Racialized Space:
Post-World War II Residential Segregation and the Reinvention of Whiteness

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Eric Robert Beckman

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF LIBERAL STUDIES

August 2005
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For Carleen and Ruby
Contents

Illustration Credits iii
acknowledgments v
Introduction 1

Chapter:

1. Witnesses to Urban Changes 8
2. A Nation Divided 14
3. Building White-Only Housing 28
4. Building Ghettos 42
5. Reinventing Whiteness 60

Conclusions 82

Appendix A: Images of Race and Space 88
Appendix B: Interview Procedures 100

Works Cited 105
Illustration Credits

Appendix A:

Fig. 1  Minnesota Historical Society Photograph Collection, ca. 1940. Rondo Avenue at Arundel Street, St. Paul. Location no. MR2.9 SP2.2 r65. Negative no. 20540


Fig. 3  Author photo, June 2005.

Fig. 4  Author photo, June 2005.


Fig. 6  Minnesota Historical Society Photograph Collection, 1955. Capitol approach and surrounding area, including Mechanic Arts High School and Central Park in foreground. R. E. Nielsen, Photographer. Location no. FM6.182 p3. Negative no. 835.

Fig. 7  Minnesota Historical Society Photograph Collection, 12 November 1956. House at 3700 Eighty-Ninth Street West, Bloomington. Norton & Peel, Photographer. Location no. Norton & Peel 241490. Negative no. NP241490.

Fig. 8  Author Photo, May 2005.

Fig. 9  Author Photo, May 2005.

Fig. 10 Minnesota Historical Society Photograph Collection, 16 October 1947. Broadway Avenue bridge, Minneapolis. Minneapolis Star Journal, Photographer. Location no. MH5.9 MP4.2 p61. Negative no. 47104.
Fig. 11  Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Feb. 1942. Detroit, Michigan. Riot at the Sojourner Truth homes, a new U.S. federal housing project, caused by white neighbors' attempt to prevent Negro tenants from moving in. Sign with American flag "We want white tenants in our white community," directly opposite the housing project. Arthur S. Siegel, photographer. Call Number: LC-USW3-016549-C [P&P]medium.


Fig. 13 Stephen Grant Meyer, As Long as They Don’t Move Next Door (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000), 230.

Fig. 14 Meyer, As Long, 230.

Fig. 15. Matthew Frye Jacobson. Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), following page 199.


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Introduction

The desire and ability to move without the right to move is refined slavery...[racial segregation] spurred and cultivated the spirit of rebellion. This rebellion is evident in many forms, from nonviolent resistance to vandalism. This rebellion is proof positive that the Negro has grown weary of being the eternal afterthought of America.

Charles W. Butler speaking in Detroit in 1963

Five years after Reverend Butler’s prophetic words the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly known as the Kerner Commission after chair Otto Kerner, was released, examining the rebellions of the previous year in predominantly black inner city neighborhoods. President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed this bipartisan commission of political and community leaders following destructive rioting in Newark and Detroit; ultimately, the commission examined twenty-three disturbances that occurred in twenty cities. These riots, along with others before and after, diminished both white support for the civil rights movement and the 1960s’ idealism embodied in the social programs of John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier and Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society. The signature legislative triumphs of the civil rights movement—the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—were juxtaposed with African American rebellions in Birmingham, Harlem, and Watts.

A growing backlash by many white Americans against civil rights and the problems of the urban poor gained national significance when many white, working-class voters abandoned the Democratic party. The George Wallace campaign of 1968, followed by Richard Nixon’s “Southern Strategy,” and the subsequent emergence of Reagan Democrats realigned American politics to the benefit of the Republican Party. In the eyes of many Americans of all races, then and now, rioting by urban African Americans was incongruous with the spirit and the achievements of the civil rights movement that had been nationally prominent since the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision and the Montgomery bus boycott of
1955 and 1956. The Kerner Commission explained this apparent contradiction as a result of the United States moving toward two nations—one black and one white, separate and unequal—in spite of the promises of civil rights (United States 1).

Residential segregation, which existed before World War II, intensified during the two decades following the war. It concentrated African Americans in decaying urban neighborhoods with few opportunities, often creating a dysfunctional cycle of crime and poverty that further depressed these areas. For many black city dwellers these bleak environments were unacceptable, especially in light of rising expectations generated by the civil rights movement and the liberal rhetoric of equality and opportunity of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. After accepting his nomination for president in 1960 John F. Kennedy proposed that “We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier.” He urged Americans to be “new pioneers” in many areas, specifically calling on them to confront “unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.” Four years later President Johnson similarly urged legislative action to create a “great society.” He declared that “the Great Society demands an end to poverty and racial injustice” (Danzer, et al 678, 686). These lofty goals were not achieved, and the subsequent anger and alienation fueled urban rebellions. Tragically, these riots furthered both the physical and the psychological distance between black and white Americans, as the image and the reality of the dangerous city fueled white flight.

I am interested in the cause of this distance—a distance so intense that some authors have termed it “apartheid” in book titles (Massey and Denton; Bullard; Kushner; and Canty). As a white man teaching United States history in a predominantly white suburban area, I am often puzzled by the blank looks that I sometimes see when I remind my classes that their educational setting is largely segregated, and inform them that by some measures schools are more segregated today than they were at the time of Brown vs. Board of Education. Confronted with these ideas
students occasionally reply that our school is segregated just because of who lives in the area, not because of any legal arrangement. They are, of course, correct but they seldom ask the next question—why is it this way—content perhaps to view it as happenstance or natural. For most, who generally perceive themselves as open minded on questions of race, white is viewed as normative and thus not noteworthy; and, the light sprinkling of students of color qualifies as integration.¹ Others make the more troubling comment that some people choose to live in dysfunctional neighborhoods, without asking how those neighborhoods were formed.

While researching and thinking through this project I have aimed not only to put myself in a better position to explain to my students how American cities come to be so segmented by race, but also have sought to understand why white folks often view their social position as normal and unremarkable. I have reduced the issues raised by these interchanges to the question: how have race and housing influenced each other? Or, how have housing patterns been shaped by race, and how, in turn, have these housing patterns influenced how Americans think about race? My answers to the first part are much more solid. Perceptions of race, including the idea that space is racialized, were powerful forces that shaped urban and suburban neighborhoods. Racial identity is dynamic and evolutionary. Hence, my ideas on housing patterns as a variable in racial identity are more speculative, but I will bring forward evidence that segregated neighborhoods and the forces that created them shaped how Americans have viewed race since World War II.

I have focused my attention on the two and a half decades after World War II. Massive housing changes accompanied and followed the war as millions of Americans relocated. Notions of race shaped these migrations. Government policies, which were initially explicitly racist, gradually shifted toward support for open housing. Courts and legislatures did not definitively

¹ In eight years at my current high school I have only taught a few classes with more than one African American student, and a handful with more than three students of color.
endorse opening housing until 1968 when the Fair Housing Act “finally committed the federal
government to the goals of open housing” and the Supreme Court held in Jones vs. Mayer that an
underused nineteenth-century civil rights law banned all racial discrimination in housing. These
changes, however, were insufficient to significantly reverse the patterns established during the
preceding decades, because the remedies were too weak and the problem too entrenched (Massey
and Denton 195-205). My discussion of these patterns will, thus, sometimes push beyond
1970.

During and immediately following World War II urban America faced a housing crisis.
The war greatly accelerated urbanization that had been underway for over a century. Millions of
Americans had moved to cities, especially those in the north and the west that were centers of
military production such as Los Angeles and Detroit. Urban housing markets, particularly those
in these regions, were severely strained. After years of economic depression and war during
which few housing units were built, millions of American soldiers were returning home, but not
necessarily to their own housing. Moreover, this housing crisis was not evenly distributed.
African Americans were overrepresented in these population movements; thus, the segregated
black belts in many cities faced acute housing crises. The public and private responses to this
housing crisis expanded and reshaped American cities. Racial segregation that was already
established in the 1940s was entrenched and expanded in ways that rewarded Americans who
were socially positioned as white while disadvantaging those positioned as black.2

Racial segregation in housing has many causes, including racial prejudices, white fears over
diminishing property values, discrimination in the real estate and banking industries, and

2 Generally, the literature on race and housing constructs racial discrimination along a black/white binary. This may
result from the reliance on census data with its racial categories. Also the degree of racial discrimination in housing
faced by African Americans has been more persistent and more permanent than that experienced by other groups.
This along with the salience of the black civil rights movement in American history and memory may account for
their focus, and mine. The scope of this project limits the number of variables that I can examine, but I certainly
feel that housing patterns and discrimination for groups outside of this black/white binary would be fruitful areas of
study. I am examining one aspect of how the categories of “black” and “white” were and are constructed. This
would be an equally valuable activity for other racial categories.
government policy. A powerful nexus of public and private actions encouraged the ghettoization, decentralization, and white flight that entrenched and expanded racial segregation following World War II. Public housing, urban renewal and highway construction played pivotal roles in holding racial minorities, particularly African Americans, in the central cities, as federal mortgage programs and the completed highways propelled white home owners outward, first to the edges of central cities and then to the suburbs. The force of law was behind the white homeowners who responded to the possibility of integration by literally fighting or fleeing. Federal policies during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s segregated metropolitan areas and subsidized white suburbia, creating a separate and unequal residential geography.

In researching these public and private actions I have been struck by how the authors, who uniformly condemn racism and segregation, treat racial categories, particularly “black” and “white,” as natural; whereas, recent scholarship on race most often views such categories as socially constructed and dynamic (Ignatiev; Jacobson; Omi and Winant; Roediger, Wages, Toward, and Colored; Roy). Post-World War II housing policies and choices not only were based upon existing social constructions of race, but also were one force constructing racial identities. Ghettoization, decentralization, and white suburbanization influenced racial identities as much as they were driven by these identities. In particular, the intensified and entrenched racial segregation in housing that followed World War II institutionalized racism and contributed to the consolidation of whiteness and shaped its content by deepening the spatial definition of race. This consolidated whiteness was broader, as it more clearly included more European Americans, and it has proved very durable, as it has persisted to the present.

In researching, I have consulted literature on racial segregation in housing across the fields of history, geography, and sociology, along with literature on the history and the theory of racial formation. Much of this project synthesizes how this scholarship deals with racism and
segregation in residential housing. This exposition is primarily historical and aims to summarize the shape, scope, and origins of racial segregation in urban housing in the years following World War II. The last section is analytical. I have taken the primary examples provided in the secondary literature and interpreted them in light of theories of racial formation found in current sociology and racial history.

In order to test my ideas and interpretations against the reality of people’s experiences I interviewed seven people who experienced neighborhood change in the years following World War II in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. These stories have served to challenge me to think more deeply about the secondary literature. I outline their diverse stories in chapter one, and I have woven the insights from these interviews into the rest of chapters.

Chapter two examines the outlines of black-white racial segmentation in American metropolitan areas during the period bounded by World War II and 1970. During these years racial segregation in housing was pervasive and broadly supported by the white public. This segregation was facilitated by government action particularly in the areas of federal mortgage programs, subject of chapter three, and public works, explored in chapter four. I argue that these programs advantaged Americans who were socially positioned as white while disadvantaging those positioned outside of whiteness, particularly African Americans. These programs subsidized both suburbanization and ghettoization, institutionalizing racism in the process.

Mortgage guidelines—which funneled millions of dollars to white homeowners on the urban periphery—were paired with massive public investments in highways, urban renewal, and public housing—which often worked together to confine poor urbanites of color to inner-city neighborhoods. Segregation wrought by these policies in concert with the private actions homeowners and the housing industry has proved durable by largely surviving the open housing regime of 1968. In part this segregation was based on the racialization of urban space. In chapter
five I will examine how housing was one site of racial construction during the period between World War II and 1968. While racial notions of black and white were clearly evident and powerful leading up to this period, I argue that they were maintained and consolidated in the social, economic, and political processes of determining which Americans would be allowed to live where.

In all of these matters I view the two and a half decades that followed the close of World War II as an opportunity lost. The housing crisis of the postwar years presented the opportunity of refashioning American housing in a just manner, which in the process would have diminished racism and delegitimated notions of race. Tragically, the opposite unfolded as the massive restructuring of American cities entrenched notions of race and the practice of racism.
Chapter 1
Witnesses to Urban Changes

Books, no matter how well written, can only teach us so much about a subject. The seven interviews that I conducted in the course of this study brought important perspectives to my research. These interviews all confirmed and complicated various aspects of my work. I have used the information from these interviews to provide examples of the developments that I am describing and exploring, while also using the stories as counter examples to demonstrate that these situations were complex and affected people in many different ways.

The seven Twin Cities' residents I interviewed have widely varying experiences. They range in age from early 30s through late 70s; they come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. A map of their locations can be found in Appendix A (Fig. 16). All of these people were located through personal networking. Some I had known directly, others were referred by friends and acquaintances. JR' was the only person to whom I had never spoken before this project, although the interview was my first extended conservation with several of the other interviewees. I am not representing their experiences as typical, nor is the Twin Cities area meant to represent the US. These gracious and insightful people have, however, rendered this project more human and more real.

The experiences of these people have illuminated ways in which housing issues affect individuals. Housing patterns vary across time and space, but the importance of housing is constant. The personal significance of housing came through in all of my interviews. Examining the impact of housing and neighborhood on these seven lives will provide an introduction to the interviewees. Their experiences, though diverse, can be paired in many ways.

A couple of the respondents did not wish to be identified by name in all instances. For consistency I have used actual initials for all respondents in all cases.

The Twin Cities area is an atypical example in two key ways. First, the construction of postwar suburban housing was generally the work of small builders, not large master builders (Adams and VanDrasek 179). Second, the Twin Cities, overall, is one of the whitest metropolitan areas in the US.
Both TL and MP fondly remember moving into their new houses as children in the 1950s. In different places and circumstances TL and MP were quite pleased with their new accommodations. Four years old in 1952, MP moved with her family into a new home in a new subdivision near 90th and Chicago in Bloomington, a second ring suburb south of Minneapolis. Today, Bloomington is fully developed, home to the huge Mall of America and served by the Twin Cities’ busiest freeways; several rings of suburbs separate it from the edge of the metro area. Then, however, Bloomington was the edge (Fig. 7). MP remembers the family driving all the way to the Sears on Lake Street in south Minneapolis to do household shopping.

Stereotypical crabgrass pioneers, MP’s family’s two-bedroom starter home in an all-white neighborhood sat on a lot stripped of its topsoil was surrounded by weeds and sand bordered by farms and trees. This new home was pleasant, with its backyard to play in, and the neighborhood was exciting, having lots of children with whom to play.

Forty-four blocks north and seven years later, TL’s parents were also pioneers seeking a better life when they became the first black family on their block in south Minneapolis. TL’s mother inadvertently fooled the real estate agent over the phone with her standard American English and then cajoled him into showing the family houses in white areas. In 1959 five-year-old TL and family moved south and east from an older, fraying neighborhood near 28th Street and 31st Avenue South to a newer, more spacious home near 46th Street and Clinton Avenue. This area of south Minneapolis contains solid, single family homes built before World War II at a time when this area, like Bloomington in the ‘50s, would have been on the edge of Minneapolis. TL remembers thinking of his family’s new home: “This is really cool.” At the time both young pioneers favorably compared their new neighborhoods with older city neighborhoods that TL had left and MP drove through to shop or visit in the city.

TL and MP followed parallel paths. Both watched their new neighborhoods change in the
1960s. White families steadily left the area around 46th and Clinton and were replaced with black families, until the neighborhood stabilized at about one-third white and two-thirds black (TL). The people near 90th and Chicago generally remained, but the houses changed as the crabgrass pioneers improved their homes with additions. The surrounding area evolved as forests and farmers’ fields were replaced with middle-class homes and ball fields. Ultimately, marriage led both to first- and second-ring suburbs northwest of Minneapolis, at first Brooklyn Center for both, and later Brooklyn Park for TL and his multiracial family. Both have watched the evolution of the Brooklyns with concern, as the entrance of more African Americans has coincided with moderate degrees of white flight, commercial property vacancy, and crime.

In a different decade SC’s parents were also looking for a better place. Like MP’s family they wound up in the suburbs, with a backyard and more house for the money. The move from St. Paul to Cottage Grove in 1980, did bring a nice home in an outer ring suburb southeast of St. Paul. But, unlike MP, SC did not fit seamlessly into her new community. As one of the few Jewish students, she felt alienated at school, especially as she moved through junior high and high school. As an adult she returned to St. Paul with her husband to begin her family in a more diverse environment.

DS was also attracted to urban diversity. A German-American, she and her Norwegian-American husband choose to move with their three children, two sons and an adopted African-American daughter, to a house on Ashland Avenue a few blocks east of Lexington Parkway. The house is on the southern end of the St. Paul’s Summit-University neighborhood, with a wide range substantial older homes from the mansions along stately Summit Avenue to the commercial district along University Avenue. The area south of Selby Avenue, including DS’s new home, was racially transitioning when she moved there in 1971. She perceives that this was a secondary effect from the construction of Interstate 94 several blocks to the north in the 1960s; African
Americans displaced by the project entered adjacent neighborhoods (Fig. 4, 17). She and her husband choose this location in part because they wanted a diverse neighborhood for their diverse family. DS describes the neighborhood at the time as a “shambles.” Racial transition created a reinforcing cycle of flight and blight. Four houses were for sale on their block alone when the family moved in, and five houses were boarded up along the block at one time during their early years. In the ensuing thirty-four years DS and family stayed, but the neighborhood changed, becoming more stable and less crime-ridden. In recent years the beautiful early twentieth-century homes have appreciated handsomely.

