

THE COLOR OF LAW

RESIDENTIAL SECURITY MAP

LEGEND

- A FIRST GRADE
- B SECOND GRADE
- C THIRD GRADE
- D FOURTH GRADE
- SPARSELY BUILT UP
(DENSE INDUSTRIAL GRADE)
- INDUSTRIAL & COMMERCIAL
- UNDEVELOPED OR FARMLAND
(NO PROBABLE CHANGE WITHIN 5 YEARS)

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A FORGOTTEN
HISTORY OF HOW OUR
GOVERNMENT
SEGREGATED AMERICA

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2

PUBLIC HOUSING, BLACK GHETTOS

THE PURPOSEFUL USE of public housing by federal and local governments to herd African Americans into urban ghettos had as big an influence as any in the creation of our *de jure* system of segregation.

Most Americans have an image of public housing: groups of high-rise towers with few amenities like playgrounds or parks, packed next to one another in central city neighborhoods, plagued by crime and drugs, and filled with black (or Hispanic) mothers and their children. It's a mostly inaccurate image even today,* but it couldn't be further from the reality of public housing when it began in the mid-twentieth century. At that time public housing was mostly for working- and lower-middle-class white families. It was not heavily

* In New York City an unusually large share of public housing units are in high-rise buildings, but there high-rises are inhabited by people of all races, ethnicities, and social classes. This is not true elsewhere. Most public housing projects consist of garden apartments, low-rise walk-ups, and single-family homes or townhouses. The federal government stopped funding high-rise public housing in the 1970s, and the share of units in high-rises has been steadily declining.

original purpose
 subsidized, and tenants paid the full cost of operations with their rent. Public housing's original purpose was to give shelter not to those too poor to afford it but to those who could afford decent housing but couldn't find it because none was available.

ex:
 In New York City, for example, from World War II to 1955, the housing authority constructed twenty large unsubsidized projects for middle-class families, all of whom paid rent that covered the housing cost. Many projects were attractive low-rise (six-story) developments, with trees, grassy areas, and park benches. In addition to giving priority to veterans, the authority maintained a list of twenty-one disqualifying factors for prospective tenants, including irregular employment history, single-parent family or an out-of-wedlock birth, criminal record, narcotic addiction, mental illness, poorly behaved children, poor housekeeping habits, and lack of sufficient furniture. To ensure that undesirable tenants were not accepted, the housing authority sent agents to inspect the condition in which applicants kept their previous homes (often shared with relatives). Couples had to show a marriage license before their application was accepted. The Boston Housing Authority had similar requirements for its middle-class projects for white families.

I

first version of public housing
 THE FEDERAL government first developed housing for civilians—living quarters on military bases had long been in existence—during World War I, when it built residences for defense workers near naval shipyards and munitions plants. Eighty-three projects in twenty-six states housed 170,000 white workers and their families. African Americans were excluded, even from projects in northern and western industrial centers where they worked in significant numbers. Federal policy sometimes imposed racial segregation where it hadn't previously been established, forcing African Americans into overpopulated slums. When the war ended, the government sold off its existing projects to private real estate firms and canceled those that were not complete. Beginning with the Great Depression of the 1930s and into

General housing shortage during 1930-1950

the early 1950s, working- and middle-class white as well as African American families faced a serious housing shortage. In the Depression only the affluent could afford to purchase homes or rent new apartments, so builders couldn't be induced to provide housing for others. World War II exacerbated the shortage because all construction material was appropriated for military purposes. Working- and lower-middle-class families doubled up with relatives, stayed in apartments that were too small for their growing families, or remained in emergency Quonset huts that had been put up toward the end of the war for returning veterans.

In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal created the nation's first public housing for civilians who were not engaged in defense work. Race determined the program's design. The administration constructed separate projects for African Americans, segregated buildings by race, or excluded African Americans entirely from developments.

Segregation in the administration's housing programs followed a pattern that was established by New Deal construction, employment, and jobs agencies. An early initiative was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), created in 1933 to bring jobs and economic growth to a region whose suffering during the Depression had been unusually severe. In Norris, Tennessee, where the TVA was headquartered, the government developed a model village with 500 comfortable homes, leased to employees and construction workers. The village, though, was open only to whites, while the TVA housed its African American workers in shoddy barracks some distance away. A TVA official explained that the town was being reserved for whites because "Negroes do not fit into the program."

