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Change and Stagnation

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Forman, Seth

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# Racial Composition of Long Island Public School Districts

## 1991–2001: Change and Stagnation

**Seth Forman**  
*Stony Brook University*

### *Abstract*

Long Island public schools became somewhat less segregated in the decade between 1991 and 2001. But, this is largely the result of population growth among minority groups, especially Hispanics. White students are more exposed to minority students than in the earlier period, but black students are less exposed to white students. The populations of both black and Hispanic students increased.

**Keywords:** Integration, Segregation, Public schools, Hispanics, African-Americans, Racism, Suburbs

### **Introduction**

This article examines trends in the racial composition of public schools in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York, between the years 1991 and 2001. With 2.8 million residents, the two-county Long Island region is the largest suburban area in the nation without a central city. As of July 1, 2003, the Nassau–Suffolk population exceeded the population of 19 states ranging from Wyoming to Arkansas.

Among U.S. cities, Long Island would rank as the fourth largest, exceeded only by New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. This context is provided to place Long Island's demographic importance in perspective, and to indicate that when it comes to the problems associated with old-line suburbs in America, Long Island is front and center (Koppelman and Forman, forthcoming).

### **Context**

Like suburbs in the United States in general, Nassau and Suffolk counties have been dogged by allegations of racial inequality and segregation. Various studies helped burnish Long Island's public image as the quintessential white suburb as historians unearthed the notorious racial policies of one of the first postwar suburban developments in Levittown (Gans 1967; Jackson 1985; Teaford 1986). At a Hofstra University conference on racism in 2002, David Rusk, the former mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico, called Long Island the "most segregated suburb in America," and blamed much of the problem on Long Island's fragmented governmental structure. Rusk also compared Long Island unfavorably to demographically similar counties such as Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia

(Rusk 2002). Local media were quick to expound on Rusk’s findings. Long Island’s only daily newspaper, *Newsday*, exclaimed in an editorial that racism is “our dirty little secret, the one everybody knows but no one wants to talk about.” *Newsday* went on to suggest that Long Islanders were in some ways more racist than 50 years ago. Racism, claimed the editorial, “came to the surface in the nation’s first post-war suburb, Levittown . . . Since then, it has become more polite, more subtle and even more embedded” (*Newsday* 2004).

Data released in 2000 by the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that Long Island’s status as the most segregated suburb is somewhat less clear than these critics assume. According to the 2000 census, the Nassau–Suffolk region is less racially segregated than 32 of the nation’s 43 primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs). The local trend is clearly toward less segregation. Where 64 percent of

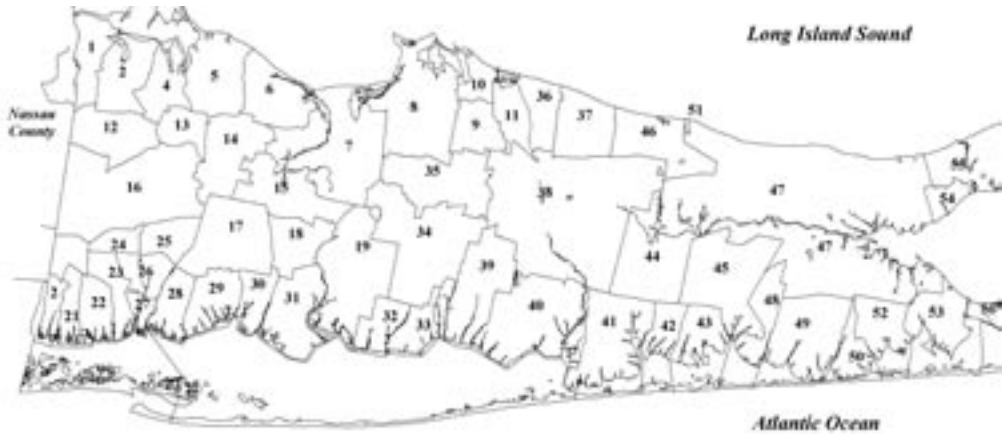
blacks in the PMSA were clustered in 10 Long Island census tracts in 1990, those same tracts today contain 60 percent of the PMSA’s blacks.

Comparing Long Island to the nation’s other PMSAs is not entirely appropriate. Many of the large PMSAs showing greater segregation contain central cities, and reflect the division between the “majority–minority” urban centers and the majority-white suburbs. Many smaller PMSAs showing less segregation do not have the racial diversity or demand for housing of a major metropolitan area. The Nassau–Suffolk region’s population of 2.8 million and its inordinately high suburban density levels (4,650 people per square mile in Nassau County) make comparison difficult. But among the relatively few similarly situated suburban PMSAs, Nassau–Suffolk still fares well: less segregated than Bergen–Passaic in New Jersey or Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (U.S. Census Bureau 2002a, table 5.5).

