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February 10, 2011

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Separate, Unequal, and Ignored

Racial segregation remains Chicago's most fundamental problem. Why isn't it an issue in the mayor's race?

By Steve Bogira  @stevebogira

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The Frances Cabrini row houses on the Near North Side.

DAVID SCHALLIOL

On this date 42 years ago—February 10, 1969—federal district judge Richard B. Austin issued a ruling aimed squarely at a persistent Chicago problem. "Existing patterns of racial segregation must be reversed if there is to be a chance of averting the desperately intensifying division of whites and Negroes in Chicago," Austin wrote.

The case, *Dorothy Gautreaux v. the Chicago Housing Authority*, concerned the location of public housing—projects were being built only in the city's black ghettos because whites didn't

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want blacks in their neighborhoods. But the broader issue, as Judge Austin noted, was residential racial segregation, a matter of much concern throughout America back then.

The nation was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders had declared a year before Judge Austin's ruling. Chaired by Illinois governor Otto Kerner, the commission called for sustained efforts to end segregation.

Chicago's ghettos in the 1960s were notorious for their shootings, robberies, rapes, fires, joblessness, single-parent families, dreadful schools and high dropout rates, rampant alcoholism and heroin addiction, abandoned buildings and vacant lots.

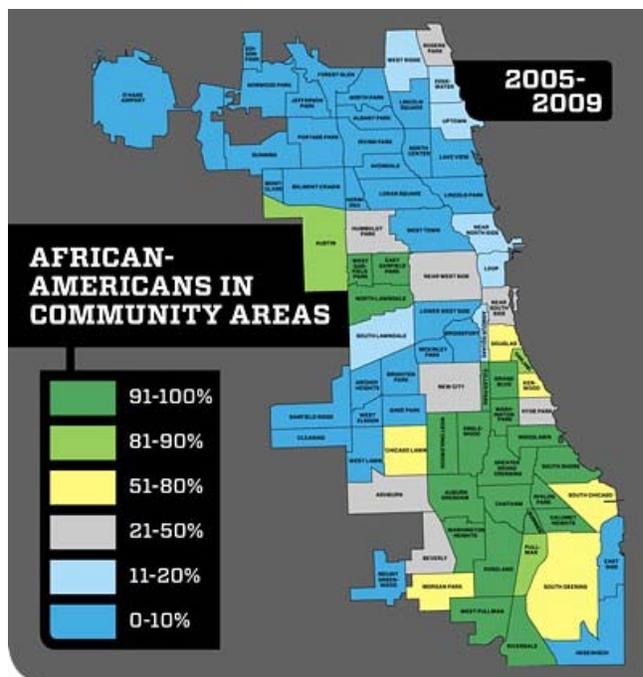
Lucky we fixed all that.

We must have fixed it—otherwise why isn't racial segregation an issue in the mayor's race?

Try finding a mention of it on the websites of any of the candidates. Editorial boards have decreed Chicago's most important concern to be its budget problems. Other issues winning attention have been school and ethics reform, job creation, the head tax, crime, transportation, privatization, the O'Hare airport expansion.

The city's finances are indeed a mess. But financial troubles come and go for Chicago. Segregation endures.

Check the map below. We aggregated recent census estimates from 2005-2009 for the city's 77 community areas. Citywide, Chicago's population of 2.8 million is tri-ethnic: 34 percent black, 33 percent white, and 27 percent Latino.



PAUL JOHN HIGGINS

But most African-Americans are clustered in two areas, as they were in the 1960s: a massive one on the south side, and a smaller one on the far west side. The south-side section, between Western Avenue and the lake, stretches more than a hundred blocks north to south, from 35th Street to the city limits at 138th. This African-American subdivision of Chicago includes 18 contiguous community areas, each with black populations above 90 percent, most of them well above that. The west-side black section includes another three contiguous 90 percent-plus community areas. Fifty-five percent of Chicago's 964,000 African-Americans live in these 21 community areas, in which the aggregate population is 96 percent black. Two-thirds of the city's blacks live in community areas that are at least 80 percent black.

On the flip side are the 33 community areas, most of them on the north and southwest sides, with less than 10 percent African-Americans. In 26 of these community areas less than 5 percent of the residents are black.

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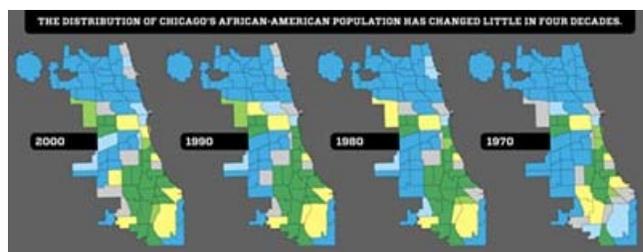
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Latinos are segregated in some neighborhoods, too, but not nearly as dramatically; they're a buffer group, living in community areas with whites or with blacks, and sometimes with both.

The maps for 1970 and 1980 show that the south-side "black belt" was still swelling in the 70s, to the south and west; the last wave of migrants was arriving from Mississippi and other southern states. From 1980 on, what's remarkable about the maps is their consistency from decade to decade.



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PAUL JOHN HIGGINS

Blacks in certain neighborhoods, whites in others.

This pronounced, persistent separation of the races would be worrisome, or at least curious, even if separate were equal—which of course it isn't. The hypersegregated black neighborhoods continue to lead the city in the same wretched problems as in the 60s. In some ways, things are worse. There's not just a lack of legitimate jobs in these areas today, but also a surplus of people without skills—and more of them have criminal records now as well, from the war on drugs. Predatory lending has multiplied the number of abandoned buildings in these neighborhoods.

So why aren't the candidates talking about how they'd deal with segregation?

