

## Racial segregation

## The great melting

**Cities are becoming less racially segregated. For that, thank suburban sprawl, extortionate house prices and immigrants**

Jan 9th 2016 | CHICAGO AND NEWHAM | From the print edition

OAK PARK, just outside Chicago, is known to architecture aficionados as the home of Frank Lloyd Wright, who built some fine houses there. This small suburban village also has another distinction: **it is racially mixed**. In the 1970s it vigorously enforced anti-segregation laws; today the **"People's Republic of Oak Park", as it is sardonically known, is 64% white, 21% black and 7% Hispanic. "Oak Park stands out so much,"** says Maria Krysan at the University of Illinois at Chicago. But it does not stand out quite as much as it used to.

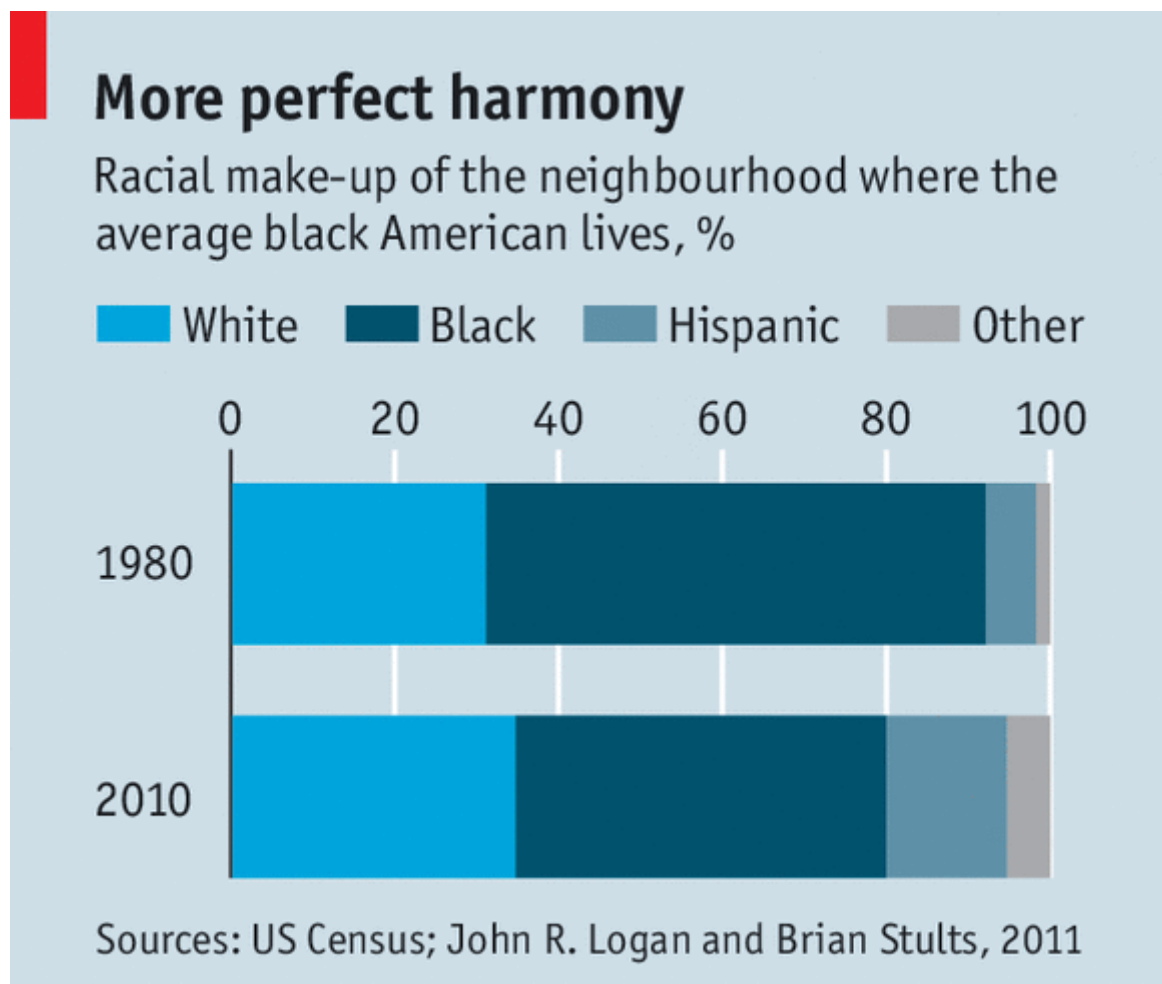


America remains a racially divided country, and **Chicago is one of its most segregated cities**. The south side is almost entirely black; northern districts such as Lincoln Park are golf-ball white; a western slice is heavily Hispanic. Yet the Chicago metropolis as a whole—the city plus suburban burghs like Oak Park—is gradually blending. For several reasons, that trend is almost certainly unstoppable.

When it comes to race, appearances often deceive. **Streets can appear black or Asian when they are actually full of black or Asian shoppers who live somewhere else**. Statistics are more reliable, and the best measure is known as the **dissimilarity index. This reflects the proportion of people of a given race who would have to move out of their census tract—an area of a few thousand inhabitants—and into another one in order to spread themselves evenly**. In 1970 the black-white dissimilarity index for Chicago was above 90, meaning that more than 90% of blacks would have had to move in order to become integrated with whites. By 2000 the figure had fallen to 81. William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a think-tank, calculates that it now stands at 76.

In 45 of 52 big American metropolises with sizeable black populations, black-white segregation has fallen since 2000, according to Mr Frey. **Southern cities, which many blacks fled in the first half of the 20th century, are now less segregated than northern ones such as Chicago and New York**; sunbelt cities such as Las Vegas and Phoenix are more mixed still. In 1980 the average black urbanite lived in a district that was 61% black. Now he or she lives in a place that is 45%

