

WHAT KIND OF PLACE WILL YOU CALL HOME?



Courtesy of Bernard Kleina

WORDS TO KNOW

pinnacle

political affiliation

racial composition

disparate

Fair Housing Act

THINK BEFORE YOU READ

What defines a good place to live?

Is a single-family home a good fit for everyone?

Should a community have all renters, all owners, or a mix of each? Why?

Cover: Image of a painted mural in Chicago, Illinois.
Courtesy of Bernard Kleina

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Race and housing: the connections between the two run deep in U.S. history. Will the future be different?

Starting in the 1890s, residential segregation and racial separation became part of many White Americans' vision of the good life. It was built right into the landscape. As generations grew up under those conditions, segregation could seem like the way things naturally were and always would be. But it was never natural. It was created purposefully by human decisions and actions.

Civil rights advocates chipped away at the segregated housing system. Activists, lawyers, and everyday people asserted their rights to live where they wanted to and could afford to. The **pinnacle** of their work was the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, known as the **Fair Housing Act**. Its passage reversed a decades-long rise in segregation across the country. Nationally, segregation rates began to fall very gradually after 1968.

A DIFFERENT FUTURE?

What decisions and actions today could create new patterns for housing in America? While housing discrimination has mostly been banned, some Americans still believe that certain racial groups or types of housing "bring down property values" or cause communities to decline. Online, home buyers can find maps of communities listing **racial composition** alongside factors such as average home price, **political affiliation**, and health statistics. Housing patterns continue to create **disparate** outcomes among people of different races. The challenges of the past are still reaching into the present and future.



Right: Woman with baby carriage at a Federal Housing Administration low-income housing project, Holyoke, Massachusetts, 1941. Left: 1949 Lustron home, prefabricated from aluminum. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

WHAT IS YOUR LOCAL STORY?

Every community has a story about housing and race. Many communities hid or overlooked this history for a long time. We hope *Unvarnished* will inspire more research into local community histories across the United States. How did these national movements for and against housing segregation play out locally?

After you have explored the national story and six community spotlights of this project, we invite you to dig deep into your own community's history. How does your community compare? How did discriminatory systems of laws, customs, beliefs, and threats influence your hometown? What movements and legal fights paved the way for people who live there today?

Once you have learned the history, think about the days to come. What is your vision for fair housing in America? What can you do today to work toward it? How could your own city or town reduce segregation and increase access to safe, good-quality housing? What kind of community do you want to live in? By bringing your knowledge of the past to your own local community activities, you have the power to envision new futures.



Poster for children's festival at Queensbridge Housing Project, Long Island City, New York, 1940. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why do you think so many communities preferred not to remember or discuss the local history of housing discrimination? Suggest some ways to make up for that omission in the historical record.
- Many people were directly impacted by unfair housing. How do you think they have shared their stories?
- Pick one of the questions in the last paragraph and provide your own answer.
- How will we know when segregation and discrimination are no longer a problem in the United States? What will it take to achieve that vision?

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