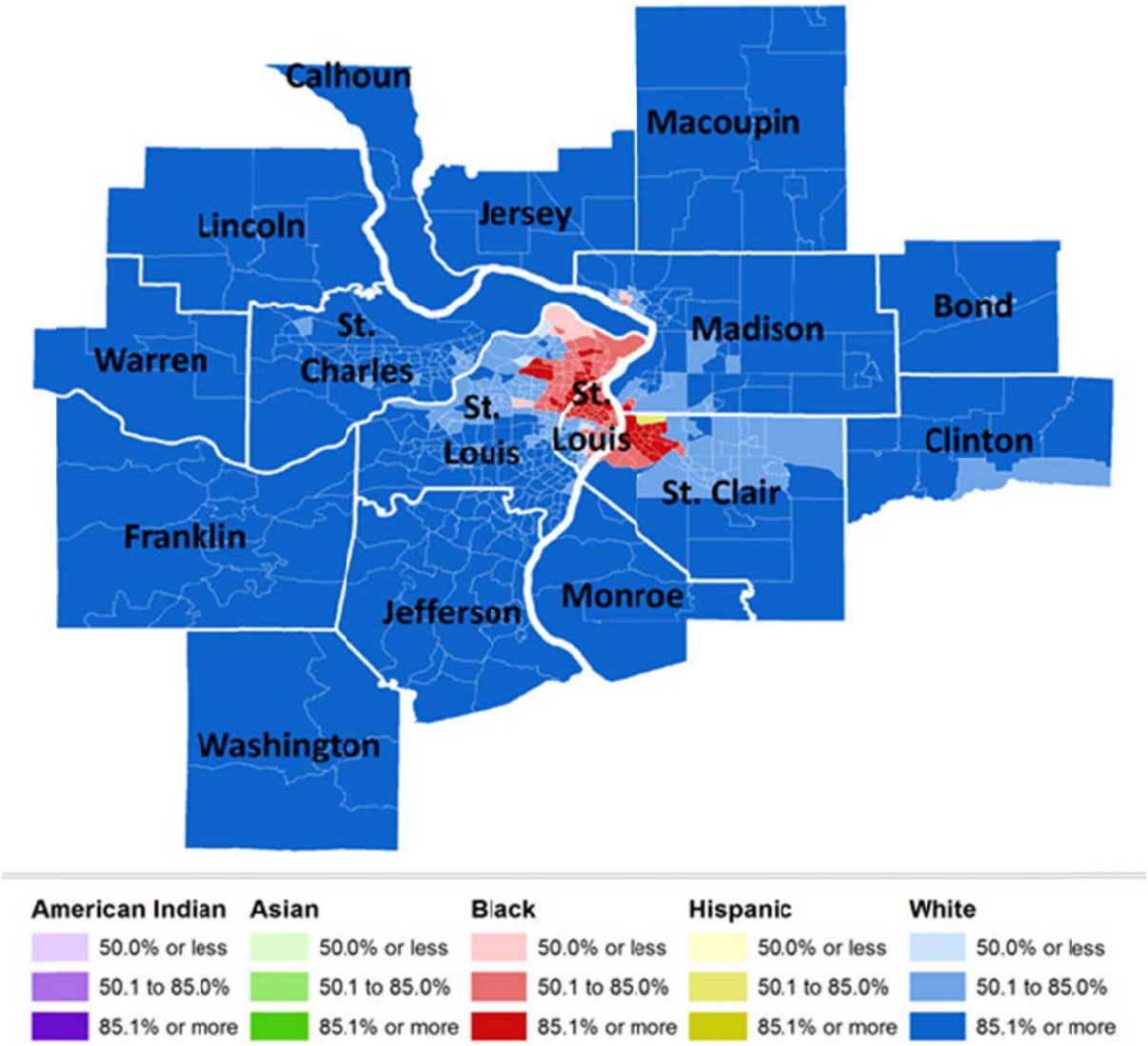
"There are so many places where whites will try to flee the problems of the city, including the problem of diversity," says University of Cincinnati historian David Stradling, author of "Cincinnati: From River City to Highway Metropolis." "Obviously the No. 1 cause of this is, of course, simply racism. There's racism that works through the white family who makes the decision to either defend against the arrival of black families or simply flee and give up the defense. Either of those strategies doesn't help as far as desegregation is concerned."

According to Stradling, the relative smallness of Cincinnati compared to the surrounding suburbs has made it easy for people to defend all-white communities. And as an increasing number of blacks move to some older suburbs, whites respond by moving farther out.
"It's about housing values," Taylor says. "It's about the fact that whites still believe that the influx of African-Americans into a neighborhood and community will negatively impact on housing values."
So blacks remain concentrated in the center city, excluded from white neighborhoods and increasingly displaced by large-scale urban renewal projects.
"In the mid-1930s, the city used federal dollars to demolish a big chunk of the central West End and build public housing," Stradling says. "The biggest blow came in the late 1950s when the lower West End (an area called Kenyon Barr) was completely demolished, the street grid changed, making room for I-75, new, wide streets, and redevelopment sites for low-rise industry (which didn't really come). Thousands of people (almost all of them African-American) were displaced. And – this is part of the tragedy for the city – those displaced residents were replaced by no one."
Which brings us back to Over-the-Rhine, where many displaced blacks moved in the 1960s. In 2001, the neighborhood was the epicenter of major riots that exploded after the police killing of an unarmed black teenager. The neighborhood is now gentrifying. Meanwhile, the region's segregation remains intact and the matter is not considered a priority for newly inaugurated Republican Gov. John Kasich.
"Right now, we've got a pretty reactionary governor," says Stradling. "And he's not interested in the urban core. There are a lot of places growing in Ohio, but the problem is how they grow at the expense of other parts of Ohio. I see years of expanded highway spending, and not spending in the urban core."