**Figure 1: Long Island in Relation to Neighboring States**



**Figure 2: Suffolk County School Districts - West**



Source: Long Island Regional Planning

1. Cold Spring Harbor	21. Copiague	41. William Floyd
2. Huntington	22. Lindenhurst	42. Center Moriches
3. Fire Island	23. West Babylon	43. East Moriches
4. Harborfields	24. Wyandanch	44. South Manor
5. Northport	25. Deer Park	45. Eastport
6. Kings Park	26. North Babylon	46. Shoreham/Wading River
7. Smithtown	27. Babylon	47. Riverhead
8. Three Village	28. West Islip	48. Remsenburg-Speonk
9. Comsewogue	29. Bay Shore	49. Westhampton
10. Port Jefferson	30. Islip	50. Quogue
11. Mount Sinai	31. East Islip	51. Little Flower
12. South Huntington	32. Sayville	52. East Quogue
13. Elwood	33. Bayport/Blue Point	53. Hampton Bays
14. Commack	34. Sachem	54. Laurel
15. Hauppauge	35. Middle Country	55. Mattituck/Cutchogue
16. Half Hollow Hills	36. Miller Place	56. Tuckahoe
17. Brentwood	37. Rocky Point	
18. Central Islip	38. Longwood	
19. Connetquot	39. Patchogue-Medford	
20. Amityville	40. South Country	

The PMSA that contains Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia, shows less segregation than Nassau–Suffolk. But those two counties are a poor comparison to Long Island, having roughly 33 percent fewer residents in 2000 (1.8 million vs. 2.8 million) and roughly half the population density. Because they are suburbs of Washington, DC, a large proportion of jobs there are middle- and upper-middle-income federal civil service jobs, which historically have attracted disproportionate numbers of educated blacks and Hispanics. By contrast, only 1.6 percent of all jobs on Long Island are federal positions (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001; U.S. Census Bureau 2002b). The federal government also provided

significant funding to purchase properties mandated by inclusionary zoning statutes and affordable housing in Montgomery County when it was in its major growth phase in the middle to late 1970s, long after Long Island’s era of major growth (Swope 2000). It is unclear, however, whether or not Montgomery County has succeeded in desegregating its schools through inclusionary zoning policies. Montgomery County claims to have created 10,000 units of integrated affordable housing units since 1974 (Swope 2000). But wealthier whites in Montgomery may be resegregating the schools by leaving the public educational system. According to the 2000 census<sup>1</sup>, one of every six Montgomery County school-aged children, or 18 percent, is enrolled in

<sup>1</sup> Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table QT-P19.

**Figure 3: Suffolk County School Districts - East**



Source: Long Island Regional Planning Board

(1-56 See Suffolk West)

- 57. New Suffolk
- 58. Southold
- 59. Tuckahoe
- 60. Southampton
- 61. Bridgehampton
- 62. Sagaponack
- 63. Wainscott

- 64. East Hampton
- 65. Springs
- 66. Amaganset
- 67. Sag Harbor
- 68. Shelter Island
- 69. Greenport
- 70. Oysterponds
- 71. Montauk

private schools (29,737 private vs. 164,305 public K–12), compared to one in every nine, or 11.5 percent, for Nassau–Suffolk (53,712 private vs. 466,213 public K–12) (Granat 1994; *Newsday* 2005).

The question of racial composition and distribution on Long Island has come to the forefront because Long Island’s demography is changing rapidly. The Nassau–Suffolk region is the quintessential “old-line” suburb, representing the part of the United States that demographer William Frey (2002) describes as the northeast “Melting Pot.” This region is characterized by a loss of native-born whites to other regions, and increasing numbers of overseas migrants. Long Island remains predominantly white, but the percentage of whites in both counties dropped between 2000 and 2003. In Nassau, the percentage dropped from 74.5 percent to 70 percent. In Suffolk, the white population went from 79.2 percent to 76 percent. Both counties

saw increases in the black population, from 10.7 percent of total population in Nassau to 11.7 percent, and from 7.5 percent to 8.2 percent in Suffolk. Hispanics in Nassau grew from 10 to 11.7 percent, and in Suffolk went from 10.5 to 12.5 percent.