Other New Deal agencies shared this commitment to residential segregation. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established work camps for jobless youth and young adults. These camps were segregated not just in the South but often in the North as well. In New Jersey, for example, Governor Harold Hoffman refused to allow any camps for African American corps members because of what he termed "local resentment." The national CCC director, Robert Fechner, implemented a policy never to

No incentive for development for working middle class
WW II made this worse
1st official public housing

Agencies that were segregated

ex

"force colored companies on localities that have openly declared their opposition to them." Initially, local administrators integrated some camps in western and midwestern states, but federal officials ordered racial segregation in these camps, too.

Many state and local governments refused to permit even segregated African American CCC camps within their borders. Federal officials accommodated these demands, locating camps for African Americans on nearby army bases or on national forest or park land. In Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, an African American CCC unit was assigned to work alongside a white one to restore the historic battleground. The white unit was housed near the town itself, but the town's residents objected to having the African American crew living in the vicinity, so the CCC set up a camp for the African American crew some twenty miles away.

II

WHERE HOUSING was not merely the byproduct of a New Deal economic development or jobs program, like the TVA or CCC, but was the direct object of Roosevelt administration reform, segregation was even more rigid. New Deal housing efforts were initially created as a project of the Public Works Administration (PWA), established in 1933 shortly after Roosevelt took office. The PWA's goal was to alleviate a national housing shortage while creating jobs in construction. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, who directed the effort, had been president of the Chicago branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the 1920s and was one of the administration's few liberals on racial matters.

Although most officials intended public housing for middle- and working-class white families, Ickes's efforts resulted in African Americans occupying one-third of the units, an unprecedented government commitment to the housing needs of African Americans. But Ickes did not propose to integrate PWA developments. Of the PWA's forty-seven projects, seventeen were assigned to African Americans. Six others were segregated by building. The rest were for whites only.

original
copy of
PWA
for public
housing

Ickes established a “neighborhood composition rule”: federal housing projects should reflect the previous racial composition of their neighborhoods. Projects in white areas could house only white tenants, those in African American areas could house only African American tenants, and only projects in already-integrated neighborhoods could house both whites and blacks. In Birmingham, Alabama, the PWA built a project restricted to African Americans in a neighborhood that the city had zoned for black residence only. The federal government took a similar approach in Miami, where it agreed to segregate housing for African Americans in areas that the city’s planners had designated exclusively for black residents. A Miami civic leader explained to federal administrators that the sites were chosen to “remove the entire colored population” from places that had been reserved for white occupancy.

Despite its nominal rule of respecting the prior racial composition of neighborhoods—itsself a violation of African Americans’ constitutional rights—the PWA segregated projects even where there was no previous pattern of segregation. At the time, many urban neighborhoods contained both black and white (mostly immigrant) low-income families. The neighborhoods were integrated because workers of both races needed to live close to the downtown factory jobs to which they walked.*

The PWA designated many integrated neighborhoods as either white or black and then used public housing to make the designation come true—by installing whites-only projects in mixed neighborhoods it deemed “white” and blacks-only projects in those it deemed “colored.”

The first PWA project, the Techwood Homes in Atlanta, opened in 1935. It was built on land cleared by demolishing the Flats, a low-income integrated neighborhood adjacent to downtown that had

* West Oakland, California, for example, was integrated—mostly white, but with a small black population—because the Pullman Company hired only African Americans as sleeping car porters. Oakland was the western rail terminus for intercontinental trains; the porters had to live close to the station. For similar reasons, African American baggage handlers in other cities also integrated downtown neighborhoods.

included 1600 families, nearly one-third of whom were African American. The PWA remade the neighborhood with 604 units for white families only. The Techwood project not only created a segregated white community, it also intensified the segregation of African American families who, evicted from their homes, could find new housing only by crowding into other neighborhoods where African Americans were already living. Some families evicted from the Flats settled in a segregated development, also created by the federal government, that later opened on the west side. But because public housing was intended not for poor but for lower-middle-class families, many of those displaced from the Flats had incomes that were insufficient to qualify. Instead, many had to double up with relatives or rent units created when other African American families subdivided their houses. A result of the government program, therefore, was the increased population density that turned the African American neighborhoods into slums.