No. 7: St. Louis

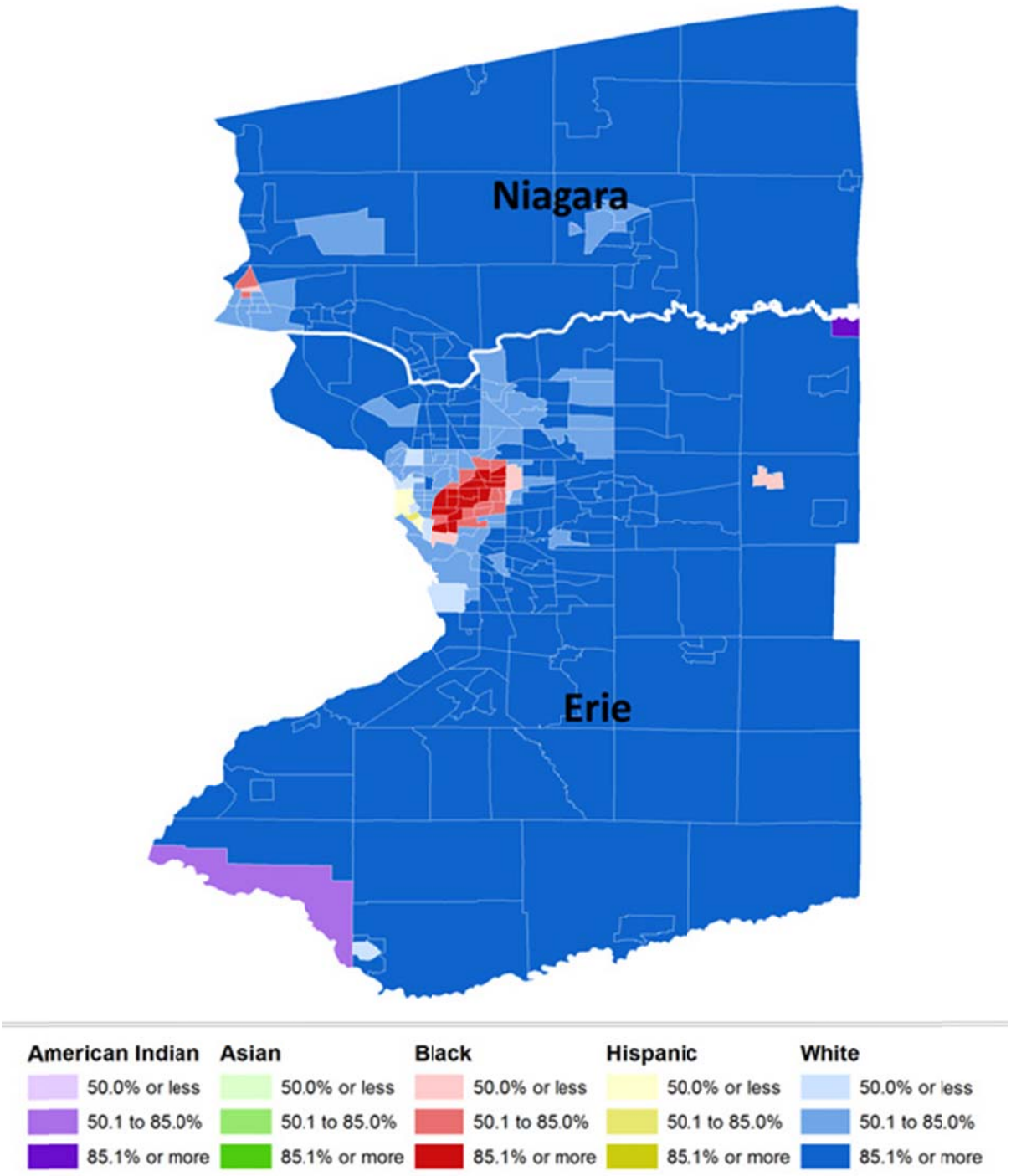
Main city population: 319,294
Metropolitan population: 2,812,896
Segregation level (dissimilarity):72.3

"St. Louis, like Louisville and Baltimore, is Southern in race relations and Northern in its organization of property," says Colin Gordon, a history professor at the University of Iowa and the author of "Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City."
Until the 1960s, the county line strictly divided St. Louis: blacks on the city side, and whites on the county side. "The boundary between the two was a sort of Berlin Wall based on both wealth and race. The suburbs that developed on the western edge of the city, the Missouri suburbs, assiduously used private deed restrictions, FHA guidelines and exclusionary zoning to try to maintain that split."



The few black settlements in the county that predated the suburbs were actually torn down, the residents forced into public housing in the city. But these days, everyone is leaving St. Louis.

"What we conventionally think of as white flight is now black flight as well," says Gordon. "The city itself is just emptying out and the predominant area of African-American settlement is in St. Louis County."
Not that this is leading to newly integrated suburban



neighborhoods. "It tends to be 90 percent one or 90 percent the other," he says. "The metro area is just thinning out."

East St. Louis is St. Louis' even more depressed sister city across the river in Illinois. In July 1917, it was the site of one of the worst race riots in American history, a mob attack on blacks that historians now call a massacre: 39 blacks were killed and entire black neighborhoods burned down. During the second half of the 20th century, whites stopped attacking blacks and simply moved far away from them. The city is now 97 percent black.

Hard-luck big cities quickly forget about their even more hardscrabble neighbors. "When you drive into St. Louis the only evidence of East St. Louis are the signs advertising no-holds-barred strip clubs," says Gordon.

No. 6: Buffalo
Main city population: 261,310
Metropolitan population: 1,135,509
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 73.24

Large numbers of black migrants did not arrive in Buffalo until the 1940s, later than cities like Detroit or Philadelphia. They came for jobs in the booming steel and auto industries, economic engines that spawned machine shops and a sprawling transportation industry. While the city's early black community lived alongside white ethnics in bustling and crowded immigrant neighborhoods, new migrants found themselves walled into the ghetto.

"The main African-American neighborhood in the city of Buffalo was a multi-racial community in which African-Americans shared residential space with various white ethnics including Polish, Italian and Russians, and to a lesser extent Irish," says Henry Louis Taylor Jr., a history professor at the University at Buffalo and the author of "African Americans and the Rise of Buffalo's Post Industrial City." "Blacks and whites not only shared residential space but actually lived together in the same apartment buildings."

The New Deal pushed mass homeownership for whites and shut blacks out. From then on, blacks would be seen as a threat to home values. The deinvestment that resulted from rapid white flight made decline a self-fulfilling prophecy. Meanwhile, the industrial jobs that blacks migrated to work in were rapidly disappearing.

"As that population increases, you are right in the heart of the accelerated transformation of the population from center city to suburban. Highways are coming in and they're trying to get out. Blacks are moving in and they [whites] are ready to sail," says Taylor.

"Homeownership begins to attach a new type of value to the neighborhood. It turns the neighborhood into a commodity, and a separation of the races based on the type of houses you can afford."

Real estate agents were eager to make money off the boom in homeownership, says Robert Silverman, a professor of urban studies at the University at Buffalo, hoping to profit from the pent-up black demand for housing and growing white fear.

"Blockbusting was taking place, where real estate agents would go into a neighborhood with all white homeowners and basically tell people that minorities are moving in, to encourage them to sell, and then flip the houses at inflated prices to African-Americans. Then lenders wouldn't lend to areas with an African-American population."

Silverman and fellow researcher Kelly Patterson found that poor people continue to be denied the right to affordable housing in Buffalo suburbs thanks to limited public transportation, poor communication from housing officials, and outright discrimination.

"Although population in the metro area has maintained pretty stagnant over the past 50 years, the population of the suburbs has actually increased," he says. "African-Americans just didn't have access to those housing markets."

Perhaps most disturbingly, they found that the only two outer-ring suburbs with black populations of above 3.7 percent were home to large prisons.

When affordable housing does get built outside the city, it is overwhelmingly concentrated in the older suburbs. The good news is that some of these inner-ring suburbs are experiencing what appears to be a degree of stable integration.

"Whites aren't fleeing those areas," says Silverman. "Predominantly middle-class and working-class African-Americans are moving to those areas seeking better educational opportunities for kids and getting access to those jobs that are in those inner-ring suburbs. So as long as the neighborhoods remain stable in terms of their infrastructure and quality of life, you don't really see people moving out as rapidly. And that's something that really distinguishes what's happening now from the past."

But those blacks who remain in Buffalo's neighborhoods of concentrated poverty remain segregated by race, and increasingly by class.

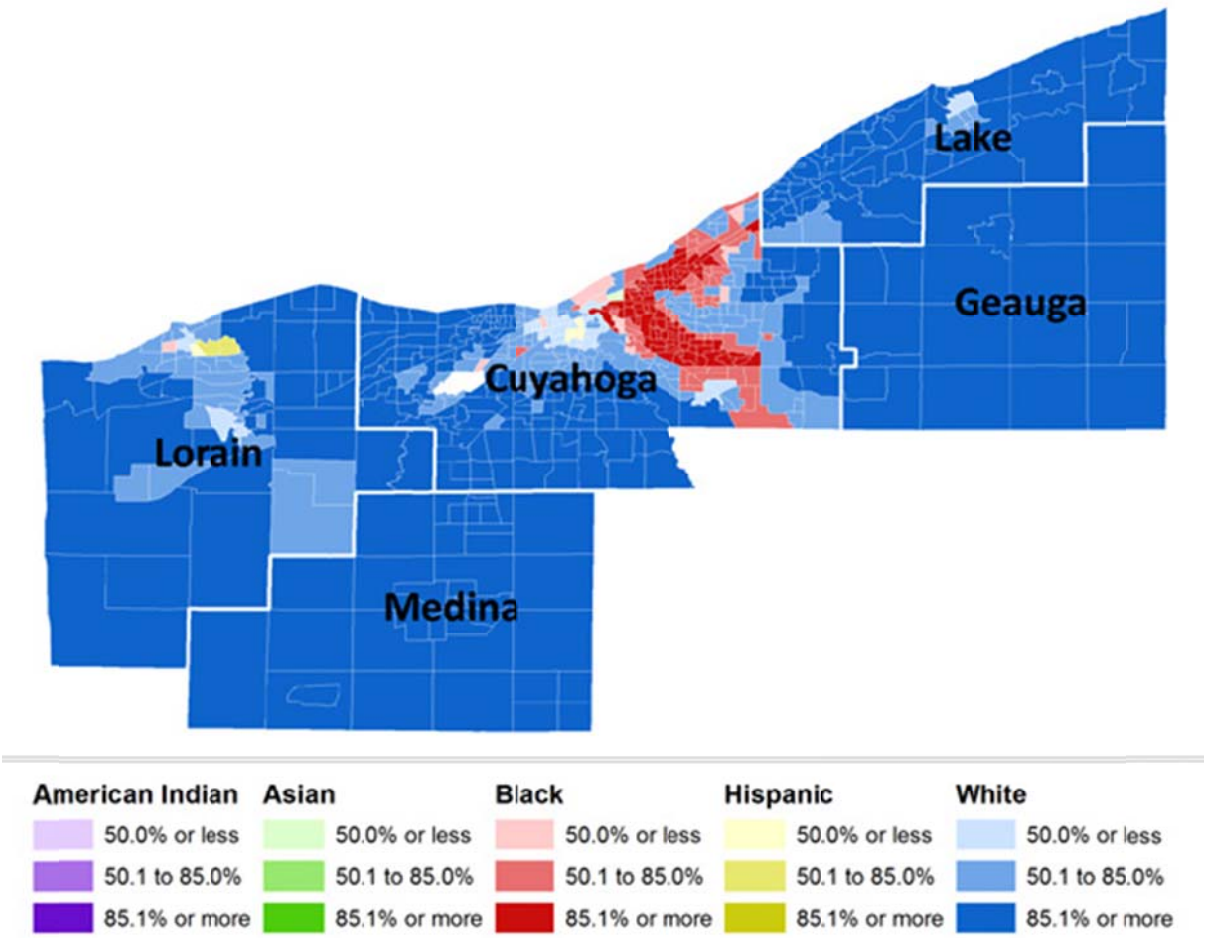
No. 5: Cleveland

Main city population: 396,815

Metropolitan population: 2,077,240

Segregation level (dissimilarity): 74.14

"African-Americans that I interviewed had very few housing choices when they came into Cleveland," says Kimberley Phillips, professor of history and American studies at William and Mary. "So they moved to where they could live, which were older houses that white ethnics left on the East Side."



