

Housing and Neighborhood Preferences of  
African Americans on Long Island  
2012 Survey Research Report  
**Executive Summary**

A Report From

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**RACISM**

# Housing and Neighborhood Preferences of African Americans on Long Island 2011 Survey Research Report Executive Summary

Long Island is one of the most racially segregated regions in the country.<sup>1</sup> For the past ten years, ERASE Racism has documented how housing discrimination plays a significant role in determining the neighborhoods where African Americans on Long Island will most likely reside. We have reported that, as a direct result of patterns of housing segregation, only 9% of Long Island's black students have access to high performing schools as compared to 30% of white students.<sup>2</sup> Studies have also shown that even the most affluent black and Hispanic homeowners are segregated into majority black and Hispanic communities with high concentrations of poverty.<sup>3</sup> These factors point to structural impediments for blacks to housing choice and to quality education. Nonetheless, studies about neighborhood preferences often suggest that so-called "self-segregation" is at play by all racial groups, including blacks, not structural racism.<sup>4</sup> In response to this assertion, we have now asked a large pool of black Long Islanders about the characteristics they value in a neighborhood. ERASE Racism contracted with the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research to conduct the telephone survey of blacks on Long Island. Our questions included perceptions of their current neighborhood and thoughts about their ideal neighborhood. We also asked about personal experiences with housing discrimination and their desire to stay in or move away from Long Island. In analyzing the responses, we reviewed local and national studies, conducted Census data analysis and aggregated data from a variety of sources to expand upon and provide a context for the survey research findings. Key findings from the survey research are incorporated in the summary of significant findings that follow and are also listed separately below.

## SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

- Blacks prefer racially integrated communities.

Despite the popular notion that blacks only want to live in communities with neighbors who share their own race or ethnicity, the telephone survey findings showed that given the choice, nearly all respondents chose a racially mixed neighborhood, with a large majority, 69%, who chose an even mix of 50% white and 50% black. Only 1% of respondents said that they would like to live in a neighborhood that is all black.

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<sup>1</sup> On a 0 to 100 scale, with 0 representing total integration, the black/white segregation for Long Island as of 2010 was 69.2%; a value of 60 (or above) is considered very high. This measurement of segregation is based on the Dissimilarity Index, which is the proportion of a minority group that would need to move to make the distribution of that group the same overall units.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Gross, "Separate and Unequal" Newsday, June 3, 2011

[http://eraseracismny.org/storage/documents/June\\_5\\_Newsday\\_OPINION\\_by\\_EGross.pdf](http://eraseracismny.org/storage/documents/June_5_Newsday_OPINION_by_EGross.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> John R. Logan, "Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics and Asians in Metropolitan America", Project US 2010, July 2011

<sup>4</sup> These studies were references on pg. 1386 of the following report: Lewis, Valerie A.; Emerson, Michael O.; Klineberg, Stephen L. 2011 "Who We'll Live With: Neighborhood Racial Composition Preferences of Whites, Blacks and Latinos" University of North Carolina Press, Social Forces 89 no.4

- Blacks live in segregated communities regardless of their income.

Long Island continues to be one of the most racially segregated regions in the nation; in 1980 the Dissimilarity Index for blacks in relation to whites was 76.9, with 100 representing total segregation. Thirty years later, in 2010, the black-white level of segregation was 69.2, still very high and indicating just a slight decrease (dropping barely 1 percentage point every five years). While Long Island also tends to be segregated by income, income disparities cannot explain the very high level of segregation experienced by blacks in the region. The 2005-2009 American Community Survey data show that in most metropolitan regions throughout the US, including Long Island, the average affluent black or Hispanic household lives in a poorer neighborhood than the average low-income white resident. Given that blacks prefer integrated communities, this pattern of racial segregation, regardless of income, suggests that factors other than black self-segregation are contributing to the high levels of racial segregation.

- Blacks report pervasive housing discrimination.

African Americans perceive housing discrimination as pervasive on Long Island. One in three, 33%, of black Long Islanders surveyed reported having experienced housing discrimination first-hand or within their immediate family. Our previous housing reports, reports by others and various law suits have documented the ongoing problem of fair housing violations, including racial steering by real estate agents, predatory lending by banks, and discriminatory municipal policies. Housing discrimination promotes and preserves residential and school segregation.

- Blacks report an increase in the Latino population in their communities, most of which are already majority minority neighborhoods.

The Latino population, the fastest growing demographic on Long Island, is facing more limited housing opportunities. In relation to non-Hispanic whites on Long Island, the level of segregation for Latinos has risen in the past thirty years. According to the new survey, almost half of blacks on Long Island said that the number of African Americans had decreased in their neighborhood in the last 10 years; of those respondents, 80% said that Latinos had largely replaced blacks in their area. The increase in the Latino population and its level of segregation suggest that Latinos, too, are experiencing housing discrimination that is limiting their housing choices to majority minority neighborhoods.

- In rating neighborhood characteristics, blacks value living close to family and friends much less than they value other factors.