Segregation on Long Island has never been the subject of formal investigation, and it is possible that school district racial composition provides a more robust focus of inquiry than residential distribution.<sup>2</sup> While it is almost impossible to determine the extent to which housing patterns are determined by personal preferences, discrimination, income, or other factors, it is widely acknowledged that school quality and peer attitudes toward school influence academic, and hence social and economic, outcomes (State University of New York at Albany 2001; Coleman et al. 1966; Lee 2004; Rusk 1999). The precise impact of school racial composition on academic performance is a subject of intense debate. Some critics

<sup>2</sup> The Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the State University of New York at Albany has analyzed public elementary school demographic data for the Nassau–Suffolk region as a whole, but not for entire school districts for each county separately. For their analysis of the Nassau–Suffolk, New York PMSA, see <http://mumford1.dyndns.org/cen2000/SchoolPop/SchoolSegdata/5380sb.htm>.

**Table 1. Highest and Lowest Performing School Districts on Long Island, 2003**

	<b>% Graduating With Regents Diploma</b>	<b>% in Poverty*</b>	<b>% Minority</b>
<b>Lowest</b>			
Hempstead	14.0	94.0	98.6
Roosevelt	16.0	94.0	99.1
Wyandanch	28.0	77.0	99.3
Uniondale	33.0	24.0	95.1
Central Islip	28.0	65.0	73.9
<b>Highest</b>			
Jericho	99.0	0.9	2.8
Bellmore-Merrick	94.0	0.7	4.0
Wantagh	92.0	0.2	2.5
Commack	92.0	1.4	2.7
Rockville Centre	90.0	8.6	16.4

\*Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Source: New York State Department of Education 2003

believe that what matters in a school is not the racial mix but the academic culture and the quality of teachers (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003). Others argue that in a country where privilege and success have been so closely connected with whiteness, attendance at the same schools by black and white students is essential to ensuring school quality (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield 2003; Orfield and Yun 1999).

These questions surrounding the best policies for achieving academic equality do not need to be addressed substantially here. The purpose of this article is not to try to make fine-grained analysis, but to establish a trend line for the racial composition of public schools. On Long Island, poverty, race, income, family structure, and school quality are so closely linked that race is taken to be a proxy for school district quality, as Table 1 strongly suggests—districts with the highest graduation rates

have the lowest poverty rates and minority populations; those with high poverty rates and minority populations have low graduation rates. From an integrationist viewpoint, higher levels of integration are understood to represent progress toward more equal educational outcomes and equality in general. This issue is examined using data from the county schools next.

## Methodology

School demographic data from the New York State Department of Education (1992, 2002) are utilized to calculate two common measures generally used to capture the degree of segregation in United States cities and places. The class of segregation indices known broadly as the *exposure index* shows the percentage of a particular group present in the school of the average student in another group, and can be presented as an *index of exposure*

to other groups or as an *index of isolation* from other groups. More specifically, the isolation index captures the percentage of black residents in the districts where the average black student attends school, adjusted for the fact that this number increases naturally with the black share of the overall student population in the region studied. A regional isolation index of 0.5, or 50 percent, indicates that the average black student goes to a school in which the black share of the student population exceeds the black share of the regional student population by roughly 50 percent (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001; Massey and Denton 1988; Orfield et al. 1997). To further illustrate, the average white student might attend a school that is 70 percent white, 15 percent black, 14 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian/Other. The exposure indices for each group must add up to 100. A larger value means that there is greater exposure to other groups, a lower value means that there is less exposure to other groups.<sup>3</sup>

The *index of dissimilarity* (sometimes called the *segregation index* or the *imbalance index*) is a measure of the overall degree of segregation, or the degree to which any two groups live—or in this case attend school—separately (Farley 2002). The dissimilarity index can be interpreted as the proportion of black students (or Hispanics or other group) that would need to move into another school district to get a perfectly even proportion of black students across all school districts in the region studied. If a region's black dissimilarity index for schools is 0.5, or 50 percent, for example, it means that 50 percent of the black students in that region's school system would have to change schools to achieve perfect representation (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001).

Also calculated is the percentage of black and Hispanic students in school districts

that have maintained between 30 and 50 percent black and/or Hispanic student populations for the entire period of 1991–2001. This measure demonstrates the number of school districts and the number and proportion of students attending school districts that have defied the “tipping point,” or the percentage of black and Hispanic students that theoretically “cause” whites to relocate in large numbers (Levy 2000). The following discussion does not include a detailed analysis of students classified by the New York State Department of Education as “Asian/Other” pupils. Although the Asian student population on Long Island has increased rapidly over the past decade, the absolute number of Asian students remains too small to say anything meaningful about their integration. Asian students do not constitute a majority in any single school district on Long Island and, where they are present, they are almost completely integrated with white students.