In 1934, the city of St. Louis proposed to raze the DeSoto-Carr area, a tenement neighborhood on the near north side whose population was split nearly evenly between whites and African Americans. For the cleared site, the city proposed a whites-only low-rise project. When the federal government objected to the city's failure to accommodate African Americans, St. Louis agreed to a blacks-only project as well. In the end, St. Louis built a segregated development for African Americans in the DeSoto-Carr area, while it demolished another previously integrated neighborhood south of downtown to build a separate project for whites.

Across the Northeast and the Midwest, the PWA imposed segregation on integrated communities. In Cleveland, for example, the Central neighborhood had been a packed but racially mixed tenement community, housing African Americans along with Italian and Eastern European immigrants. Langston Hughes, the African American poet, playwright, and novelist, recounts in his autobiography that when he attended Central High School in the late 1910s, he dated a Jewish girl and his best friend was Polish. Over the next fifteen years, white families began to leave the Central neighborhood, and African Americans arrived. Yet many whites remained.

Despite the neighborhood's biracial history, the PWA constructed two segregated projects, one for African Americans (the Outhwaite Homes) and one for whites (the Cedar-Central apartments). Although there previously had been ethnic and racial clusters in the neighborhood, the PWA solidified its racial segregation. The PWA also built a third Cleveland project, Lakeview Terrace, developed, as its name suggests, in a more scenic location; it was exclusively for whites. Like many other PWA projects for white families—but rarely like those for African Americans—Lakeview Terrace included a community center, playgrounds, and plentiful green space, and it was decorated with murals.

PWA projects also concentrated African Americans in low-income neighborhoods in Detroit, Indianapolis, Toledo, and New York where, for example, the PWA created two segregated projects: the Williamsburg Homes in a white neighborhood was for whites, and the Harlem River Houses in a black neighborhood was for African Americans. Of the twenty-six projects built in the Northeast and Midwest, sixteen were reserved for whites, eight for African Americans, and two were internally segregated.

In 1937, Congress ended the PWA program of direct federal construction of public housing and required localities wanting such projects to establish their own agencies that could then build housing with federal subsidies provided by the newly created U.S. Housing Authority (USHA). The authority continued the policy of claiming to respect existing neighborhood racial characteristics while in practice creating new racially homogenous communities. The USHA manual warned that it was undesirable to have projects for white families "in areas now occupied by Negroes" and added: "The aim of the [local housing] authority should be the preservation rather than the disruption of community social structures which best fit the desires of the groups concerned." The manual stated that projects in previously integrated areas should be open to mixed occupancy, but this standard, like that of the PWA, was rarely honored.

The first USHA-funded projects were built in Austin, Texas, largely because of aggressive promotion by its congressman, Lyndon Johnson. Segregated projects were constructed for African Americans

in East Austin's black neighborhood and for whites on the Westside. As elsewhere, the projects were used to create a more rigid segregation than had previously existed. Austin's city planners had recently developed a proposal that included shifting African Americans who were scattered throughout the city to a single Eastside ghetto; the public housing plan advanced this scheme.

Rosewood Courts, Austin's Eastside project for African Americans, was built on land obtained by condemning Emancipation Park, the site of an annual festival to commemorate the abolition of slavery. The park had been privately owned by a neighborhood association, the Travis County Emancipation Organization, and residents protested the condemnation of this community institution in which they took great pride. But their objections had no effect, despite the availability of other vacant land.

Certainly, many urban areas already had distinct African American neighborhoods when the PWA or USHA came on the scene; federal agencies cannot be charged with sole responsibility for segregation. But they reinforced it. In Chicago, for example, a substantial African American population in segregated neighborhoods predated the Depression. The PWA constructed four projects in that city. Two, the Julia C. Lathrop and Trumbull Park Homes for white families, were in previously all-white communities. African American families were assigned to the Ida B. Wells Homes in an African American neighborhood. The Jane Addams Houses, in a mostly white area that had some African Americans, was called "integrated": the PWA gave about 3 percent of the Jane Addams units to African Americans but segregated them in a designated section within the project.