The construction of I-94 disrupted the childhood neighborhoods of JB and JR (Fig. 3, 4, 17). JB is white and has long since moved to White Bear Lake, a resort community turned largely white, middle-class suburb north of St. Paul; JR is black and remains in the racially diverse Summit-University neighborhood in St. Paul. Both remember their neighborhoods warmly. JB grew up in an ethnically and racially heterogeneous neighborhood just north of downtown, a “melting pot” in his words. His Italian and Czech family shared the neighborhood with people of many backgrounds, including other Italians, Jews, Mexicans, and a few African Americans. Although the neighborhood is gone, replaced by the freeway and Regions Hospital (Fig. 3), he is still in contact with some friends fifty years later. JB and JR graduated from racially integrated Mechanic Arts High School in 1951 and 1952 respectively (Fig. 6). JR proudly told me that his birth certificate says Rondo, an area that today is the northern half of the Summit-University neighborhood. Rondo was home to most of St. Paul’s African Americans at the time of JR’s birth. He remembers riding street cars down the avenue of the same name which had a lively commercial district featuring groceries, taverns, and clubs (Fig. 1, 2, 17). The construction of the freeway destroyed many homes and all of the black-owned businesses, but some members of his family were able to purchase houses in the vicinity (Fig. 4). Like JB he remembers a harmonious
MO, the oldest of my informants, has experiences that connect with several others. Like MP and TL he moved as a child. Twelve years old in 1938 he moved with his family from Minneapolis’s near north side to a twelve-unit brick flat, south and east of the intersection of Selby and Dale in St. Paul. This area was near luxurious Summit Avenue and was home to many large Victorian houses—many of which had been subdivided and flats were rented to boarders. MO’s family owned a twelve unit flat that stood on Ashland Avenue several blocks east of the house that DS and her husband later purchased. As with that block, the area south and east of Selby-Dale declined in the 1970s. After MO’s parents died he sold the building which, like the surrounding neighborhood, became “shoddier and shoddier” as it passed through several owners. It was eventually condemned by the city. The city renovated the building and turned it into condominiums. Along with much of the surrounding neighborhood, it rose like “a phoenix from the ashes” (MO). According to MO, today the building looks better than ever. I can attest that it is quite handsome.

When MO’s family moved to St. Paul, the area south and east of Rondo was home to a small Jewish-American enclave (Fig. 17). MO’s Jewish family was attracted to this area. Although he described his immediate area as all-white, through the tenth grade he attended racially and ethnically diverse schools near those of JR and JB. He remembered his ninth and tenth grade years at St. Paul Marshall high school, a small school between his house and the southern boundary of Rondo, as comfortably socially integrated (Fig. 5). This was in marked contrast to his final two years at all-white St. Paul Central High School. After time playing trumpet in an honor band in the Navy during World War II, MO finished college and then law school. His story also demonstrates the strength of ethnic and religious bonds. Like SC, TL, and
DS housing choices were based in part on maintaining community for himself and his family. Following law school MO and his wife moved to south Minneapolis, then to St. Louis Park, and finally to a condominium in Minnetonka last year. In each of these moves MO kept his Jewish family close to a Jewish community and to Jewish institutions. His story also reflects the increasingly binary racial division of space in urban America following World War II, as he moved from the heterogeneous space south of University through neighborhoods increasingly racially isolated.
Chapter 2
A Nation Divided

Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American.

Kerner Commission

While the Kerner Commission wrote in the present tense, by 1968 their vivid description of a nation divided would have made much more sense if phrased as history. A central irony of the two and a half decades following World War II was the maintenance, and often the intensification, of racial segregation in housing, during a time when public attitudes increasingly embraced civil rights ideology. Realities on the ground overwhelmed integrationist rhetoric from 1945 through 1970, and American metropolitan areas became increasingly divided.

Fully industrialized, the postwar urban landscape exploded spatially and became increasingly segmented by race, class, and age (Fig. 16). While the rapid growth of overwhelmingly white suburbs drained city populations, low-income people, and particularly racial minorities, were concentrated in urban cores (Darden 681-82). Postwar suburbanization was paired with another, substantial population shift: the rapid urbanization of African Americans including the second great migration from south to north. Journalist Nicholas Lemann points out that the second great migration was the largest ethnic relocation in United States history. From 1940 to 1970 five million African Americans left the southern states in search of better opportunities, and many others moved to urban areas within the south (Lemann 7; Hirsch “With or Without” 66-67). Northern and western cities received the bulk of the migrants, and in

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5 Many of the processes and policies that built suburbia first filled in the outlying areas of core cities. Many core cities, such as Minneapolis, St. Paul and Detroit, were not built to their limits in 1945. These areas were often racialized as white, although their inclusion in cities that increasingly came to be racialized as black or as nonwhite makes their position more complex today. Through the 1940s and 1950s my discussion of suburban areas also, generally, applies to these areas. In fact, if these areas were included in statistics documenting assistance to white suburbanites that I present in the next chapter, the massive scope the subsidies enjoyed by white America would be even clearer.
the 1940s alone the black population of these areas increased by eighty-five percent (Meyer 79). Despite anti-fascist sentiments that swelled with the close of the war and were amplified by the growing African American civil rights movement, these migrants entered an increasingly separate and distinctly unequal urban world.

Racial segregation in twentieth century has been well documented. Using census and public opinion data for the nation as a whole economists David M. Cutler, Edward L. Glaeser, and Jacob L. Vigdor conclude that racial segregation in American metropolitan areas did not peak until 1970 (456). African American ghettos in northern cities that were created during the great migration of 1890-1930 “consolidated and expanded” until residential segregation reached “staggering levels” in 1970 (Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor, 470). In 1961 the US commission on Civil Rights described the white suburbs that encircled most major cities as a “white noose” strangling urban cores (Kushner 1-3). The commission was recording the degree to which space was racialized in American cities in 1961. The exclusion of people of color from the fringes of core cities and from suburbs imputed a white character to these rings.

The noose was very white. In 1953 the quintessential post-World War II suburb, Levittown on Long Island, New York with a population of seventy thousand was the largest municipality in the United States without a single black resident (Cohen 217). A decade later in the Midwest the situation was similar. MP graduated from high school in Bloomington, Minnesota in 1965 with eighteen hundred other students; she does not recall any black classmates other than an Ethiopian exchange student.

Regional variation existed within the common trend of racially segmented communities. Large northeastern and midwestern cities were the most segregated from 1890 to 1990 (Cutler,
In the urban north segregation peaked in 1950, and had only declined slightly by 1970 (Massey and Denton 46-47). These declines must be viewed skeptically. The census data that social scientists use offers a snapshot of a given area. The many racially transitioning areas in American cities were integrated for only a brief time. Forces that will be outlined in the following chapters made integrated neighborhoods unlikely and unstable.

African Americans’ isolation in central cities during the postwar period built upon previous segregation. The cities were already divided in ways that proved durable. In the main, “the modern spatial distribution of races in American cities was established by 1940 (Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor 466). Divided Detroit exemplifies this trend:

A visitor walking or driving through Detroit in the 1960s—like his or her counterpart in the 1940s—would have passed through two Detroits, one black and one white. Writing in 1963, sociologists Albert J. Mayer and Thomas Hoult noted that blacks in Detroit ‘live in essentially the same places that their predecessors did during the 1930s—the only difference is that due to increasing numbers, they occupy more space centered around their traditional quarters.’ ... Whole sections of the city and the vast majority of the suburbs were entirely off limits to blacks. (Sugrue, Origins 257)

While residential segregation was certainly not invented in the postwar period, an opportunity to dismantle it during a time when thousands of housing units were constructed was lost. The government policies that followed accepted space as racialized: outlying areas were seen as white and inner-cities as black.

Predominantly black urban cores were increasingly isolated. Between 1950 and 1970 the number of African Americans living in overwhelmingly black neighborhoods (defined as census tracts) grew from three out of ten to five out of ten (Kushner 3). Some middle-class African Americans integrated some urban neighborhoods, although this integration was often fleeting;

Through the 1960s the Jim Crow regime in the south did the work of white supremacy in a society where black servants had often lived near white employers, although housing segregation existed as well. Housing segregation was more vital to northern racism. After the 1970s southern and western cities grew faster than those in urban north, many of which stagnated, and thus had many more neighborhoods initially inhabited under the limited open housing regime inaugurated in 1968.
working-class African Americans were increasingly ghettoized. Writing about Chicago, historian Arnold Hirsch termed the 1940-1970 stage of this process making the second ghetto. He finds this “second ghetto” distinct from the first by not only time, but also in its much larger area and population and by the significant roles played by the state in its construction (Second Ghetto 2-15). I, like others who have investigated this process in other cities, will adopt his term.

Even after the peak period of segregation, thoroughly integrated neighborhoods were rare, and substantial racial isolation remained. Desegregation after 1970 consisted mainly of very limited racial integration of otherwise all white areas—as in the northern suburbs of Minneapolis where I teach—and was accompanied by increasingly isolated black neighborhoods. The concentration of African Americans continued between 1970 and 1990 as the “share of [census] tracks that were at least 90 percent black doubled in both city and suburbs” (Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor 471). Twenty-five years after MP’s graduation from a suburban high school without a single African American classmate, SC’s experience in suburban Cottage Grove was only slightly more racially diverse; she only recalls five to ten African American students in her class. She perceived them as stigmatized and socially isolated. Cottage Grove was white space.

Both public and private actions encouraged the ghettoization, decentralization, and white flight that entrenched the divisions in the postwar American metropolis. Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor’s causal analysis uses housing prices to find centralized—government, community, and business—racism responsible for the creation of the first and second ghettos (457-58, 483-87). Historians similarly point to collective action by white people in enforcing residential segregation, agreeing that it was multifaceted, but occasionally disagreeing over which facet to emphasize. In his thoroughly researched history of the African American struggle for fair housing, As Long as They Don’t Move in Next Door, Stephen Grant Meyer documents the terrorism and organized resistance that greeted African Americans in previously all white
neighboring racial neighborhoods. He persuasively contends that the government policies and real estate industry practices which entrenched and maintained racial segregation reflected the will of much of the white public. Meyer concludes that these many and varied actions were aimed at pleasing, placating, and appeasing white racism (7, 132, 153, 215). The actions of government, business, and individuals that drove segregation were thus driven, either directly or indirectly, by white resistance to integration.

Meyer finds this pattern across the entire twentieth-century, but some of its key results—white flight and ghettoization—surged during the 1940s. The deepening of the divisions in American cities was underway two decades before the rising crime rates and riots of the 1960s, which American historical memory often pairs with white flight. Racial conflicts were quite salient in urban America in the ‘40s. Moreover, many of the white people who left the city for the suburbs in the late 1940s and early 1950s were not motivated by racial fear, but by the attractiveness of suburban housing and affordable mortgages that often made buying cheaper than renting. Historians David Roediger and Robert Orsi contend that the emphasis on “black crime...driving...[white ethnics] out of the center city” was a product of the emotional conflict that many European Americans felt leaving behind ethnic neighborhoods filled with family and friends (Roediger, Towards 193). The crime and conflicts of the 1960s furthered trends that were already well under way.

Several developments brought these issues to the fore in the 1940s. The resurgent urbanization of African Americans in the 1940s spurred by war migration and the mechanization of southern agriculture put direct pressure on already overcrowded black neighborhoods in cities. This crowding then pressured surrounding white areas as middle-class black folks sought housing outside of traditionally black areas, often in white working-class neighborhoods. Housing discrimination created a dual housing market. In many cities African Americans paid much more
for comparable housing, because they had fewer housing options than white folks (Hirsch, *Second Ghetto* 33; Sugrue, *Origins* 53-54). This dual housing market benefited those socially positioned as white, thus motivating them to resist integration. Compared to black folks, white folks were typically able to pay less for housing when buying and renting and to receive more for housing when selling, unless they were selling in a neighborhood threatened by racial transition. White folks fought to retain these advantages, and to avoid the fate of black folks confined to blighted neighborhoods.

The creation of African American ghettos in the urban north, thus, discouraged white home owners from embracing integration. Writing about Chicago, Arnold Hirsch referred to the first ghetto as a “Frankenstein’s monster” created and later feared by white Chicagoans who worked to contain it. The “unyielding segregation” of the first ghetto give birth to the second (*Second Ghetto* 15). The depressed conditions of the first ghetto—spawned by overcrowding, overpayment for housing, and incomplete municipal services—were the sources of white stereotypes and fear. These conditions were exacerbated by crowded conditions during and immediately following World War II in many northern and western cities. Fear of these conditions was more powerful than the attraction of the American values of freedom and equality that were trumpeted during the war. In fact, white urbanites frequently viewed their resistance to integration as an exercise in their freedom to avoid the blight to which black urbanites were consigned.

Another postwar development, the deindustrialization of city centers disproportionately impacted African Americans, who were handicapped by residential concentration in deindustrializing neighborhoods and by recurring discrimination in employment. These developments were factors in the criminality that white folks feared. In Detroit, “As black jobless rates rose in the 1950s, such fears were not totally without basis. As more and more
young African American men faced underemployment and unemployment, many spent time hanging out on streetcorners, a scene that whites found threatening” (Sugrue, *Origins* 217). As the economy of Detroit declined in the 1950s, rates of burglary, robbery, and murder all increased. Several interviewees made these exact points. White mother DS described her unease with young black men hanging out on the streets around St. Paul’s Selby-Dale corner in the 1970s; while JB feels that black male joblessness led to criminality and single parent families—themselves a cause of criminality in his view.

White opposition to integrated housing was the product of more than racial prejudice and bigotry. Lizabeth Cohen claims that “racial prejudice does not adequately describe the intensity” of opposition by white folks to racial integration in housing (217). Cohen finds that Euroamerican opposition to racial integration was born of fear, cultural differences, and a white view of black people as “beacons” for crime and poverty (217). Fear of crime based both on actual developments and stereotypes fed white fears of integration. These fears were stereotypical because white people often transferred fear of poor, black neighborhoods to middle-class, black home seekers. Black pioneers in white neighborhoods were often of a higher socioeconomic class than their prospective neighbors because of the premium paid by black homeowners in the dual housing market.

Moreover, many white homeowners had deep fears about property values. Millions of working- and middle-class Americans bought homes for the first time in the two decades following World War II. Many of these (overwhelmingly white) people were “highly mortgaged” with “most of their life savings” tied up in their homes and were very afraid of any threat to property values (Cohen 217). In the postwar United States investments in real estate were financially and emotionally very significant for many Americans and fueled or rationalized much white prejudice against potential black neighbors.
Fears that black neighbors would lower property values were based on the real actions of bankers and realtors, particularly through redlining and blockbusting. Kenneth Jackson defines redlining as “the arbitrary decisions of government and private financial institutions not to lend in certain neighborhoods because of general characteristics of the neighborhood rather than of the particular property to be mortgaged” (362). As the next chapter demonstrates, public and private institutions frequently redlined nonwhite and integrated neighborhoods and thus rendered them less valuable. Due to redlining practices mortgages were nearly impossible to get for neighborhoods that were racially transitioning until the mid-1960s. This lowered demand for these properties, and with it the prices that they could command. Even after mortgages were available for these areas the white distaste for integrated neighborhoods dramatically lowered the potential market for homes in these neighborhoods thus lowering their value.

In this environment the possibility of racial transition depressed property values in white neighborhoods. Arnold Hirsch describes the financial risks posed to white Chicago neighborhoods by the threat of racial succession in the 1940s and 1950s. When the Black Belt expanded near these neighborhoods prices plummeted as owners vainly attempted to attract white buyers or renters when vacancies arose. Property maintenance declined as owners saw a dim future for their investments. Ultimately, property was sold to speculators who made “huge profits” reselling the property to African Americans desperate for adequate housing. These black pioneers had difficulty paying huge house payments, a product of the higher price and the usurious contracts with which they purchased the home in lieu of the long-term mortgages available to white home seekers. Even when they were able to make their house payments, financial stresses often led them to delay maintenance, take in boarders or illegally convert their homes to businesses. Rental housing suffered a similar fate as units were subdivided to meet the huge demand (Second Ghetto 31-34). In this way the dual housing market’s prophecy of
integration leading to blight was often self-fulfilling. Racializing space was reflexive in that white elites viewed space as having racial qualities: white as valuable and well-maintained and black is blighted and declining in value. Acting on this supposition, by extending credit for white space and redlining black space, created the valuable well maintained white neighborhoods along with blighted black neighborhoods that brought forth the supposition in the first place.

White fears that African American neighbors lowered property values were also borne out when their neighbors acted on these fears by quickly selling at the first sign of racial succession. This self-fulfilling prophesy reached new heights with blockbusting in the years after World War II. Blockbusting refers to the methods that realtor estate agents employed to profit from areas that transitioned from white to black. Since prospective black home buyers rarely qualified for mortgages in all-white areas despite their willingness to pay more, blockbusting realtors aimed to buy houses from skittish white home owners on the cheap and resell them to home hungry African Americans.

These agents stoked white fears of racial turnover in order to generate panicked selling by white homeowners at lower prices. Realtors engaged in this practice would sometimes use a black family most likely to maximize white outrage to first “break” a block. These first families—who were frequently in league with the realtors—were often poor or poorly behaving black renters along with often being more culturally distinct, newly arrived southern migrants (Massey and Denton 37-38). Some realtors paid black women to push baby carriages through white neighborhoods targeted for busting cases (Sugrue, Origins 195). Once a block was cracked blockbusters widely publicized this through handbills, phone calls, and postcards in both the white neighborhood and in adjacent black neighborhoods (Massey and Denton 38). Other agents, who often felt ethically bound against initiating racial integration, would then join in facilitating racial transition and cash in on the premiums that black pioneers paid. With only black home
seekers now purchasing in the neighborhood the remaining white residents felt that they were under siege (Feagin 34). Thus, some blocks transitioned, and space was reracialized from white to black, in a relatively short time.

