

# Citizens and MMFHC Respond to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Article

## *Getting the Facts Right on Segregation in Milwaukee*

By Marc V. Levine

There they go again.

A little over a year ago, in four days of front-page articles, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and reporter Bruce Murphy relentlessly hyped a report by the UWM Employment and Training Institute (ETI) that purportedly exploded "the myth of hypersegregation" in Milwaukee. The report, roundly criticized by academic experts, has fortunately faded from public view; it has not been published, nor have other researchers taken seriously its "new approach" measuring segregation.

Nevertheless, in February 2004, Murphy and the *Journal Sentinel* were back at it, proclaiming in another front-page headline, that "despite barriers, housing is more integrated in Milwaukee" than in the past, and that researchers who claim otherwise are merely following the "politically correct" line.

Unfortunately, this latest coverage of racial segregation and inequality, clearly the most important issues facing Milwaukee today, is riddled with inaccuracies.

Despite Murphy's assertions, the barriers to black middle class access to Milwaukee's suburbs have not gone away. According to the 2000 census, 88.3 percent of black professionals and managers in metro Milwaukee live in the city, compared to only 27.6 percent of white professionals and managers. 90.5 percent of black households with annual incomes over \$40,000 annually live in the city, compared to 20.8 percent of white middle-class households. As my Center reported to a Milwaukee County board task force last year, Milwaukee has the lowest level of black suburbanization of any large metropolitan area in the country. To make matters worse, among the 50 largest cities in the U.S., we have the fourth smallest proportion of black households making over \$40,000 a year, a reasonable threshold for middle-class status.

Murphy rightfully points out how the black poor remain ghettoized in Milwaukee, but ignores how city-suburban segregation has also effectively limited residential choices for the black middle class and affluent here. In Milwaukee, 46.7 percent of black households with annual incomes over \$40,000 live in high-poverty neighborhoods (census tracts in which at least 20% of the population is poor); by contrast, only 3.5 percent of white households at this income level live in such poor neighborhoods. (In contrast to blacks in Milwaukee, only 25.1 percent of middle-class black households in Minneapolis live in high-poverty neighborhoods, because black suburbanization is much greater there than here.)

Even among affluent black households in Milwaukee, those with annual incomes above \$100,000, 42.1 percent live in high-poverty neighborhoods (a rate that is three times higher than in Minneapolis or Baltimore, two other metro areas we examined).

Murphy invokes John Gurda's silly argument that Milwaukee's black middle-class is less suburbanized than in other metro areas because the Northwest Side, annexed to the city in the 1950s, serves as our de facto suburbia. But, if this were the case, then black and white middle-class suburbanization rates in Milwaukee would be about the same, which they are not. What's more, despite the Northwest Side annexation, white suburbanization in Milwaukee is about the same as the national average; only black

suburbanization lags here. Somehow, for the white middle class and affluent in Milwaukee, suburbia means Shorewood, Franklin, Whitefish Bay, Delafield, and Mequon; for blacks, it means the Northwest Side of the city (which now boasts a poverty rate over 20 percent and growing, as many black poor moved from Milwaukee's traditional inner city to the Northwest Side in the 1990s). That sounds an awful lot like segregation, doesn't it?

Yes, there has been small progress in Milwaukee. The Census bureau study on segregation in U.S. metropolises, published in 2002 and using a variety of measures, found the level of segregation in 2000 here down slightly from 1990 (although the study still ranked Milwaukee as the most segregated metropolis in the country in 2000).

Here's one way to look at the issue. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of metro Milwaukee black households living in the suburbs increased from 2.2 to 4.4. If that rate doubles each decade black and white levels of suburbanization will converge sometime around 2060. And if the rate changes by around 2% per decade, as it did in the 1990s, then black and white levels of suburbanization will converge around 2390. I imagine Murphy would call that slow and steady progress. My guess is that we can do much better in breaking down the racial segregation and battling the racial inequality that continues to plague this community.



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