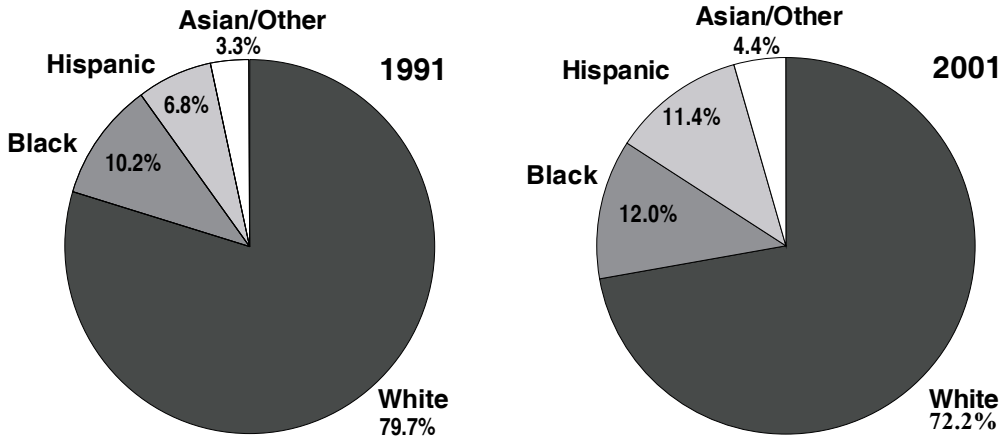
### Overall size and composition

The racial composition of Long Island public school districts underwent change between 1991 and 2001, but the general pattern of white, non-Hispanic predominance persisted. In 1991, white pupils made up 79.7 percent of all public school students on Long Island. In 2001, they made up 72.2 percent of all pupils. The proportion of black pupils increased from 10.2 to 12 percent, while the proportion of Hispanic students increased from 6.8 to 11.4 percent. The proportion of Asian and all other students (“Asian/Other”) increased between 1991 and 2001 from 3.3 to 4.4 percent (Figure 4).

The total student population in Long Island public school districts increased by 71,959, or 18.7 percent, between 1991 and 2001, going from a total of 384,084 to 456,043.

<sup>3</sup> The author is indebted to John Logan, former Director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the State University of New York at Albany from 2002–2004, currently at Brown University, for refining the definitions and descriptions of the racial segregation indices used in this article. See index explanations at “Nassau/Suffolk, New York PMSA” at <http://mumford1.dyndns.org/cen2000/SchoolPop/SchoolSegdata/5380sb.htm>.

**Figure 4: Racial Composition of the Total Public School Population of Long Island 1991 vs. 2001**



Of that increase, white pupils accounted for 22,887, black pupils accounted for 15,422, Hispanic pupils accounted for 26,058, and Asian/Other pupils accounted for 7,592. Expressed in percentages, the white student population increased by 7.5 percent, the black pupil population grew by 39.3 percent, the Hispanic pupil population increased by 100 percent, and the Asian/Other pupil population rose by 60 percent.

There are some differences in the composition of the student populations in Nassau and Suffolk counties. In 2001, Suffolk had almost 45,000 more students than Nassau County. Suffolk's pupil population was 75.7 percent white, compared with 67.8 percent in Nassau County; 10.3 percent black, compared with 14.1 percent in Nassau; 11.3 percent Hispanic, compared with 11.6 percent in Nassau; and 2.7 percent Asian/Other, compared with 6.5 percent in Nassau County.

### **The racial imbalance of Long Island school districts**

Long Island school districts remain racially imbalanced. That is, white students continue to be isolated from black and Hispanic students to a degree that is disproportionate to the representation of these groups in the general regional population.

This does not mean that Long Island school

districts are racially segregated. In fact, the average school district on Long Island is made up of roughly 24 percent nonwhite minority students. This is a far different situation from that which existed in the ex-Confederate states of the American South as long as ten years after the United States Supreme Court issued its 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawing racially segregated public facilities. At that point, a mere 1.2 percent of black pupils attended schools with any white pupils at all (National Center for Education Statistics 2002). By contrast, today on Long Island the average black pupil attends a school with a student body that is approximately 35 percent white and 22 percent Hispanic. This compares favorably with nationwide figures, which place the average black pupil in a school that is 31 percent white (Orfield and Lee 2004). By any measure, Long Island's schools are racially diverse. The term "racial imbalance" is preferred here to the term "racial segregation" because it takes into account the existence of other racial minority groups in an increasingly diverse population. Racial composition of public school districts may be the result of many complex causes, and the term racial imbalance implies that a school district's racial composition does not reflect the racial composition and distribution of the general population.