Since space racialized as black was less valuable in the dual housing market, black folks in the ‘40s and ‘50s paid more when they bought and received less when they sold than white folks, except those who sold in racially transitioning areas. Property in white-only areas appreciated in value. Lizabeth Cohen sums this up well with quotations from a 1959 talk by Newark, New Jersey civil rights activist Harold Lett:

[White homeowners, real estate brokers, lenders, and developers] created for blacks ‘a highly controlled market, where the natural laws of supply and demand are distorted, limited, and twisted...the exploitable minorities whom they [the white public] have been taught to fear actually serve the housing industry in a very profitable manner.’ In that sense, Lett concluded, the real estate market was far from a pure free market. Rather, it was rigged for everyone, with whites benefiting at blacks’ expense. (Cohen 226-27)

The black middle class was unable to secure quality housing that would appreciate in value, because their presence in a neighborhood denied them this possibility; the white middle class knew that if they maintained their properties and kept the black folks out their properties would appreciate.

Homeowners who were socially positioned as white were as powerless over the machinations of the dual housing market as were those perceived as black. Individual white homeowners, regardless of their own views on race and racism, were not in a position to affect the collective perceptions of realtors, bankers, developers, and other homeowners. What was required here was white leadership for racial equality, and it was not forthcoming. What white families did have was more options and more political power to resist integration and to continue
to profit from the rigged game.\footnote{Even if white people sold at a loss in a racially transitioning area, they were very often able to buy in an all-white suburb where their property would appreciate.}

Many white property owners “protected” themselves from integration with racially restrictive covenants which generally maintained segregation until the Supreme Court rendered them unenforceable in 1948 (Darden 680). In some areas of the United States four out of every five residences were contractually unavailable to racial minorities (Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor 476). In a particularly egregious example, only 1,500 of the 186,000 single-family homes built in Detroit in the 1940s were available to African American families (Sugrue, \textit{Origins} 43). When the housing covenant regime collapsed in the late 1940s white homeowners in many neighborhoods worked collectively, using both peaceful and violent methods to maintain segregated housing.

Many simply left. The white flight that began in the 1940s formed the “white noose” of suburbia noted by the US Commission on Civil Rights in 1961. The Twin Cities was part of this pattern. TL and DS both witnessed white flight from areas that were integrated by African American families; and JR describes the white flight out of the area surrounding the Rondo neighborhood, including DS’s neighborhood, as black residents moved in. He described the attitude as “those folks are coming, we need to move.” This process, however, was less complete in Minneapolis and St. Paul than in other cities probably because of the comparatively small black population. TL and DS lived in neighborhoods that retained significant numbers of white residents. As a point of comparison, my grandfather recalls his formerly all-white neighborhood in northwestern Detroit becoming nearly one hundred percent black within the space of three years in the mid-1960s.\footnote{Thomas Sugrue reports that most racially transitioning Detroit neighborhoods went “from all-white to predominantly black in a period of three or four years” (Origins 216). Although my grandfather took a loss as his block in northwestern Detroit was busted, the family’s new home in the then overwhelmingly-white suburb of Warren appreciated over the years. Selling this home allowed him to pay cash for a retirement home in Florida twenty-five years later.} The process was even faster in some places.

Many white people, particularly working-class persons unable to afford or uninterested
in a move to the edge of the city or to suburbia, used violence against black pioneers in an effort to maintain segregation. Arnold Hirsch devotes an entire chapter of *Making of the Second Ghetto*—“An Era of Quiet Violence”—to violent white resistance to integrated housing in Chicago. He focuses on six separate riots from 1946 through 1953, each involving thousands of white rioters engaging in violence for weeks at a time. The incidents all required hundreds of law enforcement personnel to restore order. In addition, over 350 smaller racial incidents, such as arson and house bombings were directed at African Americans who moved into predominantly white neighborhoods in these years. City officials feared publicity would lead to city-wide violence, like that experienced by Detroit in 1943 and Chicago in 1919. A compliant press keep these dramatic incidents largely unknown to outsiders (40-67, 84).

Similar incidents occurred across the country. While *Making the Second Ghetto* makes no claims beyond Chicago, Hirsch cites violent white resistance in Detroit, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Spokane, and Cincinnati in a later book chapter (“With or Without” 84). And in the foreword to the 1998 edition of *Making the Second Ghetto* he concludes that while Chicago may have been extreme, other authors have described the same pattern of violence and exclusion in many postwar American cities (viii). Historian Thomas J. Sugrue cites violence in Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia and Cincinnati as an obstacle to racial integration (“Crabgrass-Roots” 554). Meyer supports his argument that white resistance expressed through violence was the primary factor in maintaining segregation with examples from Atlanta, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, and San Francisco (55-62, 121). The violence that greeted African American pioneers throughout the ‘40s and ‘50s was unreported and, unlike black unrest in the ‘60s, occupies almost no space in American historical memory. While largely unsuccessful in stopping racial transition, this violence, along with nonviolent political activity, influenced local and national politicians.
Politicians responded to white fears and worked to limit or control racial succession in a way that maintained racial segregation over the long term. The machinations of local government were another agent in the construction of the second ghettos. Journalist Nicholas Lemann holds that the Daley political machine valued segregation, because racial succession destabilized neighborhoods which in turn threatened the community relationships necessary for machine politics (91). The machine enjoyed and appreciated electoral support from black Chicagoans, and thus pursued a separate but (almost) equal racial policy. Other politicians used white voters’ fears of racial succession to garner their support. Mayors Edward Jeffries and Albert Cobo of Detroit, a city that lacked a well-developed political machine, and Orville Hubbard of neighboring Dearborn were prominent examples of postwar white politicians playing the race card for electoral advantage (Sugrue, Origins, 63-86). Sugrue terms this white backlash against liberalism “Crabgrass-Roots Politics.” Like white movement to the suburbs, the backlash against liberalism that I referred to in the introduction was powerful and predated the upheavals of the ‘60s by two decades. It is difficult to imagine politicians resisting the thousands of white voters who packed hearings and wrote letters opposing integrated neighborhoods in cities like Detroit.

Moreover, African Americans in northern cities could vote. Their residential concentration elected some black officials who were then uninterested in integration that might dilute their political base. William Dawson, an African American member of the House of Representatives from Chicago, is a prime example. Dawson was an effective practitioner of machine politics who chose not to expend political capital on residential segregation (Hirsch, Second Ghetto 129-31). Beyond electoral politics, black nationalism, which emerged in the 1940s and was nationally significant by the 1960s, produced leaders and ideas more interested in gilding than dismantling the second ghettos. In short many powerful actors ranging from the national government to neighborhood organizations were interested in maintaining the racial
status quo. Public housing, urban renewal, and highway programs provided politicians with tools for that project.

Looking back at the intensity of white resistance to integrated housing and at the millions of African Americans streaming into urban areas, it is difficult to imagine a significantly more integrated outcome. The deepening division of urban America was over determined, as many factors worked toward segregations. But, this entrenched segregation was the product of conscious choices at the highest levels. Rather than confronting the housing crisis that followed the war in a way that built upon the egalitarian rhetoric and sacrifice of that war the federal government sanctioned and rewarded racial segregation through federal mortgage programs.
Chapter 3
Building White-Only Housing: The Sins of the Federal Housing Administration

[The FHA] did more than any other instrumentality to force nonwhite citizens into substandard houses and neighborhoods

Leslie S. Perry of the NAACP in 1949

The Federal Housing Administration was just getting started when Lester Perry made these remarks. Federal housing mortgage practices were one very important strand in the web of racism that rewarded Americans perceived as white while penalizing those who were not. These practices worked toward an institutionalized racism that continues to transfer wealth across generations. The role of federal policy in shaping separate and unequal metropolitan neighborhoods reminds us that this did not just happen. It was largely chosen, and perhaps something different can be chosen for our future.

Federal housing policies that shaped postwar suburbia had their genesis in the Great Depression of the 1930s and the challenges of social and economic reconversion after World War II. Their twin objectives were to stimulate the economy through home building and to improve the nation’s housing stock. Working toward these goals, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) permanently altered the American residential landscape. Congress and the Roosevelt administration created the HOLC during the first burst of the New Deal with the intent of protecting home ownership. During the depths of the depression it prevented foreclosures by refinancing mortgages—over one million between 1933 and 1935, ten percent of owner occupied, non-farm residences. Additionally, these refinancings introduced the long term, amortizing mortgage that became the industry standard and continues to place home ownership within reach for millions of Americans (Jackson 197). In meeting their intended purposes the HOLC created
benefits for millions of Americans in the past and present.

The HOLC reformed not only how mortgages were structured but how properties were appraised. In the process of shoring up the residential real estate market the agency introduced an insidious legacy: redlining. The bureaucrats at the HOLC, many of whom had worked in real estate or banking, undertook an ambitious project. With realtors and bankers, they mapped the neighborhoods of cities throughout the United States for the purpose of estimating the risk of potential loans. The HOLC gave each block in each American neighborhood one of four grades—A, B, C, or D. These ratings were preserved in color coded “Residential Security” maps which were used by future bureaucrats and by the real estate and banking industries. The highest grade, termed “best,” was reserved for all white, middle-class, and above, areas. The lowest grade, termed “hazardous” and deemed riskiest for investment, was coded red, was assigned to working class neighborhoods or neighborhoods inhabited by racial and ethnic minorities. Black neighborhoods were almost always coded red, hence the phrase redlining. Even a tiny African American population could lead to a “hazardous label” (Bartelt 133; Jackson 198-202; Sugrue, Origins 43-44). Kenneth Jackson, an urban historian who has seen the red lines, surmises that this grading applied “notions of ethnic and racial worth on an unprecedented scale” (199). The HOLC used race, along with other factors, as a marker of reliability.

Curiously, the HOLC itself did not discriminate; it impartially issued loans for property in neighborhoods of all four grades. Subsequent federal agencies and the private sector, however, did discriminate, influenced by HOLC maps and techniques. Private lenders in the 1930s often responded to surveys about lending practices using the HOLC’s terminology of colors and letters (Jackson 203). This redlining, which intensified in the building and relocation frenzy of the postwar years, made credit and upward mobility available to some (white) Americans and not to others. The prospect of having a neighborhood redlined, by the HOLC, another federal agency,
realtors, or in the general perception of the public, informed the white effort to exclude racial minorities, particularly African Americans from their neighborhoods. As capital was blocked from redlined neighborhoods their subsequent decline into blight often bore out their predictive label of “hazardous” (Jackson 196-202). White home owners were taught to fear black entry into their neighbors, thus affirming and rationalizing the existing prejudices of some. Of course most neighborhoods were segregated before being mapped by the HOLC. The HOLC magnified this damage by giving it official sanction and by recording it for others to perpetuate the harm. These colored maps reified the prejudices held by some privileged Americans, in a way that affected many others, privileged and not.

The agency most responsible for perpetuating this harm was the Federal Housing Administration. Created one year after the HOLC, and taking its place in managing the mortgage industry, the FHA shared its predecessor’s goals of stimulating the economy through construction and promoting social stability through home ownership. Following World War II its mission grew to include confronting a mammoth housing crisis. At the war’s close the National Housing Agency estimated that five million housing units were needed immediately and twelve and half million would be needed in the ensuing decade. One hundred thousand veterans were homeless in 1946 (Baxandell and Ewen 87). A Senate investigation immediately following the war found people living in nonresidential structures ranging from offices to chicken coops. In fact, the FHA published a technical bulletin on refurbishing chicken coops for human habitation. A process for which one might obtain an FHA guaranteed loan and decorating advice from the government (Wright 246). An Atlanta example of two thousand people applying for a single rental vacancy was typical (Baxandall and Ewen 240).

The postwar housing crisis was particularly acute for African American renters in

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9 The HOLC stopped refinancing mortgages in 1936 and was dissolved in 1951 (Jackson 362).
northern cities whose already crowded neighborhoods were swelled with migrants. This crisis was so bad that in Cincinnati the vacancy rate in black neighborhoods during World War II fell to one third of one percent (Casey-Leininger 238). In 1950 nearly one in four non-white Chicagoans, for instance, lived in overcrowded conditions, an increase from one in five in 1940. Many of these people lived in tiny units that were created by subdividing apartments and often lacked windows, toilets, and kitchens—hot plates, which created fire dangers, were used instead. Such apartments were known as kitchenettes. During the 1940s the number of white Chicagoans living in overcrowded conditions declined as the outward migration began (Hirsch, Second Ghetto 24-25). Despite this FHA’s work focused on white folks who were building new houses.

The FHA did not issue mortgages, but instead increased their availability by insuring mortgages offered commercially. This diminished risk to lenders, and dramatically increased the flow of loans, particularly for new construction. The FHA, in tandem with the Veterans Administration which insured mortgages available under the GI Bill, was extraordinarily successful at its mission. Following the HOLC’s lead the FHA set standards for mortgages and for the houses being mortgaged. Foreclosures, interest rates, average monthly payments, and down payments all decreased, while construction quality was standardized and raised. From 1937 to 1972 the percentage of Americans living in owner occupied homes jumped from forty-three percent to sixty-three percent (Cohen 214ff; Jackson 203-206; Wright 240-47). Writing in 1984, Kenneth Jackson went so far as to claim: “No agency of the United States government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the Federal Housing Authority” (203). This massive impact has been a boon for many

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10 Vacancy rates in a normal housing market range between five and 10 percent. Rents spiral upward as rates fall below this. Conditions become extremely difficult for renters if the vacancy rate dips even as low as two percent (Martin).

11 The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act was and is popularly known as the GI Bill. The Veterans Administration followed FHA “procedures and attitudes” (Jackson 204). The literature that I have encountered considers the VA’s practices as part and parcel of the FHA’s, and so will I.
Americans, but a disaster for others.

In a country based on a vision of equal opportunity, a government agency distributed the enormous advantage of home ownership inequitably. As urban areas rapidly decentralized, first to the edge of central city limits and then to new suburbs, in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, FHA policy funneled money into the new-all white areas. In the suburbs half of all homes had FHA or VA guaranteed mortgages (Jackson 215; Nivola 22). The FHA continued not only the mission of the HOLC, but also its methods. These methods included its appraisal techniques, and probably the residential security maps (Bartelt 133; Jackson 203). Unlike the HOLC the FHA chose to limit its investments to stable communities; such a community was “presumed to be a white, segregated one” (Cohen 214). Other areas, particularly working class areas of all races and communities of color in central cities were left to atrophy. In Philadelphia this meant almost exclusively underwriting new construction in overwhelmingly-white northeastern neighborhoods for a decade and a half following World War II. This “ensured the FHA was subsidizing segregation” (Bartelt 133). In Detroit, even more brazenly, “The FHA regularly refused loans to black home builders while underwriting the construction of homes by whites of a similar economic status a few blocks away” (Sugrue, Origins 44). While the rhetoric of the civil rights movement gained traction with much of white America during the 1960s, residential racial isolation was entrenched and expanded.

The Federal Housing Administration did not just reflect the prejudices of segments of white society, it codified and subsidized them. The administration encouraged and gave official sanction to white flight and black isolation. These actions represented more than the biases of administration personal; they were de jure policies through 1950. In 1943, an FHA commissioner successfully lobbied Congress to keep anti-discrimination language out of federal housing legislation (Meyer 67). Throughout the 1940s, FHA appraisal manuals stipulated that
neighborhoods inhabited by “inharmonious racial or nationality” groups—an euphemism for racial minorities and Jews—were higher loan risks than all white neighborhoods. Administration manuals of the same era encouraged the use of racially restrictive covenants that forbade white home owners to sell their property to nonwhite or Jewish costumers. The FHA endorsed this policy for a full two years after the Supreme Court ruled the enforcement of such covenants unconstitutional under the fourteenth Amendment in the Shelley vs. Kraemer and McGhee vs Sipes cases in 1948 (Jackson 208; Meyer 80; Wright 247-48). The FHA continued to insist on segregation in federally insured housing cooperatives into the 1950s (Meyer 97).

Even after the FHA repudiated racial covenants in 1950, no clear cut federal legislation or administrative policies were pursued to counter residential segregation. This void was interpreted by the housing industry and white home owners as a green light for continued segregation (Meyer 152-53). Much of this segregation was based on the belief that black entry into white neighborhoods would decrease property values. Redlining by private lenders and by FHA policy had contributed to that reality. By making some (white) areas more valuable than other (black) areas the FHA altered the metropolitan landscape, and influenced how Americans, especially white Americans, thought about their neighbors and their neighborhoods. These federal policies shaped not only the human geography of America’s metropolitan areas, but also its sociology. As the tide of de jure racism in American housing receded in the 1950s and 1960s, an institutionalized racism buttressed by white prejudice and privilege was left behind.

In practical terms, huge sums of money were at stake—nominally $119 billion of federally guaranteed mortgages between 1933 and 1973 (Jackson 215). These vast sums were flowing from all Americans, in the form of savings accounts used as capital by private lenders, to mainly those (white) Americans privileged by the FHA and lending institutions. With their own neighborhoods viewed as high risk, and effectively barred from entering white neighborhoods,
African Americans were systematically denied access to a key component of the American dream. In 1961 the NAACP proclaimed that African Americans were “excluded from 98% of all [FHA] homes built since 1946” (Meyer 153). Like the HOLC the FHA’s influence extended to the private institutions that adopted its standards, even for loans not guaranteed by the agency. The result was that in the thirty years preceding 1960, lending institutions issued less than one percent of all mortgages in the United States to African Americans (Novek online). Most mortgages were issued to white Americans buying new homes in the suburbs. Suburban areas received vastly more federal mortgage assistance than urban areas during this same time period. To take the most extreme examples: from its beginning in 1934 through 1960 the FHA guaranteed $601, $730, and $794 worth of mortgages per capita in suburban counties around New York, Washington, D.C, and St. Louis respectively. The comparable numbers for the urban, racially mixed counties of Bronx, New York and Hudson, New Jersey $10 and $12 respectively (Jackson 211).

The story is not just the fifty percent of postwar suburbanites who directly benefited from this assistance by living in homes purchased with guaranteed mortgages. The Federal Housing Administration created the basis for mass produced suburbia. Massive consumer demand, coupled with assurances from the federal government, encouraged builders to produce as many houses as possible. The ensuing mass production lowered the prices for new suburban homes, benefiting all people able to obtain mortgages, with or without federal assistance, to purchase these homes (Wright 248). Additionally, FHA policies after 1949 allowed guarantees for large loans to developers, who contributed to lower prices through economies of scale in massive suburban developments—where the white middle class increasingly lived (Baxandall and Ewen 116-39; Wright 246). These developments created affordable homes and wealth in the form of home equity for millions of white Americans and huge profits for a few master builders.
While a few of these builders sold to racial minorities, the vast majority excluded nonwhites from suburban developments, even in the unlikely event that they were able to secure financing (Cohen 217). The most significant of these master builders, William Levitt, was openly hostile to racial integration. In 1988 he described to *Esquire* magazine how his family had left their Brooklyn home when an African American professional had moved into the neighborhood. Later in life he applied his family’s experience on a massive scale. He evicted a white family renting a house in Levittown because they had allowed black children to play in their home. Levitt refused to sell to African Americans, and even tried to prevent resales in his developments. Legal challenges to these practices were unsuccessful until a New Jersey Supreme Court decision in 1960. He defended suburban segregation throughout his public life, even after the 1968 Fair Housing Act (Baxandall and Ewen 74-80, 176-77; Cohen 217). In spite of his disrespect for civil rights law, federal mortgage insurance was one key ingredient in Bill Levitt’s wealth and influence.

The corollary of advantaged, white suburbs was disadvantaged, nonwhite city neighborhoods. These areas were abandoned by the federal government, left at the side of the highway leading to the suburban variant of the American dream. Entire areas were written off first by the government and then by the private sector. Camden and Paterson, New Jersey are urban areas with significant African American populations and as of 1966, when the FHA abruptly changed its focus to urban areas, they were the location for zero FHA guaranteed mortgages (Jackson 213). In another example, a study conducted by the *Newark News* in 1956 found that of the more than five thousand Veterans Administration loan guarantees in Essex county, New Jersey over fifty percent had gone to two all white communities, while just over one percent went to Newark and Montclair, the municipalities with the largest black populations (Cohen 221). Entire cities were being starved of capital.
Moreover, the imprimatur of the federal government on racist housing practices encouraged private discrimination. In Philadelphia, local banks followed the FHA’s lead in loaning in all-white areas, and redlining black and integrated areas (Bartelt 133). The actions of the HOLC and the FHA in Detroit not only provided realtors and bankers with the tools to segregate the area, the federal agencies “legitimated systematic discrimination” by giving these practices “official sanction.” The role of the government was key, without federal and local support individual choices alone would not have maintained “suburban exclusiveness and homogeneity” (Sugrue, Origins 43, 44, 245).

The policies shaped inner-cities as well as suburbs. The abandonment of neighborhoods, by private lending institutions and the FHA, was a key factor in “the deterioration of stable, working class communities” (Wright 247). Many of the white residents from these communities were able to move to the new and affordable mass-produced suburbs. Unable to qualify for mortgages, units in the old neighborhoods remained vacant, contributing to crime and blight (Jackson 213). The FHA’s bias against both home repair (vis a vis home building) and working class communities of color made renovation loans scarce and home maintenance more difficult. Moreover, FHA programs “stripped” many core cities of their middle class constituency diminishing their economic vitality and their tax bases (Jackson 206). Federal mortgage programs subsidized the flight of folks with the ability to maintain their houses from neighborhoods that needed maintenance.

Long-time St. Paul residents DS and JR both stressed the pernicious influence of redlining by lending institutions throughout the postwar period. JR emphasized that the inability to get mortgages outside of the Rondo area was one factor in segregating the African American community. DS attributed the blight on her block in the early 1970s to redlining. Houses were left unsold. They were either left empty or became rental properties. Neither person, however,
solely attributed the problems that they described to redlining. DS acknowledged crime and white flight; JR recognized hostility from neighbors in “no-no areas.” The rapidly suburbanizing United States of the postwar era was also increasingly prosperous, but that prosperity was not shared by many inner-cities. In the midst of the postwar economic boom, many urban areas became poorer and more economically and racially isolated. The complicity of the Federal Housing Administration in this pattern was and is clear.

While private discrimination continued for many years, federal support for residential segregation reversed in the 1960s: going from support to tolerance and finally to disapproval under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In 1962 President Kennedy, who had courted and received critical African American support in the election of 1960, issued an executive order opposing racial discrimination in housing. The order was symbolically significant, but had little practical effect. It was too little—afflicting as few as one in five transactions—and too late to arrest the now institutionalized pattern of residential segregation. Executive order 11063 covered neither transactions involving single family homes occupied by the seller, nor existing housing receiving federal guarantees; and, it was not vigorously enforced by the newly created Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing (Meyer 169-71). Moreover, the FHA was intransigent. The American Friends Service Committee which worked for fair housing laws and practices reported an FHA officer stating: “I see no utility in Executive Orders” (Meyer 205).

In 1966 the FHA dramatically reversed policy and began guaranteeing loans to urban neighborhoods. Unfortunately urban decline and white flight were so rooted by this time that the policy shift just helped more white folks sell their home and leave for the suburbs. This process further eroded property values and economic vitality (Jackson 215). Ghettoization of urban African Americans had spawned blighted, black neighborhoods. By the middle 1960s federal support had facilitated enlarged and impoverished ghettos alongside stable suburbia. These
policies racialized space in ways that endure long after their termination.

The seething anger and resentment in many of these places exploded into summers of violence in the middle 1960s. While this violence further alienated many white Americans from urban problems, it did contribute to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act.\textsuperscript{12} This law forbade racial discrimination in most real estate and rental transactions; and the \textit{Jones vs. Mayer} Supreme Court decision of the same year covered the act’s exceptions by forbidding housing discrimination by any private individual (Meyer 207-209). The impact of federal housing policy is evidenced by the decline in segregation after these policy shifts took hold in 1968; but progress between 1970 and 1990 was marginal. This reminds us that the federal government is but one actor, and that much of the damage of the immediate postwar period had been institutionalized.

Federal lending practices pursued from the Great Depression through 1968 structured the housing market and institutionalized racism. In the racially segregated context of the postwar era any policy which benefited suburban homeowners disproportionately benefited white Americans, even if the policy was racially neutral on its face. For instance, housing legislation and FHA procedures favored the single, detached home, and favored buying new housing over repairing existing housing. The result was that “suburban middle income famil[ies] received the most assistance” (Wright 246). Since even economically-able African Americans were generally excluded from these communities, the effect was racially unjust.

The same is true with the scores of policies, which directed vast sums of government assistance toward home-owning suburbanites. Some significant examples are: highway construction, the income tax deductions for mortgage interest and property tax, cheap gasoline (relative to other industrialized nations), and greater federal aid for sewer and water construction

\textsuperscript{12} The Fair Housing Act was passed five weeks after the Kerner Commission issued its report, and one week after the rioting that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.
than for repair (Jackson 191; Nivola 24-26). A raft of federal policies made the postwar suburbs possible and aided their overwhelmingly white residents. Historians Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen summarize the situation well: “The suburban migration absorbed enormous amounts of federal aid for housing and highways, draining the cities of resources” (179-80). The government policies combined actions of white homeowners and the real estate industry to create “affirmative action” for white folks in housing (Rubio 86). White flight was one result of these policies, as three white persons left core US cities during the 1950s for every two nonwhite persons who moved in (Cohen 212).

Federal policies segregated and rewarded suburbia, creating a separate and unequal residential geography. This geography has impacted how Americans see each other, creating psychological distance. Even when laws, and to a lesser extent attitudes, changed to favor integration during the late 1960s, the advantages of the postwar period gave many white Americans greater resources. They were able to use the equity in their homes to move further from the center, as people of color, who could by this time receive mortgages and purchase houses themselves, moved into what were once all white areas. In many places this has meant that desegregation is not stable, as areas integrate and then resegregate through white flight. Decaying urban neighborhoods, like segregation in general, did not just happen. The federal government did not plan to create American apartheid, but until the late 1960s it did encourage and countenance it. These policies were one part of a racist web which denied many people, African Americans in particular, full access to the American dream.

The impact of these policies ripples into the present. Now that formal redlining is illegal, TL continues to see the pernicious effects of racial steering and of the perception of integrated neighborhoods as less valuable. Living in the Minneapolis suburbs of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park since 1979, he and his wife feel that they have paid a price for their choice to live
in integrated neighborhoods (Fig. 16). Neither house appreciated as much as others seemed to, although in the case of the Brooklyn Center house they saw the its age—built in 1919—as a factor. They clearly feel that they have less equity in their house on an 8000 North block in Brooklyn Park than they would if they had moved further out from the city. They felt steered by their real estate agent in 1986, and hostility from one of their new white neighbors, who immediately erected a privacy fence dividing their houses and were reluctant to allow their daughter to play with TL’s daughter.

Their observations show how the racialization of space has evolved, and remains. They seem to feel that TL’s presence alone would not racialize a block as black and diminish the value. The one-drop concept that drove intense resistance in the immediate postwar period is not a concern. By the same token their mildly integrated neighborhood is not perceived as valuable. They highlighted their worries that the perception of Brooklyn Park as racialized space has led to blight and abandonment by noting vacate commercial property. In whiter Anoka county where I work, the area has been referred to as “Brooklyn Dark.” They also pointed me to the fence along 53rd Avenue North demarcating Brooklyn Center from more dangerous Minneapolis (Fig. 8, 9). One can cross the line there without noticing a change in the housing stock. I did. But, the fence is there to point out what isn’t so obvious.

Finally, my interviews provided a glimpse into white privilege. In episode three of Race: The Power of an Illusion legal scholar John Powell notes that housing did the work of Jim Crow in postwar America. By which he means that housing practices maintained segregation and allowed white families to transfer wealth across generations without overtly using bigotry and racist laws. MP acknowledged the all-white character of her Bloomington neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s, but did not associate this with the term segregation. Segregation, to her, was something that was directly mandated by law. She remembers watching the civil rights struggles
on TV and condemning the racist violence of the Jim Crow South. The forces at work that segregated Bloomington were not so obvious.

Similarly, JB does not fear racial integration of his stable White Bear Lake neighborhood: “If [people of color] can afford to move into the neighborhood, I have no problem with it.” I have no doubt that he is sincere that class conformity is a priority while racial conformity is not. But, the long history of housing discrimination, redlining, and white flight out of racially integrated areas greatly diminishes the chances that many black folks can afford to move into the area. MP’s and JB’s families benefited from their investments in housing. These investments were underpinned by federal mortgage programs that affected all Americans; they were unavailable to African Americans, but white Americans were able to take advantage of them without overt bigotry. Other government interventions most directly affected people of color in urban cores.
Sometimes derided as showing the futility of social reform, urban renewal was never anything of the sort. Poor people reaped only the benefit of rhetorical preambles and a whirlwind of bulldozers.

Arnold Hirsch

It would be difficult to find a government program with a worse reputation over the past three decades than large-scale public housing projects for families.\(^1\) Ostensibly built to benefit less fortunate Americans, the projects became dangerous and seemingly dysfunctional neighborhoods that trapped their residents in poverty rather than providing a step up. In 1980 ten of the poorest sixteen neighborhoods in the United States were Chicago Housing Authority projects (Jakle and Wilson 129). The CHA and the Pruitt-Igoe homes in St. Louis—torn down in 1972 after only seventeen years of service—are invoked by critics to demonstrate the failings of public housing. These critics describe the “blunder[s]” of “utopian” planners who compounded urban problems with “egoistic” high-rise projects (Hall 259-60; Jacobs 373; Nivola 73). The Nixon administration halted the construction of new projects, and the nation is now slowly dismantling those that remain. Racially segregated, the projects are prominent symbols of the racialized space of American cities: black on the inside and white on the outside. As tools to build a more just United States high-rise public housing projects were generally a failure, but to understand their role in the last sixty years of US history we must appreciate the complex set of motives behind their construction.

First pursued as part of the New Deal mix of patronage, idealism, and Keynesian stimulus, public housing was always aimed at much more than simply aiding the poor. There was never one federal attitude toward public housing, even for a specific time period, because

\(^1\) Public housing programs for seniors have been much more successful and are viewed more positively.
public housing policy was produced by a combination of various members of congress and executive branch officials, often working toward different ends. Some politicians pushed public housing in order to assist those who lacked adequate shelter, while others were more interested in its use to allow for other public works projects which destroyed housing. After World War II public housing’s ability to significantly assist the less fortunate was hamstrung by Joseph McCarthy and the home construction lobby. Funding for public housing, which would have competed with housing constructed by developers and private contractors, was limited. Such limits fit well with Senator McCarthy’s famous cause of anticommunism, which viewed any public venture as suspect, along with his less famous cause of shilling for the real estate industry. The government austerity of the Eisenhower years further restricted the money available for public housing. As a result, the nation met most of the postwar housing crisis with private construction of new single-family homes (Baxandall and Ewen 87-105). The resulting private developments were segmented by race and by class as the previous chapter detailed.

Although government projects were a mixed blessing to the non-elderly, urban poor, they did facilitate other public works, while maintaining racial segregation in housing. For the city governments and the business and institutional interests that pushed for these programs, public housing was a success, despite the concentration of poverty, crime, and hopelessness that ensued. These tragic results implicate all levels of government in the creation of an unequal urban geography. The interrelated public works programs of public housing, highway construction, and urban renewal contributed to the entrenchment of racially segregated urban areas in the years following the Second World War.

Looking back it is tempting to see the intense hostility to residential integration discussed in chapter two as unstoppable, but public policy played a clear role in making the ideas of some into the reality of most. Subdivisions, highways, public housing towers, and commercial and civil
projects have a permanence that has outlasted the racial attitudes that shaped them. My brief foray through the literature leads me to agree with Arnold Hirsch’s strong statement:

With the emergence of federal supports for the private housing industry, public housing, slum clearance, and urban renewal...government took an active hand not merely in reinforcing prevailing patterns of segregation, but also in lending them a permanence never seen before. The implication of the government in the second ghetto was so deep, so pervasive, that it virtually constituted a new form of de jure segregation. (“With or Without” 84-85)

Urban America’s racial geography was chosen. Public works projects restructured American cities after World War II and played pivotal roles in holding racial minorities, particularly African Americans, in the central cities. These programs institutionalized racism by restricting racial minorities to inferior housing located in areas that increasingly bled good jobs during the postwar era.

Urban theorists Peter Hall and Arnold Hirsch stress that the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, the sources of many urban renewal programs and much public housing construction, were pushed to passage by business, institutional, labor, and political interests. These groups were all pursuing parochial goals. Hirsch argues that in Chicago urban renewal was not clearly motivated by racism, although the consequences were racist. In contrast, the racially based placement of public housing was clearly based on prejudice and discrimination (Hall 248-49, Hirsch, Second Ghetto 133, 214-44). Historians discern explicitly racial motivation in the public policies that shaped residential patterns in, Cincinnati, Miami, and Atlanta. In Miami, for instance, African American neighborhoods near the central business district had been targets for removal before Congress enacted urban renewal, public housing, and highway legislation (Bayor 71-92; Casey-Leininger 242; Mohl 103).

Even when policies were not pushed for racist reasons, the results often were because of the disparity in political and economic power between those socially positioned as white and
those socially positioned as black. Throughout the US the political powerlessness of black folks was often a combination of racial discrimination and economic disadvantage. As JR pointed out regarding the destruction of his Rondo neighborhood for Interstate 94 in St. Paul: “How could we have made a fuss when we didn’t own any property?” Even black homeowners had limited power with which to shape the project. The result was that of the four hundred homes torn down for I-94 in the first phase of its construction, three hundred belonged to African Americans.

One of eight African Americans living in St. Paul in the early 1960s was displaced by the construction of the freeway (St. Paul). Likewise, in Detroit: “highway planners were careful to ensure that construction of the new high-speed expressways would only minimally disrupt middle-class residential areas, but they had little such concern for black neighborhoods.” The result was the devastation of “the most densely populated sections of black Detroit” (Sugrue, Origins 47). Publicly funded projects did not benefit the public, broadly defined. Instead, public agencies, like the private real estate market, viewed space that was racialized as white as inherently more worthy of protection than space that was racialized as black.

Although some local politicians were clearly motivated by racism, public housing policy at the national level was not as explicitly racist as the machinations of the Federal Housing Administration. Many legislators and public housing bureaucrats were as interested in helping the poor and the nonwhite as they were in aiding the white middle-class.\(^{14}\) However, these actors frequently accepted discriminatory policies that entrenched segregation as part of legislative compromises.

Such compromises and contradictions run through the history of public housing. First, the federal Housing Acts of 1937, 1949, and 1954, along with case law, required that housing projects only be constructed at the option of local municipalities. All-white suburbs could and

\(^{14}\) Unlike many of the officials in the FHA who were associated with the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which favored racial and class segregation, the public housing bureaucracy was more rooted in New Deal idealism (Hirsch, “With or Without” 85).
did refuse public housing projects with their often black residents, and within major cities, site
selection was often racially based (Jackson 222-25). The histories of urban segregation often
feature city government appeasing segregationist interests even when implementing federal
programs.

Even if suburbs wanted public housing projects, the law oriented them to the city. In
1937 the real estate industry, as worried then about competition from the public sector as it was
fifteen years later, successfully lobbied Congress for public housing rules that required old
housing be destroyed for a new housing project to be built, a requirement more easily met in older
cities with plenty of substandard housing (Jackson 226; Wilson 47-48; Wright 227). This
requirement also meant that the construction of public housing did not help reduce the
overcrowded conditions that the dual housing market created for many urban African Americans
through the 1960s. Furthermore, until 1962, laws encouraged public housing administrators to
select residents so that building populations reflected the racial composition of the surrounding
neighborhood (Wright 234). This often led local housing agencies to hold public housing units
vacant in white neighborhoods while many African American families languished on waiting lists.

