

INTRODUCTION



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

WORDS TO KNOW

residential segregation

tenement

racial disparities

sundown towns

exclusionary practices

THINK BEFORE YOU READ

What does “home” mean to you?

What words come to mind when you think about the community you live in?

Who are your neighbors?

Who aren't your neighbors?

Cover: “The Country Home,” advertisement printed in St. Paul, 1904.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

WHY DO WE LIVE WHERE WE LIVE?

Isn't that a simple question? Everyone needs somewhere to live and there have always been different kinds of homes in America—rural and urban, temporary and long-term, small and large. People have lived in everything from tipis to log cabins to adobes, farmhouses to **tenement** buildings, high-rise apartments to single-family houses, and more. All these different types of housing seem to offer limitless choices.

But are those choices really limitless? We might think people live where they do because they chose to live there or because that's just how things worked out. But when we ask enough questions about how people came to live where they do, we begin to see hidden forces that shape our communities. **Residential segregation**, one of the biggest of those forces, has drawn invisible lines of separation around the places we call home.

Children returning home after school, Chinatown, San Francisco, California, about 1900. Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Kaestner family in front of their 1923 farmhouse in Benton County, Iowa, 2016. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Children play in Ruston yard while Tacoma Smelter Stacks cover the area with arsenic and lead residue, Tacoma, Washington, 1972. Courtesy of the National Archives

Mother and children in the playground,
Ida B. Wells Housing Project, Chicago, Illinois, 1942.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Boy building a model airplane in a
Farm Security Administration labor camp,
Jobstown, Texas, 1942.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Miner's children on porch of their home, Zeigler, Illinois, 1939.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

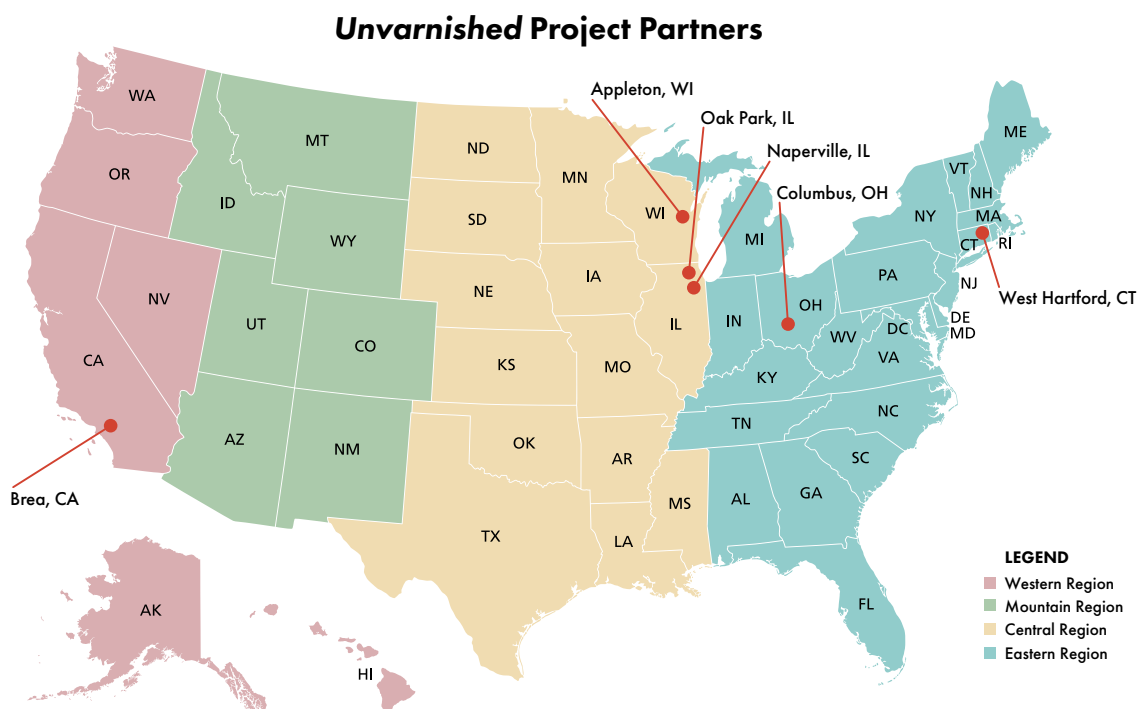
HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

Housing segregation didn't just happen by chance. It was not limited only to the South nor was it the work of a few bad people. Housing segregation is *everywhere*. It is the result of large-scale systems that took shape by the 1890s and intensified during the 20th century. It is the product of intentional choices made by many people—workers, families, neighbors, real estate developers, bankers, and legislators. Using the power of their institutions, these groups created housing systems that separated Americans by race, ethnicity, and class. Those systems gave White Americans certain advantages unavailable to others, creating **racial disparities** that endure into the present, still shaping our lives today. Residential segregation is American history.

SIX COMMUNITY STORIES

The *Unvarnished* project spotlights six communities with histories of racial residential segregation: Appleton, Wisconsin; Brea, California; Columbus, Ohio; Naperville, Illinois; Oak Park, Illinois; and West Hartford, Connecticut. They are typical cities and towns, not too different from thousands of others in the country. Like most places in the Northern and Western United States, all six have histories of segregation. What makes them unique is that each of them has a historical society, museum, or cultural organization committed to exploring this troubling history together as a group and sharing what they learn.

Segregation did not look the same in each of these communities. Some were **sundown towns**. Some demolished entire neighborhoods or pushed out once-thriving communities of color. Some created plans and rules that dictated who could live where. Often, communities find it easier not to discuss this history. It can bring up a painful past. But in this project, all the participating communities are taking the opportunity to ask questions about how their city or town has been shaped by segregation.



HOW WAS YOUR COMMUNITY SHAPED?

There are millions of community stories in the U.S. Your community has a story, too. We invite you to explore the stories of the *Unvarnished* project partners. As you do, consider how **exclusionary practices** and segregation policies might have affected people, neighborhoods, and communities you know.

Once you learn how these systems worked, research and share your own community history. Nearly every community has some stories of exclusion and resistance. To find out about them, you and your class will be asking questions. Did people here always have free choices about where to live? Or were their choices limited by forces that divided and sorted people? Why don't our neighborhoods always reflect the full diversity of our town, city, state, or nation?



Wife and children of Mexican sugar beet worker, Saginaw Farms, Michigan, 1941.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

William and Daisy Myers, the first black residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania, with their children Billie, Stevie, and Lynda, 1957. Courtesy of the Library of Congress



The Lopez children of Trampas, New Mexico, listening to their grandfather's stories, 1943. Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Children of migratory fruit workers in tent home, Berrien County, Michigan, 1940. Courtesy of the Library of Congress



About his photography, Camilo José Vergara says "My work asks basic questions: what was this place in the past, who uses it now, and what are its current prospects? Using insights from a variety of disciplines such as ethnography, history, and archeology, I uncover patterns shaping the nation's poorest and most segregated postindustrial cities." This photograph is titled *Ann and her children going to get free food, Robert Taylor Homes, 4037 S. Federal St., Chicago, 1995*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Camilo José Vergara, [LC-DIG-vrg-00319] <https://guides.loc.gov/vergara-collection-guide>

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Look at some of the images of different kinds of homes in this article. Notice similarities and differences. Why do you think there are so many different kinds of housing in the United States?
- Think about your own community. Who is present? Who seems to be missing? Why do you think the population is the way it is?