

# City's racial gap detailed in black and white

**C**larance Wood knows the deal. You're tired of people pointing their fingers at you and calling you a racist.

You're tired of hearing about this plight and that social problem when, damn it, your life hasn't been easy, either.

Wood, president and CEO of the Jane Addams Hull House Association, says he hears this all the time. Some new study comes out and another sound bite makes its way from news item to truism.

For example, a child in a low-income white family is three times more likely to have home Internet access than a child in a comparable African-American family.

"People look at that," Wood says, "and they say, 'Well, this family has as much money as that family, why are they not making the same kinds of choices? Where are their priorities?'"

You want to be done with racism. I do, too. And so does Wood.

Certainly it is not as overt as it once was. But, as much as we don't want it, as careful as we are not to use the off-limits words, as correct as we try to be in what we teach our kids, race is still here. It still divides us. It still determines how we experience the world.

This week, Hull House released "Minding the Gap: An Assessment of Racial Disparity in Metropolitan Chicago." It's a big, thick report, 137 pages full of charts and graphs.

You pick it up and think it's going to be full of technocratic jargon, that it's going to bore you and accuse you and make you mad. You think you're going to want to put it down. But then you find you can't.

"Minding the Gap" is sickeningly compelling reading.

Page by page, paragraph by paragraph and line by line, the report describes two completely different cities, documenting disparities in income, education, housing, transportation, health and safety.

There is, you'll be glad to know,

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some good news in each area. The wide statistical gulfs that separate blacks from whites in each area are narrowing. At this rate, it will take just 200 more years for the gap to close entirely.

200 years.

That's how far apart we are. That's how entrenched we've gotten in the separate worlds where we live.

It's so easy to point a finger at, let's say, those families who aren't buying computers for their kids, to declare it all a matter of personal responsibility and family values and people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.

Read "Minding the Gap" and you won't be able to do that anymore. Researched by Loyola University's Center for Urban Research and Learning, the report combines findings from the 1990

and 2000 census counts, along with health studies, economic surveys and other existing sources to paint a comprehensive picture of what life is like for blacks and whites in Chicago.

You can thumb through it and, on virtually any page, find numbers that will take your breath away.

Whites are 125 percent more likely to use marijuana than blacks; 181 percent more likely to use cocaine; 431 percent more likely to use inhalants; 516 percent more likely to use LSD.

And yet blacks account for 79 percent of all drug arrests.

Follow that number where it leads — to prison, to a lack of education, to a lack of job opportunities — and you start to get the idea that all of this is way more complicated than you want to think it is. Do all the well-meaning, moral algebra you want and you just can't make that number — 79 percent — look fair.

Or start with housing. Try not to swallow hard when you read that Edison Park is 96 percent white. And Lincoln Park is 88 percent white. And Lake View is 84 percent white.

Don't blink when you see that Greater Grand Crossing is 99 per-

cent black. Or that Auburn Gresham, Englewood, Roseland, Washington Heights and West Englewood are all 98 percent black.

Follow those numbers where they lead. As it happens, the housing stock in those predominantly black neighborhoods is older and shoddier than anywhere else in the city. Older housing translates into higher upkeep and repair costs, safety problems and health issues, like lead poisoning and asthma.

Map those neighborhoods against where jobs have been created. Commute times for African Americans in Chicago have increased twice as much as they have for whites. And, even though whites are proportionally more likely to use public transportation, such as Metra, to get to work, blacks are more likely to have been impacted by the transit service cuts of the late 1990s.

Map those neighborhoods against where the bank branches are. Lincoln Park and Lake View have more than 15. Auburn Gresham and Englewood have less than four. Is it any wonder that blacks are 17 times more likely than whites to cash their paychecks, for a fee, at a currency exchange? Or that blacks take on 41 percent of all sub-prime home refinancing loans?

Map them against the location of doctors' offices, grocery stores and the thousand other quality-of-life conveniences found in other parts of the city.

Then think once more about those families and their Internet access. They're bringing home the same amount of money, yet they're not spending it the same way.

It's what Wood calls "the full environmental experience of the family."

In simpler terms, it costs more to be black in Chicago than it does to be white. And unless we do something about it, that truth is going to be with us for the next 200 years.



Blacks make up 79 percent of all drug arrests, but whites are more likely to use just about any drug you can name. —ROBERT A. DAVIS/SUN-TIMES

Get a copy of "Minding the Gap" at [www.hullhouse.org/gap](http://www.hullhouse.org/gap).