



Journal Sentinel Services Classifieds OnWisconsin LIVE Coupons Yellow Pages

Online Bachelor's & Master's Degrees for Working Professionals

- Accounting
- Education
- Management
- Business
- Information Technology
- Nursing

News Articles: Advanced Searches



Subscribe to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel online

JS Online Features List

ON WISCONSIN : JS ONLINE : NEWS : EDITORIALS :

E-MAIL | PRINT THIS STORY

FEATURED ADVERTISERS



Life in Milwaukee, black and white

Shop the city's largest lighting showroom

Recent study denies realities of race here

By MARC V. LEVINE, GREGORY D. SQUIRES and JOHN F. ZIP

Last Updated: Jan. 18, 2003

What a welcome headline for Milwaukee, as we approach celebration of the Martin Luther King holiday: "Study explodes myth of area's hypersegregation."

For three days last week, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel provided unprecedented coverage of a short report by the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's Employment and Training Institute claiming that new ways of measuring racial patterns in housing prove that Milwaukee is not as segregated as virtually all researchers contend.

Too bad the headline is dead wrong. The institute's report is a blend of shoddy research and specious analysis. The fact of the matter, sadly, is that Milwaukee is as segregated as national studies continually show and that racial inequality remains firmly entrenched in our social landscape.

Putting aside for the moment the methods used in the report, its authors' conclusions hardly support the sensationalistic headlines. The report shows that only 9% of metro Milwaukee's population - and only 5% of the region's whites - live on so-called "integrated" blocks.

Segregation in Milwaukee



Illustration/KRT

- [Martin Kaiser](#): The debate continues on segregation
- [Levine, Squires, Zipp](#): Life in Milwaukee, black and white
- [John Gurda](#): Numbers tell one part of the story
- [Lois Quinn and John Pawasarat](#): Complaints not really about our methodology
- [Thomas Hylton](#): Discourage sprawl; encourage integration
- [William R. Tisdale](#): All is not well when it comes to diversity here
- [Bruce Murphy](#): Point, counterpoint on reporting

- News
- Wisconsin
- Milwaukee
- Waukesha
- Oz/Wash
- Racine
- Editorials
- Columnists
- Obituaries
- Letter to Editor
- Weather
- AP The Wire

Special Features:



Archived Features:



University of Phoenix ONLINE

Programs offered in:

LEARN MORE >>



MARKETPLACE



Need Help?

[Searching Archives](#)
[Wireless Access](#)
[Site Topics](#)
[Table of Contents](#)
[Contact Staff](#)
[Subscriptions](#)

Five percent. Does that statistic justify the conclusion: "Study explodes myth of area's hypersegregation?" On the contrary, by any reasonable analysis, it proves that Milwaukee is hypersegregated.

[David Shi](#): Why a nation celebrates the life of Martin Luther King

[Gregory Stanford](#): Hypersegregation label still applies to area suburbs

[Jobs](#)
[Cars](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[Rentals](#)
[Personals](#)
[General Classifieds](#)
[Grocery Coupons](#)
[Buy & Sell Tickets](#)
[Contests](#)

But even to come up with this measure, the Employment and Training Institute committed several methodological and conceptual errors. The authors' chief contention is that the dissimilarity index - the primary tool used by social scientists to measure racial segregation in metropolitan areas - is racially biased, advocates the dispersal of blacks from majority-minority neighborhoods and produces unfair rankings of metro areas.

This is nonsense. The dissimilarity index is not, as the institute implies, some sort of Jim-Crow-era, white-domination tool, with an agenda of diluting black political power or promoting mass population dispersal.

Rather, it is simply a measure that provides a statistical estimate of the extent to which the racial composition of neighborhoods resembles the racial composition of a metropolitan area.

Seems intuitive, doesn't it? If a metro area is 15% black, but most blacks live in neighborhoods that are 80% black, most observers would agree that things look a bit more segregated than if most blacks lived in neighborhoods that were 50% black. In this fashion, the dissimilarity index gives us a systematic way to compare levels of segregation in metro areas with different proportions of racial minorities.

But the dissimilarity index is just one tool researchers have used to compare levels of segregation in various metro areas. The U.S. Bureau of the Census, for example, recently issued a report comparing segregation in the nation's largest metropolitan areas using five different measures (dissimilarity, isolation, exposure, centralization and spatial proximity).

The bureau's finding, when all measures are taken into account: Milwaukee ranks as the nation's most segregated metropolitan area.

Although the Employment and Training Institute authors caution against using any one index to rank metro areas by level of segregation, they do exactly that. But their measure of "integration" - which calculates the percentage of the metro area population living on blocks that are at least 20% white and 20% black - is deceptive for three reasons.

First, the 20% figure is arbitrary. Why is a block with 20% "others" considered integrated? Why not 10, 25 or 50%? ETI has simply

chosen a number out of thin air, with no methodological justification. By what logic, in a metropolitan Milwaukee that is 16% African-American, does the report come to the conclusion that a block 79% black is "integrated?"