"Politically, it doesn't play," says Alexander Polikoff, the lawyer who brought the Gautreaux case. "People aren't anxious to be reminded of the fact that we've got residential segregation. And doing something about it is damnably difficult." Polikoff pursued remedies for segregation through Gautreaux for 40 years. He never got much housing built for CHA families in white areas, but he was able to start a "mobility" program which allowed several thousand CHA families to move to the suburbs with rent vouchers—a significant victory, but not enough to greatly change the overall picture.

Segregation is "a very difficult and intractable problem," says Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey, one of the nation's leading researchers of the subject. "Politicians don't like to face up to difficult and intractable problems, whatever their nature, as we've seen with global climate change. And because this one involves race, it's especially third-rail in American politics." Massey says the inattention to segregation may explain why "Chicago and New York and Philadelphia and Detroit have hardly changed in 40 years in terms of their overall levels of segregation."

The neglect of racial segregation this election is nothing new; it hasn't been an issue in a mayor's race here in decades. Back when segregation was discussed, mayoral candidates were mainly eager to assure voters they'd do nothing to upset it.

In 1971, the Gautreaux case was still inching along in Judge Austin's courtroom. In March, a month before the mayoral election, the CHA complied with Austin's order to plan public housing in white neighborhoods as well as black by listing 235 proposed sites in white neighborhoods. But the sites needed city approval. Mayor Richard J. Daley quickly called the proposal "detrimental" and said the units "should not be built." His Republican opponent, Richard Friedman, declined to guarantee to block the units if elected, noting instead that open housing was "the law of the land." The Independent Voters of Illinois called Daley "racist" because of his opposition to the sites. But Daley knew "racist" was better in Chicago than "integrationist." He trounced Friedman. The *Tribune* observed afterward that Friedman's campaign had become a "lost cause" because of his stance on the housing list.

About that time, many liberals throughout the country stopped pressing for desegregation, and the issue largely disappeared from the nation's agenda.

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It's not just politicians who don't like dealing with the issue. Candidates would have to answer questions about it if citizens were asking them—but we prefer a sunnier view of Chicago.

"Out of our diversity comes our city's greatest strength," Mayor Daley said in 2008, when he was pushing Chicago's bid for the 2016 Olympics. He didn't mention that the city's blacks and whites live in separate neighborhoods.

Blacks in Chicago weren't always severely segregated—it's just been that way for about the last 110 years. As black migration into the city rose modestly around the beginning of the 20th century, the black belt formed on the south side between railroad tracks.

Other ethnic enclaves have existed in Chicago, of course, but they were never nearly as concentrated, and their residents tended to assimilate and disperse fairly quickly. For Chicago's blacks, dispersal wasn't an option; given the violence that greeted them when they moved into white neighborhoods, the safest mode of expansion from the black belt was into adjacent neighborhoods. Blacks were met there with bricks and bottles and occasionally bombs, but there was some safety in numbers. Various legal or quasi-legal methods were used to hem blacks in as well, such as restrictive covenants that forbade white property owners in border neighborhoods to rent or sell to blacks.

In the middle decades of the 20th century, southern blacks streamed into Chicago and other northern cities, seeking jobs. Chicago had three kinds of neighborhoods then: white, changing, and black. Or, as white Chicagoans knew them, good, going, and gone. Whites continued to resist the incursions, sometimes violently, but before long they usually fled, moving west within the city or following the newly built highways into the suburbs. Many of the city's biggest employers moved to the suburbs as well. In the ghettos left behind, unemployment and poverty grew.

In the late 1960s, efforts to improve the circumstances of urban blacks began to change from desegregation to "community development"—programs aimed at making ghettos more habitable. White conservatives favored anything that might keep blacks where they were. White liberals liked the money that community development programs provided. Black politicians grew fond of segregation, too, since it provided a stable electoral base.

One of the insidious traits of segregation is how easy it makes it for the haves to ignore the plight of the have-nots. For most whites, concentrated poverty and its many ills are an abstraction—something they read about but rarely see, since it exists in parts of town they don't live in or work in or visit. On the north lakefront, where the neighborhoods are more diverse than most in Chicago, residents may also be fooled into thinking it's the norm throughout the city.

A common assertion about segregation is that it's merely an expression of group preferences: black neighborhoods are overwhelmingly black because that's the way blacks want it—segregation results from "innocent private decisions," as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas put it in a 2007 school desegregation case.

"The people opposed to desegregation have always said that, but that's not what blacks say in opinion polls," Massey says. "They much prefer to live in an integrated neighborhood, and have much more tolerance for different [racial] configurations of neighborhoods than whites do. Whites are the group that prefer substantially own-group neighborhoods."

The community development approach that came into vogue in the late 60s has remained the dominant strategy nationally, and certainly in Chicago. For decades now, when mayoral candidates here talk about uplifting poor neighborhoods, they promise to do it by reducing crime in those areas, improving their schools, and providing more jobs. They'll make separate equal. They also tend to insist the crucial problem isn't race but class.

But perhaps the greatest evil of racial segregation is how it concentrates the poverty of blacks, as Massey and others have shown. Because of historical—and some continuing—discrimination, blacks are more likely to be poor. When this is combined with segregation, it means blacks are far more likely than any other group to live in concentrated poverty. It's hard to be poor; it's much harder to be poor and surrounded by poverty and all the harmful cultural norms and behavior, such as crime, that accompany it. It's a kind of poverty whites rarely experience, and one tough to escape.

When Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson studied Chicago residents in the most disadvantaged quartile of the city's census tracts a few years ago, he found that no white families, and only a few

Hispanic families, were represented. "Residents in not one white community experience what is most typical for those residing in segregated black areas," Sampson wrote in 2009, in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. "Trying to estimate the effect of concentrated disadvantage on whites is thus tantamount to estimating a phantom reality."

