

The urbanization of the internet

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Myspace, one of the original social networks, was created to be open to everyone, while Facebook was exclusive. Loose security at Myspace made the site a haven for predators, danger, and disreputable behavior. Facebook was established to eliminate the perils that were inherent in Myspace. It was created as a college only site, which had the socio-economic implication that the poor and uneducated need not apply. This is similar to the racial fear of the previous half-century that saw the white population fleeing the decaying inner cities for the exclusivity of suburbia. This same phenomenon was echoed in the creation of Facebook.

Myspace continued to be a haven for deviance and what Danah Boyd calls the "subaltern teens", while Facebook had attracted a more urbanite client base with an 'invitation only' strategy. Social networking requires that friends exist on the same system. This is consistent with the changing landscape of America's socio-economic division. Eric Bickford of the University of California-Berkeley contends, "White households, with their higher incomes, were able to locate in the new, more expensive housing in these new neighborhoods, while nonwhites, with lower incomes, increasingly occupied the older, less desirable areas near urban centers". This de facto segregation is what has led Myspace to attract subaltern teens, while Facebook placed barriers to entry.

Today, both systems have an open door policy and have similar security measures in place. Yet, the division continues. Facebook users generally have a low opinion of Myspace and Myspace users often see Facebook as snobbish and stuffy (Boyd). These same attitudes exist between the inner cities and the suburbs. The air of resentment and hostility bubbles just

beneath the surface of the socio-economic morass. Though the doors have been opened for both suburbia as well as social networking the path to integration is slow. This reflects the American cultural attitude toward race, ethnicity, and economic status.

The short history of social networking reflects a century of American attitudes about the association. Myspace has become a magnet for the poor, disenfranchised, unusual, and outcast. Facebook has become the home for the upper-class attitudes that continue to divide the country. In many ways the story of social networking is the story of 'White Flight'. Though both web sites and suburbia are open to all and similar in usability, they continue to maintain different demographics based on the users' attitudes about association and integration.