It would be going too far to suggest that cities like these would have evolved into integrated metropolises were it not for New Deal public housing. But it is also the case that the federal government's housing rules pushed these cities into a more rigid segregation than otherwise would have existed. The biracial character of many neighborhoods presented opportunities for different futures than the segregated ones that now seem so unexceptional. Yet those opportunities were never seized.

III

As THE nation prepared for war in 1940, Congress adopted the Lanham Act to finance housing for workers in defense industries. Lanham Act projects played a particularly important role in segregating urban areas—like Frank Stevenson's Richmond—where few African Americans had previously lived. In some cities, the government provided war housing only for whites, leaving African Americans in congested slums and restricting their access to jobs. In other cities, like Richmond, war housing was created for African American workers as well, but it was segregated. By the war's end, the Lanham Act had combined with PWA and USHA programs to create or solidify residential racial segregation in every metropolitan area they had touched. war

When construction of civilian public housing resumed, it continued to promote segregation. Local governments, with federal support, were responsible for its racial character. Segregation violated constitutional rights whether it was federal, state, or local government that insisted upon it. The examples that follow—from the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific Coast—reflect a racial design that prevailed throughout the country during the war and its aftermath.

In 1941, Boston began building the West Broadway project, designated for white middle-class occupancy only. It remained almost entirely white, with only a few token African Americans, until a legal complaint by civil rights groups in 1962 forced the city to cease excluding qualified African American applicants. Another Boston project from the 1940s, Mission Hill, had two sections: Mission Hill itself and across the street, the Mission Hill Extension. In 1962, 1,024 families, not one of them African American, lived in Mission Hill. At the Mission Hill Extension, 500 of 580 families were African American. Five years later, after Boston agreed to desegregate the developments, Mission Hill was still 97 percent white while the Mission Hill Extension had increased to 98 percent African American. One observer reported, "In the rental office there are two windows, one for Mission Hill and one for the Extension, and except for the absence of two signs saying

'white' and 'colored' it might be Birmingham, Alabama. There is literally a line of whites and a line of Negroes paying their rent."

Cambridge, home of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also required segregation in its housing projects. In 1935, the Cambridge Housing Authority, in cooperation with the PWA, demolished a low-income tenement neighborhood that had been integrated, mostly by African Americans and European immigrants. There the authority built Newtowne Court, restricted to white tenants. Later, in 1940, local and federal agencies again worked together to establish Washington Elms, an adjoining segregated project for African Americans.

In Detroit, a substantial population of African Americans had arrived during World War I seeking jobs in munitions plants; most lived in racially separate neighborhoods. Shortly before the United States entered World War II in 1941, the government commissioned a bomber plant in Willow Run, a previously undeveloped suburban area with no preexisting racial housing arrangement. Nonetheless, when the government built a new community for the workers, its policy was that only whites could live there.

At the time, the Federal Works Agency (FWA) had also been given responsibility for constructing temporary housing for war workers. Clark Foreman, its director, proposed a Detroit development, the Sojourner Truth Homes, for African Americans. The project was in the district of Democratic Congressman Rudolph Tenerowicz, who persuaded his colleagues that funding for the agency should be cut off unless Foreman was fired and the Sojourner Truth units were assigned only to whites.

The director of the Federal Housing Administration supported Tenerowicz, stating that the presence of African Americans in the area would threaten property values of nearby residents. Foreman was forced to resign. The Federal Works Agency then proposed a different project for African Americans on a plot that the Detroit Housing Commission recommended, in an industrial area deemed unsuitable for whites. It soon became apparent that this site, too, would provoke protests because it was not far enough away from a white neighborhood. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt protested to the president. The

FWA again reversed course and assigned African Americans to the Sojourner Truth project. Whites in the neighborhood rioted, leading to one hundred arrests (all but three were African Americans) and thirty-eight hospitalizations (all but five were African Americans).

Following the war, Detroit's politicians mobilized white voters by stirring up fear of integration in public housing. Mayor Edward Jeffries's successful 1945 reelection campaign warned that projects with African Americans could be located in white neighborhoods if his opponent, Dick Frankenstein, won. Jeffries's literature proclaimed, "Mayor Jeffries Is Against Mixed Housing." One leaflet, distributed in white neighborhoods but pretending to be addressed to African Americans, suggested that a vote for Frankenstein would bring black families to white communities. It read:

NEGROES CAN LIVE ANYWHERE
WITH FRANKENSTEIN MAYOR.