Anti-discrimination amendments that would have encouraged integration were stripped
out of public housing bills during the legislative process in the 1950s. Public housing advocates
reluctantly opposed these amendments which they accurately perceived as poison pills meant to
kill public funds for housing needs (Jackson 226; Meyer 86-87). Enabling legislation further
marginalized public housing and its residents by restricting occupancy to the very poor. This
narrowed its political appeal, further decreasing the possibility that housing projects would be
welcomed in middle- or even mixed-income neighborhoods (Nivola 22-24). Desperate to provide
shelter to the nation’s most vulnerable citizens, public housing advocates accepted all of these
compromises in an attempt to get more units built. In fact, more housing was built. Kenneth
Jackson reminds us that in 1962 two million people lived in a half million public housing units that were certainly “superior to the dilapidated structures they replaced” (224). Nicholas Lemann puts a human face on this with his description of the excitement that many residents felt moving into the Chicago Housing Authority’s Robert Taylor homes when they opened. For Ruby Haynes, the new construction and large units of these homes were a welcome contrast to the often dilapidated, dangerous and overcrowded housing she had known in sharecropper shacks in Mississippi and in kitchenette apartments in Chicago. Ruby’s then twelve-year old son, Larry remembers moving into the Robert Taylor Homes: “I thought that was the beautifullest place in the world” (107, 225, 345).

The lingering New Deal optimism of President Truman’s Fair Deal is reflected in the 1949 Housing Act’s promise to uplift the downtrodden and provide quality housing for all Americans. Hirsch refers to this language as a “rhetorical shroud” for the act’s purpose of providing public capital for private enterprises (“With or Without” 88-89). This argument is at the core of his persuasive Making of the Second Ghetto, where he traces the 1949 and 1954 laws to similar Illinois legislation that was pushed to passage by Chicago’s business and university leaders. These actors used the power and the resources of public agencies to clear central city land for commercial development and to preserve white enclaves around institutions like the University of Chicago (132-50). Political forces may well have pushed the legislation and appreciated the rhetorical cover that the preamble gave to them, but they did not produce the legislation alone. Liberal legislators also pushed for housing programs for the stated purpose, and the ensuing legislation was in some measure theirs too.

These contradictions ran through local public housing policies as well. Many people concerned with the public good staffed local housing bureaucracies, but often accepted segregation in individual projects, site selection, or both in order to get housing built. Their
Altruism was no match for the forces favoring segregation in city government. In Chicago, as housing activists resigned in frustration or were replaced, the Chicago Housing Authority went from a “reluctant accomplice” to segregation to a leader in using public housing to enforce racial separation (Hirsch, *Second Ghetto* 228-44). Some public works directors were never interested in desegregation. In New York City, Robert Moses began planning slum clearance and housing projects in 1945 in working-class Lower East Side, East Harlem, and Brooklyn neighborhoods, instead of vacant land near the periphery. Peter Hall quotes Moses as referring to the “Bronx colored project” as evidence that he clearly understood the racial implications of his work (250). Welcomed or not, segregation was the price paid for building public housing projects that only partially met the national need for quality shelter.

The threat of racial violence and the electoral clout of white voters severely constricted the placement of public housing. The path not taken in postwar America was to meet the massive housing crisis, which was particularly acute in African American neighborhoods of big cities, by building integrated public housing in vacant areas at the periphery of these cities. This was proposed in many cities, fiercely resisted, and ultimately abandoned. In all of the cities whose public housing policies I surveyed (Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and Miami) public housing in outlying white neighborhoods was politically untenable because of white resistance. Instead, local governments, using state and federal funds, built housing projects in black neighborhoods or in neighborhoods already transitioning from white to black. In a typical example, Detroit planners proposed twelve housing projects scattered throughout the city, but overwhelming white opposition meant that only four were constructed, all in inner-city black areas (Sugrue, *Origins* 84-85). Their construction, like highway and slum clearance projects, destroyed existing housing. The result was continued segregation and almost no relief for African Americans dealing with a dearth of quality, affordable housing.
Postwar white riots in Chicago aimed at African Americans moving into all-white public housing in white neighborhoods chilled any attempts to use public housing as a tool for integration in that city. Actions of the city government reflected the electoral clout of white segregationists and of business and labor interests who wanted the projects to be built regardless of location. The city resistance to integrated housing, through a city council veto over site selection, but supported the construction of public housing in the city. The result was that ninety-eight percent of Chicago Housing Authority units constructed after 1950 were in “all black neighborhoods,” and the residents of these projects were also nearly all black (Hirsch, Second Ghetto 214-44). Unfortunately these inner-city neighborhoods were simultaneously losing manufacturing jobs. When the black middle class began to inherit the single family homes left behind by white flight, public housing residents became increasingly socially and economically both. This isolation was part of a vicious circle of economic decline and social pathology that impelled those who could to abandon central city neighborhoods. Federal resources entrenched rather than ameliorated this racial and class segregation.

Furthermore racial discrimination in public housing programs, like such discrimination in federal mortgage programs, legitimated private sector housing discrimination. Advocates of open housing in postwar Detroit blamed the city’s segregationist public housing policies for encouraging racist behavior in the real estate industry. One critic, Cyril Lawrence commented that the “public has interpreted the policy [of maintaining segregated public housing projects in segregated neighborhoods] as applicable to all housing.” Another critic, George Schermer of the Mayor’s Interracial Committee went even further in his attacking the “detrimental effect” of the city’s public housing policies. These policies not only fostered “distrust and disbelief in government on the part of minority and liberal [groups],” they also gave “official sanction to the prejudices of others” (qtd. Sugrue, Origins 86-87). Public housing policies accepted space as
racialized, thus legitimating private actors doing the same. The harms of the segregationist public housing policies spilled beyond the entrances to the projects.

Public housing was frequently a key element in slum clearance, urban renewal, and highway construction projects. Hirsch documents how the public housing provisions of the Illinois laws that created urban renewal programs and were models for the federal Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 existed only because of fears that African Americans displaced by these projects would seek housing in all-white neighborhoods, and because anti-public housing legislators saw urban renewal as an alternative to a full scale public housing program (Second Ghetto 114, 273). Mark Condon of Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government summarizes the situation well: “Public housing was now meant to collect the ghetto residents left homeless by the urban renewal bulldozers” (qtd. in Wilson 48). The poor did not generally benefit from the ventures for which they were being displaced. These motivations are why Hirsch is so skeptical of the lofty claims in the preambles to housing legislation that ultimately harmed many poor people. The mission of public housing, and in some cities the rationale for its existence, had shifted from providing for the needy to housing those displaced by projects that benefited business interests, universities, and suburbanites. (Hirsch, “With or Without ” 90; Sugrue, Origins 120-24).

The destruction of housing and insufficient construction of relocation housing exacerbated the dire housing crisis that black urbanites faced in the 1940s and 1950s. In Detroit, where racism limited the construction of public housing and many housing units in black neighborhoods were destroyed, approximately one in every thirty black applicants for public housing was placed in a unit between 1947 and 1952 (Sugrue, Origins 47-58). The other twenty-nine crowded the already overcrowded black neighborhoods, setting up a chain reaction of ghettoization, black pressure on white neighborhoods, and white flight.
Despite this crisis a lot of good housing was destroyed. Under federal urban renewal programs only twenty percent of housing in an area had to be deemed blighted for clearance (Wright 232). Given the economic motivations for clearing low-income neighborhoods there was room for substantial abuse. Sometimes the housing was not even blighted, just in the way. Hirsch describes the demolition of quality housing to give the middle-class units of the Lake Meadows urban renewal project a view of Lake Michigan (Second Ghetto 119). Citing examples from several American cities, Peter Hall claims that through 1961 urban renewal programs “destroyed four times as many units as had been built” (253). The effect was even greater than the four to one ration implies, because many of the replacement units were financially out of reach for those displaced. One study claims that between 1949 and 1967 urban renewal destroyed 383,000 dwelling units which had primarily housed poor people, but only constructed 10,000 affordable units (out of 107,000 new units) on the land that had been cleared (Ryan 177). The shortfall was met in part by public housing that was often constructed at some distance from urban renewal zones.

Many of those displaced had no good options for new housing in extremely tight markets; African Americans were further disadvantaged by the racial discrimination in real estate markets discussed in the previous two chapters. In Detroit, an urban renewal zone north of Gratiot Avenue on the lower east side displaced many black residents, one third of whom wound up in public housing. Another one third were unable to be traced to new locations, and were probably doubled up in the already crowded surrounding neighborhood (Sugrue, Origins 50). This crowding caused blight which discouraged investment, in turn furthering blight. Existing, quality housing was often subdivided into apartments and began to deteriorate. Blight often began even before renewal, as an area to be destroyed was starved of capital. Eventually suburbanization freed housing in the center, but only after the cycle of blight had begun (Jakle and Wilson 130-
36). Urban renewal, officially aimed at clearing slums, often only relocated them.

Land clearance for new highways caused similar results, with the added injustice that the new roads widened the economic disparity between the city and the suburbs. The new highways were making materially comfortable suburban lifestyles available to some Americans while lowering living standards for others by not only razing their homes but also by encouraging the job-depleting deindustrialization of city centers. Raymond Mohl documents how federal dollars built highways in Miami, but local officials decided where. The result was construction of a section of Interstate 95 and the destruction of the Overtown neighborhood. Like many other neighborhoods impacted during this time, Overtown bordered on the central business district and its residents were predominantly African American. Many of those dislocated joined other African Americans moving to the city in a segregated public housing project near Liberty Square Center. This project was the kernel of Miami’s second ghetto of Liberty City (Mohl 132-42). This is another example of slum relocation, not simply slum clearance.

The story was the same elsewhere. In Cincinnati, black residents displaced from an old slum neighborhood by highway building and urban renewal projects were channeled into a second ghetto via government supported housing projects which were quickly filled (Casey-Leininger). In Atlanta, city officials used highways not only to transport the middle and upper classes and to clear slum neighborhoods, but also to form borders between black and white neighborhoods. The first two goals were more easily met as the number of African Americans seeking housing—again, because of destroyed housing and migration from rural areas—could not be contained by the highway borders. Public housing was used to channel African Americans into neighborhoods that were transitioning from white to black (Bayor 71-92). As in Chicago, Atlanta officials were unable to prevent racial succession, but controlled it with public works projects. Whether or not it was intended, and the evidence suggests it was a mix of both in varying proportions in most
cities, these programs entrenched residential segregation and created separate and decidedly unequal neighborhoods.

Freeway projects sometimes leveled integrated working class neighborhoods. Thus, some of the few racially heterogeneous areas were destabilized and segregation became more pervasive. This further segregated metropolitan areas by increasing the isolation of communities of color. The Boyle Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles is illustrative. In a 2004 lecture, historian George Sanchez documented how Boyle Heights ethnic and racial diversity before World War II included significant communities of Americans of Japanese, Jewish, Latino, and Slavic descent. Following World War II five new freeways carved up Boyle Heights and displaced hundreds of Mexican American and African American families many of whom landed in racially isolated housing projects. Meanwhile many Jewish and Slavic Americans moved into suburban communities; often the vacancies created were filled by Latin American immigrants. The result was that a previously heterogeneous space is overwhelmingly Latino today.

Although Sanchez explicitly compared Boyle Heights to ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago, its story parallels the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul. After the diverse neighborhoods along Rondo Avenue and near downtown were destroyed with the construction of Interstate 94 in the 1960s, less diverse neighborhood patterns followed both in and out of the area. JR, JB, and MO all recall relatively harmonious, though limited, ethnic and racial diversity in their sections of St. Paul in the 1940s and the 1950s. White families were more likely to have the resources to move farther away. JR perceives that what remained of the Rondo neighborhood was more racially homogeneous. Similarly, Author Evelyn Fairbanks’ section of Rondo was mostly populated by white folks before the freeway and mostly by black folks afterwards (St. Paul).

These effects were not total, however. The core cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and their schools have remained more racially diverse than most other large cities in the US. But, as
in these other places, space was racialized. When racial frontiers, such as Selby Avenue in St. Paul, were breached by black folks, many white folks left. I find it most likely that if more African Americans lived in or moved to the Twin Cities through the twentieth century the area would have been more thoroughly segmented by race. Today, even though each core city taken as a whole is racially mixed and both have multiracial areas, some segregation by neighborhood remains. Each city has several neighborhoods, including St. Paul’s Como Park where I reside, that are over ninety-percent white.

Thus, there is much more to this story than heterogeneous space being destroyed and replaced with racial homogeneity. In addition to noting the incomplete homogenization of neighborhoods since the 1960s, it is also important to keep in mind the limits to racial interaction even in integrated neighborhoods. Although JB proudly remembers his neighborhood as a “melting pot” in the 1930s and 1940s, he also remembers yelling “Hey, Nigger” at a black man walking down the street as a small child. He does not recall specifically learning the word or even specifically knowing what it meant, but he certainly had been exposed to it and was interested in its power. He attributes this knowledge to his family. While JB moved beyond these attitudes, he also had and has Jewish friends despite his father’s anti-semitism, they do complicate the notion of inter-racial harmony.

Furthermore, while integrated schools and neighborhoods sometimes resulted in integrated social relations, often they did not. All of the respondents talked about high school experiences for themselves, their children, or both. JB, TL, and JR attended high school in the city as did DS’s children. All mentioned social segregation of students by race. DS’s three children attended Central High School in St. Paul which was racially integrated when they matriculated in the 1980s; her two white sons socialized with white friends and her black daughter with black friends. At Washburn High School around 1970 TL remembers having white friends through his
involvement in sports, but he also recalls his interracial friendships as somewhat atypical and not fully accepted by all other students, either black or white.

Earlier still, JR experienced racial segregation within multi-ethnic schools and neighborhoods. JR remembers attending integrated schools: first McKinley grade school and then Mechanic Arts High School.Unlike TL, whose interracial horizons expanded in high school, JR found racially drawn social boundaries in high school. He recalls that high school was where a person “found out you were a different color,” and speculates that parental disapproval of interracial dating was at the root of this. Other than athletics, school activities were racially segregated, as were the resulting friendships. He also recalls segregation beyond school in eating establishments and other public places. This segregation did not abate until the 1970s. In the same part of St. Paul MO attended Marshall High School in the 1940s, where he remembers racially integrated social bonds formed through music groups and sports teams. He spent eleventh and twelfth grade at St. Paul Central High School, in order to participate in the school’s robust band program; he found the all-white school to be segmented by class and social cliques.

These school and community experiences should limit the conclusions about how integrated some inner-city spaces were before new highways and suburbs were built. The schools that sprang up in the suburbs after this time, however, were much more thoroughly segregated. And, although subsequent Minneapolis and St. Paul high schools were integrated to varying degrees, they were increasingly anomalous in the wider metropolitan area. None of my suburban students participates in a carpool as JB did when he rode to the University of Minnesota with three Mexican American, Jewish American, and African American neighbors; nor do my students work in groups in class where each group mate was born in a different country as sometimes happens in my wife’s classroom at Roosevelt High School in south Minneapolis today.
Neighborhood deconstruction for freeways or for urban renewal projects in the Twin Cities and elsewhere was particularly hard on black folks who still faced barriers to their relocation plans and were less likely to have the resources to move wherever they wished. The disproportionate effect of urban renewal policies on African Americans caused many contemporaries to refer to it as “Negro removal.” For a black family forced out of its home in the 1950s, whether it be for freeway construction, the clearance of a neighborhood, or the construction of a public housing project, retreat to the suburbs was often blocked by poverty and nearly always by the interlocking racism of the real estate industry, hostile neighbors, and federal lending practices. Those who could afford market-priced housing moved elsewhere in the city, often meeting resistance and impelling white flight, and those who could not afford this often moved to public housing. They frequently arrived “disenheartened and hostile” (Wright 234). A series of public policies advantaged white suburbanites and contributed to the material deprivation that characterized many inner-city neighborhoods at the end of the twentieth century.

Both St. Paulites also reflected on the ripple effects from the destruction of a portion of the Rondo neighborhood to make room for Interstate 94. Their observations largely corroborated the narratives of destroyed business districts and dislocated low-income people that I have found in the literature. JR noted the demise of small businesses, particularly those operated by African Americans, as a blow to the economic and social health of the community (Fig. 2). Both described the role of black refugees from the project in precipitating white flight out of adjacent neighborhoods.

JR’s experiences did complicate this story. He described how the second phase of the I-94 project included monies to compensate homeowners for equity in their houses and provided relocation costs. This coincided with the decline of redlining and the dawn of open housing
policies. The result was that some of the black middle-class families, mainly from the Oatmeal Hill section of Rondo east of Dale Street, were able to buy or build nicer homes (Fig. 17). He remembers an aunt in Rondo who was displaced from Carrol Avenue for a housing project, was able to build a new home one block south on Iglehart Avenue. Her daughter built one down the street. He views the story as bittersweet. White residents of Rondo were more likely to own homes and so were more likely to be able to move away. Despite the benefits to some black families the process increased racial segregation and racial distance.

This brings to mind August Wilson’s description of how a black neighborhood in Pittsburgh dealt with urban renewal in his play *Two Trains Running*. In 1969 the specter of demolition haunts the area, especially the businessman Memphis. His diner is on a block scheduled for demolition. The once vibrant diner is nearly vacant as the condemned neighborhood dies. The play ends with an intoxicated Memphis announcing the news that the city is prepared to offer him $35,000—$10,000 more than he demanded. He plans to use the money to triumphantly return to Mississippi. But, like JR’s memories of Rondo, the audience is aware that something has been lost with the closing of the diner and that Memphis’ compensation may not lead to a better life. His predicament parallels that of the folks displaced by redevelopment in Rondo who were not welcomed in their new neighborhoods, and saw their dreams of assimilating into middle class communities slip away with flight and abandonment. Watching *Two Trains Running* at the Penumbra Theatre in the area that once was Rondo I was not confident that moving to Jackson, Mississippi would allow Memphis to successfully relocate his business.

