Sunday Symposium

Closer together?

Last Updated: Jan. 18, 2003

No, Milwaukee is not integrated

There is something that strikes me as I look at the demographic map of the "integrated" metro Milwaukee area - almost all of the integrated blocks and 80% or more African-American blocks are on the northwest side of Milwaukee ("Closer together/A more integrated Milwaukee," Jan. 12-14).

Integrated would imply blacks and whites have equal access to mortgage loans, family-sustaining employment, adequate health care and quality education. The unfortunate truth is that metro Milwaukee leads in mortgage loan denial rates and income disparities by race. The average black person's income is $494 to a white person's $1,000.

One can look at demographic statistics differently, but integration remains elusive. Integration implies long-term stability and equal access to resources. But Milwaukee suffers white flight of people and capital to the suburbs.

It takes work to create and maintain integrated communities. The true danger of the study done by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is that it implies that the work is done. Yet to create true integration, we have to urge our civic organizations, religious communities, governmental officials and politicians to work harder, not less.

Hypersegregation is an ugly word that can be banished from our vocabulary with a sincere effort to create stable and integrated neighborhoods, not just a number shuffle.

Zachary Williams
Milwaukee

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It pays to question everything

Questioning the questions can have unexpected answers.

First, is Milwaukee the "most segregated" city in America? For decades, that has been the perception of Milwaukee worldwide, now let's look at the reality.

A group of researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee questioned everything regarding that topic; in particular - the mid-1950s traditional measuring device used to answer that question in today's world.

The new UWM research has concluded - and the leading professionals in the measurement of integration have accepted as valid - that Milwaukee now ranks in the middle of integration in the nation. Under the new arithmetic, Milwaukee-Waukesha ranks as the 43rd most integrated metro area of the nation's largest 100. Under the old segregation index ranking, Milwaukee ranked 98 out of 100.

Call it new math, but however one looks at it, the numbers do add up. And in reality, who are our neighbors block by block?

Second, does this mean perceptions of race are changing in Milwaukee? Hardly, but it's a start. The race card issues are now off the table. Milwaukee gets a fresh start. Thank you, UWM!

Dan Gallagher
Milwaukee

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Series helped shatter the myth

I commend Bruce Murphy and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel for a great series of stories, graphs and perspective on how racial segregation and integration are actually occurring in American cities, especially those in the Midwest.

For more than 20 years, I have been involved in interpreting census data and other data on the African-American community in Indianapolis. It always bothered me that sociologists would classify Indianapolis as a highly segregated city and metro area; living in this city and community, I saw increasing amounts of racial integration every day.
Even though I knew Indianapolis had a far higher level of integration than national academics assumed, I bought into the myth about Milwaukee's "hypersegregation." I thought a black community - albeit larger than Indianapolis' though with lower median incomes, higher rates of poverty and a smaller middle and upper class - would be packed into rigidly segregated neighborhoods. The series helped shatter the myth.

For years, African-Americans have been moving into previously white neighborhoods. By contrast, whites have been moving into black neighborhoods. The old "block busting" practices, at least in Indianapolis, weren't occurring and haven't occurred for some 20 years. The series indicated that what's happened in Indianapolis happened in Milwaukee and other cities.

The Journal Sentinel is to be highly commended for allowing Murphy the time and the resources to do this story and do it right.

Amos Brown III
Director of strategic research, Radio One Indianapolis

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Issue of economic isolation persists

The Journal Sentinel's report minimizing hypersegregation in Milwaukee misses the broader picture of the division between the races in our community. While there may be more integrated blocks in our community than previously reported, the economic isolation of our minority population continues to increase.

A December study by American City Business Journals reported that "the income gap between black and white households is wider in metro Milwaukee than in any other major metro area."

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development has reported African-American unemployment has increased dramatically in the last decade, in spite of the investment of public and private dollars in various downtown development projects. It reported that the poverty rate in neighborhoods such as King Drive was 50% in 1999, five times the metro average.

The Greater Milwaukee Committee Economic Development Task Force reported that job growth in Milwaukee and wages have also lagged.

There is a reason crime is higher and graduation rates are lower in Milwaukee's minority community: the strikingly high rate of economic segregation. As Milwaukee embarks on a new wave of economic
development activity - the Park East Freeway corridor, the Menomonee Valley, the Pabst brewery - we need to be sure that the entire community benefits from the tax breaks and incentives that government plans to offer. We can't continue to leave so many of our citizens behind.

John Goldstein  
President,  
Milwaukee County Labor Council  
Milwaukee

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The problem exists; how do we fix it?

As the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Employment and Training Institute advocates, new approaches to segregation data should be considered. No analysis of census data, however, can or will change our housing patterns, reduce racial bias or end racial discrimination.

While we should better understand the extent of racial isolation, we should not succumb to the temptation to use a different statistical measurement as a justification for concluding that race no longer restricts opportunity in our area.

As the institute recognizes, no single statistic can portray the reality of integration. All have limitations. For example, the institute definition of integrated blocks, more than 20% blacks and more than 20% whites, guarantees a city with few blacks will rank low. At most, only 5% of the blocks can meet the definition in a 1% black city. The rest must be 100% white.