Second, the report claims that examining racial patterns at the block level yields radically new findings on levels of segregation. It doesn't: About the same percentage of metro Milwaukee residents live in 20/20 census tracts as they do on blocks. Contrary to the hyped claims, looking at blocks does not change the analysis. This is a complete red herring, designed to give an air of originality to the report.

But setting an arbitrary 20% threshold for integration does distort things because, by definition, metro areas with smaller black populations simply do not have enough blacks living there to meet the 20% threshold. Thus, using that measure, a metro area with a 19% black population, where every block was 19% black (perfect integration using the "dissimilarity index"), would be more segregated than a metro area that was 40% black, containing one block meeting the 20/20 criterion and all the rest highly segregated.

Clearly, this conclusion would be ludicrous.

Finally, the study's measure is flawed, because the authors are unable to distinguish "integrated" areas from neighborhoods in racial transition. Almost all of the blocks designated by ETI as "integrated" in Milwaukee are on the west and northwest side of the city.

Between 1990 and 2000, the white population declined by 53,000, and the black population grew by more than 41,000 in these neighborhoods; the black percentage of the population grew from 36.9% to 56.7%. This doesn't look like integration - it looks like the latest phase of white flight and resegregation in Milwaukee.

If the trends of the 1990s continue, by 2010 these neighborhoods will be 77% black. But under the study's criteria, these neighborhoods will still be "integrated."

There are countless other problems with the report.

- It fails to properly analyze the place of suburban exclusion in Milwaukee's racial segregation: Milwaukee ranks near the bottom among large metropolitan areas in the percentage of blacks living in the suburbs.
- The report badly misanalyzes the issue of "majority-minority" neighborhoods, failing to distinguish between such neighborhoods that are created mainly by choice (middle- and upper-class black communities such as Prince George's County, Maryland) and "majority-minority" neighborhoods that are created because of discrimination and social inequality (such as

Metcalfe Park and much of Milwaukee's inner city).

As the Journal Sentinel said in an editorial last week: "Yes, many African-Americans choose to live in the black community, but often because they feel that white neighborhoods are too hostile."

Contrary to the report, no credible social scientist has claimed that black neighborhoods are problematic because they are black neighborhoods. But a wealth of research has demonstrated that, as a result of discriminatory treatment by a variety of public and private institutions, minority communities are often served by troubled public schools, provide fewer job opportunities and offer fewer recreational facilities.

To understand these neighborhood effects requires neighborhood level - or census tract - data. Block level data is useful, but not for revealing the costs of racial segregation. The report completely ignores the economic and social contexts of poverty, joblessness and crime that give segregation its bite in Milwaukee and elsewhere.

- Finally, efforts to help at least some families move from low-income, minority communities in inner cities to outlying middle income and predominantly white communities are not designed to weaken minority political power but rather to improve the life chances of minority families.

Early returns from the Gautreaux program in Chicago and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's "Moving to Opportunity" program in five large cities indicate that these efforts are in fact delivering the desired goods. Would ETI have us pull back from these efforts to break down the walls of suburban exclusion?

By every meaningful measure, Milwaukee remains highly segregated, with serious social and economic consequences, a point that even the report does not contest.

Whether Milwaukee ranks higher or lower than Salt Lake City on some index is far less important than the fact that Milwaukee and many other cities face an undeniable crisis of racial inequality. Black unemployment and poverty in Milwaukee are more than triple the white rate, and in many predominantly black inner city neighborhoods, over half the working-age population is unemployed or out of the labor force. These are the realities of segregation in Milwaukee that the report whitewashes.

Bad research often leads to bad policy. We can only hope that celebration of the flawed ETI report by Mayor John Norquist and others quoted in the Journal Sentinel articles will not discourage efforts to alleviate Milwaukee's long-standing segregation.

Today, more than ever, Milwaukee needs new and innovative strategies to reduce appalling racial gaps in poverty, income and employment; to break down barriers that still exist to equal housing opportunity; and to improve conditions in the city's poorest neighborhoods.

Misleading newspaper headlines based on specious research may make us feel better about things for a while; but in the end, as a community, we need to stop pretending things are getting better and come up with strategies to make them better.

Marc V. Levine is professor of urban studies and history and director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Gregory D. Squires, a former UWM faculty member, is professor and chair of the department of sociology at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. John F. Zipp, also a former UWM faculty member, is professor and chair of the department of sociology at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio.

A version of this story appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Jan. 19, 2003.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

[News Articles:
Advanced Searches](#)



[Subscribe to the
newspaper -
order online](#)

[JS Online Features List](#) ▼

© [Copyright 2003](#), Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved.
Produced by [Journal Interactive](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Journal Sentinel Inc. is a subsidiary of [Journal Communications](#), an employee-owned company.
v050802a