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Segregation and Poverty in the Twin Cities

A Summary from and update of *Metropolitics*

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Twin Cities region became more segregated by race and by income. Beginning in parts of the central cities, areas of concentrated poverty and segregated minorities have spread outward into the inner suburbs, destabilizing these communities. What follows is a brief account of this trend, with a focus on the schools, which sound an early warning signal for the health of these communities and the region.

According to the 1990 census, extreme poverty and transitional poverty tracts accounted for only 11 percent of the metropolitan population, but 36 percent of the region's poor people lived in those tracts.¹ Simultaneously, the Twin Cities became more racially segregated. In the 1980s, the concentration of African-Americans grew faster than in any other metropolitan area in the United States with over 1 million people, except for Milwaukee, Detroit, and Buffalo. In the Twin Cities, poor blacks are more than twice as likely to live in extreme poverty tracts than poor whites (40 percent of poor blacks live in extreme tracts versus 18 percent of poor whites).

Race and Poverty

The Central Cities

The Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts have a disproportionate amount of minority students. In 1997, 67 percent of elementary school students were non-white, and over half of these were African-American students. In St. Paul, 61 percent of elementary school students were non-white; 41 percent of these were Asian, and another 39 percent African-American. In total, this is a change of 185 and 178 percent, respectively, since the early 1980s. Moreover, ten schools in Minneapolis were over 90 percent minority, with Bethune Elementary being the most segregated at 96 percent minority. In St. Paul, East Consolidated Elementary was the most segregated at 84 percent minority.

Minneapolis and St. Paul also have a disproportionate amount of poor children. In 1997, 69 percent of Minneapolis elementary school students and 67 percent of St. Paul elementary school students participated in free and reduced lunch programs.² This is a change of 188 and 258 percent, respectively, since the early 1980s. There were nine schools in Minneapolis with over 90 percent poor children, and three schools (Bethune Elementary, School of Extended Learning, and Lucy Craft Laney Elementary) with virtually all poor children (98-99 percent). In St. Paul, East Consolidated Elementary is 95 percent poor, and ten schools are over 80 percent poor.

Such dramatic changes in the concentration of poverty and minorities have contributed greatly to white flight. In the 1980s, Minneapolis lost 41 percent of its white preschool children and St. Paul lost 32 percent. Certain neighborhoods near core poverty areas lost 75-100 percent of their white preschoolers in Minneapolis and 50-75 percent in St. Paul. According to the Minneapolis Homeowner's Survey, by 1993, 45 percent of families with children planned to leave within 5 years.

As black immigration and white flight grew, so too did segregation, as shown by the concentration of minority students. In addition, in 1980, the two blackest census tracts in Minneapolis had a 2:1 ratio of black to white pre school children. By 1990, there were 19 tracts with a larger proportion of black preschoolers: seven tracts had a ratio of 3:1, and one was as high as 32:1. In St. Paul, there were four tracts with a ratio of 3:1 and one tract as high as 19:1. The areas with the highest concentration of African-Americans were also the poorest.

¹ An extreme poverty tract is 40 percent or more poor, and a transitional poverty tract is 20 to 40 percent poor.

² Free and reduced lunch participation is an indicator of poverty. Because older children are less likely to participate or report their participation in these programs – due to social stigma – elementary school data is the most accurate.

The Inner Suburbs

The inner ring suburban districts have also become increasingly poor and non-white. Over the past fifteen years, these districts have experienced a major transformation. In Brooklyn Center, the amount of poor children rose from 17 to 51 percent; in Columbia Heights, 15 to 35 percent; and in Richfield, from 10 to 33 percent.

Minority populations have risen as well. In Brooklyn Center, the percent of minority children rose from 9 to 37 percent; in Richfield, from 8 to 25 percent, and in West St. Paul, from 5 to 19 percent.

As these concentrations have risen, white flight has spread into these suburbs. Eighteen of 29 inner suburbs lost white preschoolers in the 1980s. Specifically, Fridley experienced a drop of 24 percent; Brooklyn Center experienced a drop of 21 percent; St. Louis Park experienced a drop of 29 percent; Richfield experienced a drop of 14 percent; and South St. Paul experienced a drop of 14 percent.

The Second Ring

Second ring suburban districts, wedged between wealthy and rapidly declining areas, are hybrids. Some districts have experienced growing poverty without racial change. These are typically poor white, often blue collar districts with low property wealth. Other districts have experienced change in some schools, but not others. In the south, Bloomington has experienced the greatest change. In 1997, Bloomington was 19 percent minority and 21 percent poor. Yet Valley View Elementary was 45 percent minority and 51 percent poor.

