CORRECTION: This article incorrectly states that John Logan, a professor at the State University of New York at Albany, drops metro areas with fewer than 50,000 African-Americans from his segregation index. Logan actually drops metro areas with fewer than 147,000 African-Americans from his ranking of the Top 50 Metro Areas. He also offers a complete index of all 331 metro areas but warns that results for any metro area with fewer than 50,000 African-Americans should be interpreted with caution. Logan said he does not recommend reliance on any single measure of segregation but believes the exposure index found on his Web site, www.albany.edu/mumford/census, is a better measure of integration than the approach used in a recent study by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Professor drops cities instead of altering tactics

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Last Updated: Jan. 12, 2003

One professor who has recognized the problem of calling Western cities the least segregated is John Logan of State University of New York at Albany.

Logan simply drops metro areas with low numbers of African-Americans, such as Salt Lake City, from his index.

Logan - and, by extension, his approach - has become influential partly because of his speed. There are so many academics who use the segregation index that there was a race to see who could digest the 2000 census results the fastest. Logan was the clear winner.

"We made a very big effort to provide information quickly," Logan said. "Often within 24 hours of its release, we had it organized for segregation. I think it was very
effective."

So effective, in fact, that Logan was quoted in stories rating and decrying urban segregation in newspapers across the country - including this one. The stories, which are reproduced on the Web site of the university's Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, have gained Logan considerable publicity.

Logan concedes that the low level of diversity in Salt Lake City is "a very important characteristic of the place." But rather than attempt a new formula that takes this into account, Logan simply drops any metro area with less than 50,000 African-Americans from his rating of segregation in the top 50 metro areas.

This may remove the problem of having Western cities with few blacks rate as least segregated, but it presents a question of inconsistency.

"There is no scientific basis" for removing some cities, Logan concedes.

Indeed, according to Karl Taeuber, the retired University of Wisconsin-Madison professor who is considered the father of what is technically called the dissimilarity index, "the big advantage of dissimilarity is that it allows a comparison of metro populations where relative populations vary greatly."

UW-Milwaukee researcher Lois Quinn, whose new study challenges the accuracy of the segregation index, called Logan's approach methodologically inconsistent.

"If you can't look at the winners under this formula, the cities with the smallest population of African-Americans," she said, "then how can you look at the losers, the cities with a high population of African-Americans, and say they are the most segregated?"
The massive inconsistency of Logan's approach is illustrated on another part of his Web site, where he provides ratings of 331 metro areas in America but urges "caution" for any with less than 50,000 blacks. As Quinn points out, this would mean the results for 226 metro areas shouldn't be taken seriously, the vast majority of the ratings.

And after all the warnings about areas with small populations of African-Americans, Logan believes no such caution is needed in rating portions of metro areas. He uses the segregation index to describe Milwaukee as highly segregated, while the suburban areas of Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties have only "a moderate level of segregation."

As anyone actually living here would know, African-Americans make up a tiny proportion (1.7%) of the population in the three suburban counties, about the same percentage as Salt Lake City. Nearly all the integration in the metro area occurs in the city of Milwaukee.