*Exposure*

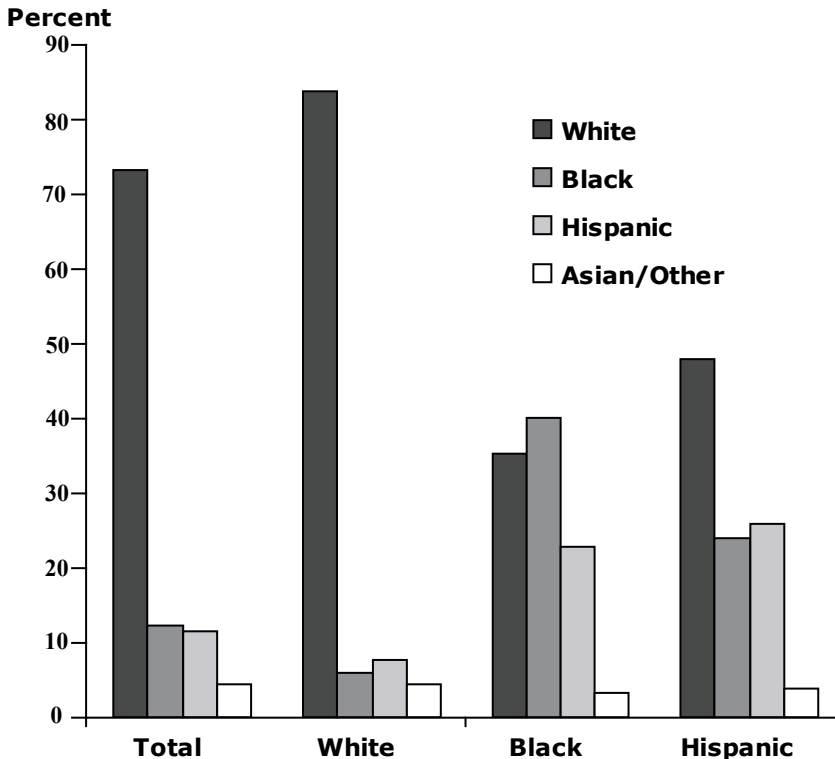
In 2001, Long Island public schools appeared to be racially mixed, but with stubborn and significant racial imbalances. While whites made up 72.1 of all students on Long Island, the average white student went to a school that was 82.4 percent white. Black students made up 12 percent of Long Island's students, but the average white student went to school in a district where just 5.8 percent of students were black and 7.5 percent were Hispanic. The average black student went to school in a district that was 34.7 percent white, 39.5 percent black, and 22.5 percent Hispanic. The average Hispanic student's school district was 47.1 percent white, 23.6 percent black, and 25.5 percent Hispanic (Figure 5).

The exposure index generally showed slightly more exposure for groups in 2001

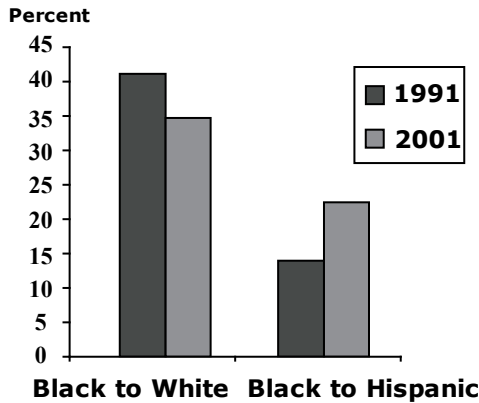
than in 1991, although the exposure rate of the average black student to whites, the most watched measure, was down from 1991. In 1991, the average white student went to a school in a district that was 5.3 percent black, compared with 5.8 percent in 2001, and 5 percent Hispanic compared with 7.5 percent a decade later. The average white student's school district in 1991 was 86.4 percent white, but in 2001 was 82.4 percent white. The average black student also showed a slight decline in isolation, going from a school district that was 42.7 percent black in 1991 to a district that was 39.5 percent black in 2001.