NEGROES — DO YOUR DUTY NOV. 6.

By the late 1940s, as white families increasingly found shelter in the private market, more African American than white families remained dependent on public housing. Projects built for whites ran the danger of having vacant units that only African Americans would want to fill. In 1948 and 1949, the Detroit City Council held hearings on twelve proposed projects, seven of which were to be situated in outlying (predominantly white) areas. If approved, they would have set Detroit on a hard-to-reverse trajectory of residential integration. But Jeffries's successor, Albert Cobo, who had also campaigned against "Negro invasions" in public housing, vetoed eight of the twelve, including all seven in the white neighborhoods. Only projects in predominantly African American areas were approved, further solidifying the city's segregation.

In northern California, Richmond was not the only community in which the government created segregation. The San Francisco Housing Authority, in 1942, constructed a massive development to house 14,000 workers and their families at the Hunters Point Naval

Shipyard and began to assign apartments on a nondiscriminatory first-come, first-served basis. The navy objected, insisting that integration would cause racial conflict among workers and interfere with ship repair. Local officials bowed to the navy's demand and moved African American tenants to separate sections.

Because discrimination by landlords left African American migrant war workers facing a greater housing shortage than whites, the authority's policy resulted in many vacant units in the white sections while black war workers' housing needs went unmet. The San Francisco Housing Authority attempted to recruit white tenants by placing advertisements in light-rail commuter cars, despite the long waiting lists of African Americans for apartments. This combination of vacant white units and waiting lists for black units increasingly characterized public housing nationwide.

San Francisco created five other projects during the war years, all segregated. Four were for whites only and were in white neighborhoods—Holly Courts, Potrero Terrace, Sunnyside, and Valencia Gardens. The fifth, Westside Courts in the Western Addition, was exclusively for African Americans.

The Western Addition had been a mixed community, including a large Japanese American population. But when the federal government relocated Japanese-origin families to internment camps, their residences were vacated, and African Americans were able to rent them, making this one of the few San Francisco neighborhoods where African Americans could find housing. By placing a segregated project in this integrated area, the housing authority propelled its transition to almost all-black. The authority seemed to follow a principle that if a neighborhood had even a few African American residents, it should become an African American neighborhood.

In 1942, the San Francisco authority announced its resolve to maintain segregation by unanimously adopting a resolution: "In the selection of tenants . . . [we shall] not insofar as possible enforce the commingling of races, but shall insofar as possible maintain and preserve the same racial composition which exists in the neighborhood where a project is located." One commissioner resigned in protest of the policy (which replicated the neighborhood composition

rule that Harold Ickes had adopted). Responding to protests by civil rights groups and African American residents, the authority said it would cease discriminating, but by 1944 only five white families resided in the Westside Courts' 136 units, and no African Americans lived in the other developments. A housing authority commissioner explained that in Westside Courts "[w]e deliberately allowed a few white families to go in so as not to establish a purely Negro project." By the end of World War II, over one-third of San Francisco's African Americans, barred from private housing almost everywhere in the city, were residing in segregated public projects either in the Western Addition or in temporary Hunters Point barracks.

The only integrated war project in the Bay Area was one that housed shipyard workers in Marin County, across the Golden Gate Bridge from the city. The project was not integrated purposely; the first buildings were dormitories for single men, and the shipyard's rapid expansion left no time to separate the races. As workers flooded in, officials could barely keep up, just handing out blankets and pillows and assigning rooms that were available. Perhaps to their surprise, the officials found that integration presented few problems among the workers, so the biracial character of the project was maintained when workers' families arrived. After a few years, however, private housing in the area became available to whites, and the Marin project, too, became predominantly African American.

The waffling of San Francisco's elected leaders and housing administrators about whether to segregate public projects, like similar waffling in Boston and elsewhere, makes sense only if these officials knew that the segregation they imposed was wrong, if not unconstitutional. In 1949 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution requiring "nonsegregation" for future housing projects and for filling vacancies on a nondiscriminatory basis. But the city's housing authority voted to reject the new policy, and as a result, all public housing construction was suspended. A compromise was eventually reached—the housing authority agreed not to discriminate in future projects, while maintaining its segregation policy in those already in existence. When the authority proceeded in 1952 to build one of its already-planned projects for whites only, the NAACP took it to court.

