

How rising minority income does (or does not) lead to residential integration in the US

This paper examines how access to integrated neighborhoods changed for Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans from 1970 to 2010. Data come from the Decennial U.S. Census, with neighborhoods defined using census tracts, which are small geographic units established by census officials in collaboration with local authorities. For our analysis, we created comparable census tract grids for 287 consistently defined metropolitan from 1970 through 2010.

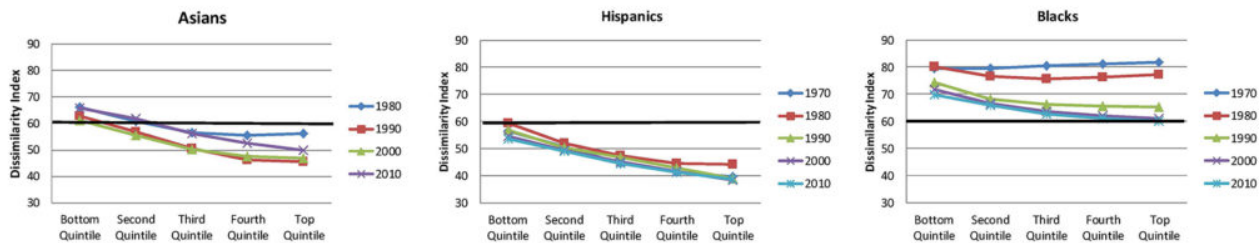


Fig. 1. Segregation from whites by race and income 1970-2010.

We measured segregation using the index of dissimilarity, which gives the percentage of minority and majority group members that would have to exchange tracts to achieve an even or integrated residential distribution. It ranges in value from 0 (complete integration) to 100 (total segregation). Non-Hispanic whites were here defined as the majority group while Hispanics, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic Asians served as the minority groups.

We computed dissimilarity indices by income quintile for each group in each census year, where a quintile contains a fifth of all households ranked by household income moving from lowest to highest. As shown in Figure 1, in all years dissimilarity values declined with income for all minority groups, but at each date we observe a clear ordering among groups, with blacks experiencing the highest degree of segregation from whites, Hispanics the lowest, and Asians falling in-between.

Over time the degree of segregation experienced by minority group members generally declined, though the size of the decline increased as incomes rose, meaning that minority group members became increasingly able to translate income gains into integration with whites as time progressed. Although blacks showed the greatest improvement in their ability to integrate over time, as of 2010 levels of black segregation remained above 60 at all income levels while Hispanic and Asian levels of segregation fell from values around 60 in the lowest income quintile to values in the 40-47 range in the highest. Thus the most affluent blacks are currently as segregated as the poorest Hispanics and Asians.

We also computed interaction indices as the percentage of whites in the neighborhood of the average minority group member to estimate the likelihood of residential contact between minorities and whites. As shown in Figure 2, the likelihood of residential contact with whites generally rose with income for all groups but was much lower in all years and at all income levels for blacks. In 2010, the likelihood of white contact rose from around 40% in the lowest quintile to 50% in the highest, whereas over the same income range the likelihood of white contact rose from 60% to 70% for Hispanics and from 60% to 66% for Asians.

These findings clearly indicate that rising income brings much less access to integration among African Americans than among Hispanics or Asians. Thus the uniquely high level of black segregation experienced by blacks cannot be attributed to their lower average socioeconomic status. High black segregation and a limited ability to achieve residential contact with whites as income rises also means that African Americans are less able than other groups to separate themselves from the poor and less able to achieve co-residence with the affluent as their incomes rise.

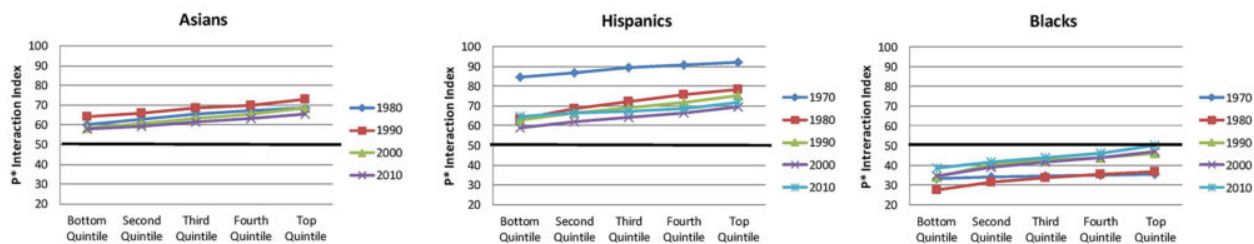


Fig. 2. Likelihood of interaction with whites by race and income 1970-2010.

Even after controlling for a variety of group and metropolitan characteristics, blacks are still observed to achieve far less integration with whites as income rises compared to other groups. Metropolitan areas that are most conducive to minority integration are large, urbanized areas located in the northeast with lower percentages of immigrants, less manufacturing, and higher rates of innovation. Whatever the local economic terrain, however, income in 2010 continued to buy less access to higher quality integrated neighborhoods for blacks than for other minority groups in the United States.

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Publication

[Segregation by race and income in the United States 1970-2010.](#)

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