It should be noted that the decline in black isolation from other groups took place largely because of increased exposure to Hispanics, the fastest growing student racial/ethnic group. Hispanics experienced an increase in isolation, which is common for rapidly growing groups. The average

**Figure 5: Exposure Index**  
**Racial Composition of the Total Public School Population of Long Island and of the School District of the Average Student from Each Racial Group, 2001**



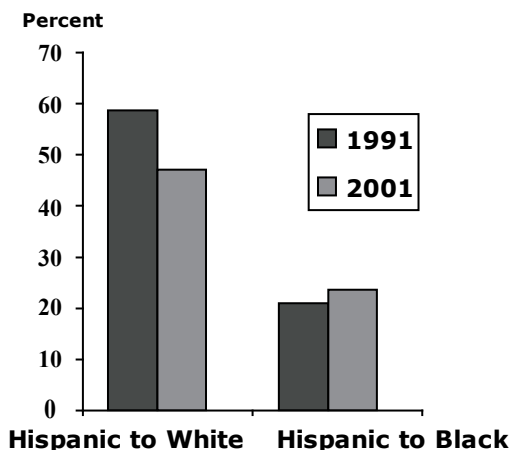
**Figure 6: Long Island Public School Districts Exposure Index for Black Students, 1991 vs. 2001**



Hispanic in 1991 attended school in a district that was 17.5 percent Hispanic, but in 2001 the average Hispanic student attended school in a district that was 25.5 percent Hispanic. In terms of exposure for these groups, the average black student's school district was 41.7 percent white in 1991 and 34.7 percent white in 2001. For the average black student, the school district was 14 percent Hispanic in 1991 and 22.5 percent Hispanic in 2001 (Figure 6). The average Hispanic student attended school in a district that was 58.7 percent white in 1991 and 47.1 percent white in 2001, and 21 percent black in 1991 and 23.6 percent black in 2001 (Figure 7).

In sum, the average white student on Long Island has become slightly more exposed

**Figure 7: Long Island Public School Districts Exposure Index for Hispanic Students, 1991 vs. 2001**



to blacks and somewhat more exposed to Hispanics. The average black student has become less exposed to whites and more exposed to Hispanics. The average Hispanic student has become less exposed to whites, slightly more exposed to blacks, and much more exposed to Hispanics.

It is important to remember that both the isolation and exposure indices depend to a large degree on the size of the group. The isolation index is almost inevitably smaller for smaller groups, and it is likely to rise over time if the group becomes larger. That is what has happened in the case of Hispanic students. Asians, a group that has grown only slightly less rapidly than Hispanics, also saw its Isolation Index go from 8.5 percent in 1991 to 11 percent in 2001.

The exposure index also depends partly on the overall size of the group being exposed to. In other words, as whites have become a smaller proportion of total students (79.7 percent to 72.2 percent), it is expected that blacks and Hispanics would be exposed to fewer whites. This is what has made it possible for the average black student to become less exposed to white students, but for the average white student to become more exposed to blacks. As Hispanics have grown as an overall percentage of student population, it is expected that all students—black, white, and Hispanic—would be exposed to more of them. For the most part, while most school districts on Long Island have become more racially integrated, large-

scale integration has taken place largely among blacks and Hispanics, while whites are only slightly more integrated than in the past.

To overcome these shortcomings in the segregation indices, it is helpful to look at the racial composition of the average public school district on Long Island. In 1991, the average district was 82 percent white, 9.6 percent black, 5.4 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian/Other (Figure 8). In 2001, the average Long Island district was 76.1 percent white, 10.7 black, 9.6 percent Hispanic, and 3.6 Asian.

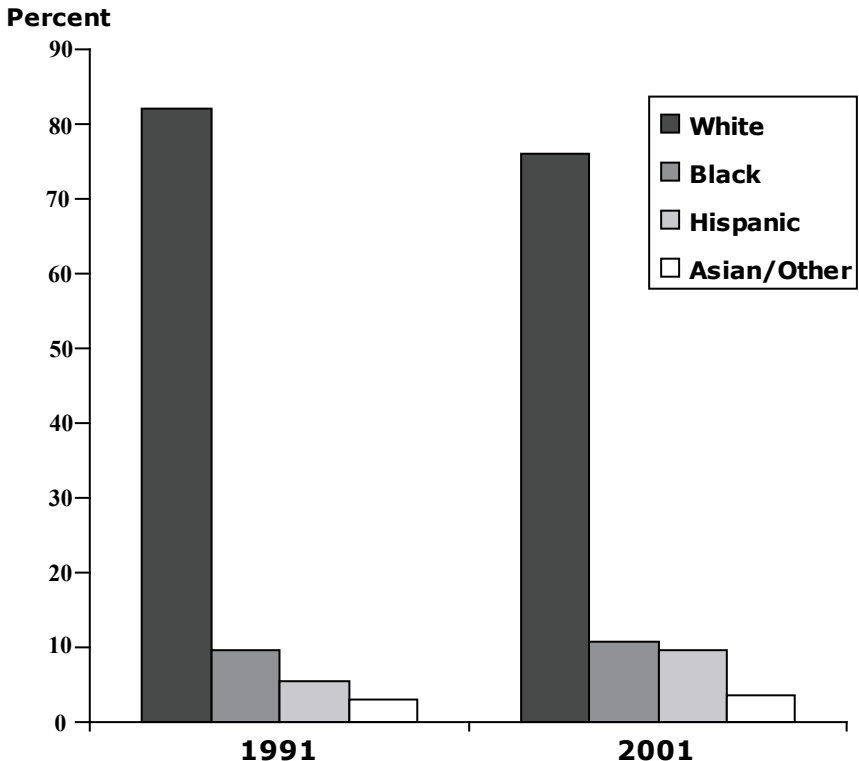
That the average public school district on Long Island became slightly more racially diverse is consistent with the finding that the number of school districts in which black and Hispanic students make up between 30 to 50 percent of students grew from 7 to 13, to approximately 10 percent of all Long Island school districts. This

