

July 12, 2006

### **Statement to the Nassau County Legislature**

Nassau County Fair Housing Legislation: Legislative Item # 292-06  
Amendments to the Nassau County Human Rights Law

I am writing to support the proposed amendment to the Nassau County Human Rights Law that would give local authorities a stronger mandate to investigate and settle cases of housing discrimination in the County. I am providing written testimony because I am unable to appear in person.

I am Professor of Sociology at Brown University since 2004. I earned my PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1974. I have personal experience living in Long Island, where I began my academic career as Assistant Professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (1972-1980). Subsequently I was employed at the State University of New York at Albany, reaching the rank of Distinguished Professor (1980-2004). I also served as Director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research.

I am a nationally recognized expert on patterns and trends in racial residential segregation. I have published more than 150 articles on related topics, and my research using results from Census 2000 has been widely reported, including several articles in *Newsday* that refer to local trends. I have developed a webpage that provides statistical information about all metropolitan areas, central cities, and suburban regions in the country since 1980. I invite you to inspect the data for Long Island (the Nassau-Suffolk PMSA) that can be found at [http://browns4.dyndns.org/cen2000\\_s4/data.html](http://browns4.dyndns.org/cen2000_s4/data.html), and to compare Long Island with other areas.

Although there has been some progress in reduction of black-white segregation in the United States since the 1960s, all studies show that it is surprisingly persistent in certain parts of the country, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. Segregation in suburbs is typically lower than in central cities, primarily because the black population is smaller and the pockets of minority concentration are less entrenched. However segregation in the Long Island suburbs (measured by differences in racial composition across census tracts) is unusually high. Social scientists most commonly measure segregation by a Segregation Index that ranges from 0 (all areas have the same racial composition) to 100 (all areas are either all-white or all-black). The average suburban region in the U.S. had a Segregation Index level of 56.6 in 2000. The average

central city was at 64.9. The level for Nassau-Suffolk was 74.4. That makes this region the third highest among suburban regions in the country.

More remarkable from a public policy standpoint is that there has been very little change in the last two decades. The level was 77.6 in 1980, 77.2 in 1990, and now 74.4. This is not a phenomenon that is going away by itself.

Why is high segregation a problem? In my opinion there are two convincing answers. First, because it results to a substantial extent from discriminatory treatment in the housing market, it is illegal and it unfairly restricts the housing opportunities of black residents. Second, it has very real consequences for people's lives.

I would like to illustrate this point by sharing some information about the communities where black residents live and the schools that their children attend.

## **1. Communities**

Data from Census 2000 allow us to describe some key characteristics of the census tracts where blacks and whites live, controlling for their income. If there were no racial discrimination in housing, we might still expect to find black residents in lower status areas than whites, simply because they tend to have lower incomes. But if we compared people with similar incomes, we would expect similar outcomes.

To make the actual result more dramatic, I will compare the neighborhood qualities of the average black household on Long Island with an income of over \$60,000 with those of the average white household with an income of under \$30,000. This is a large enough difference that most of us would expect to find that the affluent black households live in much more desirable neighborhoods than the much poorer white households.

- # The median income of their neighbors was actually \$60,857 for affluent blacks and \$66,316 for poorer whites.
- # The poverty rate in their neighborhood was 9.6% for affluent blacks and 5.7% for poorer whites.
- # 21.9% of the affluent blacks' neighbors had a college degree, compared to 29.9% of poorer whites.

These results speak for themselves. For black Long Islanders, living in segregated neighborhoods means living in unequal neighborhoods.

## **2. Schools**

Not surprisingly residential segregation also translates into school segregation. The Segregation Index for Long Island public elementary schools in 2000 was 70.9. The average white student

was in a school where 83.7% of classmates were white and only 5.3% were black. The average black student was in a school where 42.0% of classmates were black and only 32.5% were white.

My primary concern is how this pattern affects people's opportunities and quality of life. For schools, it is well known that educational outcomes are greatly affected by concentrated poverty, and I use this as an indicator of educational opportunity. The average white student was in a school where only 13.2% of classmates were eligible for reduced-price lunches. In the school of the average black student, 46.7%, or nearly half of the student body, was eligible.

I conclude that segregation certainly has a cost, and it is a legitimate function of government to protect minority citizens from this burden.

I have often been asked what government can do, and Nassau County's proposed fair housing legislation would be a model program for the nation. Housing discrimination is illegal, but it is one of the few examples of legislation where current policy is to rely on the victims to protect themselves – to recognize the crime, to collect evidence, and to bring a civil suit to seek compensation. A more effective policy would be to bring to bear the power of government, creating a mechanism by which local authorities could play a more active role.

I encourage you to take this positive step forward.

Sincerely yours,

John R. Logan  
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Director, Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences