

Harvard study: School segregation increased

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) - Segregation in U.S. schools increased during the last decade, despite the nation's growing racial diversity, according to a Harvard University study.

The study, released Tuesday, found that 70 percent of black students and more than one-third of Hispanic students attended predominantly minority schools during the 1998-99 school year, the latest data available from the National Center of Education Statistics.

The study also found that white students were more segregated from other minorities. While the average black student or Latino student attended a school that was 53 to 55 percent black or Latino, the average white

student attended a school more than 80 percent white.

"White children are growing up in a society that is going to become more than half minority, and they are almost totally isolated from those minorities," said Gary Orfield, a Harvard professor and co-director of The Civil Rights Project that conducted the study. "These suburban kids are vastly unprepared for the future."

One reason the researchers cited for resegregation was the U.S. Supreme Court's 1974 ban on desegregation across city-suburban boundaries, which they said left central city schools overwhelmingly poor and overwhelmingly segregated.

"Cleveland is a classic case of a place that had to go through a desegregation experience that was very difficult and often counterproductive because the city and suburbs were so separate," Orfield said.

Last year, the Cleveland schools were released from court control, ending a 27-year-old desegregation case that required schools to reflect the racial composition of the district. Today, half of the district's more than 120 schools are considered all black.

The Harvard study's data also shows that Latinos have become increasingly isolated. In 1968, 23.1 percent of Latino students attended schools with a minority enrollment over 90 percent; in 1998, that number was

36.6 percent.

The 1990s, a decade which brought Supreme Court decisions limiting desegregation remedies, also saw an increase in the number of black students attending schools in which more than half the enrollment was minority, from a low of 62.9 percent in 1980 to 70.2 in 1999.

The Harvard study also included several recommendations, including creating metropolitan magnet schools with programs to attract students of all races across district boundaries, drawing foundation support to continue local programs aimed at integration, and promoting teacher exchange programs between cities and suburbs.

Thomas: Court's election role justified

ST. LOUIS (AP) - To suggest that partisanship influenced the Supreme Court's role in last year's presidential election is off base, Justice Clarence Thomas said Friday.

"I think one of the ways our process is cheapened and trivialized is when it's suggested we have sort of a way to make decisions that have more to do with politics," Thomas told a conference of federal court judges and lawyers in six Midwestern states.

Thomas was among the five-member court majority that voted in December to stop hand recounts of Florida ballots as sought by Democrat Al Gore. The decision effectively decided the 2000 election for Republican George W. Bush.

Thomas defended the court's role in his prepared remarks, and in response to ques-

tions afterward.

"Through the year, despite some of the controversial issues, I believe we maintained our civility and respect (among justices) so integral to our system," Thomas said, adding that no member of the high court "has cheapened our work with temper tantrums or incivility."

Thomas said he ignores detractors he thinks are motivated to influence the justices, and that "all too often the criticism is unfounded and has little to do with what we do every day."

Thomas started his legal career in Missouri, as a state assistant attorney general.

On the Supreme Court for a decade, he is its only black justice and is among its most conservative.

Diversity

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"When the decision-makers are white males, they pick those close to them," says Avis Buchanan, an attorney with the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

The lawyers' committee has handled many class-action personnel suits against the federal government. "Call it the 'similar to me' phenomenon."

After a wave of lawsuits, settled in the past few years but dating back through the administrations of Clinton, George Bush and Ronald Reagan, some agencies have taken action.

The Secret Service, for example, appointed its first black woman supervisor this month.

Last year, the Agriculture Department -

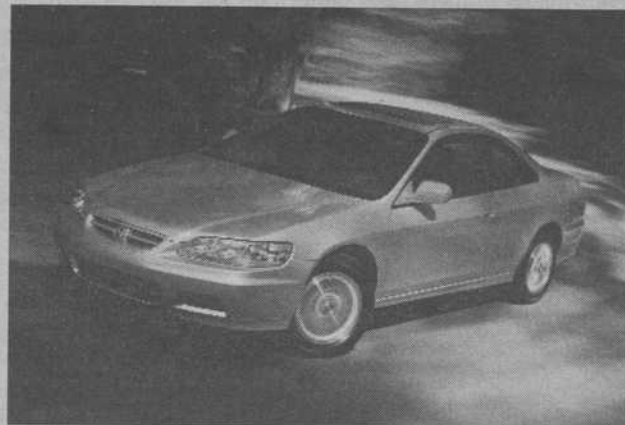
already accused of favoring white farmers in its subsidy policies - introduced staff minority advisory councils.

Colin Powell, the first black secretary of state, recently called attention to the place of minorities in the government when he pledged to raise the numbers of Hispanics working at the State Department.

"There will come a day when a future secretary of state will be able to stand up here proudly and look at a more diverse work force than we have now," he told Hispanic interns last month.

The government acknowledges that the numbers of Hispanics in its ranks are low.

But overall, an Office of Personnel Management report describes the government as the pacesetter in employing minorities.



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