Public housing and the related highway and urban renewal programs were another area where federal policy influenced the sociology of American cities along with their geography. The redlined neighborhoods of the postwar United States’ cities were caught in a vicious whipsaw.
With loans scarce, properties were not kept up and more frequently went vacant. As middle-income residents left for the suburbs, economic vitality waned and the tax base slumped. The poorest and most vulnerable citizens were herded into the projects. All of this encouraged more middle-class flight, “reinforc[ing] the image of suburbia as a place of refuge from the social pathologies of the disadvantaged” (Jackson 227). As the core got uglier, poorer, and more dangerous, the psychological distance between the vanilla suburbs and the chocolate city grew.

While many factors contributed to these conditions and to the overrepresentation of racial minorities in these neighborhoods, the interconnected policies of public housing, urban renewal, and highway construction were deemed one major key by the authors of the five case studies that I have visited. Focusing on these factors is worthwhile for several reasons. First, as noted, public works projects have a permanence that ensures effect beyond the careers and lives of their makers. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright reminds us that the projects were built to last for the duration of their sixty-year mortgages, but were not supposed to be appealing enough to retain residents. The result was almost instant blight (Wright 229-37). Second, the role of these projects in entrenching racial segregation—sometimes intentionally, usually knowingly—reminds us that the disastrous consequences of that segregation were, in part, chosen. Third, these policies gave official sanction to segregation, confirming instead of challenging this threat to the American project of equality.

Moreover, as the first ghettos produced the second, the effects of the postwar transformation of American cities shapes urban life at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Arnold Hirsch vividly points out that

...a sustained postwar building boom served as a federally supported centrifuge that separated an outer layer of whites from a dense black core. Attempting to end discriminatory practices in housing in the post-civil rights era is not simply a matter of closing the barn door a little too slowly—the horse has not only escaped, but it has gotten into the trailer, moved down the interstate, and been put out to
Getting the horse back into the barn will be very difficult.

These public works projects reflected the idea that space was racialized, and that white space was inherently more valuable. Acting upon these ideas did much, of course, to racialize space and to privilege white space. Public works projects reified notions of whiteness and blackness. This racial formation has been at least as permanent as the structures themselves.
The suburbs helped turn Euro-Americans into “whites” who could live near each other and intermarry with relatively little difficulty. But this “white” unity rested on residential segregation, on shared access to housing, and life changes largely unavailable to communities of color.

George Lipsitz

Limited inter-racial space existed alongside space that was thoroughly racialized in Minneapolis-St. Paul in the years following World War II. Both of my African-American informants, TL and JR, were very aware of racial boundaries which overlaid physical features. In St. Paul streets demarcated racial terrain. In general African Americans felt restricted to the Rondo area, bounded by University Avenue, Lexington Parkway, Selby Avenue, and Rice Street (Fig. 17). Within this area Dale Street served as a class border dividing more economically stable “Oatmeal Hill” to the west from poorer “Cornmeal Valley” to the east (JR). JR remembers places beyond these borders as “no, no areas.” White-only areas, such as Frogtown north of University, were policed by stares and questions directed at African Americans. Like the area south of Selby where DS moved in 1971, all-white Frogtown, originally a German-American enclave, transitioned racially after the freeway was constructed and African Americans began moving there. Today the area has a diverse black, white, and southeast Asian population.

TL’s experiences a few decades later in south Minneapolis compare to and contrast with JR’s Rondo life. He was raised by a mother who stressed acculturation to white expectations to allow her children to achieve success functioning across racial lines. TL gradually learned how people were socially positioned by race. As a youngster he often played with a white boy who lived next to his new house in south Minneapolis, but they always played outside. The friend’s family soon moved to the suburbs. TL recalls that it took him a while to “figure it out.” For
both TL and JR, comments, facial expressions, anxiety, and apprehension were all signs that he was not welcome. As he grew up and became more mobile, racial dividing lines became clear: “it just seemed like [people] knew.” Some of these lines, such as the Minnehaha creek, also functioned as class divisions. The area north of the creek was seen as black or working-class. White folks living north of the creek were “certainly accepted,” but it was perceived that either they could not move south or that they were tied to the area by a Catholic church and sometimes a parochial school that allowed them to side step integrated schools.

Other areas of town were more clearly racialized. TL describes being afraid of northeast Minneapolis’s German and Polish residents. Football games between Edison High School in Northeast and Washburn featured racial taunting. Similarly, TL remembers that the near north side’s streets were clearly coded as black. The Mississippi river divided these areas. Broadway street crossed this divide on what was viewed as “the longest bridge in the world: between Africa and Poland” (Fig. 10). Today, seeing people of color in Nordeast, as locals often called the area after the accent of its original Eastern and Central European inhabitants, seems strange to TL.

My interviewees certainly found urban spaces to be racialized, but these spaces changed over time and existed along side spaces that were more heterogeneous. Three of the seven specifically sought out racially or culturally diverse areas. These experiences run counter to historical narratives which stress racially endogamous families, especially white ones, seeking racially homogeneous neighborhoods. DS and TL wanted their multiracial families to feel more comfortable. TL and his white wife wanted their children to see “kids of color” in their neighborhood, and thus chose to live in a Brooklyn Park neighborhood in 1986 that contained a few other mixed race families. DS and her husband were similarly attracted to the transitioning area south of Selby in 1971.15 Both families were seeking to avoid the isolation that SC felt as

15 While the interracial character of TL and DS’s families is atypical it does provide them with a valuable insight into issues of race and ethnicity. Their family situations force them to think about race more than most people and provide each of them with multiple perspectives on racial issues.
one of two Jewish children in her class at Cottage Grove high school. Today she has made choices similar to those families by choosing to raise her children in the city.

Racialized space interacted with governmental action to propel racial segregation, but also to contribute to racial formation. Ghettoization, decentralization, and white suburbanization influenced racial identities as much as they were driven by these identities. In particular, the intensified and entrenched racial segregation in housing that followed World War II contributed to the consolidation of whiteness and partially shaped its content by deepening the spatial definition of race.

Conflicts over housing and the racist policies that they encouraged further racialized urban space. The complex of mortgage insurance programs, urban renewal, public housing policies, and highway construction that I am analyzing here constituted legal segregation (Hirsch, “With or Without” 84-85), and the legal infrastructure that authorized and organized these policies were segregation laws. Analyzing the social impact of de jure segregation, legal scholar Ian Haney Lopez contends:

As a social construct, race depends on what people believe, rendering it an inherently unstable concept. Segregation laws increased the stability of racial categories by fixing mutable racial lines in terms of relatively immutable geographic boundaries...While housing patterns and citizenship have depended on race, the converse is true as well: race often follows from neighborhoods and nationality. Consider the ease with which we assign racial identities knowing only that someone is from Santa Monica or South Central, Greenwich Village or Harlem. Moreover, this link between space and race functions as a matter of both external and internal identification—as a matter of what others believe of our identity, and of how we think of ourselves. (120)

Postwar housing patterns were determined in large part by federal policies. These patterns racialized urban space and consolidated whiteness by deepening and broadening it. Whiteness deepened by becoming more durable through its association with space and physical structures,

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16 Haney-Lopez appears to be referring to explicitly racial laws such as the Jim Crow south. I am arguing that the racial policies surrounding housing following World War II functioned as segregation laws.
and whiteness broadened by solidifying the whiteness of people who could have been constructed as inbetween, or off-white. Many of these people would have been perceived as “inharmonious” by the FHA in the 1930s and the 1940s, but were allowed into postwar mass suburbia, where they were regarded as white. In the case of new suburban communities municipal boundaries naturalized racial divisions as community divisions.

I am not arguing that people became white by moving to the suburbs or by resisting neighbors of color. Like all racial identities whiteness has a history. The origins of whiteness were much earlier, in colonial and antebellum America, although the content and boundaries of whiteness have changed over time. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson divides the political history of American whiteness into three periods. From the immigration law of 1790, which stipulated that only “free, white” persons could become American citizens, until the influx of Irish Catholics in the 1840s whiteness was “unconflicted.” This identity was “fractur[ed]” by European immigration into “a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races” (7-8). Hence people, primarily from southern and eastern Europe, but also including Irish Catholics and people from southwestern Asia, have been identified by historians as inbetween or not-yet-white because of their ambiguous social position.

The racist immigration restrictions of the 1920s closed this epoch and began a period of “reconsolidated” whiteness. During this time “the late nineteenth century’s probationary white groups were now remade and granted the scientific stamp of authenticity as the unitary Caucasian race--an earlier era’s Celts, Slavs, Hebrews, and Saracens among others, had become the Caucasians so familiar to our own visual economy and racial lexicon” (Jacobson 7-8, Fig. 15). Jacobson’s periodization fits the work of other scholars in the whiteness field who emphasize the disruptive effects of immigration on racial categories. David Roediger and James Barrett similarly argue that the anti-immigration laws of 1917, 1921, and 1924 “defused” the “racial
threat” posed to WASPs by eastern and southern European immigrants (Roediger, Colored 168) and opened the door to a less complicated whiteness for these inbetween people.

In fact, people who moved to segregated communities like Levittown, New York were by definition socially positioned as white. Metropolitan America was a very segregated place in the 1940s, especially if one counts millions of eastern and southern European Americans are counted as white; many crabgrass pioneers left racially segregated neighborhoods. Many of these migrants were from European immigrant families that had been racially inbetween in the early years of the twentieth century. Historically, they were racially stigmatized and faced prejudice and discrimination. By the 1940s, however, these not-yet-white ethnics had moved toward a less contested whiteness. Furthermore, the notion that Italian immigrants were “positioned as white in the most critical of ways immediately upon their arrival in the United States” (Jennifer Guglielmo 8) almost certainly applies to other southern and eastern European immigrant groups. Most crucially Euroamericans who were socially not-yet-white were white by law from their first days in America. These groups were allowed to naturalize as citizens and thus were treated equally under the law in sharp contrast with immigrants from Eastern and Southern Asia (Haney Lopez; Jacobson 7-8; Roediger, Colored 168). Other social forces such as mass culture (Rogin) and World War II (Moore 1-18, 36) pushed inbetween peoples from southern and eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, southwestern Asia, through the entry to American whiteness.

Inbetween Euroamericans may have been through this door to whiteness by the end of World War II but the processes of residential apartheid helped to slam it shut. By defining large tracts of metropolitan space as exclusively white and by implication rendering the remaining space nonwhite, the forces of ghettoization and suburbanization undermined inbetweenness and racial heterogeneity. Deborah Dash Moore describes the “white ethnic” identity of Jewish Americans newly arrived in Los Angeles and Miami from the Northeast following World War II;
the phrase “white ethnic” testifies to the continuing salience of ethnicity for some groups within a white identity and social position. This affirmation of whiteness stemmed from Jewish migration to locales racially organized along a black/white binary (54-55). While Los Angeles did not have the explicit Jim Crow legacy of Miami, the rapidly expanding metropolis was increasingly segmented into white and not white spaces. George Sanchez makes this point and highlights postwar housing policies as a turning point. Before World War II Jewish Americans were excluded from many LA neighborhoods by covenants and other mechanisms; after the war Jews were welcomed into suburban areas that excluded “non-Caucasians.” All of this suggests that Jewish Americans in Los Angeles and elsewhere retained their ethnicity, but it existed alongside a much less contested whiteness.

While suburbanization and resistance to urban integration did not create whiteness in the postwar US they did consolidate it, by reinforcing the inclusion of peoples previously socially positioned as inbetween and by enhancing the material and social advantages of whiteness. Through residential segregation the children and grandchildren of not-yet-white European immigrants became fully white in their racial identity. Neither of my Jewish informants questioned their whiteness at all, though both also had strong Jewish identities. SC is in her thirties, so her perception corroborates my argument; whereas, MO is approaching eighty, so his sense of lifelong whiteness gives me pause. This pan-ethnic whiteness was also more durable.

If the United States government and its white American citizens had embraced open housing with their laws and their actions racial boundaries may have become more permeable or at least less salient. Instead the social and physical distance between neighborhoods defined by race hardened racial divisions. Legal scholar John Powell’s contention that geography did the work of Jim Crow in metropolitan areas outside of the south (Race 3) works on two levels. The racialized geography of postwar America fostered white privilege, in the form of immense
economic advantages stemming from home ownership, while also reinforcing the ideology behind this privilege by buttressing the notion of whiteness. By whiteness I mean the idea that some people physical features which make them “white,” and that these people share cultural characteristics that explain their social, economic, and political power. Whiteness was not created by postwar housing, but its dismantlement was delayed.

Instead the entrenchment of residential segregation through racist mortgage, public works, and urban renewal policies reproduced whiteness. Although many working class white ethnics lost their homes to urban renewal, their racial status advantaged them in other areas of federal housing policy. After government bulldozers destroyed many working class neighborhoods, those displaced moved to increasingly segregated and racially isolated neighborhoods in all white suburbs or central city ghettos. Legal scholar Martha Mahoney asserts that Jewish, Greek, and Italian Americans were made white by their access to white neighborhoods (274). Thomas Guglielmo more subtly argues that not only were Italian Americans “white on arrival,” but their “firm hold on whiteness never loosened over time” despite facing prejudice and discrimination (41). Housing played a role in this, as “Italian Americans mobilized as whites” in order to take advantage of white privilege such as federal mortgage guarantees (Jennifer Guglielmo 12). As a result the racial assignment (by society) and the racial identity (by the person) of the descendants of southern and eastern Europeans were solidly white. These identities and assignments were instantiated in part through their neighborhoods.

Anthropologist Karen Brodkin treats this subject at length for Jewish Americans. Brodkin synthesizes a range of interdisciplinary scholarship along with her family experience as a third-generation Jewish American who moved from a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn to a white Long Island suburb at the age of eight. She places suburbanization and entry into the middle class at the center of the whitening of Jewish Americans, particularly for those in the New
York area. “By the time I was an adolescent, Jews were just as white as the next white person. Until I was eight I was a Jew in a world of Jews” (Brodkin). I am not arguing that Jewish Americans lost their ethnic identity on the path to suburban whiteness, but I do see evidence that the consolidation of whiteness amounted to a form of racial assimilation for some previously inbetween peoples. Tukufu Zuberi in his analysis of the dynamics of the American color line defines assimilation as a “gradual process in which one set of cultural traits and historical genealogies is relinquished and a new set is acquired through participation in dominant mainstream culture” (146). Karen Brodkin’s analysis of the whitening of American Jews emphasizes gender as a cultural trait that organized whiteness on Long Island. Assimilating to whiteness meant assimilating to heteronormative gender roles associated with white bourgeois culture.

In Brodkin’s view these roles were shaped by capitalism while simultaneously binding whiteness and Americanness (24). The economic advantages of home ownership secured suburbanites middle class status, allowing many to act out heteropatriarchal gender roles associated with whiteness. The federal government freed up capital that allowed many recently white families to act of white identities. Like sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Brodkin recognizes the political dimensions of racial formation. This is particularly clear in the area of white suburbanization which was only possible with massive governmental support. Race, class, and gender were interwoven to produce “whiteness as a political identity and as a stable and powerful system of oppressive economic and political practices that are sustained by opposition to all manner of nonwhiteness (Brodkin 23). Jewish Americans leaving urban neighborhoods increasingly populated by people of color were integrated into pan-ethnic white neighborhoods in the suburbs which were defined by difference to the city.

Whiteness was being reconstructed in these suburban subdivisions. Religious and ethnic
identities were losing prominence, but not disappearing, as racial identities became dominant (John Powell in Race 3; Lipsitz, 7). The connection of these identities to spaces and physical structures gave them an unfortunate permanence. Philip Rubio asserts that although whiteness originated in the colonial period, “[the white race] was reinvented with the post-World War II suburb” (115). This reinvention involved privileges in housing and jobs extended to white suburbanites along with a narrative of white people as refugees in their own country fleeing the dangers of the city, ranging from crime to potential nuclear strikes. Perhaps this is part of what James Baldwin had in mind when he repeated “White is a metaphor for safety” (qtd. in White 179). Today white people’s discussion of suburban living is often a discourse about safety in which space that is deemed safe is space that is racialized as white. Baldwin furthered this point by arguing, in the words of E. Frances White that “whiteness was about a false claim on innocence that depended on the demonization of blackness” (White 180). This false claim has taken many forms from colonization to slavery and emancipation and continuing through white flight and battles over open housing.

Suburban housing itself often consciously referred to the Euroamerican past. For instance, the houses in Levittown, New York were Cape Cod style cottages modeled on the homes of early seventeenth-century New England Puritans, including some who dwelt on Long Island sound (Hales online). Some of these homes were later updated to look like colonial farmhouses (Fig. 12). According to art historian Peter Bacon Hales “the Dutch Colonial was all the rage in the later ’50s” (online). This style allowed European Americans, including many from families that had been in the US for a half century or less, to act out an historic identity. Metaphorically, the quarter acre suburban plot was imagined as a modern version of fifty acres of farm land and the key to white republican citizenship. (Rubio 116). For previously inbetween

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17 At the end of the time period under discussion ethnic identities began a resurgence that gained strength in the 1970s. Interrogating the relationship between these resurgent ethnic identities and whiteness is an important aspect of Matthew Fry Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color.
white ethnics these narratives became a vehicle for racial assimilation by adopting various “historical genealogies” of whiteness.