Sampson has been studying poverty in Chicago for much of the last two decades. He's found that in Chicago, poverty, like segregation, persists: neighborhoods that were poor and black in 1970 were generally poor and black in 2000. (From 1970 to 2000, not a single Chicago neighborhood changed from black to white.) The neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are also high in cynicism and distrust, he's written. In a longitudinal study, Sampson focused on the verbal ability of children growing up in Chicago's poor black neighborhoods and found "detrimental and long-lasting consequences for black children's cognitive ability rivaling in magnitude the effects of missing one year of schooling." Verbal ability, he noted, is a "major predictor of life outcomes."

These kinds of deep, neighborhood-based problems, linked inextricably in Chicago to racial segregation, are why desegregation advocates continue to maintain that segregation itself needs to be confronted.

The present mayoral candidates talk about improving the city's schools by "empowering principals with greater autonomy" (Rahm Emanuel), putting a "Parent Academy in every school" (Gery Chico), "making neighborhood schools the priority" (Carol Moseley Braun). Emanuel promises a "world-class learning experience" for every child in every neighborhood.

In a 2010 book, *Organizing Schools for Improvement*, the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research studied school system decentralization here in the 1990s. The authors concluded that decentralization improved schools significantly—in certain neighborhoods. The schools that didn't improve were in the poor African-American neighborhoods of the south and west sides. "In Chicago, extreme poverty combines with racial isolation," the authors wrote. "Integrated, Latino, and racially diverse schools were much more likely to progress than schools that were predominantly minority (a combination of Latino and African-American students) or predominantly African-American."

The authors noted that many urban children contend with homelessness, domestic violence, abuse, and neglect. "Such children can make extraordinary demands on teachers when they appear in their classrooms. . . . If the number of students presenting substantial needs is too large, even extraordinary teachers can be quickly overwhelmed." The African-American schools had "substantially higher" percentages of abused or neglected children than other schools studied; racially integrated schools had the fewest of these children. "As we factor in the presence of additional students who might be homeless or living in foster care, or in households with chronic domestic violence, one begins to develop a sobering picture of the magnitude of the overall personal and social needs facing some schools," the authors wrote. "While it is still possible for schools to improve" in such circumstances, "the barriers appear almost insurmountable."

I sought to speak with the six mayoral candidates about racial segregation, and five of them obliged. (Carol Moseley Braun's spokesperson didn't answer numerous calls and messages.) None of the candidates have a comprehensive plan aimed at directly addressing racial segregation, and I got the impression they hadn't thought about the issue much. Desegregation strategies are being tried elsewhere in the country; more on that later. All of the candidates favor affordable housing—just as they're all opposed to crime—but none of them have developed an approach to ensure that affordable housing desegregates or deconcentrates poverty.

Racial segregation in Chicago today is "less of a problem than when I was growing up," said Miguel del Valle, who came to Chicago from Puerto Rico in 1955, when he was four. "We are not the city that we were 40 years ago, or 50 years ago, when the lack of mobility was due to race. Today the lack of mobility is due to economics. A Latino family or an Asian family or an African-American family can move into any neighborhood in the city of Chicago—there aren't the kind of roadblocks there once were. That is not to say that there isn't still some resistance. But in those days, that resistance was blatant—people burning down houses because of who moved in. I lived through that period, and that's a thing of the past."

When I asked him about the continued hypersegregation of African-Americans on the south and west sides, del Valle said the key was economic: "We have to build a middle class, and create job

opportunities, and give people choices. If we want more racial integration in the city of Chicago we've got to elevate people economically."

Can that be done in poor, hypersegregated neighborhoods? "We haven't been successful in breaking into that cycle, but it can be done," del Valle said. "That's why I'm such a big believer in strengthening community schools, beginning with early childhood education where you're working with the parent and helping that child develop. You make the school an anchor, and then you deal with the surroundings."

Del Valle said he also backed more affordable housing. "People should be able to live where they want to live," he said. "They should be able to go anywhere in Cook County, anywhere in the state of Illinois with a rent voucher." He supports the proposed Sweet Home Chicago ordinance, which would use tax increment financing money to build affordable housing. It's not clear yet where that housing would be built and whether it would therefore decrease concentrated poverty or segregation.

Gery Chico and Rahm Emanuel would only answer questions by e-mail. Chico said he'd address segregation with policies "that create more jobs, provide affordable housing and reform the education system to give children an opportunity for a job and a better life. I see lack of jobs as the biggest factor that keeps Chicago segregated." Chico said that as mayor, he'd lead by example by "staffing my leadership with a diverse, talented team." He'd also stay "in touch with Chicagoans of every race, color and community" and "spend time in all our diverse, vibrant neighborhoods." He didn't respond to follow-up questions.

"Chicago draws its strength from its diversity," Emanuel's response began. He said he'd promote policies ensuring "safe streets, strong schools, and good-paying jobs throughout the city with the goal of lifting all neighborhoods up." Accomplishing that would lead to "other positive benefits, like promoting integration." He said he'd make sure there were "affordable housing options throughout the city, and that every neighborhood has access to a great public school, public transportation and healthy food. This will give every Chicagoan the resources and access they need to build a better life for their children."

I asked him in a follow-up how a city could provide those things in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty.

"We start by promoting economic development," his response said, "and that can begin by establishing strong anchors in each community—a grocery store where there isn't one, a transportation hub that helps residents access job opportunities, a great school that serves as a community center for job training." He offered as an illustration the Old Town School of Folk Music's move in 1998 to Lincoln Avenue, into a space "that had little economic vitality. By creating a strong anchor in the community and pushing small businesses to fill in around it, a vibrant local economy that creates jobs and produces revenue for the city can be established. We need to do this in more communities."