black  
(see  
chart).  
Asians  
and



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Hispanics are neither more nor less segregated than they were, probably because two trends are cancelling each other out: as some members of those fast-growing groups move out of ethnic enclaves, they are replaced by new immigrants. Still, both groups are far more integrated than blacks: the Hispanic-white index of dissimilarity was 44 in 2010, and the Asian-white score just 40.

America is unusual, both for its obsession with race and for its superb statistics. Poor countries lack the means to collect precise data, and many rich ones choose not to. Some, like France, are so high-minded that they hold race to be irrelevant; in others racial censuses smell uncomfortably like fascism. A few countries distinguish foreigners from natives, though, and there the trend is mostly the same as in America.

In Sweden migrants from outside Europe have become less segregated since the 1990s, calculate Bo Malmberg and others at the University of Stockholm. By one measure, desegregation is happening fastest in Malmö, a city with lots of immigrants. In the Netherlands Sako Musterd, a geographer, calculates that foreigners have become less segregated from the native Dutch in Rotterdam. Amsterdam grew more segregated until the late 2000s, but now seems to be going the other way.

The European country that stands out is Britain. Like America, Britain collects excellent data on race and ethnicity; also like America, it is becoming steadily more mixed. Gemma Catney at the

University of Liverpool has shown that every ethnic minority became less segregated between 2001 and 2011 (the two most recent British census years). Black Africans, who had been among the most clustered, are spreading out especially quickly.

Yet Britain's streets are often quite different from America's. Around West Ham football ground, in the east London borough of Newham, is a ward called Boleyn. Once largely white and British, it is now something else entirely. In the Ercan fish-and-chip shop, on the Barking Road, the managers complain that whites have moved to the suburbs, to be replaced by immigrants and ethnic minorities who have not developed a taste for fish fried in batter. "Only on match days you see English people around here," says one. The supermarket next door has 27 national flags above the entrance.