Euroamericans who opted to fight instead of flee their potential neighbors of color also adopted these genealogies. Arnold Hirsch’s description of anti-integration white violence in Chicago provides several examples. White Catholics in the Englewood neighborhood historicized their possession of the area with stories of immigrant forebears building Visitation Church where there was once only a swamp. Three of the other four Chicago riot sites that Hirsch examined had similar mythologies. Polish Americans in Calumet Park claimed to have moved to an area “still a wood” and replaced it with “beautiful residences.” Czech Americans in Cicero remembered their parents and grandparents finding a “wilderness.” Euroamericans in several areas oddly claimed first resident status (194-195). Like Euroamericans in many other times and places in United States history, productive use of resources and the conquest of nature imbued Englewood’s Catholics with a sense of rightful possession. Connecting with these narratives reinforced the whiteness of the Englewood Catholics. Such narratives naturalized white as American and treated home ownership as a component of a fully white identity.

Similarly, Thomas Sugrue’s analysis of intersections of race, politics, and housing in post-World War II Detroit during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s finds activists using historical genealogies in order to position themselves as white and oppose integration. White Detroiters organized racially exclusive, pan-ethnic homeowners associations to fight public housing and racial integration. These groups presented their goal of all-white neighborhoods as consistent with traditional American values. The names of the “civic,” “protective,” and “improvement” associations connected the American dream of home ownership with independence and rootedness (“Crabgrass-Roots” 557). Here again whiteness was functioning as a sign of safety. Anti-integration rhetoric in postwar Detroit combined these republicans themes with explicit
appeals to patriotism. Racist white citizens portrayed racially segregated housing as a reward for white veterans of World War II and compared the fight against black neighbors with the fight against German, Italian, and Japanese soldiers abroad. The language of rights framed these appeals. Eventually this rhetoric was combined with red baiting, another expression of Americanness, aimed at defeating integrationist politicians and public housing, which it did (Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots” 564-69).

In posters, letters, flyers, and public statements Americanness was equated with whiteness and was deployed in the political arena in opposition to racially integrated neighborhoods (Fig. 11). White people who demonstrated against open housing in Milwaukee similarly conflated whiteness with Americanness in the 1960s (Fig. 14). Euroamericans asserted their whiteness to protect their privileged position in a dual real estate market. What was lost was an opportunity to use the changes in housing that the postwar period required to deemphasize or even dismantle racial identities in favor of broader American identities rooted in values of equality and community.

Sugrue describes the white neighborhoods and their associations as pan-ethnic, including southern and eastern European peoples who may have been legally white on arrival but were socially and economically positioned inbetween whiteness and blackness. Asserting whiteness as Americans was a way to get out from under the prejudice and discrimination that not-yet-white-ethnics faced. Additionally Sugrue describes fear mongering about sexually dangerous black penetration of white neighborhoods as means of asserting whiteness (“Crabgrass-Roots” 561-62). David Roediger approvingly cites James Baldwin's claim that European immigrants decided to be white. Roediger goes on to argue these immigrants “struggled to be recognized as white” and worked to equate whiteness with Americanness as part of this struggle (Towards 185, 189). Although Detroiters who claimed whiteness were unable to prevent African Americans from
moving into their neighborhoods, the power of government and private racism meant that all-white neighborhoods were waiting for them when they decided to leave the city.

In this social environment racial polarization along a black/white binary was pushed by material rewards for whiteness and penalties for blackness. Hence choosing or mobilizing around whiteness meant rejecting blackness. As the twentieth century unfolded Euroamericans of all ethnicities were able to reap the substantial material benefits of white privilege. Writing about Italian Americans Thomas Guglielmo concludes that these advantages encompassed “housing, jobs, schools, politics, and virtually every other meaningful are of life” (43). Often these gains came at the expense of people of color. For many of these people, like the white homeowners in Detroit and Chicago, this relationship was quite clear. The dual housing market privileged white people with access to home ownership and stable property values, while forcing many people of color to overpay for overcrowded housing, a combination which led to undermaintained, blighted neighborhoods. Perhaps this is why embracing Americanization meant rejecting blackness as much as embracing whiteness for many European immigrants (Jacobson 9, Barrett and Roediger 34).

Rejecting blackness in order to choose whiteness was nothing new. The practice of American whiteness has been built on the rejection of blackness, from the origins of whiteness with the enslavement of West Africans, through white supremacies past and present. This follows from the truism that “As a concept, race requires the existence of two or more distinct races” (Zuberi 147). Thus, in the United States being white has meant not being black. Toni Morrison illuminates this process for literature by describing how literary whiteness is based on an unwritten blackness in American literature (269). Ian Haney Lopez details how legal whiteness was constructed as not nonwhite in court cases interpreting the prerequisite of whiteness for naturalization in American immigration law (27-28). Haney Lopez demonstrates
how this construction necessitates the seemingly irrational one drop rule of American blackness by which any African ancestry rendered a person black.

This vision of whiteness required total segregation. In St. Paul, the integrated Rondo neighborhood was racialized as black, because of many African American residents. MO, who always saw himself as white and lived outside, but near, the boundaries of Rondo, perceived the neighborhood as black; JR who grew up in Rondo, however, remembers more white than black folks in the area. The determination of developers like Bill Levitt to keep their developments all white and the vitriol and violence directed at black pioneers and their white allies in white city neighborhoods were premised on a construction of whiteness as completely nonblack. Such a vision of whiteness was reified by postwar suburbanization and ghettoization.

Images of white segregationists from the 1950s and 1960s drive this point home. Asserting that space was white combined with and depended on anti-black vitriol (Fig. 13). The whiteness of the neighborhood could not allow one black neighbor, like the whiteness of Jim Crow often did not allow one drop of black blood. White folks policing the color line of their neighborhoods were equally hostile toward the liberal allies of black pioneers. Father James Groppi supported African American young people of Milwaukee’s south side in their demands for equal treatment, including the right to use urban space that had been racialized as white. Marches organized by Father Groppi and his commandos, as the increasingly militant youth were known, were greeted with hate speech and violence (Meyer 191-96).

The public expressions of these white segregationists provide an insight into the consolidation of whiteness. Counterdemonstrators opposed Father Groppi and his commandos (Fig. 14). They publicly linked whiteness, Americanness, and the belief in God. Shouts of “Back to Africa” and “Open Housing in Africa” (Meyer 191, 193) are further evidence of the conflation of whiteness, Americanness and privilege. Similarly, Jennifer Guglielmo links the
development of a white ethnic identity among Italian Americans to “shared values and grievances of descendants of white immigrants in opposition to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements” (13). Interestingly the anti-black, white supremacist mob also yelled “Polish Power” at the marchers (Meyer 192), demonstrating the persistence of ethnic identities. These yells, similar to invocations of white supremacy and solidarity invoked by Polish-speaking tavern patrons in Chicago during neighborhood integration battles (Hirsch 186), are reminders that constructions of whiteness remained complex and dynamic in the postwar era.

In discussing race and place with my seven interviewees from the Twin Cities, I was struck by the fluidity between ethnicity and race. At the core of my project are questions about whiteness. In most of the conversations interviewees shifted between ethnic and racial descriptions for European Americans. In general, ethnic identifiers were used when commenting on the past, while “white” was used when discussing the present. This shifting nomenclature implies a consolidating whiteness that diminished ethnic identification.

DS and MP are prime instances of this. In discussing her family history, DS described her childhood community in rural Iowa as German. She noted that the church in this community called itself “English,” an artifact, she assumed, of anti-German sentiment during the World Wars. DS also described her husband as Norwegian-American, and noted a strong Scandinavian influence on their lives from this and time spent with Danes during five and half years living in Nigeria where they went months without seeing other white folks. This time in Nigeria was followed by moves to Bemidji, where their African American daughter was adopted, and then to the racially unstable neighborhood in St. Paul. Once the story shifted to these later times DS described areas and people exclusively in racial terms. DS belonged to St. Paul’s Lutheran Church which she described as originally Swedish, but half black and half white when she joined
in 1971.\textsuperscript{18} The juxtaposition of African Americans and European Americans created an assertion of racial identity, done here without malice.

MP is about the same age as DS. Despite growing up in a different environment her descriptions of racial and ethnic identities followed a similar trajectory. She described the ethnic identities and upbringing of both of her parents. Her father was born in northeast Minneapolis in 1919 and spoke Finnish before English. Her mother grew up Swedish. By the time the family was living in Bloomington, though, they “mostly considered themselves American.” This comment demonstrates how white folks view themselves as without race or color, and how whiteness and Americanness overlap. As with DS these identifications come without malice. MP is proud to view herself and her immediate as family as without racial prejudice. I need to keep in mind that—although the construction of all-white suburbs did not “just happen”—it was driven by public and private decisions—the creation of an unconflicted, seemingly natural whiteness did “just happen,” to some folks. People are not inclined to interrogate their good fortune. Many folks did not aggressively assert whiteness, as some of the above may imply, but instead accepted a consolidated, beneficial whiteness.

This does feed my argument that suburbanization consolidated whiteness. For MP’s family the move into an unconflicted whiteness was more about losing ethnicity than about opposing blackness, but of course they lived forty-four blocks south of the racial frontier that TL’s family and others were pushing. Unlike TL’s family, MP’s could leave an area with an ethnic character, Nordeast, and assimilate into a neighborhood that was only perceived as white. TL indicates that his mother, like others on the move in the 1950s, wanted what was best for her family. She felt that she could acculturate to her new neighborhood, and she pushed her children

\textsuperscript{18} In the 1960s the white members of St. Paul Lutheran Church decided to welcome African American members when the Summit-University neighborhood where the church was located began to transition racially. This is an important reminder that many white folks were not threatened by integration. St. Paul merged with Reformation Lutheran in the 1970s to form St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church. The church is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
to do the same. Many of their new neighbors disagreed and left, acting on a sentiment that MP recalls one of her Bloomington neighbors expressing. The move from Nordeast more clearly socially positioned MP’s family as white even though they choose not to express this positioning through bigotry.

African Americans TL and JR also saw race and ethnicity as overlapping, and their stories imply an asserted whiteness by some European American ethnics who were more than willing to use bigotry. For both, neighborhoods which they felt were most racialized as white and least safe for black folks were also ethnically identified: Nordeast in Minneapolis and Frogtown in St. Paul (Fig. 16, 17). Neither saw ethnic and racial identifiers as exclusionary nor did they perceive racial inbetweenness. In fact, JR feels that St. Paul was less open to black folks than Minneapolis, a point that he made by noting how close to Minnehaha Creek some African American households were able to move. He described St. Paul as an “ungodly territorial” place where “poor folks” sorted themselves by race and nationality. This notion parallels David Roediger’s idea, which he borrowed with attribution from W.E.B. DuBois, that whiteness provided a psychological wage that encouraged working class European Americans to assert the primacy of racial identities (Wages). This is most significant in JR’s case, since his experiences began prior to World War II. He perceived ethnicity in the form of Jewish stores and Italian neighborhoods, for instance, but certainly viewed these folks as white. This fits in with the periodization of American racial history that posit the 1920s as the beginning of a consolidated pan-ethnic whiteness (Jacobson 7-8; Roediger, Colored 168). Although I stand reminded, however, not to overstate the role of postwar housing and segregation in forming racial identifications, these observations do feed my argument that European Americans with hybrid identities asserted whiteness by rejecting blackness.

This argument, however, is complicated by SC’s experiences as Jewish teenager in
Cottage Grove in the 1980s. At first glance the alienation and prejudice that SC and her brother experienced counters the notion of a consolidated whiteness. Although SC clearly saw herself as a white kid, this whiteness was neither uniform nor unconflicted. Her difficult experiences in Cottage Grove differ from those of Karen Brodkin whose move to suburbia persuaded her that “Jews were just as white as the next white person.” The much larger Jewish population in the city and suburbs of New York may account for this difference. At a minimum these conflicting examples are a reminder of the variation in experiences across time and space.

On the other hand, the longer SC and I talked the more parallels I saw with the trajectories that I have read about. First, SC did identify herself as white from a young age. For the first three years of her schooling before moving to Cottage Grove she attended the same integrated JJ Hill school as DS’s children. In this context, a school that she described as half white and half black, she clearly identified as white. Second, during her time in Cottage Grove SC feels that she lost some Jewishness. She did not fit in with the Jewish students from St. Paul with whom she attended religious education, and she slowly withdrew from religious participation. As a high school student she had plastic surgery to reduce the size of her nose in an attempt to be less conspicuous. These experiences were painful. They can be seen as moves toward a consolidated whiteness so totalizing that a person would seek to alter themselves physically. As with MP, these moves were not predicated on bigotry. In fact, SC feels that her experiences as a teenager have made her more compassionate toward people facing discrimination or adversity. She has abandoned the conformity of Cottage Grove for more multicultural St. Paul. Of course her maintenance of a Jewish cultural identity does remind me that these processes were uneven and often incomplete. These reminders, in fact, were found in all of my interviews.

While whiteness, and white racism, obviously existed prior to the housing battles and

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19 DS felt that the integration of this school in the late 1970s helped to stabilize the surrounding neighborhood since white children were no longer racially isolated in grade school.
suburbanization of the 1940s and 1950s, the continued segregation of urban America constituted a racial project that entrenched whiteness through the process of racial formation. Sociologists Omi and Winant define racial projects as the building blocks of racial formation and racism. These projects link racially determined distribution of resources and representation of racial dynamics (60, 72). Following World War II housing and the financial benefits of home ownership were linked with vicious anti-black rhetoric, violence, and white flight. Thus the postwar reorganization of American housing was a racist social project.

This social project racialized urban space, and this racialized space shaped the content of American blackness and whiteness. The hierarchies that flow from race are reflexive in that racial inequality is used to explain racial difference and vice versa. For example, from the earliest stages of urbanization the segregation of African Americans in overcrowded urban neighborhoods was a product of the production of race as a category used to divide Americans. Crowding and segregation created a dual housing market that charged black people more money for inferior housing in neighborhoods often not served by city services. These neighborhoods were also redlined, leaving the residents without access to credit to refurbish their homes and without a wide range of potential buyers. The resulting blight in many inner city neighborhoods was then used by many white Americans to explain the racial differences between black people and white people (Roy 104-106).

Postwar housing changes exacerbated inequalities through government facilitated suburbanization and ghettoization. One result was the continuing racialization of space. “In the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition” (Sugrue, Origins 9) and that space defined blackness negatively and whiteness positively. Some white folks from Milwaukee’s south side gave voice to racial content derived from the racialization space by placing signs in their windows opposing Father Groppi and racial integration. A sign reading
“Niggers Don’t Waste Your Time Marching—Fix Up Your Homes and Yards” demonstrates how racial assignment was reflexive, and how white perceptions of racialized spaces ignored structural advantages and disadvantages. Another sign read “Niggers and Clergy! Pray for Forgiveness for Destroying Property” similarly combines reflexive racialization with the property interest in whiteness that many people socially positioned as white were mobilizing to protect (signs from Meyer 194).

Whiteness, in contrast, became associated with the qualities that people prized in suburban neighborhoods—“better schools, living conditions, and affordable housing” (Mahoney 274). As jobs left city centers increasingly dominated by people of color, these suburban areas equated whiteness with “‘employed or employable,’ stability and self-sufficiency” (Mahoney 274). Ian Haney Lopez conceives race as having physical, social, and material dimensions (15). Clearly housing segregation and the racialization of space became part of the material basis for race in this country. Joseph Sciorra, an Italian American anti-racist, relates stories of urban neighborhoods disrupted by “economic disinvestment in the form of redlining and highway construction experienced increased criminality which former Italian American residents blamed on new African American and Puerto Ricans.” While unfortunate, Sciorra feels that this racialized assignment of blame is “not at all surprising” given the distance of political and economic forces that shape everyday life (200-201). The physical distance between black city neighborhoods and white suburbs also helps to explain this. Many of the white, suburban teens with whom I work have very little first hand experience with Minneapolis, a city that is relatively close; despite the racial diversity of Minneapolis as whole, the area is racialized as black for many of them.

These forces shaped the material reality of millions of Americans. With home ownership the basis of financial security for so many middle income Americans and with this resource inequitably distributed based on race, it is not surprising that huge disparities in net worth
continue to separate black and white Americans in the post-civil rights movement era. In 2005 a white household in the United States is worth ten times as much as a black household, on average. This far exceeds differences in income, and can be explained in large part as a product of inherited wealth. In fact, the average white household has has more than twice the home equity as the average black household (National Urban League 5). In her influential law review article “Whiteness as Property” Cheryl Harris argues that “rights in property are contingent on, intertwined with, and conflate with race.” Through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present” (1714). White residential space is an example of Harris’ thesis; it was racialized as white while implying and providing home ownership. The wealth that home ownership represented could be easily passed on to descendants, transferring yesterday’s racist disparities to today.

This powerful economic nexus motivated people to mobilize and to define themselves as white. George Lipsitz terms these advantages and the efforts of white people to retain them the “possessive investment in whiteness” (vii-viii). The possessive investment in whiteness has a “cash value” (vii) that stems from past and present discrimination in housing, education, and employment (7). The insidiousness of racially segmented housing markets lies in how it allows this possessive investment in whiteness to continue without explicit appeals to race. The ignorance of white people regarding the deep involvement of the federal government in the creation of housing inequality allows many to wander through life believing that their good fortune has been entirely earned. Legal scholar Richard Ford demonstrates how racial segregation in metropolitan areas is self perpetuating, even without any racial animus or appeals to nationalisms of color. The creation of higher property values and better governmental services in

37 The notion of whiteness as property was advanced by Albion Tourgée, Homer Plessey’s lawyer, in the late nineteenth century in the Plessey vs. Ferguson. The court accepted this rationale, which Tourgée used to argue to that Plessey, who was very light skinned for an African, was being denied the benefits of being seen as black. The court ruled that Plessey was not entitled the property of whiteness by virtue of having on great-grandparent of African descent. All of this was part of the court’s ruling that Jim Crow segregation was constitutional (Rubio 80).
white areas means that white people have the means and the motive to live in all white areas. Even if this premise is not explicitly based on race, desirable neighborhood characteristics are often more available to white people because of inherited wealth and other white privileges. Given the continued salience of white racism and nationalisms of color along with these material incentives, residential racial segregation is extremely durable. Hence, “racially identified space both creates and perpetuates racial segregation” (Ford 1845). He foregrounds political geography, specifically local governmental units, in perpetuating this discrimination.

