

## *All-White Neighborhoods Are Dwindling as America Grows More Diverse*

Segregated nonwhite neighborhoods persist, with consequential exceptions.



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May 1, 2019

As the country has become more racially and ethnically diverse over the past 40 years, American neighborhoods have, too. And the change is most apparent in places that were once all white:

Compared with 1980, more census tracts today are in the middle of this distribution, with a mix of white residents and other groups. But the center here has grown primarily because the right side has collapsed.

In 1980, about a quarter of the census tracts in America were almost exclusively white — 97 percent non-Hispanic white or more — and one-third of white residents lived in such a neighborhood. Those figures are probably undercounts, as the 1980 census lacked tract boundaries for much of rural America. But by the latest census data, just 5 percent of white residents live in such a place, mostly in rural areas.

These charts informed how we thought about neighborhood racial change in a project The Upshot published over the weekend. Most neighborhoods in America that have become more diverse have shifted from the right side of that picture toward the center; Hispanics, Asian-Americans and African-Americans have moved into once predominantly white communities.

Places in Gwinnett County, Ga., that were more rural and almost all white in 1980, for example, have grown in population to become diverse suburbs of Atlanta today. Affluent sections of Bergen County, N.J., have become more diverse with the arrival of Asian immigrants. The white working-class Milwaukee suburb of West Allis has seen an inflow of Hispanic residents.

It's far more rare in America that neighborhoods have become more diverse because they have shifted from the left side of this distribution toward the center — in other words, because white residents have moved into neighborhoods that were predominantly African-American and Hispanic.

Our project focused on the small but growing number of places experiencing such change. There are about 1,400 such tracts in America that have changed in this way since 2000, home to nearly five million people today.

That's a relatively small share of all neighborhoods, but these places embody a deep tension at the geographic center of many cities. White households that have historically avoided black neighborhoods in particular show a growing willingness to live in them. Many scholars would say that's a mark of progress.

But the arrival of these white households — which have on average much higher incomes than the residents around them — tends to unleash rapid change in the housing market that can threaten longtime homeowners and especially renters. That economic reality runs headfirst into the desires of some residents and city officials to build more diverse and equitable communities. In many neighborhoods, the market forces are simply more powerful.

American cities have few, if any, models of how to manage this kind of change well.

“There's this whole set of policies that created the disinvestment in these neighborhoods that now makes them so attractive to gentrifiers and other investors,” Japonica Brown-Saracino, a sociologist at Boston University, told us during our reporting. “I don't see a parallel set of policies to protect them now that people want to move back into them, or to think about exactly how are we going to manage or direct this investment.”

Such policies could include land banking, the preservation of vacant lots for future affordable housing. They could include protections for lower-income homeowners from the property taxes that rise when home prices do. They require thinking not just about who can stay as neighborhoods change, but who will be able to move in.

Any of these ideas would require action long before a housing market became hot.

We mapped both sets of diversifying neighborhoods in an interactive that is part of the article. But the graphs shown on this page help illustrate the nationwide context. Isolated all-white neighborhoods have dwindled as many nonwhite neighborhoods have remained segregated. There are still nearly 3,000 census tracts in the United States with few if any white residents. About 10 million Americans live there.

And where predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods are growing more diverse with the arrival of white residents, the benefits of diversity have often been accompanied in the housing market by a new set of challenges.

**Correction:** May 1, 2019

*An earlier version of this article gave an incorrect affiliation for Japonica Brown-Saracino, a sociologist. She is with Boston University, not Brown University.*

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A version of this article appears in print on May 1, 2019, on Page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Data Shows Decline in Number of White Neighborhoods

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