The case went to trial in 1953. The housing authority's chairman testified that the agency's intent was to "localize occupancy of Negroes" in the Western Addition and ensure that no African Americans would reside in projects inhabited by whites. The authority's executive secretary then made this concession: although projects in white neighborhoods would remain all white, the authority would admit more white applicants to its nearly all-black Westside Courts project and to Hunters Point (where black and white tenants remained segregated by building). It was a meaningless concession because whites were unlikely to apply to reside in Westside Courts now that they had rapidly increasing opportunities to move to the suburbs. Only a decision to assign African Americans to the all-white projects would have promoted integration, but such a proposal was not on offer by the authority. Temporary war units at Hunters Point still housed African Americans twenty-five years after the war ended. Although most whites had left Hunters Point by then, few African Americans could find homes or apartments elsewhere in the city or its environs.

The judge's decision was an NAACP victory: he ruled that the authority's policy violated the Fourteenth Amendment. A California appeals court upheld the finding, instructing San Francisco to abandon segregation and assign black families to projects outside the Western Addition. With contempt for the spirit of the court order, the authority established three new public housing projects in other areas that by then had few white residents, ensuring that segregation in these neighborhoods would be reinforced. Moreover, the California decision was not widely imitated. Nationwide, segregation in public housing remained the rule.

IV

HARRY TRUMAN became president upon Roosevelt's death in 1945. By the time he was elected in his own right in 1948, the lack of civilian housing had reached a crisis. The millions of returning World War II veterans and their baby boom families needed shelter, and there was a severe shortage. In 1949, Truman proposed

a new public housing effort. Conservative Republicans had long opposed any government involvement in the private housing market; they had supported the Lanham Act as a war measure only because it contained a commitment that all federal housing for war workers would be demolished or taken over by localities after hostilities ceased. To defeat Truman's bill, they attempted to saddle the legislation with an amendment prohibiting segregation and racial discrimination in public housing. The conservatives knew that if such an amendment were adopted, southern Democrats would kill the legislation. Without the amendment, the southerners would support public housing as they had other progressive economic legislation throughout the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, provided the bills did not challenge segregation. Many southern Democrats particularly wanted public housing for white constituents in their own districts and states.

Liberals, led by Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey and Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, had to choose between enacting a segregated public housing program or no program at all. On the Senate floor, Douglas proclaimed: "I should like to point out to my Negro friends what a large amount of housing they will get under this act. . . . I am ready to appeal to history and to time that it is in the best interests of the Negro race that we carry through the housing program as planned rather than put in the bill an amendment which will inevitably defeat it." The Senate and House rejected the proposed integration amendments, and the 1949 Housing Act was adopted, permitting local authorities to continue to design separate public housing projects for blacks and whites or to segregate blacks and whites within projects.

Whether such segregation was in anyone's best interests is doubtful. True, without the public housing, tens of thousands of African Americans would have had to remain in tenements that were out of compliance with the most minimal municipal building and health codes. But with the segregated projects, African Americans became more removed from mainstream society than ever, packed into high-rise ghettos where community life was impossible, where access to jobs and social services was more

difficult, and where supervision of adolescents and even a semblance of community policing was impractical.

The NAACP, for one, was unwilling to sacrifice integration for more housing and supported the 1949 integration amendment, despite its cynical sponsorship. So did a few congressional radicals, led by Vito Marcantonio of New York, who argued on the House floor that "you have no right to use housing against civil rights. . . . Housing is advanced in the interest of the general welfare and in the interest of strength[en]ing democracy. When you separate civil rights from housing you weaken that general welfare."

In the wake of Congress's repudiation of integration, government administrators reiterated a commitment to segregation, insisting that they could not impose by regulation what Congress specifically rejected. The director of the federal Division of Slum Clearance justified the use of redevelopment funds to demolish black neighborhoods and replace them with housing for whites, saying "it does not appear reasonable to assume that . . . we can impose an anti-segregation requirement . . . in light of the Congressional intention as evidenced by its vote on [the amendment]."

