

Building Inequality: How Housing Segregation Shapes Income Segregation

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Studies of residential segregation tend to focus on characteristics of households that shape neighborhood outcomes, rather than on housing options available in the neighborhoods where households seek to live. The spatial configuration of housing determines the housing opportunities in each neighborhood, the backdrop against which households' resources, preferences, and constraints play out. In this study, I use Census and American Community Survey data to document trends in the segregation of housing units by type and by cost at multiple geographic scales, and I test whether housing segregation predicts residential segregation by household income in the 100 largest metropolitan areas from 1990 to 2014. Housing segregation between single-family and multifamily units increased during this time, while segregation between higher- and lower-cost housing units declined. Housing segregation varies among metropolitan areas, and residential income segregation is markedly higher in metropolitan areas where housing is more segregated by type and by cost. The segregation of housing is an important predictor of residential segregation, and this study complements empirical work that implicitly assumes but does not examine the configuration of housing. As long as housing opportunities remain segregated, residential segregation will change little, with urgent implications for policymakers.