That may be a good example of neighborhood economic development, but it seems unrelated to **addressing concentrated poverty**. Lincoln Square's individual poverty rate was 13 percent in 1990 and 11 percent in 2000—well below the citywide rates of 22 percent and 19 percent those years. If Lincoln Square had been an area of concentrated poverty, would the Old Town School have even considered moving in?

I asked Emanuel if he'd make any direct efforts to desegregate neighborhoods, or if he saw desegregation as mainly a by-product of the safe streets, good schools, and jobs he'd ensure. "The latter," he said.

He noted that he'd worked on the Plan for Transformation as vice-chair of the CHA. This was the federally funded program under which most of the city's high-rise projects were demolished. A few of the residents got units in mixed-income developments built on the sites of the old projects; **most were given rent vouchers and settled elsewhere**. "While the policy was not perfect, combating the cycles of poverty that were fostered by the CHA high rises and building mixed-income housing developments scattered throughout the city has helped promote integration," he said.

The tearing down of the high-rises offered an extraordinary chance for widespread desegregation, which might have happened had the displaced residents gotten more counseling and support to help them move to middle-class neighborhoods. But a study of the plan in the

2009 *Journal of Public Affairs* found that most of the displaced residents merely moved from their vertical ghettos to horizontal ones, settling in "disadvantaged, predominantly black neighborhoods."

William "Dock" Walls and Patricia Watkins—the two African-American candidates besides Braun—both believed that segregation ought to be addressed directly, but their proposals for doing so were modest.

Walls said segregation isn't discussed "because people don't want to face reality. People believe that's just the way it is in the city of Chicago." He graduated from Chicago Vocational high school, in the southeast side neighborhood of Avalon Park, in 1975, with only one white classmate. "In Chicago, we think such racial segregation is normal, but it's not," he said. He suggested neighborhood festivals "so people can come into different neighborhoods and see how different people live."

Walls said some African-Americans aren't interested in hearing about desegregation, not because they wouldn't like to see it happen, but because they have pressing problems and want quicker solutions. "It's hard for people to think about something like desegregation when they're not eating and they don't have jobs, even if segregation is related to why they're not eating and don't have jobs," he said. "They want to eat right now. People today want instant oatmeal, they don't want hominy grits."

"Chicago is hypersegregated," Patricia Watkins said. "I think it needs to change because if we're going to benefit as a city, we have to have experiences with other cultures besides our own." In black neighborhoods, she said, "when the kids go to school, they see all black faces, when they go to the store, they see all black people, when they go to church, they see all black people. They only have experiences with other ethnicities by television."

She said she'd seek to provide affordable housing in all 77 Chicago communities "to help diversify the neighborhoods." She'd organize a festival-exchange program between neighborhoods "so people can get used to being around each other so they can build relationships and eventually live together." She'd also like to create "tourist attractions" in every neighborhood, including the hypersegregated black ones, to encourage Chicagoans to visit them "once we bring the violence down."

"The mayor of Chicago is the mayor of Chicagoland," Myron Orfield

says. Orfield, who used to live here, has been a leading force for desegregation in the Twin Cities—he's the **executive director of the Institute on Race & Poverty at the University of Minnesota.** He says a Chicago mayor carries much clout with suburban mayors, and could use it to help ease segregation in the city and the near suburbs.

Orfield went to law school at the University of Chicago before moving to Minnesota, where he served five terms in the state house and one in the senate. He authored many metropolitan law reforms that have helped deconcentrate poverty and desegregate Minneapolis and Saint Paul and some of its surrounding suburbs.

Wealthy suburbs benefit from a vibrant central city—it's often what attracts businesses and people to a region. But those wealthy suburbs tend not to do their share when it comes to dealing with the region's social problems, Orfield maintains. He says this is especially true of what real estate consultants call the "favored quarter" in a metro area—newer suburbs with the most expensive commercial and residential developments. These suburbs get a big share of government money for highways and infrastructure, but build only expensive housing to keep their tax base high, making sure the poor are someone else's concern. In the Chicago area, the favored quarter is the northwest suburbs, Orfield says.

For desegregation to succeed, affordable housing needs to be available throughout a metropolitan area, he says, including its favored quarter and other thriving suburbs. And he believes the richer suburbs should share some of their wealth to help pay for the region's social needs: people of lesser means shouldn't have inferior schools and services just because they can't afford to live in the metro area's richer communities. Much of this would entail new state laws—but Orfield thinks a Chicago mayor could be instrumental in bringing those about. A favored quarter means a less-favored three-quarters—the central city and older suburbs, many of which are also struggling with racial segregation and the costly problems that accompany it. "A mayor of Chicago could lead a regional coalition of areas that are being hurt by segregation, to try to reduce it," Orfield says.

The efforts of Orfield and others **in the Twin Cities' region have induced wealthy suburbs to build nearly half of the region's new affordable housing units in recent years**—"which is not what it ought to be, it should be more than half, but it's vastly better than in the Chicago area," Orfield says. About 40 percent of those units are held by black and Latino families. Wealthy suburban school districts have also redrawn their boundaries to increase integration in their schools.

Alexander Polikoff—the Gautreaux lawyer—also advocates a **metro strategy**. But instead of focusing on the building of new affordable housing throughout a region, which he thinks is prohibitively expensive and politically problematic, **he'd like to see more federal money spent on an expansion of the Gautreaux "mobility" program, with more housing vouchers for the poor to use in middle-class suburban neighborhoods.** "There has never been a serious effort to desegregate via the voucher program," he says. "I'd like to see it tried."