With funds from the 1949 act, massive segregated high-rise projects were constructed nationwide, including the Robert Taylor and Cabrini Green Homes in Chicago, Rosen Homes and Schuylkill Falls in Philadelphia, Van Dyke Houses in New York City, and the Pruitt-Igoe towers in St. Louis. Although public housing was rapidly becoming a program exclusively for African Americans, working-class whites were accommodated in places where they still needed housing. The Igoe towers, for example, were initially reserved for whites only, while Pruitt was for African Americans. Black families were accepted in Igoe only when whites could no longer be found to fill vacancies.

In about a dozen states (among them California, Iowa, Minnesota, Virginia, and Wisconsin), the few suburban officials who may have wanted integrated developments were prevented by state constitutional amendments, adopted in the 1950s, that required a local referendum before building a low-income family public housing project. Middle-class white communities then systematically vetoed

public housing proposals. A lower federal court found such referenda requirements unconstitutional because their racial motivation was so obvious—referenda were not required, for example, for low-income senior citizen housing. But in 1971 the Supreme Court ruled otherwise, upholding the referendum provisions on the grounds that they preserved democratic decision making.

In 1952, its last year in office, the Truman administration had adopted a new “racial equity formula” that required local housing authorities that practiced segregation to build separate projects to house low-income black families in proportion to their need, an attempt to address a pervasive situation in which large numbers of white-designated units remained vacant while African Americans stayed impatiently on overflowing waiting lists.

Dwight D. Eisenhower succeeded Truman as president in 1953, becoming the first Republican to hold the office in twenty years. A political realignment, with Republicans becoming more conservative than northern Democrats on matters of racial equality, was under way. Soon the new administration began to reverse the few halting steps toward nondiscrimination that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had taken or considered. Following the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision invalidating “separate but equal” public education, Berchmans Fitzpatrick, general counsel of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, stated that the decision did not apply to housing. In 1955, President Eisenhower’s housing administrator told a congressional committee that the government should not “move too precipitously” to eliminate racial segregation from federal programs. The administration formally abolished a policy (it had never been enforced) that African Americans and whites receive public housing of equal quality. It also ended even nominal adherence to requirements that local housing authorities give priority to the neediest applicants, regardless of race, and that the net supply of housing available to African Americans not be reduced by demolition projects.

In the 1950s some housing authorities built scatter-site rather than concentrated units, having recognized that high-rise ghettos for the poor aggravated residents’ desperation and generated more crime. They also hoped that scattered units would provoke less opposition

from whites. In the mid-1970s, the federal government began to recommend that cities use their public housing funds this way. Yet most cities, Chicago and Philadelphia being extreme examples, continued to situate public housing in predominantly low-income African American neighborhoods. A few municipalities did begin to use funds for scatter-site projects, but these were typically cities with small low-income African American populations.

Public housing authorities not only continued to choose segregated sites for new developments but made efforts to segregate existing projects where integration might have been tolerated. In 1960, for example, the Housing Authority of Savannah evicted all white families from its integrated Francis Bartow project, creating an all-black complex. The authority justified its policy by observing that with national (and local) housing shortages abating, whites could easily find homes elsewhere and African Americans needed the public projects more.

In 1984, investigative reporters from the *Dallas Morning News* visited federally funded developments in forty-seven metropolitan areas. The reporters found that the nation's nearly ten million public housing tenants were almost always segregated by race and that every predominantly white-occupied project had facilities, amenities, services, and maintenance that were superior to what was found in predominantly black-occupied projects.

V

BY THE 1960's, when few white families were still living in urban public housing, civil rights groups had little remaining reason to challenge the discriminatory assignment of tenants. Instead, their focus shifted to opposing the placement of what had become predominantly African American projects in already-segregated neighborhoods, increasing residents' racial isolation.

In 1976 the Supreme Court adopted lower court findings that the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), with the complicity of federal housing agencies, had unconstitutionally selected sites to

maintain the city's segregated landscape. Although the authority had suggested tracts that would integrate white neighborhoods, each project was subject to veto by the alderman in whose ward it was proposed. In his ruling, the district judge who originally heard the case wrote, "No criterion, other than race, can plausibly explain the veto of over 99½% of the housing units located on the White sites which were originally selected on the basis of CHA's expert judgment and at the same time the rejection of only 10% or so of the units on Negro sites."