Phillips is the author of "Alabama North: African American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland."

"For other groups, there were similar patterns of segregation in particular moments in time. In the early 20th century, blacks, Jews and Italians were all highly

segregated. These were working people, poor people, the groups that tended to have the fewest housing choices," says Phillips. "The persistence of black residential segregation is remarkable."

White working-class people's greatest asset was their home. They perceived blacks to be a danger to that wealth and stability – their small and tenuous purchase on the American dream.

"The only leverage the white working class had was in their homes. That fear drove them to organize in ways that otherwise they might not have," she says. "There was always a joke that you needed a passport to go from one side of the city to the other."

Now the value of those assets is falling across the board. Cleveland posted a 17 percent population loss since 2000, falling below 400,000. Once a manufacturing behemoth, the city is now smaller than Omaha, Neb.

Blacks are moving into nearby neighborhoods and suburbs, while whites are moving farther away, says Mark J. Salling, a professor of urban affairs at Cleveland State University and an expert on the area's demography.

Salling, unlike others interviewed for this series, doesn't see the process in racial terms. He says that a simple equation is at work: Continuing suburban sprawl without population growth is hollowing out the city center. New construction continues to spread outward long after the region's population stagnated.

"I wouldn't describe it as white flight," he says. "I don't think many people are moving out because African-Americans are moving into the neighborhoods. We continue to have new houses built on the fringes of the area, and no in-migration into the area."

Phillips, however, says that race continues to fuel the high levels of suburban segregation.

"Some of those segregation patterns migrated to the suburbs," she says. "It's a subtle resistance that happens – with very profound effects."

There are exceptions to the segregated status quo. Like Chicago, Cleveland is home to a suburb that pioneered integrated housing during the 1950s and '60s.

"Our very first home we bought was in Shaker Heights," says Phillips, referring to the east-side streetcar suburb. "It was one of those planned communities that got built in 1920s, and they planned integration in 1950s. They established incentives to encourage people to move into certain parts of Shaker Heights. And they wanted to integrate schools, and they wanted to do it naturally without having to bus."

