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### How to De-Segregate a Hypersegregated Country

If an average white American is asked about segregation, they would most likely say that it is a thing of the past. After all, that's what most believe the abolition of the Jim Crow Laws and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 achieved. However, sociologists in 2018 would tell them that those legislations did nothing to reduce the impacts of segregation; in fact, in many ways we are regressing. Scholars Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton point out that even in 1993, the rates of geographic concentration of the black community indicated not only segregation, but a form of hypersegregation. Hypersegregation is defined by Massey and Denton by "when the extent of racial segregation is so intense and occurred on so many dimensions simultaneously" (195). To address this prevailing issue, Alvin Chang of *Vox* makes the case that when school districts purposefully draw district lines that are illogical in a geographical sense, it increases the likelihood that children from a very segregated area will be going to school with children from an entirely different residential space. While much of racial and political injustices occur due to gerrymandering, or the drawing of district lines to achieve a specific result, gerrymandering can also be used as a tool to mitigate segregation in public schools. Hypersegregation in all aspects has persisted, but specifically in education, into the twenty-first century, and it will continue to exist as long as school districts fail to gerrymander the district lines to promote integration.

In their article "Segregation and the Making of the Underclass," Massey and Denton lay out the very complex and multifaceted causes of segregation in the United States, especially in

urban areas. The process of ghettoization has persisted not because blacks choose to live in certain areas, but because of some very deliberate choices made by people in socioeconomic power. “This extreme racial isolation did not just happen; it was manufactured by whites through a series of self-conscious actions and purposeful institutional arrangements that continue today” (Massey and Denton 1994). These institutional arrangements include discriminatory housing markets, poorly funded educational institutions, and a lack of political representation of black residents. All of these intersecting factors come together to enforce the existence of the underclass; a demographic of people who are so systematically disadvantaged that upward mobility is nearly impossible. “In a segregated world, the deck is stacked against black socioeconomic progress, political empowerment, and full participation in the mainstream of American life” (Massey and Denton 1997). Massey and Denton make the claim that until all of these barriers are attacked simultaneously, hypersegregation will persevere.

If Massey and Denton did not convince their audience of the continued existence of segregation, then one can only hope that Chang’s *Vox* article “The Data Proves that School Segregation is Getting Worse” will do the job. Opposed to Massey and Denton, Chang chooses to zero in on the issue of educational segregation, since it is an issue that is perceived to be solved by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Chang begins by deconstructing the popular argument made by other social commentators like Robert VerBruggen that school segregation is not getting worse due to an increase in diversity in schools nationwide. While there are more Asian and Hispanic immigrants than there were fifty years ago, that fact does not account for the increased isolation of black communities in largely poor areas. Chang encourages his audience to pay special attention to this long standing isolation, since “a large body of research shows that

growing up in heavily segregated, poor neighborhoods affects everything from your education level, your future earnings, and your happiness to your health and, ultimately, your life span” (Chang). Neighborhood isolation naturally leads to educational isolation, since where you live often determines where you go to school; and according to much of the data Chang includes, there is more segregation than there was in the 1970s. Unlike Massey and Denton, Chang proposes a solution; rather than obeying typical neighborhood borders to determine where children go to school, the district lines can be gerrymandered to integrate children of various racial and socioeconomic identities into the same school district. “School boards can draw school attendance boundaries to lessen that segregation — to send kids to less racially segregated schools. We don’t have to send kids to the nearest school, especially because it ends up recreating the underlying residential segregation” (Chang). The problem remains that many school districts fail to do this, or they create district lines that further racial isolation and segregation. All this at the hands of the people who still believe that black Americans choose to live in this hypersegregated, impoverished state.

Ultimately, Massey and Denton and Alvin Chang are vocalizing the same idea; hypersegregation is anything but old news, and it pervades every facet of life. However, Chang focuses his argument on educational segregation and offers a very real and seemingly achievable path toward solving this country-wide epidemic; school districts must be cognizant of who attends which school, and they also must play an active role in breaking down the systems of residential segregation that persist despite the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Those who continue to believe that black-white segregation is a choice are only partially mistaken. Rather than a choice of the black population, the hypersegregation of blacks is an active choice of the white

Americans who “still feel uncomfortable in any neighborhood that contains more than a few black residents” and want to “contain growing urban black populations” (Massey and Denton 195). Conversely, the deconstruction of these racist systems of oppression can only be achieved by the people in privilege making an active choice to reverse the damage already done and ensure that we push for real integration — that we move forwards rather than backwards.

### **Works Cited**

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- Massey, S. Douglass and Nancy A. Denton. “Segregation and the Making of the Underclass.” *The Urban Sociology Reader*, edited by Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, Routledge, 2013, pp. 192-201.