

America has to look after middle class

The middle class is shrinking.

This isn't really a shocking revelation – especially to the middle class – but the extent of the decline should be alarming to anyone concerned about our collective future.

Just take a look at “Growth in the Residential Segregation of Families by Income, 1970-2009,” a new study based on U.S. Census Bureau data.

The report, a collaboration between the Russell Sage Foundation and Brown University, should be required reading for all Americans.

The researchers found that the percentage of families living in middle-class neighborhoods declined from 65 percent in 1970 to 44 percent in 2007.

They also found that a third of all American families now live in neighborhoods classified as either affluent or poor, up from just 15 percent in 1970.

The gap between rich and poor in college completion, which has grown more than 50 percent since the 1990s, is particularly disconcerting. Similarly, the gap

between standardized test scores for these two groups is 40 percent wider than it was in 1970.

We are becoming an increasingly divided country as the affluent continue to insulate themselves from their less fortunate peers.

This is a dangerous trend.

Throughout history, people were generally considered either rich or poor. The rich were typically landowners who maintained their status by simply procreating; the poor never questioned their plight or strove to rise above their circumstances.

This was simply the way the world was and – until the advent of the Industrial Revolution – everyone knew their place in the two-tiered societal hierarchy.

In the United States, the middle class did not really exist until after World War II.

Some seem nostalgic for that bygone era, but a dichotomous society is not in anyone's best interest – including the rich.

As goes the middle class, so goes America.

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