No. 4: Detroit

Main city population: 713,777

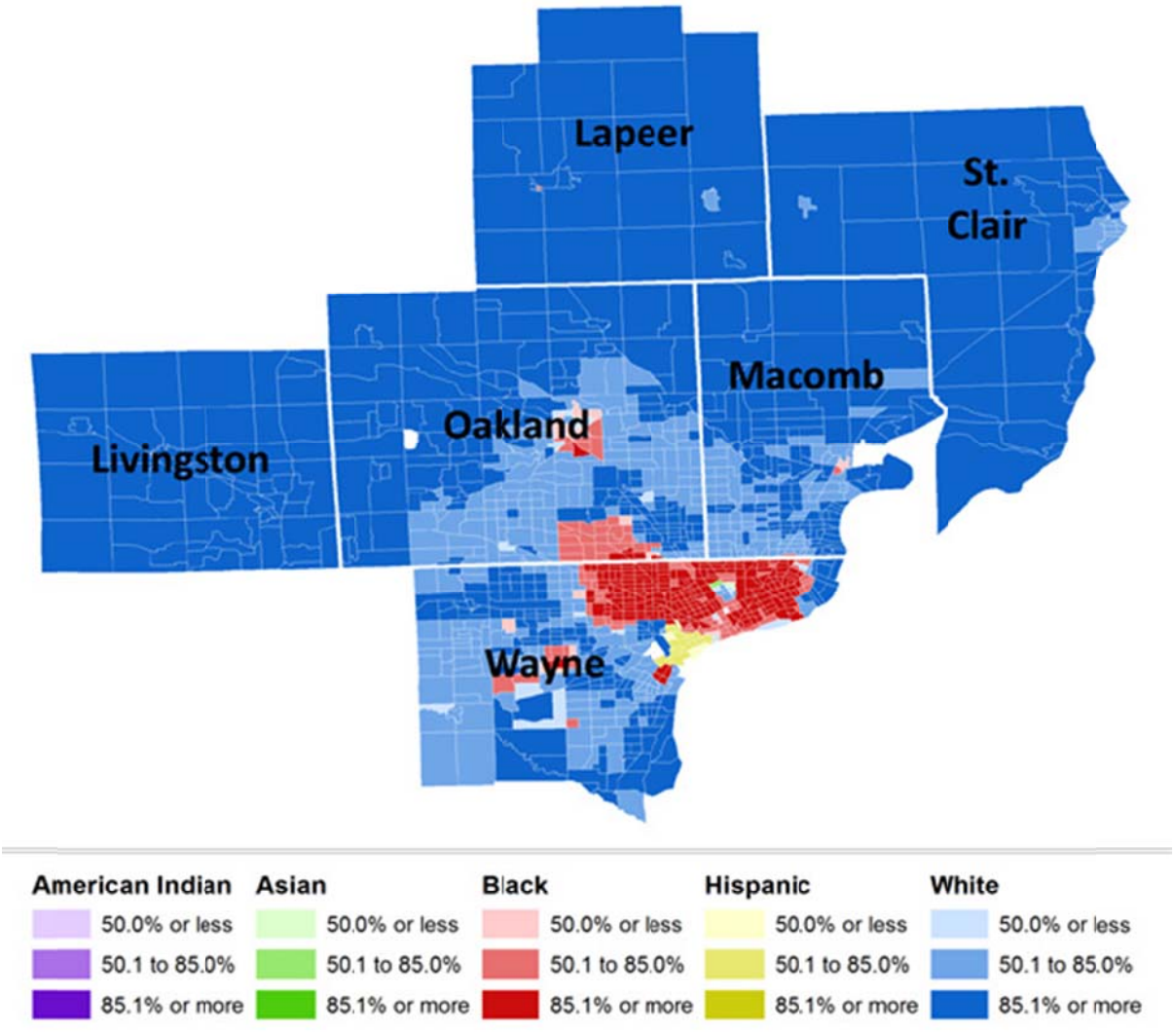
Metropolitan population: 4,296,250

Segregation level (dissimilarity): 75.25

The new census numbers show a 25 percent decline in the city's population, a shock to even the most pessimistic local observers. Detroit, measured at 713,777 people in 2010, is in free fall.

In the early 20th century, however, the city's real estate was valuable, and jealously guarded by whites. The hundreds of thousands of blacks who migrated to work in the city's booming auto and defense industries found that most jobs and neighborhoods were closed to them.

In the 1920s, '30s and '40s, working-class white ethnics bought homes and began to identify as just "white." And being white meant keeping blacks, suffering from an extreme housing shortage, away from white neighborhoods and jobs. Along with the restrictive covenants that barred the sale of homes to non-whites and discriminatory public and private lending practice, white Detroiters perpetuated widespread harassment, violence and property destruction against blacks who dared move out of the crowded ghetto in the city's Lower East Side. "For most of the 20th century, Detroit was one of the most segregated cities in the United States," says Tom Sugrue, a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit." "The city became a magnet for black migrants – and whites fiercely defended their turf against black newcomers."



One developer even erected a 6-foot-high cement wall between white and black neighborhoods to make the former actuarially sound. "In many neighborhoods, whites used violence and intimidation to deter black newcomers. In my book, I document nearly 250 incidents involving mobs, vandalism and violence directed toward the first black families to move into formerly white neighborhoods. Whites also formed hundreds of 'neighborhood improvement associations' that pledged to keep 'undesirables' – namely blacks – out. Real estate brokers and mortgage lenders – backed by federal housing policy – also played a critical role in creating an unfree housing market for African-Americans."

With the relocation and decline of industry, blacks were stuck in an increasingly jobless and expanding ghetto. Black unemployment rose to 22.5 percent in 1980, doubling in just 20 years. White workers, writes Sugrue, followed industry to the suburbs. Those too poor to stay behind became "angrier and more defensive." In 1972, every majority white ward in the city supported George Wallace in the Democratic presidential primary. The Alabama governor – who once declared "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" – had a message that resonated.

The new census numbers show large numbers of blacks moving to the suburbs, and increasing integration as a result: Detroit's dissimilarity index fell a dramatic 10 points since 2000, one of the largest decreases nationwide. This good news, however, is only made possible by the broader economic disaster.

"Blacks are fleeing the city and are following the path of least resistance into formerly all-white bastions like Warren and Harper Woods, where houses are often on the market for months or years," says Sugrue. "But many whites, trapped by the collapsing housing market, are unable to move. Hence a decline in segregation rates."

In Detroit city, Latinos are the only growing segment of the population. The Mexicantown neighborhood is thriving, with few boarded-up windows, a leafy park and abundant taquerias.