could be an indication that the traditional tipping point for white flight has become less salient. The tipping point is said to be in the 20 to 30 percent range (Farley et al. 1978). The higher number of 30 to 50 percent minority districts suggests that more school districts were experiencing growth in minority populations and not experiencing commensurate white flight. Of the seven districts that had between 30 and 50 percent black and Hispanic populations in 1991, only two (Elmont, Copiague) had tipped to majority-minority populations, while five (Glen Cove, Long Beach, Bay Shore, Riverhead, and South Country) were still between 30 and 50 percent black and Hispanic.

*Racial imbalance*

The dissimilarity index measures whether one particular group is distributed across school districts in a region in the same

**Figure 8: Racial Composition of the Average Public School District on Long Island, 1991 vs. 2001**



way as another group. Instead of asking whether pupils are exposed to other pupils of different races, it looks at the school's racial composition in relation to the total pupil population in the region. Thus, if the school population in Brentwood, Long Island is 20 percent white, and that is also the rough proportion of the white student population on Long Island (it is not), there is little cause for concern, even though the white population is small in each case (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2004). Values of 60 or above are considered very high. Values of 40 to 50 are considered a moderate level of racial imbalance, and values of 30 or below are considered fairly low.

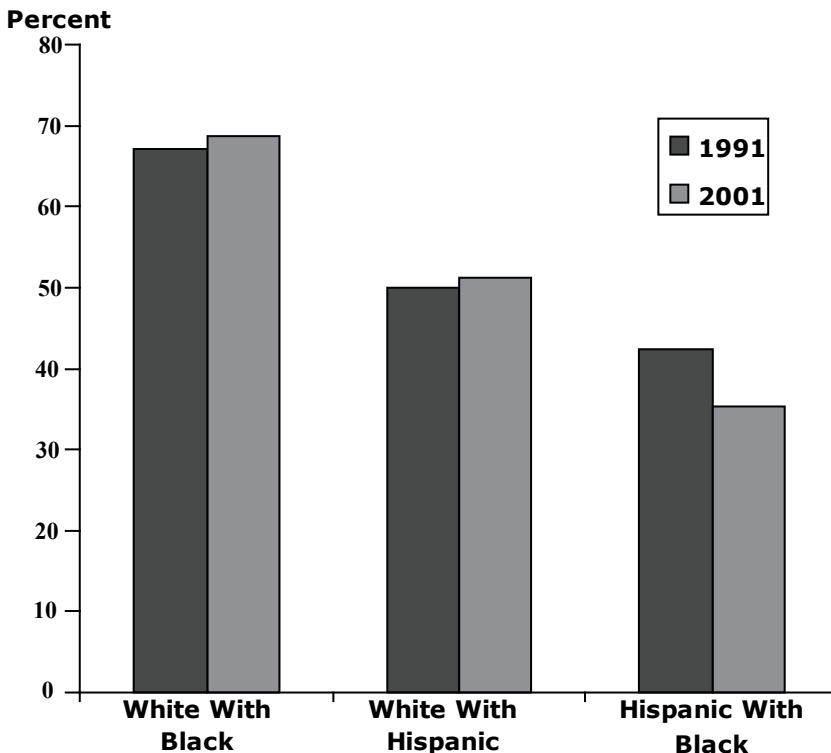
The dissimilarity index indicates that whites grew slightly more isolated from blacks and Hispanics between 1991 and 2001, while Hispanics and blacks became less isolated from one another. The index for Long Island school districts shows that in 1991, 67.1 percent of white students or black students

would have had to move to be evenly distributed among Long Island's school districts, while in 2001 68.7 percent would have had to move (Figure 9). The white dissimilarity index with Hispanics also grew, from 49.9 percent in 1991 to 51.3 percent in 2001. The Hispanic to black dissimilarity index fell from 42.4 to 35.4 percent.