The study found that blacks on Long Island consider the most important neighborhood characteristics to be a low crime rate (89%), landlords/homeowners who take care of their property (81%), high quality public schools (80%), and good local services (78%). Conversely, very few black respondents, 28%, considered living close to family and friends as one of the most important characteristics when thinking about their ideal neighborhood. In addition, 64%, or almost two-thirds, said that they received a little or no assistance from their neighbors in finding jobs, babysitting and carpooling. These findings contradict the common myth that African Americans choose to live in the same community because they value social ties and being able to rely on one another more highly than other factors.

- The neighborhood characteristics that blacks most value are lacking where they live.

Respondents identified problems with the quality of their local public schools and the local government services that are offered in their neighborhood. Only 16% rated their local public school as excellent. In addition, just 37% believe that local public schools are a good value compared to the taxes they pay. When thinking about the quality of their local government services, 37% rated them as fair or poor and 43% said that they are not a good value compared to the taxes they pay. A significant percentage also reported problems with crime in their neighborhood.

- Blacks value quality schools, but give the schools in their community a poor rating.

When thinking about a place to live, 80% of blacks said they consider high quality public schools as one of the most important factors although, as stated in the previous bullet, only 16% rated their local public school as excellent, and almost half of all respondents, 40%, rated their local school as fair or poor. Not surprisingly, this dissatisfaction was most pronounced among respondents who live in high-need districts, with 55% rating their local schools as fair or poor.

There is significant evidence that concurs with the perception of the survey respondents that blacks on Long Island have limited access to high quality public resources, such as good schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2008-2009 only 9% of black students on Long Island had access to a high performing public school, compared to 14% of Hispanics and 30% of whites. Segregation and concentrations of poverty are two of the major reasons why students of color are overrepresented in low performing schools. On Long Island, more than one-half of black youth under the age of 18 live in 9 of 100 school districts (that reported on student demographics). In these 9 districts, less than one-third of young people are white and the poverty rate among households is twice that of households in other schools districts. Consequently, there are vast disparities in resources for students and student performance in majority black schools, as compared to majority white schools.

- Blacks report a higher likelihood of leaving the region.

Barriers to quality resources, such as high performing schools, could help explain why blacks tend to report a higher likelihood of leaving the region than whites. According to the 2012 Long Island Index Survey Report, 59% of black residents said they will leave Long Island in the next five years, as compared to 48% of white residents; this is a trend observed in prior Long Island Index polls and further confirmed by ERASE Racism's study. Our survey found that roughly half, 52%, of all blacks said they were somewhat or very likely to leave Long Island in the next five years. Another 27% said that they were somewhat or very likely to move from their current residence to somewhere else on Long Island. When asked why they were thinking of moving to another area on the Island, the most common response, by roughly 40%, was unhappiness with their current neighborhood.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Neighborhood Racial Demographics and Housing Discrimination

- When asked about the percentage mix that best represents the kind of neighborhood in which they would most like to live, nearly all respondents (all of whom were black) chose a racially mixed neighborhood, with a large majority, 69%, who chose an even mix of 50% white and 50% black. Only 1% chose all-black.
- Among blacks who said their neighborhoods had become less African American in the last 10 years, 80% said that Latinos had largely replaced blacks in their area.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents said they believe that African Americans miss out on housing because real estate agents will not show blacks homes in white areas. Just under half, 44%, believe that African Americans miss out on housing because white homeowners and landlords will not rent or sell to blacks. Altogether, over 80% of respondents said these forms of housing discrimination are somewhat or very likely to affect blacks.
- Roughly one out of three respondents said that they have, or a family member has, been a victim of housing discrimination. A majority of those respondents explained that the discrimination involved a real estate agent who would not show, sell, or rent them homes in mostly white areas, when they could, in fact, have afforded those homes.

### Neighborhood Quality Preferences and Satisfaction with Current Neighborhood

- A majority of African Americans reported that they consider a low crime rate (89%), landlords/homeowners who take care of their property (81%), high quality public schools (80%) and good local services (78%) as the most important neighborhood characteristics.
- Only 28% of blacks considered “living close to family and friends” as one of the most important neighborhood qualities and a majority, 64% or almost two-thirds, said that they received a little or no assistance from their neighbors in finding jobs, babysitting, and carpooling.
- Only 16% rated their local schools as excellent, while nearly half, 40%, rated them as fair or poor. Fifty-five percent of those in high-need districts rated their local schools as fair or poor, compared to 11% in low-need and average-need districts. In addition, only 37% believe that local public schools are a good value compared to the taxes that they pay.
- Thirty-seven percent of black residents rated their local government services as fair or poor and 43% said that they are not a good value compared to the taxes they pay.
- Roughly half, 52%, of all blacks said they are somewhat or very likely to leave Long Island in the next five years. Another 27% said that they were somewhat or very likely to move from their current residence to somewhere else on Long Island. When asked why they were thinking of moving to another area on the Island, the most common response, by roughly 40%, was unhappiness with their current neighborhood.