Because this would require federal money, the mayor of Chicago couldn't do it on his own; he'd need backing in Washington. One Chicago mayoral candidate is familiar with President Obama, of course. **But Obama so far has been a disappointment to desegregation advocates. "The national administration has backed away from mobility proposals," Polikoff says.**

Myron Orfield's brother, Gary Orfield, is a prominent desegregation advocate who focuses on schools. Codirector of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, he taught at the University of Chicago in the 1980s and has returned to Chicago often for school-based research. School desegregation has become even more difficult in the wake of a five-to-four Supreme Court decision in 2007 that barred most programs aimed at racially integrating schools.

Gary Orfield says a Chicago mayor interested in furthering school desegregation would make sure his city's magnet and charter schools had explicit diversity goals and worked hard to achieve them. Magnet schools in white neighborhoods should recruit a diverse student body, but often don't, he says. He'd like to see a push for statewide magnet schools "set right in the middle of Chicago." Statewide magnets, often residential, are open to students from across the state; Illinois has one in Aurora—the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy.

Charter schools could also attract more diverse student bodies, Orfield says. "The problem is they're not being held accountable in a serious way—they're just assumed to be better by definition." They often don't have diversity goals or provide the kind of transportation needed to build a diverse student body, he says. (A 2009 study found that African-Americans who transferred from Chicago public schools to charters on average ended up in schools 84 percent black instead of 90 percent black.)

Orfield and others have managed to increase school integration in some metro areas despite the Supreme Court decision. Though a plan he crafted in Louisville two decades ago was struck down by the court's ruling, Louisville board members have asked him to help them design another one to achieve diversity. When he talks about moving toward diversity in Chicago, "people look at me like, this is just impossible. And I say, 'Well, I did it in Saint Louis, I did it in Louisville'—they don't believe it.

"Segregation didn't happen by accident, and integration doesn't happen by accident," Orfield says. "It can be done, but you really have to plan to do it. You have to make it a goal."

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Tags: Politics, Chicago, race, segregation, election, politics, census, black, white, Latino, Hispanic, demographics, Chicago Housing Authority, Patricia Watkins, William "Dock" Walls, Miguel del Valle, Rahm Emanuel, Gery Chico, Carol Mosley Braun

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Where do you live Steve Bogira?



report

2 likes, 2 dislikes  like  dislikePosted by **totally dude** on 02/09/2011 at 9:16 AM

Where do you live, Steve Bogira?

report

1 like, 2 dislikes  like  dislikePosted by **totally dude** on 02/09/2011 at 9:16 AM

He lives in Echo Park.

report

0 likes, 4 dislikes  like  dislikePosted by **FGFM** on 02/09/2011 at 9:22 AM

A good deal of resistance to public efforts at desegregation, besides obvious conservative biases, is mere fatigue at the repeated failures of housing and community development programs to break the generational cycles of persistent poverty, crime, single parent households and academic failure. Justifying public expenditure is very difficult in the current economic environment for even successful programs, and when the tax burden is placed disproportionately on the middle class, as in Chicago, additional spending on rent vouchers or affordable housing is politically impossible. When people think it doesn't work, they're not going to spend more on it hoping for a change. Del Valle makes the best point in this article - schools and programming for young children and their parents is the best investment of time and money to end poverty and the racial isolation that accompanies it in Chicago. People rarely overcome the impact and limitations of their upbringing and education, but children can be taught to think of themselves differently.

report

4 likes, 2 dislikes  like  dislikePosted by **Juansinmiedo** on 02/09/2011 at 10:30 AM

So what are you proposing here? A project in Gold Coast? A mansion on 95th? Not plausible. And while you seem to want to separate the issue of class status (poor v. wealthy) from race, there are times when your article skirts the line and brings it back into play, which personally I think is more the issue. I don't think (most) people care what color person they live next door to, as long as they are of a similar status. I'm middle class. I don't want to live next to a crack house. And while I may want to live next to a mansion, that's just not going to happen anytime soon. If you want to live in a nicer neighborhood, fix the issues that got you in the one you're in now. Education is accessible by pretty much anyone now, and by multiple means. Do SOMETHING to better yourself, rather than complain about how the white folk got it so good. One final note: As you yourself pointed out, these neighborhoods "were noted for their shootings, robberies, rapes, fires, joblessness, single-parent families, dreadful schools and high dropout rates, rampant alcoholism and heroin addiction, abandoned buildings and vacant lots." And this is what you want the new mayor to force to spread out? Again I say, not plausible.

report

11 likes, 3 dislikes  like  dislikePosted by **isaiah77721** on 02/09/2011 at 10:55 AM

I think the ills of the african american community are the indirect result of the lack of investment in those communities. As we can see, no businesses=no jobs. If the only businesses that come into the black communities are drug dealers and liquor stores, then what can we expect people to gravitate towards. If our basic public services, such as libraries and public schools are not equipped with the same tools as predominantly white communities, then what can we expect the people who arise from these communities to amount to? I grew up in the middle-class Pill Hill neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. There was one library which was outdated with green screen computers that were hardly meeting minimum requirements, not to mention outdated reference materials, and was located next door to the most thriving business in my community, Kenwood Liquors. So the unfriendly environment combined with lack of resources led me out of my neighborhood for basic service.

Also, my parents were unable to send me to a competitive public school in my neighborhood because the even in a middle class black neighborhood, there are subpar buildings with subpar teachers and subpar equipment, no computer labs or science labs and the like. Simply videos about computers and videos about lab experiments. So

Children are already behind when they reach a reasonable age in terms of education.

So the unskilled, ignorant, alcoholic, jailed, black person may not always be the problem as an individual. It may be that the system is set up for the young black student to fail in life. Fortunately my parents were middle class and sent me to Bridgeport and Hyde Park, and ultimately private school to get a quality of life, which simply weren't available in my neighborhood, where there were no projects, no hoodlums, just regular working class black people.