No. 3: Chicago

Main city population: 2,695,598

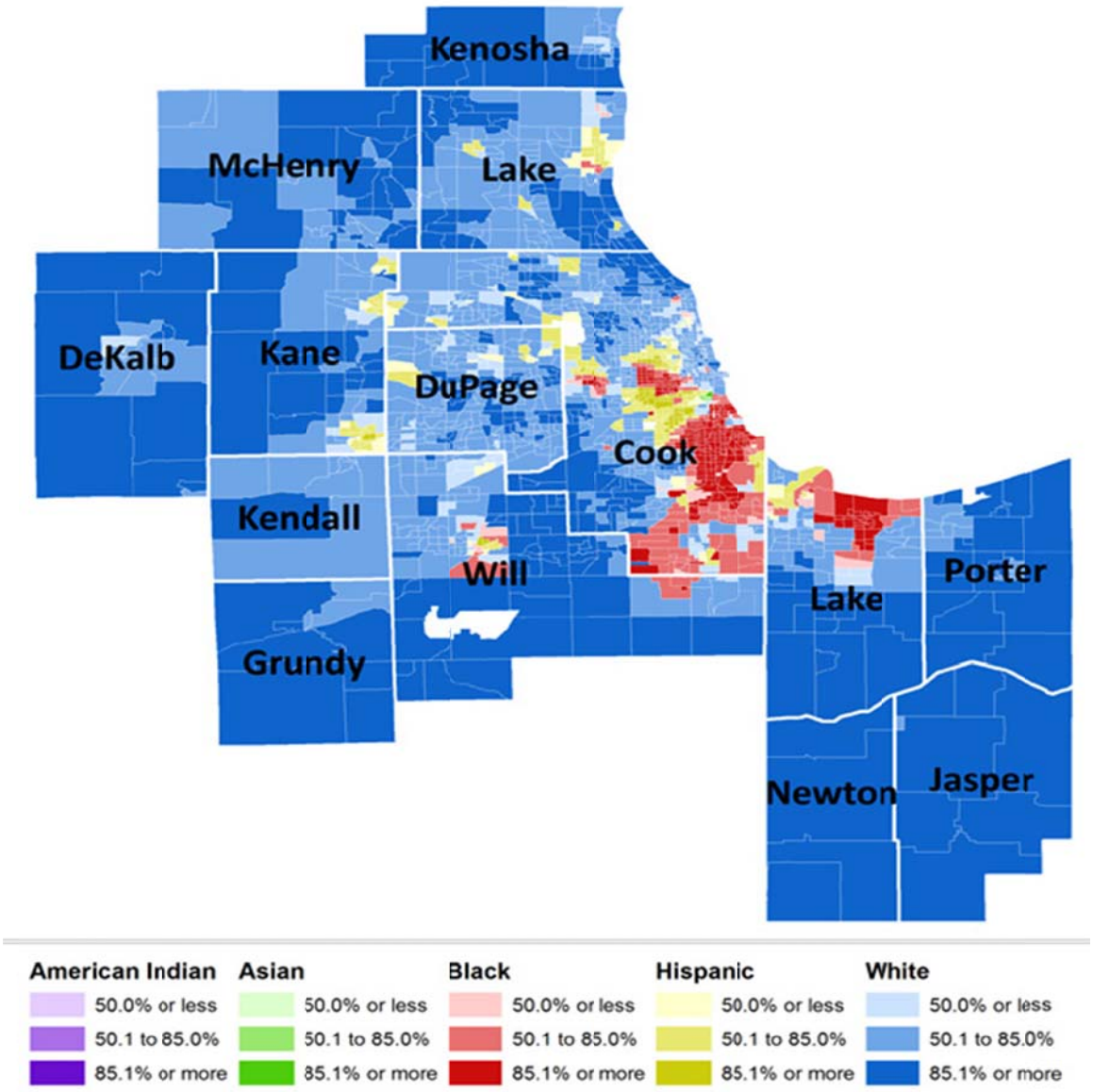
Metropolitan population: 9,461,105

Segregation level (dissimilarity): 76.43

In Chicago, white counter-protesters attacked open housing marchers, hitting Martin Luther King in the head with a brick. He later said that he had "never seen as much hatred and hostility on the part of so many people."

"It's been segregated since before significant black migration to Chicago started in about 1915," says Lincoln Quillian, a professor of sociology at Northwestern University who researches segregation. "It increased especially after World War II, with the Great Migration of blacks from the South to northern factories. There were only certain parts of the town, on the South Side, open to blacks at the time."

Like all migrants, blacks often settled among relatives and friends. But once settled, they were barred from moving into neighboring white communities, creating what historian Arnold Hirsch called Chicago's "second ghetto." Later on, the relocation of industry was a long-term economic catastrophe for working-class blacks in the city, converting poor neighborhoods on the South and West sides into what Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson calls "jobless ghettos."



"Segregation was the result of organized white opposition to the expansion of blacks, including steps to eliminate them as serious competitors for residential areas and jobs," says Wilson, the author of numerous books on segregation and poverty in Chicago. Later on, white people moved to the suburbs – and took the jobs with them. "Since 1980, over two-thirds of employment growth has occurred outside the central city." Chicago's iconic public housing towers, now demolished, cemented the concentration of black poverty. After the end of de jure segregation in public housing, white city alderman aggressively kept the projects out of their communities. Meanwhile, Wilson says, Richard J. Daley reinforced segregation by using "the Interstate Highways Act of 1956 to route expressways through impoverished African-American neighborhoods," including the "14-lane Dan Ryan Expressway, which created a barrier between black and white neighborhoods."

The city is increasingly diverse, however, with Latinos now making up a full 25 percent of the population. And there are pockets of integration, including the North Side neighborhood of Rogers Park, where a mixture of whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos live.

"It may help that no group feels like there's a group that runs the neighborhood completely," says Quillian.

Chicago's suburbs were also resistant to integration. In Cicero, a suburb just west of the city, thousands of whites attacked a black family moving into the apartment complex in 1951. One activist noted that while whites burned black churches in Mississippi, they burned down black homes in Chicago. The whites who didn't fight fled (and some did both). Today, Cicero is 87 percent Latino.

"In the 1960s, people were seeing the very evident effect of blockbusting and panic peddling occurring throughout neighborhoods in the city of Chicago, largely on the west side," says Rob Breymaier, the executive director of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center, which helps to foster integrated housing in a village just to the south of Cicero. "The practice of blockbusting and panic peddling is that realtors would parade African-American families through white neighborhoods. Then they would call and say, 'I don't know if you saw, but you might want to sell now before housing prices fall.'"

Oak Park was one of a handful of places around the country where progressive whites made common cause with blacks. But in the Chicago area, it's the exception, not the rule. Today, middle-income blacks are increasingly moving into Chicago's suburbs. And though Quillian says that there isn't white flight like there was in the past, many communities appear to be resegregating. The problem now is white avoidance.

No. 2: New York

Main city population: 8,175,133

Metropolitan population: 18,897,109

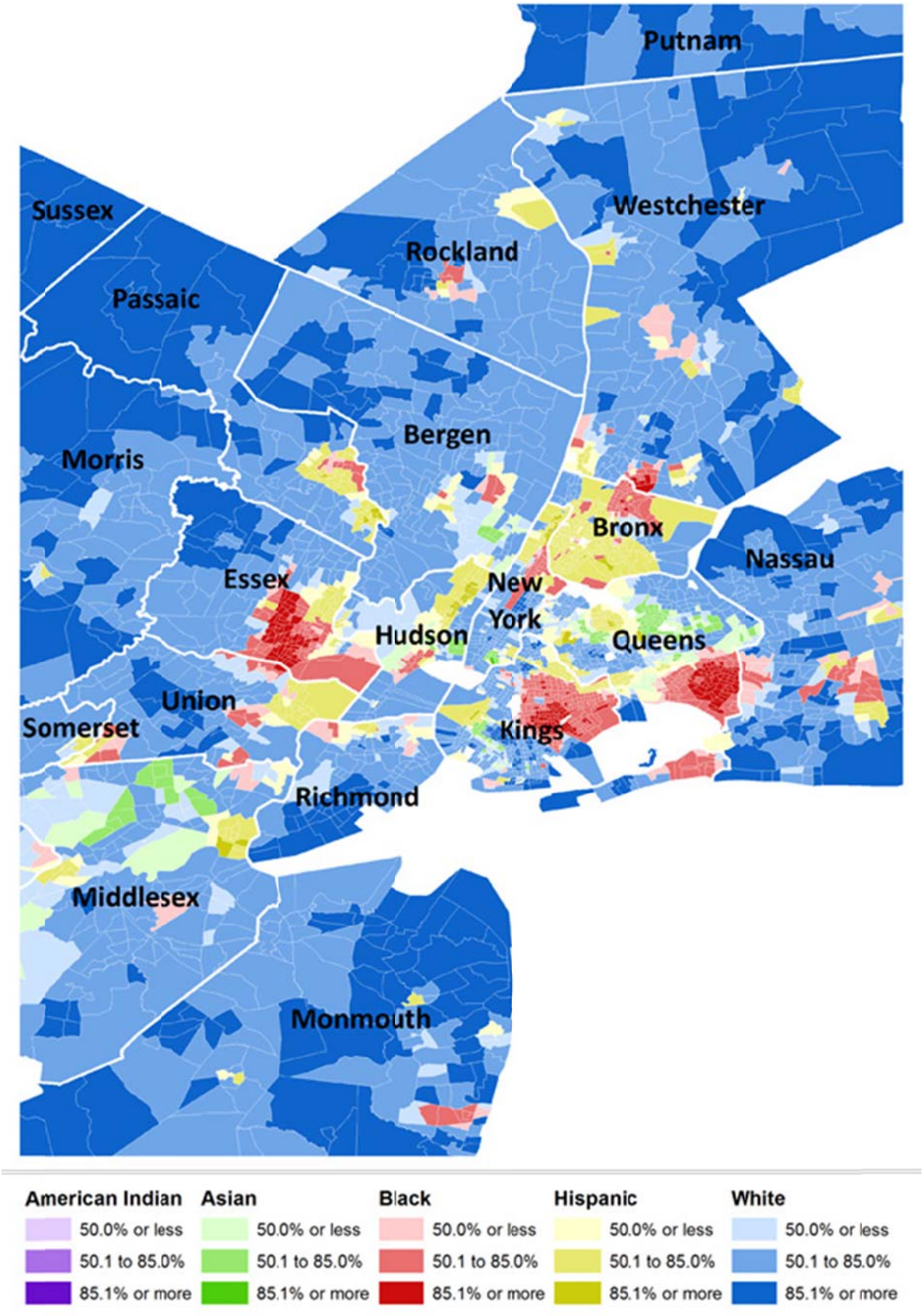
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 78.04

New York escaped the decay that has struck manufacturing cities across the Northeast and Midwest. But it hasn't shaken the lines that divide the Rust Belt by race: New York remains the second most segregated metro area in the country.

"Here in the home of limousine liberalism, the first part of the problem is to get anyone to stop talking about 'diversity' in the aggregate long enough to acknowledge that municipal and neighborhood segregation didn't just drop from the sky ... and isn't simply a function of economics or of self-selection," Craig Gurian, executive director of the Anti-Discrimination Center, says. "Rather [it] was created by explicitly discriminatory conduct on the part of both public and private actors over the course of decades. Patterns, once established, tend to stay in place unless active steps are taken to undo them."

In 2009, the Obama administration signed a landmark consent decree with Westchester County, which is nearly 80 percent white. A lawsuit filed by the Anti-Discrimination Center had charged the county with misrepresenting its affordable housing efforts to the federal government. The suit received widespread media attention and was seen as a blow to racially and economically exclusive municipalities nationwide. But Gurian says the decree hasn't been enforced.

"The problem is not just a Westchester problem: Over 1,000 jurisdictions across the country are looking to see whether the federal government will ... hold Westchester's feet to the fire," he wrote. "It is especially critical that there be enforcement because the Westchester County executive, Rob Astorino, has publicly defied lawful federal authority."



Resistance to desegregation is hard to overcome. In the 1940s, MetLife refused to rent apartments to blacks in Manhattan's sprawling Stuyvesant Town development. In the 1980s, Yonkers almost bankrupted itself fighting an effort to build affordable housing on the city's white east side. New York is also one of two cities, alongside Los Angeles, with sky-high segregation of Latinos.

Ingrid Gould Ellen, an urban planning and public policy professor at New York University, says that New York City is somewhat more integrated than the data would suggest, because it is far denser than most cities. Since census tracts are made up by population, tracts in New York tend to be very small.

"What happens is that we're not making apples to apples comparisons. The neighborhoods in Atlanta and Houston are 10 times the size of neighborhoods in New York City physically," she says. "The census tracts are so much smaller, so you're likely to cross over a number of census tracts every day."