Ethnic Pakistanis, who may be immigrants or British-born, are now the biggest group in Boleyn. That is not saying much, though. Of the ward's 16,000 inhabitants, just 2,500 were Pakistani at the time of the 2011 census, making them 16% of the population. Most of the remainder belonged to Britain's largest ethnic groups—white Britons (who are 13% of the population), Indians, Bangladeshis, black Africans, black Caribbeans and white eastern Europeans. Boleyn also contains mixed-race people and members of groups that are rare in Britain as a whole, such as Filipinos and Sri Lankans.

Newham has become astonishingly diverse, as have other working-class parts of London (see map). That has shaped its politics. Newham not only lacks powerful ethnic blocks; its politics is actually anti-ethnic. In Newham's old town hall Sir Robin Wales, the mayor of the borough, talks proudly about removing ethnic newspapers from local libraries and refusing to subsidise street parties if they are designed to attract only one group. Sir Robin, who is a white Briton (specifically a Scot, and thus a rarity thereabouts), was easily re-elected in 2014, winning 61% of the vote.



**INTERACTIVE:** Click/tap here to explore further with our ward-by-ward breakdown of each ethnic group. (<http://www.economist.com/news/international/21685490-white-shuffle-not-white-flight>)

Perhaps Britain and America will become more segregated over time, with ghettos in new places. Perhaps many cities in countries that refuse to collect race data are quietly dividing. Perhaps—but probably not, because the forces driving integration are both powerful and widespread.

The first is the drift of non-whites from city centres to suburbs and commuter towns. British and

American suburbs are still mostly white, but less so than before. In 1990 just 47% of American Hispanics and 37% of blacks lived in **suburbia**; by 2010, 59% of Hispanics and 51% of blacks did. Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago, has lost 140,000 black inhabitants since 2000, while the surrounding rural and suburban counties all gained them. Whites are moving into some cities, including Chicago, though rarely as quickly as blacks are leaving.

Some old suburbs have become heavily black or Hispanic—or, in Britain, south Asian. **But for the most part suburbanisation leads to mixing. Ethnic minorities who leave city centres tend to be better-off and neither need nor want to live in enclaves. If they choose to move to a newly built suburb, as they often do in America, they will be blocked neither by racist housing laws, which have been abolished, nor by bigoted assumptions about the character of the neighbourhood. That is why the swelling, sprawling cities of the American south and west are so mixed.**

A second force for integration is immigration. **In Newham the churn caused by immigrants arriving and then moving to better districts has thoroughly dissolved old colour lines.** The same is true of parts of America, too. John Logan of Brown University says that whites often stay when Latinos and Asians move in to a district. **After a while blacks move in too, taking advantage of the path paved by the Latinos and Asians**—and whites mostly continue to stay. Logan Square, a handsome district in north Chicago with wide boulevards and big, stylish houses, seems set to become such a **“global neighbourhood”**. Its population is 42% white and 46% Hispanic.

A powerful third force is love, which integrates families as well as places. **In London whites and black Caribbeans marry or cohabit in such numbers that there are now more children under five who are a mixture of those two groups than there are black Caribbean children** Marriages between whites and Asians are growing, too. America is mixing just as quickly. In 2014, Mr Frey calculates, 19% of new American marriages involving whites and 31% involving blacks were mixed-race. The share for both Hispanics and Asians was 46%. The children of such unions can be hard to deal with statistically. So in the future the numbers will probably underestimate the speed of desegregation.

All this is most welcome. **But there is a fourth driver of racial and ethnic integration in cities, which is not so benign. Because big cities are such desirable places to live, and have failed to build enough new homes, they are now so expensive that people can barely afford to segregate themselves.** In London property prices have risen so steeply that the average first-time buyer needs to raise a deposit equivalent to about 120% of annual income, according to Neal Hudson of Savills, an estate agent. In the 1980s it was enough to raise just 20-30%.

**Increasingly, people just buy property where they can. And along with the great weight of evidence showing that countries are becoming less segregated by race and ethnicity, there is also growing proof that they are becoming more segregated by income. One kind of separation might be replaced by another.**

From the print edition: International