



Metro Boston Equity Initiative Issue Summary No. 10

We Don't Feel Welcome Here: **African Americans and Hispanics in Metro Boston**

A report by Josephine Louie (April, 2005)

The Issues at a Glance

Over the past decades, Metro Boston has become significantly more multiracial and multiethnic. Despite growing diversity, the region remains highly segregated by race, and perceptions of racial discrimination among racial minorities are high.

- In a recent poll of 400 African Americans and Hispanics in Metro Boston, eighty percent of African Americans and half of Hispanics say that racial discrimination in the region is a somewhat or very serious problem.

Substantial shares of African Americans and Hispanics believe that fear of unwelcome reception from existing residents and high housing costs keep group members from good housing. Many believe that housing discrimination persists, although fewer today cite it as a serious barrier than in the mid-1990s.

- A striking 85 percent of African Americans and almost 70 percent of Hispanics say that members of their group miss out on good housing in Metro Boston at least some of the time because they fear they will not be welcome in existing communities.
- Over 80 percent of African Americans and 70 percent of Hispanics believe that members of their group miss out on good housing in Metro Boston at least

some of the time because they cannot afford it. The share of African Americans who believe that poor affordability poses a barrier “very often” appears to have risen from 32 percent to 53 percent over the past ten years.

- Three out of four African Americans and roughly half of Hispanics believe that discrimination by White owners or real estate agents occurs sometimes or more. Shares who believe that discrimination by White owners occurs “very often” may have dropped by a quarter among African Americans and by half among Hispanics over the past ten years.

Experiences with “day-to-day” forms of racial discrimination are common.

- Over half of African Americans and four out of ten Hispanics say they are treated with less respect, receive worse service at restaurants or stores, are called names or insulted, or experience other forms of “day-to-day” discrimination a few times a month or more because of their race.
- One out of three respondents say they have felt unwelcome because of their race in professional sports venues in Metro Boston; one out of five have felt similarly in area museums. Almost half of African Americans and a third of Hispanics say they have felt unwelcome because of their race in shopping areas and restaurants.

- Respondents with higher incomes and education levels are equally likely (and in some cases more likely) than their lower status counterparts to say they have experienced different forms of racial discrimination. Women are more likely to perceive racial discrimination in housing and in general, while men more often report that people act afraid of them or treat them as dishonest.

African Americans and Hispanics report that they have personally experienced racial discrimination in employment more often than in housing.

- One out of four total respondents say they have been denied a job because of their race in the past ten years, and one in five say they have experienced racial discrimination during their last year at work. In contrast, one out of eight say they had a personal experience of racial discrimination the last time they looked for housing in Metro Boston.

Large shares of our survey respondents support further racial integration in Metro Boston schools.

- A vast majority—over eighty percent—of African Americans and Hispanics believe that more should be done to integrate the region’s schools. Support for this position is especially strong among younger, male, never married, and lower-income respondents.

Policy implications

To make progress in ending the serious perceptions of discrimination held by African Americans and Hispanics in Metro Boston, the region must commit to eradicating the actions and practices that fuel these perceptions.

- Government officials must rigorously enforce anti-discrimination laws in

employment and housing. They and other policy leaders should support increased training of employers and agents involved in the sale and rental of housing to ward against discriminatory practices. They must promote public awareness of discriminatory treatment and the legal remedies that are available.

- Police departments around the region must continue to train their staff to apply standards of equal treatment to people of all backgrounds, and they must actively recruit and develop trained officers who understand the backgrounds, concerns, and protection needs of all members of diverse communities.
- Policy leaders should promote greater racial diversity in public schools across the region. Inter-district programs like METCO and measures that further residential integration throughout Metro Boston should be bolstered.
- Community groups can bring diverse people together through work on shared community development goals, and faith-based groups can continually challenge people’s deepest fears and assumptions about other races and ethnicities. Both groups can foster exchange and learning across diverse communities.
- Researchers and journalists should continue to examine the deep racial inequalities that exist in the region, to help the public understand and discuss the contexts that contribute to these inequalities. The future health of the region will depend on the ability of all in Metro Boston to live and work together with interracial understanding and trust.

A full copy of the report can be found at: <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/metro/pollpaper.pdf>