Osseo has undergone the greatest change. From 1992 to 1997, Osseo went from 6 to 17 percent minority students and 9 to 18 percent poor students. Yet these district-wide numbers mask extremes within the district. In 1982, Zanewood Elementary was 13 percent minority and 20 percent poor. By 1997, it was 49 percent minority and 60 percent poor. Compare that with Elm Creek Elementary, which in 1982 was 4 percent minority/ 3 percent poor and in 1997, just 3 percent minority/ 7 percent poor. To deal with these changes, Osseo has altered attendance boundaries. The district has isolated poor minority children in older less-than-adequate buildings in Brooklyn Park, the southeastern portion of the district, and has built elaborate schools in Maple Grove, the northwestern portion of the district.

Fast-Growing Districts

Fast-growing suburban districts, which account for 21 percent of the metropolitan area's students, have a low rate of poverty and low numbers of minority students. Half of these students are in Rosemount or South Washington County, which are 11 percent minority/ 9 percent poor and 8 percent minority/ 12 percent poor, respectively. With the exception of some of the blue-collar districts like Shakopee, these districts also have a correspondingly low drop out rate.

Southern and Western Developing Districts

Finally, the southern and western developing districts are the least racially and socioeconomically diverse, consist largely of an upper middle class student body, and have low drop out rates. In 1997, Edina was the region's wealthiest school district, with only 3 percent poor students and 5 percent minority students.

Spending and Student Success

The Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts spend \$7,060 per pupil, 15 percent more than any other school district group in the region. Inner ring schools are second in per pupil spending (\$5,829 per pupil), followed by the southern and western developing districts (\$5,651 per pupil), the second ring (\$5,408 per pupil, about the metropolitan average), and lastly the fast-growing districts (\$5,050 per pupil).

Yet low non-graduation rates do not correlate with high school spending. Minneapolis and St. Paul have the highest drop-out rates: 33 percent of 9th graders do not graduate in Minneapolis, while 28 percent do not graduate in St. Paul. In the inner ring districts, approximately 1 in 7 students doesn't graduate from

high school.

Aside from the southern and western developing districts (which are wealthy enough to spend highly without asking residents to pay exorbitant property taxes), low poverty, low paying districts have attracted and kept more middle class families than high poverty, high spending districts.

One particularly disturbing trend has emerged regarding school funding. Due to low property tax revenues, most of the funding for the central cities comes from state aid. When the cities have asked the state for more funding, they have struck an unsettling bargain with the suburbs, who initially are reluctant to provide this additional funding: The cities threaten a metropolitan area desegregation law suit if their funding doesn't increase. Under pressure from constituents, suburban representatives support the increase funding. This is self-destructive regional polarization.

Desegregation and bussing

In the Minneapolis school district, bussing began in 1972 on a federal court order. This early effort to combat segregation did mitigate the situation for a number of years, but as the above statistics show, intra-city desegregation is no longer effective.

In 1983, under threat of a desegregation lawsuit against St. Paul, the State Board of Education established the "15 percent rule" – *i.e.*, if one or more buildings in a district exceed the overall district minority population by more than 15 percent, the district is segregated. The penalty for segregation is a reduction in state aid.

Currently, Minneapolis is the only district with an extensive desegregation plan. St. Paul continues to use voluntary magnet schools and the suburban districts have neighborhood schools. Districts like Osseo are legally segregated. (Again, in 1997, elementary schools district-wide were 17 percent minority, but Zanewood, Orchard Lane, Crest View, Park Brook, Willow Lane, Fair Oaks were from 35 to 49 percent minority.) Bloomington, Anoka, and Robbinsdale are also segregated.

Finally, the state formula doesn't consider inter-district or metropolitan wide data. Yet, school desegregation is now effectively impossible in the core cities and in the inner suburbs districts.

Conclusion

Concentrated poverty and growing segregation continue to move from Minneapolis and St. Paul into the inner suburbs and increasingly, the second ring as well. With this movement has come higher high school drop-out rates and other social changes that destabilize communities. Some districts like Osseo, are now legally segregated. More importantly, integration is no longer possible within Minneapolis and St. Paul, or within a number of inner ring districts either. A metropolitan-wide integration plan is needed.