Are we doing better? Neither the institute's approach nor the segregation index describes how racial patterns in housing are changing. Only time comparisons can do that. Neither index is "racially biased." Both provide different, valuable but limited information.

We would better spend our time reducing racial bias and discriminatory behavior than trying to define away the problem statistically.

William H. Lynch  
Milwaukee

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Great news for Milwaukee

Congratulations to the Journal Sentinel for a tremendous report and
coverage on the segregation study. All I can say is: Wow.

While we still have a long way to go before we can proudly proclaim that there is no segregation in Milwaukee, at least now I believe that we are being judged by proper and current information. Obviously, this study is some tremendous news for Milwaukee, but it will also be very useful to many cities across the country.

The Journal Sentinel has succeeded in opening my eyes and has demonstrated that I must always remember that there may be two sides to any story and not to simply conform to accepted assumptions. This work is deserving of a standing ovation.

Dean Amhaus
President,
Spirit of Milwaukee
Milwaukee

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Segregation is all about jobs

So, are we to relax and breathe a sigh of relief that we're really not as bad as the nasty media has made us out to be? To me, it's not the geographical segregation - it's economics. It's all about jobs.

I worked for more than 12 years in the staffing and recruitment industry. I witnessed firsthand that segregation in Milwaukee is played out in the hiring process. I received requests for workers from companies wishing to specify race, sex and age. With large fees at stake, there's a "wink-wink" kind of compliance that made me sick. I left the industry because of this widespread practice.

Recently, a prominent real estate company requested that I refer a clerical support candidate to the company. It added that this person should not be African-American, as the other two clerks were African-American - apparently, the company thought having so many would be dangerous.

Most jobs are now located in the suburbs. Is it a coincidence that most are off the bus lines that many inner city workers depend upon for transportation?

Laura Parrino Byxbe
Milwaukee

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A closer look at community
The terrific series of articles finally explained a phenomenon that has long puzzled me.

When I campaigned either for myself or other Milwaukee School Board candidates, I was constantly surprised at how many neighborhoods seemed much more integrated than I expected based on the common description of Milwaukee as hypersegregated. I wondered if I had somehow stumbled onto unusual neighborhoods or if the analyses had not caught up to changing residential patterns. But the analyses never seemed to change. Turns out neither explanation fit - the measure was fatally flawed.

Bad social science leads to bad decisions. An argument against the neighborhood school initiative was that massive busing was needed to overcome neighborhood hypersegregation, yet I got the impression that many neighborhoods showed more variety than their schools.

One question that the data does not get at is whether the black and white neighbors are part of the same community or simply live next to each other. I got the impression that the latter may be true in many cases, especially with the weakening of community institutions.

Good work.

Bruce R. Thompson  
Professor,  
Milwaukee School of Engineering  
Former Milwaukee School Board president  
Milwaukee

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Other statistics paint different picture

I applaud the Journal Sentinel for its series devoted to black-white segregation in metropolitan Milwaukee. For readers, the most important issue is whether the current situation reflects what they hope for in this region.

I urge people to look at the question from several standpoints. A University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee study shows that about a fifth of metro Milwaukee residents live in blocks that have between 20% and 80% black neighbors, about average for the largest 100 metro areas in the country.

Our research shows that in some other ways, metro Milwaukee ranks near the top in black-white disparities. The average white lives in an area where only 5.3% of neighbors are black; 67.2% of the average black's neighbors are black. The average white household earning more than $60,000 lives in a neighborhood with a median income of...
$59,600; the average black household in the same income bracket lives in a neighborhood with a median income of $35,100. The typical white child attends a public elementary school where 20% of classmates are eligible for the reduced-price lunch program. In the average black child's school, 67% are this poor.

I make these points not to criticize Milwaukee, nor to make any other place look better by comparison, but simply so that local residents will have more than one way to assess their hometown.

John Logan  
Director,  
Lewis Mumford Center,  
State University of New York  
Albany

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It's not enough to value diversity

As the leader of a national organization that convenes diverse young community leaders to work on urban issues in 10 urban areas across the country, I have always found Milwaukee's ranking as the most segregated city in America a bit curious. The new study by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Employment and Training Institute and Bruce Murphy's excellent series in the Journal Sentinel confirm what I have always thought - Milwaukee is not much worse than many other cities.

It would be a mistake, though, to celebrate this news as very good. As editors thoughtfully noted, segregation continues to be an issue in the city and is especially a problem in our suburbs. Milwaukee also still has tremendous disparities in education, employment, health, public safety and wealth between whites and African-Americans or other minority groups.

Recently, several hundred young professionals came together through the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce to explore ways to improve integration. Many other groups such as Public Allies have been convening diverse people around these issues as well.

We must all continue to work hard to create a community that not only values diversity on the surface, but demonstrates it by reducing disparities so that Milwaukee is the best place for all people to work and raise their families.

Paul Schmitz  
President & CEO,  
Public Allies  
Milwaukee