My dad worked for the Chicago Police Dept for 33 years and was unable to send his kid to a school in his district where he lived in a nice single family home and paid taxes that was relatively low in crime, simply because the resources were not available and he refused to let his child fail in life.

Signed Lauren D. Russell, CPA, 26 years of age, Chicago, IL

report 10 likes, 4 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **LaurenDRussell,CPA** on 02/09/2011 at 11:28 AM



"A project in Gold [sic] Coast?"

There actually is scattered-site public housing in Streeterville, not sure about the Gold Coast.

"If you want to live in a nicer neighborhood, fix the issues that got you in the one your [sic] in now."

Such as poor English skills.

"And this is what you want the new mayor to force to spread out?"

Daley certainly did, but he spread it mostly to the suburbs.

report 4 likes, 2 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **FGFM** on 02/09/2011 at 12:25 PM



As large as the problem is, I think it's almost unrealistic to focus only on the hope that any one mayoral candidate could "fix" it. Instead, let's give some attention to the many organizations doing good and struggling to survive in these communities. From my experience, children and young people, especially, do want options for their future, do want education, a place to build their skills, and a place to be (off the streets) after school. Let's keep them funded and growing. Not the whole solution, but an important part.

report 1 like, 2 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **imo** on 02/09/2011 at 2:17 PM



"We must have fixed it—otherwise why isn't racial segregation an issue in the mayor's race?"

Since this sentence appears near the head of the story, by itself as a paragraph, I am assuming that this was the writers intended message, that we as a city and region no longer care about this issue. The lack of comments following this story simply reinforce what the writer already knows.

The writer wonders off track into regional issues and solutions while never coming to grips with why this is so. Much has been written about solutions, and I do happen to believe in the work the Orfield has done, but the deeper, and more difficult, story is the apathy to the issue.

report 1 like, 2 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **John43** on 02/09/2011 at 4:59 PM



I think you're right, John--the apathy is the key and striking thing. I'll try to get to that in other stories. The sociologist Herbert Gans wrote that poverty persists because it serves purposes for the rest of us. That may be true about segregation too. But I also agree (and admire) Myron Orfield's effort to show people that desegregation ultimately serves everyone's interests.

report 2 likes, 1 dislike  like  dislike

Posted by **Steve Bogira** on 02/09/2011 at 5:47 PM



I think if you solved the crime and economic development problems, segregation would take care of itself. People would move to areas with great locations and housing stock. Most people also aren't nearly as prejudiced the media likes to accuse of being.

report 1 like, 2 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **James Reyes** on 02/10/2011 at 2:48 AM



Should we be as concerned about Polish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Middle Eastern and Hispanic segregation? We seem to enjoy the fact that there are ethnic neighborhoods in the city unless they are ethnically Black Americans or White Americans. Some of these are practically institutional - the city put PR flags in Humboldt, a pagoda el stop at Argyle and street honorariums all over the place, of which King drive is one. This city is segregated by race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, economics, religion...So I guess my question would be this: is the problem segregation, or what can be done about the vast communities of poor black people in Chicago? That approach would be harder to sell your editor, but if segregation is not the issue, or it skews ambiguous when you broaden the scope even slightly, why not write about the actual problem? The juxtaposition with white communities appeals to dichotomous thinking and invites readers to feel guilty or oppressed, but Chicago is so much more than black and white. A well to do white (Irish) neighborhood like Edison Park isn't the problem, nor that people of certain ethnicities or religions tend to organize into cohesive communities.

report

5 likes, 1 dislike like dislike

Posted by **Juansinmiedo** on 02/10/2011 at 10:14 AM



"A well to do white (Irish) neighborhood like Edison Park isn't the problem"

Aside from the fact that a black female friend of mine was physically harassed by off-duty cops when she attended a work reunion at a bar up there.

report

3 likes, 2 dislikes like dislike

Posted by **FGFM** on 02/10/2011 at 11:30 AM



It's an important issue, but like most discussions of it, it is short on the raw numbers at root, which are staggering.

I'd like to ask what neighborhood/area of Chicago would ever (and *could* ever) welcome well over 500,000 people in a twenty-year time period.

This influx pretty much guaranteed friction - when I hear people talk about northern-vs-southern racism, the element usually missing is that while northern white ethnics certainly didn't roll out a red carpet, it's not like they were aggressors who actively moved to black areas to cause problems.

The long-term effect of slavery is still the 800 lb gorilla in the room, and the "Great Migration" would be better framed/studied in the context of war refugees, and how other nations have successfully integrated them into their societies.

Deprived of schooling for a few centuries, then after the brief tease of Reconstruction left largely powerless, penniless and dependent on sharecropping - what would people expect to happen in a city like Chicago where you already had a dozen conflicts between European groups that had been fighting between themselves for millenia?

Education of kids is indeed the key, as is getting capital into these neighborhoods, and educating people why Wal-Mart may provide a few jobs and cheap Chinese plastic crap, but you're still hemorrhaging your community's wealth to outside stockholders in the big picture.

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org...>

"Migration from the South slowed during the 1930s but accelerated when World War II production created new jobs. In the 1950s, the expanding use of the mechanical cotton picker pushed another wave of black agricultural workers out of the South. Between 1940 and 1960, Chicago's black population grew from 278,000 to 813,000."

report

4 likes, 0 dislikes like dislike

Posted by **The Welshman** on 02/10/2011 at 11:45 AM



So an entire neighborhood is a "problem" because FGFM's friend was harassed there? Any other sweeping generalizations champ?

report

3 likes, 0 dislikes like dislike

Posted by **huber1946** on 02/10/2011 at 12:23 PM



I'm curious as to why you don't attempt an alternate approach to talking about an exhausting issue...what might have been the different perspective we'd approach reading the article if it had been titled "Most White Americans in Chicago live in hyper-segregated neighborhoods"....