### Analysis

Because this article is attempting to gauge levels of racial distribution and separation, it is important to define demographic groups appropriately. Since the separation of blacks from non-Hispanic whites has been a perennial issue in American history and culture, most studies attempt to measure the degree of separation between these two groups. It is also possible, however, to measure black separation from all non-blacks, which would include a good number of Hispanics, many of whom identify themselves as white.

**Figure 9: Dissimilarity Index  
Long Island Public School Districts,  
1991 vs. 2001**



In the 2000 census, approximately 90 percent of all Hispanic respondents on Long Island identified their race as white. Some researchers prefer to compare blacks with non-Hispanic whites on the grounds that it is the measure that best gauges social opportunity. Other researchers have pointed out that because blacks historically have been more highly segregated

from ethnic immigrants than from native-born whites, the fact that blacks are now more highly integrated with Hispanics than with native-born whites is itself socially significant (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001). Both of these comparisons appear reasonable, and while this study does not group all non-blacks together for purposes of analysis, it does measure integration levels for the three main groups.

Overall, the analysis in this article indicates that in 2001 there was much more racial integration in Long Island school districts than in 1991, but that was much more the case for blacks and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites. The overall exposure of the average white student to blacks and Hispanics was up slightly compared with 1991, but not as much as might be suggested from the increase of almost 40 percent in total black pupil population and 100 percent in total Hispanic pupil population. The average black student on Long Island was more exposed to Hispanics, but less exposed to white students, than in 1991. This is consistent with the growth in Hispanic students and the relative decline in white students. The average Hispanic student was more isolated from whites but more exposed to blacks in 2001 than in 1991. In short, blacks and Hispanics on Long Island grew less isolated from each other and slightly more isolated from whites, while white students became only slightly less isolated from blacks and Hispanics.

Further research is needed to confirm speculation that high housing costs in a hyper-inflated market may encourage middle-class whites to tolerate greater percentages of minority residents, as higher-end neighborhoods become less accessible to them.

## Policy implications

The causes of racial imbalance and segregation are complex. Racism; self-segregation among immigrant, racial, religious, and demographically similar groups; racial gerrymandering; housing costs; income differences; and planning and zoning practices are among the causes most often identified.<sup>4</sup> In the United States there is a mesmerizing array of distinctions upon which citizens base location decisions. According to David Brooks (2003):

*Maybe it's time to admit the obvious. We don't really care about diversity all that much in America, even though we talk about it a great deal. Maybe somewhere in this country there is a truly diverse neighborhood in which a black Pentecostal minister lives next to a white anti-globalization activist, who lives next to an Asian short-order cook, who lives next to a professional golfer, who lives next to a postmodern-literature professor and a cardiovascular surgeon. But I have never been to or heard of that neighborhood. Instead, what I have seen all around the country is people making strenuous efforts to group themselves with people who are basically like themselves.*

From a public policy standpoint, the most pertinent question remains to what extent racial separation in America reflects voluntary decisions of groups, and to what extent it does not. From this question it follows that differences in outcomes in terms of life chances, opportunities, and social mobility resulting from housing, neighborhood, and school district clustering is perhaps the most important public policy concern. A fierce political and academic debate is currently taking place over whether or not the racial mix of particular

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of causes, see Forman 2003.

schools is critically important to the quality of education.

Gary Orfield, a professor of education at Harvard University, is perhaps the most prominent proponent of the belief that schools with a majority of nonwhite students are at a terrible educational and social disadvantage. In Orfield's view, racial imbalance is a primary, perhaps *the* primary, source of the racial gap in student achievement (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield 2003; Orfield and Yun 1999). Other scholars, notably Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom (2003 and 2004), believe that factors (family support, school discipline) other than the race of the students that one attends school with are more important in terms of educational quality and academic achievement. Still others—such as the people behind the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity*, which recently won a lawsuit in New York state mandating the revamping of the state aid formula for public schools—believe that majority nonwhite school systems can reach parity with majority white schools only with the infusion of greater resources (Rebell and Wardenski 2004).

The question of whether or not citizens are being deprived of opportunities due to the racial distribution in communities and school districts must be answered satisfactorily before sound public policy that totally addresses equality (education, employment, and housing) can be honestly and legitimately pursued.

## Author

Seth Forman is Research Associate Professor at the Center for Regional Policy Studies at Stony Brook University and the Deputy Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board.

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