

ELAINE GROSS

The Need to Tackle Segregation Head-On

Long Island is renowned for being the nation's first suburb—birthed with its tens of thousands of affordable new homes, federally financed to bring them within reach of GIs returning from

World War II. But this wealth-building machine was explicitly for white people only. GIs who were black were summarily blocked from living in these new homes, just because they were black.

The racism was structural—brought about by both government and business—and it was interpersonal, with individuals actively carrying out the policies and discriminating to ensure that blacks didn't slip in. This is Long Island's legacy. Structural racism continues, and today other non-white groups are sometimes victimized as well.

Our housing is still segregated.

Measuring residential segregation, Long Island is among the 10 most racially segregated metropolitan regions in the United States. White-to-black segregation levels remain severe. Segregation levels between whites and Hispanics, and whites and Asians, while not yet severe, are rising. Housing discrimination is still occurring. Local housing discrimination lawsuits are resulting in successful settlements.

Segregation levels in public schools are heading in the wrong direction. Between 2004 and 2016 the number of intensely segregated school districts (90-100% non-white) more than doubled, and students attending these segregated schools more than tripled.

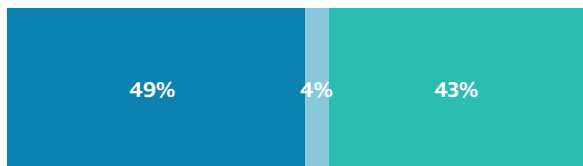
Interestingly, the Long Island Index's latest survey of Long Islanders shows significant differences by race concerning public education—with 60% of blacks saying that more should be done to integrate schools, compared to 49% of Hispanics and only 28% of whites. Whites are also dramatically

On balance, do you think more should be done to include students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in public schools on Long Island, do you think less should be done, or are the current efforts about right?

Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

■ More should be done
■ Less should be done
■ Current efforts are right

HISPANIC:



BLACK:



WHITE:



Source: 2017 Long Island Index survey

more satisfied with the quality of public education than are blacks and Hispanics.

The ongoing segregation and discrimination create indefensible disadvantages for certain Long Islanders and also deprive Long Island of talent and skills that the region needs to compete successfully in a 21st-Century economy. They are a self-inflicted drag on Long Island's economic prosperity.

How can the current trajectory be reversed? A sizeable proportion of the current silent bystanders on Long Island will need to become champions for change in their own communities and with local and state governments. They will need to support laws, policies, and practices that dismantle segregation.

Structural problems require structural solutions. Yet too often the instinct is to leave structural racism in place and then wonder why efforts around the edges don't make a lasting difference.

Regional cohesion and empathy across racial groups is far less likely, because people from different racial groups do not know each other, do not live together or go to school together, and as a result inhabit very different

realities. Solving structural racism will require a shared understanding of history, objective facts about current challenges and how to address them, and familiarity with and empathy for people who are not like oneself.

The familiarity and empathy gaps on Long Island will not lessen if segregation remains so widespread and unchallenged. Central to the prosperity and sustainability of Long Island is the extent to which Long Islanders tackle segregation head-on.

Ms. Gross is President of ERASE Racism.