The reason none of the candidates wants to talk about race, (or should want to talk about race) is that the issues you're concerned about are no longer simply due to segregation...class, exposure, education, culture have significantly complicated the issue of why segregation still exists, but also why poverty, housing disparity, food deserts also exist. I mean a pre-schooler can tell you its racism. But that's so 1970s...to just say racism. Its a never ending mix of issues that in the last decade have been complicated with an apathy from a younger generation who seems to not care as long as they have iPods and AirForce Ones. Its cool to wear an airbrushed Obama t-shirts, but not to attempt to enact change on a personal scale, never mind getting involved with politics or world issues...nearly impossible to inspire the kind of energy we see right now in Egypt. I mean, never mind systemic issues, defacto, dejure racism, public policy, corrupt cops...if individual citizens made personal effort, however small...hell, if you live in the Wild Hundreds, take the El up north of North Avenue, walk around like THOSE streets are your city too Explore. Lakeview residents...drive south of Roosevelt Rd. go have dinner at Morrisons on Ashland, fight to keep Army and Lou's open just cuz its a Chicago institution...I mean, just get out of comfort zones...

I did my architectural thesis on this topic over a decade ago, and while I'm glad you have put some effort into this article, laying out decades old information...let's try harder to stop allowing a mindset of NO AGENCY to exist. ...Segregation is not the cause but the result. De-segregating as a focus seems to suggest that somehow if former Ida B. Wells residents could live on the gold coast, all would be good...too simplistic of a thought process. Black people have choices. White people have choices too. And God forbid we acknowledge that this city has Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, Mixed Heritage populations that count too. Expand the dialog. Don't quote Massey one more time for chrissake

report

4 likes, 1 dislike  like  dislike

Posted by **bridgeport artist** on 02/10/2011 at 12:41 PM



One factor that is ignored here is the (non) role of the members of the City Council in designing effective measures to increase racial and economic integration. Some of this legislative inaction is probably a byproduct of the Voting Rights Act, which has encouraged residential segregation by requiring "Black" and "Latino" wards with large enough majorities of one demographic group to be able to elect "one of their own." In the last redistricting, millions of dollars were spent on a lawsuit (brought, ironically, by a group of aldermen including now-Cook County President Preckwinkle, and represented by now-President Obama's law firm) which redrew the wards on the southwest side to further racially segregate them. If the population of the City were spread out in truly random fashion, certain politicians would no longer be able to get elected. "Follow the votes."

report

2 likes, 0 dislikes  like  dislike

Posted by **Pugh Dendum** on 02/10/2011 at 12:59 PM



I currently live in Ukrainian Village and I am a rare breed. I have lived in Chicago for over 25 years and I have fought the temptation to following the pack. Although, I didn't grow up in Chicago, I was born here in 1963. Shortly after that, my parents moved to a small town in Alabama.

Growing in the south in the late 60s and 70, black folks definitely knew their place. So, when I graduated from college, was eager to move to Chicago, because I thought it would be more liberal and tolerant. As I talked to friends and family (all of which are African American) they made it clear, if you're black you should live south of Madison Avenue. My point, if you think about the migration path (from the south) and history of most of the black folks in Chicago, then you get a deep understanding of the culture self segregation which are presence in Chicago.

For years, I lived on the North side of Chicago in communities that didn't always welcome me. I have always been the only African American guy living in the building or even on the block. As a well educated white collar professional, over the years I have endured stinging insults and numerous questions about my desire to live on the north side from white and black folks alike.

It wasn't until recently that I decided to throw in the towel. As I sat in park with my 3 year old daughter, for the first time in my 25 years in Chicago I questioned the lack of community. You see in my effort to be a trail blazer, I had developed thick skin, so thick that I had almost forgotten how good it felt to be around people that accepted you. I have endless stories of entering a park and watching people steer their kids away from my daughter. It really hurts when I watch my daughter treated as an outsider in a Chicago City Park on the north side.

So, after years of not yelling to the people that wanted to tell me where to live, I have decided to sale my Ukrainian Village home and move to Kenwood in search of a community that I hope will embrace my family... and specifically my daughter. My experience tells me that this issue is much bigger than the ambitions of all the candidates combined.

report

10 likes, 1 dislike  like  dislike

Posted by **Noland914** on 02/10/2011 at 1:54 PM



"So an entire neighborhood is a "problem" because FGFM's friend was harassed there? Any other sweeping generalizations champ?"

Yeah, while we're at it - I used to live in Bridgeport under duress because it was cheaper than any of the black neighborhoods around where I needed to be. One black woman I knew rented an apartment there and moved out the next day because someone threw a brick through her window. I warned another black female to be careful in the area and she pooh-poohed my advice until one of the locals informed her that "We kill n*ggers around here." Before Fat Albert's ABC Tap at 31st and Shields closed, there was a huge knock-down, drag-out brawl between a group of black men who had stopped in for a drink and the rest of the patrons. The racial animosity in the neighborhood was so thick that you could cut it with a knife. The cops and their buddies up in Edison Park appear to have the same mentality.

report

2 likes, 1 dislike like dislike

Posted by **FGFM** on 02/10/2011 at 3:17 PM



Much respect for Noland914, Bridgeport artist, and Lauren Russell's comments! The real issue should be the lack of investment and absence of intention when it comes to connecting the neighborhoods in the city to each other (and not just downtown or the lake), but especially under-served and ignored communities that include middle class and working class black, asian american, american indian, latino, etc folks.

report

2 likes, 0 dislikes like dislike

Posted by **bettina** on 02/10/2011 at 4:49 PM



Dear reader.