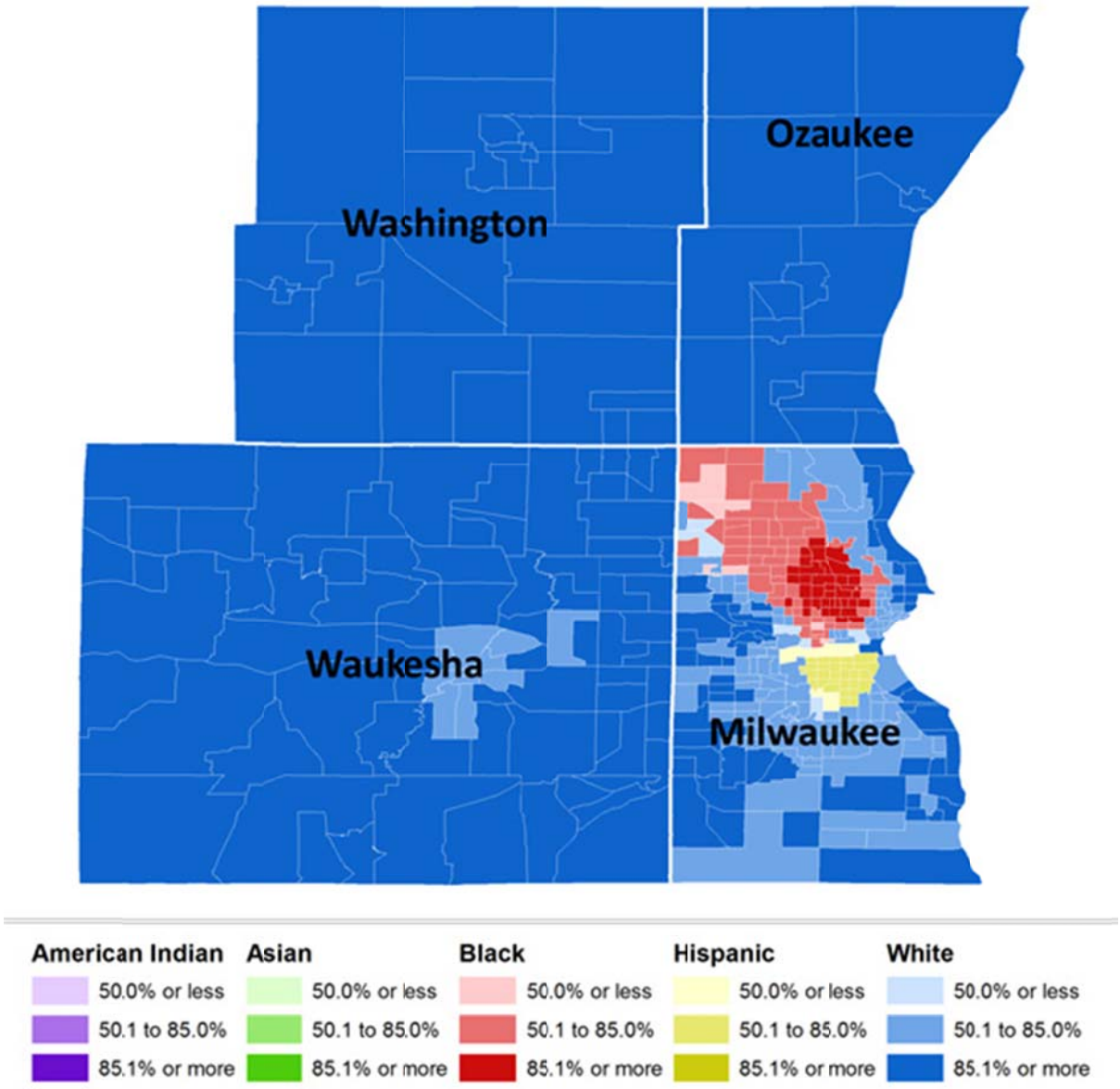
The daily commute of the average New Yorker also lessens racial isolation. Thanks to the dominance of public transit, intra-city travel tends to be a diverse experience.

"People are much heavier users of public transit than other parts of the country," says Ellen. "The New York-L.A. comparison: I live down the street from my office but I'm in the subway most days. I'm literally bumping elbows with people from all over the world. Whereas if I'm in L.A., I get in my car in my all white neighborhood, and drive to work. It's very different."

No. 1: Milwaukee
Main city population: 594,833
Metropolitan population: 1,555,908
Segregation level (dissimilarity): 81.52

Milwaukee is consistently rated one of the country's most segregated metro areas. Like Detroit and most places on this list, Milwaukee has been battered by deindustrialization, with segregated urban blacks disproportionately hurt as jobs and the tax base suburbanized and moved away.

"Most of our history is very similar to Chicago, Cleveland or even Baltimore," says Marc Levine, professor of history and economic development at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. "Every place has had the zoning ordinances, then restrictive covenants, the practices of realtors. The standard history. What makes Milwaukee a little bit different than these other places, which explains why we're



consistently in the top five and often No. 1, in segregation? We have the lowest rate of African-American suburbanization of any of these larger cities."

Nationwide, blacks have been concentrated in the inner city, far away from where new jobs are created. Yet the case of Milwaukee is extreme: 90 percent of the metro area's black population lives in the city. Making matters worse, suburban whites are notably hostile to building any form of public transit to connect city people to suburban jobs, further exacerbating segregation's ill effects.

If you're wondering if this can somehow, some way, be blamed on union-busting Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, the answer is yes. Walker took the lead in a campaign against public transit to connect the suburbs to the city during his time as county executive. He thought the funds would be better spent on highways.

"There is virulent opposition in these exurban counties to any kind of regional transit system, particularly a regional rail system. There have been proposals over the years, but they're always DOA," says Levine. "Governor Walker's big issue as state representative and county executive was 'Over my dead body light rail,' and he fought with Milwaukee's mayor over funds for regional rail. He very much represents that suburban and exurban base."

Levine has done some fascinating research into Walker's political base. Of the nation's 30 largest metro areas, Milwaukee had the biggest partisan vote gap between city and suburb, with city-dwellers supporting Obama 31 points more than suburbanites.

Milwaukee sticks out in another way: Civic boosters have mounted a major campaign to deny the city's segregation. In 2002, a group of job training researchers at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, released a study contending that nationally recognized measures of segregation are "racially biased" and, using a new measure, argued that Milwaukee was actually the tenth most integrated of the largest 50 cities.

While people everywhere – especially whites – find it hard to talk about race, the methodological contortions undertaken in Milwaukee are striking.

"It's not really controversial in Milwaukee. No one seriously doubts we're a highly segregated place. It's only controversial because this work, which has never been published, never been peer reviewed, and isn't taken seriously by any academic experts, purported to show something that some local political leaders wanted to tout in order to make Milwaukee look better," says Levine. "These non-faculty contract researchers got a grant from a local foundation whose president said, 'I don't think Milwaukee is really as segregated as all these studies have shown. Can you run some numbers that show that?'"

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel covered the findings extensively, despite their lack of academic rigor.

"Milwaukee ranks across the board as among the most segregated metropolises in the nation. It has among the highest rates of racial inequality across a whole range of indicators: black-white joblessness, black-white poverty and black-white ownership of businesses. There's a bit of civic embarrassment and sensitivity to it," says Levine.