In the years leading up to the final ruling, the City of Chicago had blocked efforts by the CHA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to comply with consent decrees and lower court decisions. In 1971, for example, CHA officials identified land for new projects that included some predominantly white areas. Unlike the high-rises the agency had built to concentrate public housing in a black ghetto, these proposals were for low-rise, scatter-site housing. But they still would have had African American tenants. Mayor Richard J. Daley rejected the proposal, saying that public housing should not go where it was not "accepted."

In defending HUD before the Supreme Court, President Gerald Ford's solicitor general, Robert Bork, expressed the government's opposition to placing public housing in white areas: "There will be an enormous practical impact on innocent communities who have to bear the burden of the housing, who will have to house a plaintiff class from Chicago, which they wronged in no way." Thus the federal government described nondiscriminatory housing policy as punishment visited on the innocent.

The Supreme Court rejected Bork's objection, upholding lower court orders that HUD must henceforth construct apartments in predominantly white areas of Chicago and its suburbs. The CHA-HUD response was to cease building public housing altogether. Yet even if the CHA, HUD, and the City of Chicago itself had complied with the Supreme Court's decision and built units in the city's white communities, it mostly would have been too late. The litigation had dragged on for years, during which time most of the vacant land in white neighborhoods that could have been

used for scatter-site housing had been developed. Following the Supreme Court decision, the separation of African American from other families in Chicago increased. As whites in integrated urban neighborhoods departed for the suburbs, the Chicago area's share of African Americans living in all-black areas grew.

Other federal court decisions or settlements—in Baltimore, Dallas, San Francisco, Yonkers, and elsewhere—also recognized that HUD or local governments had created or perpetuated segregation. In Miami, for example, African Americans eligible for public housing were assigned to distinct projects while eligible whites were given vouchers for rentals of private apartments to subsidize their dispersal throughout the community. It was not until 1998 that civil rights groups won a requirement that vouchers be offered to African Americans as well—too late to reverse the city's segregation. In most other cities, court orders and legal settlements were also not sufficient to undo the segregation that federal, state, and local government had created and abetted.

VI

FROM THE beginning, the real estate industry bitterly fought public housing of any kind and had support from Republicans in Congress. Industry lobbyists insisted that socialism in housing was a threat to private enterprise, a difficult argument to make when, from the 1930s to the end of World War II, private enterprise had been unwilling or unable to build dwellings affordable for working- and middle-class families. But once the housing shortage eased, the real estate lobby was successful in restricting public housing to subsidized projects for the poorest families only. New federal and local regulations set forth strict upper-income limits for families in public housing. Beginning in about 1950, many middle-class families, white and black, were forced out under these new rules, although many would have preferred to stay in the low-rise, scatter-site, and well-maintained projects that mostly characterized pre-1949 public dwellings.

This policy change, mostly complete by the late 1960s, ensured that integrated public housing would cease to be possible. It transformed public housing into a warehousing system for the poor. The condition of public projects rapidly deteriorated, partly because housing authority maintenance workers and their families had to leave the buildings where they worked when their wages made them ineligible to live there, and partly because the loss of middle-class rents resulted in inadequate maintenance budgets. The federal government had required public housing to be made available only to families who needed substantial subsidies, while the same government declined to provide sufficient subsidies to make public housing a decent place to live. The loss of middle-class tenants also removed a constituency that had possessed the political strength to insist on adequate funds for their projects' upkeep and amenities. As a result, the condition and then the reputation of public housing collapsed. By 1973 the changeover was mostly complete. President Richard Nixon announced that public housing should not be forced on white communities that didn't want it, and he reported to Congress that many public housing projects were "monstrous, depressing places—rundown, overcrowded, crime-ridden."

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, government housing projects frequently defined the racial character of neighborhoods that endured for many years afterward. Reflecting on public housing in his state, Carey McWilliams, who had been California's housing commissioner in the early years of World War II, later wrote that "the federal government [had] in effect been planting the seeds of Jim Crow practices throughout the region under the guise of 'respecting local attitudes.'" We can only wonder what our urban areas would look like today if, instead of creating segregation where it never, or perhaps barely, existed, federal and local governments had pushed in the opposite direction, using public housing as an example of how integrated living could be successful.