Racial segregation in urban areas has indeed been durable, rising in the face of triumphs of the civil rights movement. The rhetoric of equality and justice that flowed from this movement and World War II propaganda were no match for realities on the ground between 1945 through 1970. Even after 1970, when overall segregation began to ease, the physical isolation of many inner city African Americans deepened. These racially isolated populations also were also economically isolated and thus disproportionately poor. Sociologists Massey and Denton have persuasively argued in their book *American Apartheid* that racial segregation “is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well being blacks in the United States” (2). They see residential segregation as the “missing link” in the creation and maintenance of an impoverished black underclass.

Post-World War II suburbanization and ghettoization entrenched separate and unequal urban Americas in ways that continue to structure American life. Historians of whiteness argue that white people of the early nineteenth century were defined as people working at white jobs. In the latter half of the twentieth century as uniform employment segregation ebbed, white people were increasingly defined as people living in white neighborhoods. Notions of class, gender, and Americanness combined with increased racial segregation to consolidate a broad pan-ethnic whiteness in opposition to a construction of blackness read as urban dysfunction. This
consolidated whiteness has been durable and has seamlessly passed wealth across generations, while the dominant political discourse was rejecting overt racism. Any serious attempt to dismantle whiteness and white supremacy will have to untie, or cut, the knot of racialized urban space.
Conclusions

Ironically, some Detroit observers were hopeful in the 1940s. These optimists believed that the black migration could be paired with liberal rhetoric and policies to disrupt neighborhood segregation. Integrated housing would then become a setting for greater interracial understanding that would in turn nurture a civil rights movement. These claims were not crazy; there was some evidence for understanding amongst the racial strife of 1940s Detroit. Government investigators who examined the racial disturbances in the Detroit area in 1942 and 1943 reported that in Hamtramck, a municipality completely surrounded by the city of Detroit, Polish American and African American communities lived well together, until many Poles were stirred up by real estate agents, white hate groups, and second generation Poles fearing job competition with blacks (Rubio 239). In fact, the city-wide 1943 race riots did not affect the few racially integrated areas, and there were more such areas in the 1940s than in previous decades (Sugrue, Origins 55). Of course the open housing movement’s dream of racial harmony was derailed by real estate and job market machinations that were already bedeviling Hamtramck.

These stories are part of a narrative of resistance to segregation and injustice that may be obscured by the broad trends of racialization and racism. Most of the cities I surveyed had an active civil rights community during the entire postwar era. In some instances white neighbors resisted blockbusting or tolerated neighbors of color. While some churches and church officials helped to organize resistance to integration, others, like St. Paul Lutheran near the Rondo neighborhood and Father Groppi in Milwaukee, actively embraced it. Moreover, many people fondly remember more racially diverse communities. George Sanchez chronicles such feelings in Boyle Heights in the Los Angeles area, based on his memories and those of many informants. Similarly, JR, JB, and MO all remember degrees of harmony in St. Paul’s few integrated areas. Although these communities were often destroyed by public works projects, and while they
stand out as exceptions, they do form a usable past for imagining how a more just course could have been and could still be followed.

During the two decades that followed World War II the US lost an opportunity for justice in housing. Americans could have decided to build a more fair and equitable postwar society. A greater investment in public housing could have alleviated the massive crowding of many inner-city areas. This commitment could have included racially and economically integrated public housing built on the fringes of urban areas, and incorporated into middle-class housing developments. Instead of demanding, then encouraging, and then countenancing, discrimination in private developments, federal mortgage programs could have only guaranteed mortgages in racially open neighborhoods. Government could have repudiated notions of racialized space instead of reifying them.

It is quite clear that such a path was at a minimum very unlikely, and most likely would have been politically impossible. Imagining the country walking down it requires us to ignore legions of angry white voters and hordes of violent white mobs. We have to imagine a world where civil rights activists have more political clout that multi-billion dollar industries. We must picture a Congress whose members ignore the easy politics of fear mongering and instead take up the dangerous burden of leadership for an unpopular cause. Noting why these choices were not made reminds us why the path of segregated America was taken and for whom. Perhaps it can serve as a reminder to us today that unlikely and politically difficult choices may be the right ones.

The real estate machinations which entrenched racial segregation and white privilege were driven in large part by governmental policies. These policy decisions belie the notion that the prosperous white noose around declining black inner-cities just happened or was the product of one groups’ better talent or work ethic. Segregated America was chosen.
Housing was the site of one of many interconnected racial projects that reinvented American Whiteness in the years following World War II. Government mortgage programs and public works played key roles in the reinvention of whiteness by supporting segregation and instantiating notions of race. These actions encouraged racial identification and racial discrimination, even among whites of good faith. And they legitimated bigotry among those of bad faith. One result was metropolitan areas deeply divided by race and class. A broader and durable whiteness that associated European Americans with Americanness, safety, and stability was constructed in residential areas. The same processes that entrenched urban segregation also contributed to the the notion I often pick up from my students that this reinvented whiteness is normal and unremarkable.

American whiteness and white privilege were not invented in the postwar suburbs; American blackness and racial disadvantage were not brought to life in the second ghettos that arose following World War II. But their dismantlement was delayed as both race and racism were strengthened. Deconstruction of these identities will prove difficult. Much like the first ghetto and its consequences shaped postwar housing policies, Americans today are living in world shaped by the white suburbanization and the creation of the second ghettos. These factors have further racialized space in ways that leave Americans divided by race and living in metropolitan areas marked by these divisions. If the first ghetto was Frankenstein, the second ghettos loom like Godzilla: larger and much more dangerous.

The combination of this racial project in housing with similar projects in the media helps to explain the view of many white Americans today that their experience is normative. I am referring to a popular discourse about middle-class suburban life that paints it as both naturally white and typical. This discourse ignores the realities that white is a color, that whites are raced, and that whiteness has a history. Postwar construction of housing, infrastructure, and businesses
greatly expanded the size of urban areas. Most white residents of these large, segregated
metropolises not only did not have any black neighbors, but they lived far away from any black
folks. This physical distance combined with a psychological distance stemming from vast
differences between black and white areas in prosperity, housing quality, and commercial
activity. Additionally, overwhelmingly-white media fed white Americans a steady diet of images
that reflected their own experiences to the exclusion of others. These media played a role in
forging the pan-ethnic, consolidated postwar whiteness (Rogin), and it presented this whiteness
as normative.

This construction of normative whiteness was interwoven with the institutionalization of
white privilege. Public and private policies in the postwar era ensured that Americans positioned
as white had access to hundreds of billions of dollars of capital to improve their lives, their
homes, and their neighborhoods. Not only was this capital almost completely unavailable to
Americans positioned outside of whiteness, particularly African Americans, but its allocation
often actively harmed communities of color. The investment of this capital in housing, by far the
most significant financial investment for most working- and middle-class Americans, allowed the
transmittal of wealth across generations, passing white privilege from a generation of official
discrimination into a generation of official tolerance.

Moreover, the creation of housing markets that rewarded white space and penalized black
space also institutionalized racism by confirming the notion that white space was more valuable.
Racial identities and divisions were naturalized through class distinctions and municipal
boundaries. Whiteness’s association with residence in suburban communities and with middle-
class lifestyles made it seem natural and earned. The historical genealogies of whiteness that were
incorporated into housing transformations—white suburbanites as embattled, hardworking
setters and pioneers—reinforced the notion of white privileges as earned in the face of danger.

85
James Baldwin’s twin insights that white is a metaphor for safety and that whiteness is about a false claim on innocence were thus rhetorically transported through the civil rights era (White 179-80). The incorporation of these narratives explains in part the durability of whiteness, and how it has obscured the good fortune and government largess that has supported the white middle class.

But some hope can be gleaned from how whiteness has continued to evolve and from the insight that it will continue to do so, constructed anew by countless words and deeds. White America did attempt to square the circle of massive racial inequality in a country officially commitment to equality of opportunity of all. After 1968 the law, although often ineffective, endorsed open housing and rejected segregation. The result has been the incorporation of a modicum of tolerance into whiteness that allows for mild integration of housing. The incompleteness of this shift is evidence of the massive structural barriers to true equality that were erected by the postwar housing market.

The official disapproval of segregation has slowly created an environment where open bigotry is increasingly unacceptable. In researching this project every book and every interview included open denunciations of racism., although disavowal of white privilege and open bigotry were evident on the internet. Similarly, the Republican Party which gradually aligned itself with white identity politics during the postwar years has recently presented an image of white Americanness as open to limited diversity, to the point of persuading network news officials to allow their crew members of color to be pictured as participants at recent Republican National Conventions. In the last election cycles the party has openly courted black voters. While the party does not include many nonwhites, it openly rejects bigotry. This shift, however, may rely on the conflation of whiteness with Americanness. After simultaneously appealing to both for decades during which the patriotism was mobilized for white privilege, the party’s appeals to
patriotism serve at some level as appeals to whiteness.

Beyond the shifts in black-white dynamics, increased immigration from Asia and Latin America and the identity politics of these groups, along with American Indians, has destabilized the vision of the US racial regime as binary. Many people who are positioned as neither white nor black live in the suburbs today, further undermining segregation and complicating notions of race. These developments may play a role in emerging racial identities of multiraciality and hybridity. The history of spaces that were racialized as red, brown, or yellow and the emerging multiracial and hybrid spaces would all be worthy objects for further study.

So, slim rays of hope do shine through massive walls of division built during the postwar world. This wall of deindustrialized, blighted urban cores and privileged white identities and neighborhoods will be difficult to destroy. A more just and equitable future will require not only breaking down racism in the future will also involve the collective task of deconstructing race.
Appendix A
Images of Race and Space Race and Space

Fig 1. Streetcar rolling down a now disappeared avenue. Young JR on board? Rondo Avenue at Arundel Street, St. Paul, c. 1940.
Fig. 2. Small business on Rondo Avenue, later plowed under by I-94. Booker T. Cafe & Tavern, 381-383 Rondo, St. Paul, 1960.
Fig. 3. This picture was taken from the edge of the current Region’s Hospital complex just north of downtown St. Paul. The hospital replaced a neighborhood where young JB once delivered papers. His house sat where the off-ramp from Interstate 94 was built.

Fig. 4. Whither Rondo Avenue? I-94, looking east from the Grotto Street foot bridge.
Fig. 5. While in the ninth and tenth grades MO was among the diverse student body at Marshall High School. He attended a few years before this picture was taken in 1949.

Fig. 6. Mechanic Arts High School, the furthest right of the three large buildings, served students from various racial and ethnic groups, including JB and JR who graduated a few years before this picture was taken in 1955.
Fig. 7. Little House on the Prairie. This Bloomington house, photographed in 1956, was very near MP’s childhood home. The ranch style connects this house both to the mythology of Euroamerican western expansion and the California craze of the ‘50s.
Racialized space along the Brooklyn Center-Minneapolis Border

Fig. 8. You are now leaving Minneapolis. This picture was taken looking north across 53rd Avenue from Minneapolis toward Brooklyn Center. The fence and the houses are part of a redeveloped neighborhood.

Fig. 9. The border. A side view of the fence which marks the subdivision as a part of Brooklyn Center.
Fig. 10. “The Longest Bridge in the World: between Poland and Africa” via Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis, 1947. This bridge was replaced in the 1990s.
Fig. 11. Whiteness as Americanness. In 1942 this sign was posted directly opposite the Sojourner Truth housing project in Detroit. The project had been designated for African Americans. White Detroiters rioted in opposition. Note the American flags.
Fig. 12. Genealogies of whiteness, times two. This 1990 photo shows a Cape Cod cottage in Levittown, New York remodeled into a larger, two-story Dutch colonial. Besides showing how white mythologies were incorporated into postwar housing, this shows how residents of white spaces were able to add value to their homes.

Fig. 13. Not even one drop. Whiteness as the total absence of blackness. Protests in front of the home an African American in Miami, 1957.
Fig. 14. Disgust with white liberals. Counterdemonstrators in Milwaukee opposed Father James Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council’s marches for open housing in very clear terms in 1967. Note again the conflation of whiteness with Americanness, and here with Godliness, too. The sign, with its quotation from a popular Stevie Wonder song celebrating the romantic appeal of a young man from the “wrong side of the tracks” is heavy with irony, even beyond the misspelling. The teenagers are asserting whiteness and the importance of racial boundaries by quoting a black artist who was singing about his move beyond socially imposed boundaries.
Fig. 15. By the time of this 1941 cartoon from the Detroit Free Press, whiteness was consolidated to include Euroamerican ethnics whose racial status had previously been less sure. Cartoons from the turn of the century often featured European immigrants who were physically distinguished by nationality, as opposed to these cookie-cutter ethnics.
Fig. 16 (above). Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Initials mark areas where interviewees lived in the past and live now. Highways are marked. This map shows the explosive growth of the metropolitan area. Minneapolis and St. Paul were not developed to their municipal boundaries in 1945. Today, the area is developed far beyond these city limits. Area west of downtown St. Paul is featured below.

Fig. 17 (left). St. Paul near downtown, home, at one time or other, to four interviewees. Borders of the old Rondo neighborhood are marked. The Frogtown neighborhood is north of Rondo, on the other side of University Avenue.
Appendix B

Interview Procedures

Interviews ranged in length from forty minutes to more than two hours. I brought the following prepared questions to each of the interviews. No interview followed this script, but I steered each interview through most of the topics represented by the questions below. I developed four different versions of the questions which are listed below. Many questions appear in all four sets.

**Interview questions for people who lived and stayed in a neighborhood that changed (JR, DS).**

A. Please describe your experiences with neighborhood change.

   Where have you lived? For how long?

   How has your neighborhood changed?

   When these changes were happening why did you think they were taking place? Has that view changed?

   Did you view the changes in your neighborhood (or your move to another neighborhood) as part of a larger pattern? How did you perceive this pattern?

   How has your perception of this pattern changed over time?

B. **Evaluation** of neighborhood changes.

   To what degree did you view the changes in your neighborhood as positive or negative for you and your family?

   For the city as a whole?

   What role did race, as perceived by yourself and/or others, play in your impression of neighborhood change?

C. **Personal impact**

   Do you remember when you first became aware of race in your identity and the social identity of others?

   What factors determined race?
What, if any, other identities competed with race?

How did your perception of neighborhoods, yours and others, reflect your perceptions of the racial identities of people living there? How did these perceptions change over time?

What aspects of these changes do you still carry with you?

D. Racialization of Space

What sort of stereotypes of people were tied to race and neighborhood? How did these change over time? To what degree were your views in tune with the community views?

Interview questions for people who moved out of a transitioning neighborhood (JB, MO).

A. Please describe your experiences with neighborhood change.

Where have you lived? For how long?

How has your neighborhood changed?

When these changes were happening why did you think they were taking place? Has that view changed?

Did you view the changes in your neighborhood (or your move to another neighborhood) as part of a larger pattern? How did you perceive this pattern?

How has your perception of this pattern changed over time?

B. Evaluation of neighborhood changes.

To what degree did you view the changes in your neighborhood as positive or negative for you and your family?

For the city as a whole?

What role did race, as perceived by yourself and/or others, play in your impression of neighborhood change?

C. Personal impact
Do you remember when you first became aware of race in your identity and the social identity of others?

What factors determined race?

What, if any, other identities competed with race?

How did your perception of neighborhoods, yours and others, reflect your perceptions of the racial identities of people living there? How did these perceptions change over time?

What aspects of these changes do you still carry with you?

D. Racialization of Space

What sort of stereotypes of people were tied to race and neighborhood? How did these change over time? To what degree were your views in tune with the community views?

**Interview questions for people who were integration pioneers (TL).**

A. Please describe your experiences with neighborhood change.

Where have you lived? For how long?

How has your neighborhood changed?

When these changes were happening why did you think they were taking place? Has that view changed?

Did you view the changes in your neighborhood (or your move to another neighborhood) as part of a larger pattern? How did you perceive this pattern?

How has your perception of this pattern changed over time?

B. Evaluation of neighborhood changes.

To what degree did you view the changes in your neighborhood as positive or negative for you and your family?

For the city as a whole?
What role did race, as perceived by yourself and/or others, play in your impression of neighborhood change?

C. Personal impact

Do you remember when you first became aware of race in your identity and the social identity of others?

What factors determined race?

What, if any, other identities competed with race?

How did your perception of neighborhoods, yours and others, reflect your perceptions of the racial identities of people living there? How did these perceptions change over time?

What aspects of these changes do you still carry with you?

D. Racialization of Space

What sort of stereotypes of people were tied to race and neighborhood? How did these change over time? To what degree were your views in tune with the community views?

Interview questions for people who moved to suburbia (MP, SC).

A. Please describe your experiences with neighborhood change.

Where have you lived? For how long?

How was your new neighborhood different from your previous neighborhoods?

Why did your family move?

Describe your experiences in your new neighborhood.

Did you view the changes in both your new and old neighborhood as part of a pattern as part of a larger pattern? How did you perceive this pattern?

How has your perception of this pattern changed over time?

B. Evaluation of neighborhood changes.
To what degree did you view life in your in the suburbs as positive or negative for you and your family?

For the city as a whole?

What role did race, as perceived by yourself and/or others, play in your impression of suburban life?

C. Personal impact

Do you remember when you first became aware of race in your identity and the social identity of others?

What factors determined race?

What, if any, other identities competed with race?

How did your perception of neighborhoods, yours and others, reflect your perceptions of the racial identities of people living there? How did these perceptions change over time?

What aspects of these changes do you still carry with you?

D. Racialization of Space

What sort of stereotypes of people were tied to race and neighborhood? How did these change over time? To what degree were your views in tune with the community views?
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