I would like to respond to your article about segregation in Chicago, "Separate, Unequal & Ignored" (February 10, 2011) by Steve Bogira.

I don't know what race Mr. Steve Bogira is but more often than not, a story like this is written by a white, left wing liberal who thinks he must come to the aid of African Americans because they have no clue on how to solve problems on their own. It's sort of condescending in my opinion.

First of all, I think that Mr. Bogira is insinuating that it's the white people that are causing this segregation.

He has a chart that shows which areas are more segregated than others.

In the near loop, downtown area, which is a predominantly a white area, there are about 11-20% African Americans residing there.

Then, the chart shows that on the south side of Chicago, such as, Englewood or Chatham it has around 99% African Americans.

What this tells me is that, there are more African Americans in white neighborhoods than White people in African American neighborhoods.

Why? He's insinuating that it's racism.

Why is it that fear and crime is never mentioned as the reason why White people don't want to live in these neighborhoods?

I read in our local newspaper that African Americans, though, are only 34% of the population here in this city, they commit 80% of all homicides here.

The article goes on to say that, if you go to the South side of Chicago in an African American neighborhood, you can close your eyes and if you come in contact with anyone, 4 out 5 times he or she that you touch is involved with our justice system. Isn't that kind of scary?

I walk around my neighborhood in the near north Navy Pier area and there are plenty of African Americans enjoying themselves like everyone else without fear of anything.

Can you say that about a white person walking around in a Black neighborhood?

If you see a white person there, he has that squirrel nervous tick, that isn't very comfortable to look at.

Another point I would like to make is how Mr. Bogira thinks that some of the segregation problem could be solved by just building low income housing in white neighborhoods.

How does that solve the fear and crime problem?

By living next to white folks, does the income of poor African Americans suddenly and magically doubles or triples and that crime would automatically disappear?

I would think that crime will now be spread to a much broader area of the city.

I think that's what Mr. Steve Bogira has in mind, spread not only the wealth but crime also.

I could be wrong.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

D. Whitehead.

Chicago, IL

report

4 likes, 1 dislike like dislike

Posted by **D. Whitehead** on 02/10/2011 at 5:47 PM



Surprisingly, the author didn't ignore high rates of black crime and social dysfunction, and he even mentioned the suburbs when mentioning integration. But then he asks why so few want integration. You can't figure it out? We don't want our safe neighborhoods turned into crime-ridden ghettos. Had old Mayor Daley put housing projects in Edison Park and other stable white areas, he'd have spurred more white flight, further reduced the city's tax base, and perhaps created new ghetto's (plus get voted out in the next election). The author also forgot to mention that middle-class black areas also resist public housing. As long as the underclass acts like the underclass, others will seek to avoid them.

The Solution? Truly wish I knew. But destroying the few remaining middle class neighborhoods seems suicidal.

report

5 likes, 1 dislike



like dislike

Posted by **thekgb** on 02/10/2011 at 7:18 PM



Myron Orfield is classic hypocritical white man making money off the black cause. He regularly consults on race and poverty for big dollars - exclaiming the need for integration in all places - especially schools. Meanwhile, big chunk of those "consulting" dollars go the private schools that his kids attend. And last time I checked private elementary and high schools were not exactly great bastions of integration for either race or soci-economic status. As long as there are poor black people, and white guilt, closet racists like Myron Orfield will continue to thrive.

report

2 likes, 1 dislike



like dislike

Posted by **DrWatkinsPhd** on 02/10/2011 at 7:46 PM



"If you see a white person there, he has that squirrel nervous tick, that isn't very comfortable to look at."

Yeah, I think I saw you trying to buy crack at Pizza King last week.

report

3 likes, 2 dislikes



like dislike

Posted by **FGFM** on 02/10/2011 at 8:57 PM



"I would like to respond to your article about segregation in Chicago, "Separate, Unequal & Ignored" (February 10, 2011) by Steve Bogira."

It's a good thing you made that clear, D. Whitehead, because I don't think anyone would have figured it out by the fact that you were posting in the article's comment section and responding to specific points in the article.

"I don't know what race Mr. Steve Bogira is but more often than not, a story like this is written by a white, left wing liberal who thinks he must come to the aid of African Americans because they have no clue on how to solve problems on their own. It's sort of condescending in my opinion."

For you to have that opinion you would have to come from the presumption that the crime, poverty, and poor education in parts of the city as well as all the effects created from the virtuous cycle of hopelessness that results are not anyone's problem but those who live it directly. You obviously don't think it is your problem. I think that is completely misguided. For one thing, as a resident of Chicago it is your tax dollars that are paying for police officers and court personnel that must deal with the crime. The fact that people are living in poverty means they are generally spending much less in taxes than they receive in services. They will get county supported health care at Stroger Hospital and elsewhere since they can't afford insurance, for example. Guess who gets to make up for this? All the other taxpayers like yourself. In addition, if neighborhoods in the inner-city are able to improve it will cause development in those areas which results in greater tax revenue. It means less of a burden for all the other taxpayers.

So since you think it is condescending to attempt to find ways to reduce all this poverty and crime I guess you must be be against lower taxes. Perhaps you are extremely disappointed that the county rolled back half of its sales tax increase so that now Chicago doesn't quite have the highest rate in the nation. And I suppose you never complain about property tax increases and would be happy if you pay more. You cannot separate yourself from what goes on in the lower income parts of the city. It is not only up to those who live in poverty-stricken areas to figure out how to get people out of poverty. Everyone is connected through the tax structure and the economy.

report

2 likes, 1 dislike



like dislike

Posted by **The original IAC** on 02/11/2011 at 2:11 AM

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