

NJS Presents**The 2018 Paul A. Stellhorn New Jersey History Award Winning Undergraduate Papers****In this Issue:*****“Without The Least Provision”: Black and Desegregationist Resistance to Systemic Racial Discrimination in Private and Public Housing in Trenton, New Jersey, 1938-1965*****By E. Rosie Driscoll****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v5i1.154>**

Most historical scholarship on race and housing in the 20th-century United States examines public housing and private housing separately or focuses on large metropolises. This study seeks to understand the relationship between public and private housing discrimination, segregated residential patterns, and desegregationist advocacy in mid-20th Century Trenton, New Jersey. To do so, it utilizes archived documents of local civil rights organizations, correspondence between activist groups and local public officials, and local newspaper articles along with secondary literature on race and housing. This thesis argues that the introduction of federal public housing programs in the 1930s, intended to increase quality housing access, allowed Trenton's government officials to place black residents in segregated projects, thereby reinforcing existing segregated residential patterns. Simultaneously, financial institutions and realtors infringed upon black Trentonians' agency in the private market through discriminatory lending and realty practices that discouraged integration. City leaders' segregationist attitudes furthered systemic racial discrimination, confining black Trentonians of all socio-economic classes to poor quality, overcrowded housing. Black and segregationist activists resisted segregationist practices by asserting their right to fair representation as taxpayers through letters, community meetings, and public demonstrations. By the 1960s, they gained an ally in Trenton's mayor, but the mass exodus

of white Trentonians in the postwar period prevented integration efforts from coming to full fruition. These findings suggest that racial discrimination in private and public markets coalesced to systemically limit black families' ability to access decent and sufficient housing conditions throughout the country.

In the summer of 1917, the *Trenton Evening Times* reported that Trenton mayor Fredrick Donnelly convened social workers and “representative” black citizens to discuss “the problems raised” by the influx of black Southerners into the capital city. This meeting was organized at the offer of the National League on Urban Conditions.¹ Later known as the National Urban League, the organization was formed in 1911 to assist black southern migrants in finding “suitable employment and housing” in the North.² Covering the event, a white *Trenton Evening Times* journalist described the housing conditions faced by Trenton’s black residents: “It would appear that the men and women had been brought here to meet the demands for more help without the least provision having been made for the housing of most of them; they are scattered all over the city in buildings of the poorest kinds.” The journalist further states that black and white resident would be “better off” if “decent houses” and community establishments were provided for them in a segregated neighborhood. The journalist’s segregationist logic—that black residents would be “better off” amongst themselves—became a common response to desegregationists in the realms of housing, education, and public accommodations. His suggestions for residential segregation were partially indicative of what was to come: Trenton’s residential areas would become largely segregated as its black community grew, but the promise of “decent houses” for African American migrants did not come to fruition.

¹ Unknown Author. *Trenton Evening Times*, July 31, 1917.

² Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of State Historical Commission, 1988), 62.

Black Southerners flocked to Trenton and other Northern cities in the 1910s to enter manufacturing jobs made available by the United States' participation in World War I.³ By 1920, Trenton's black community comprised 2.6 percent of its population.⁴ Trenton's greatest period of population growth, however, was yet to come. A second wave of migration before and during World War II grew the city's black population to 7.5 percent in 1940 and, in 1950, to 11.6 percent.⁵ As Trenton's black population grew in numbers, so did the need for "decent," affordable housing.

The story of Donnelly's meeting raises several questions. What happened as Trenton's black population expanded exponentially in the next few decades? How did residential segregation function in the city of Trenton? What was the role of mayoral offices and other city government bodies and agencies in addressing race and housing? Was "decent housing" ever made available? How did black activists and desegregationists work to undo and resist residential segregation? This paper seeks to answer these questions using a variety of archival sources, largely from the Trentoniana collection housed at the Trenton Free Public Library and from the historical *Trenton Evening Times* database accessible through the New Jersey State Library, also located in Trenton. The Trentoniana collection includes an array of meeting minutes, letters, organizational reports, and paraphernalia of the Trenton Committee for Unity, later known as the Trenton Council on Human Relations, as well as the papers of Mayor Arthur J. Holland, who's Advisory Committee on Human Rights was active during the 1960s.

Historians have compiled a wealth of literature on black community resistance against segregation, but have largely focused on fights for public accommodation or educational

³ Ibid, 45.

⁴ U.S. Census Data, Trenton Census Data on Race 1880-1990, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NJtab.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html>.

⁵ John Cumbler, *A Social History of Economic Decline: Business, Politics, and Work in Trenton*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 149.

segregation, such as on the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The works of those who have studied race and housing were deeply influential to this thesis. This paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship that suggests postwar segregation of whites in suburban settings and minority groups in urban centers was the result of laws and policies which created systemic racial disparities in housing access, thereby proliferating residential segregation. One such work is John Bauman's 1987 book *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*, in which Bauman traces public housing from the earliest government foray into housing through the 1930s New Deal era's Public Works Administration to the 1970s, an era in which he characterized public regard for public housing programs as "federally owned slums."⁶ Bauman argues that this shift occurred due to federal and local government attempts to use public housing programs as a tool with which they could engineer urban renewal and relocate low-income populations outside of city centers and business districts. In Philadelphia, he argues, the local housing authority used public projects as urban renewal projects to revitalize waning business districts by clearing "slums" and relocating displaced residents in locations away from city centers to assuage white Philadelphians' fears of "ghettoization," or, dense black communities in city centers.⁷ While whites gained access to affordable housing in the suburbanization boom, black Philadelphians, largely barred from such housing, turned increasingly to public housing. In Bauman's work, race and class overlap and inform how Philadelphians experienced public housing, but he does not delve deeply into the ways in which the public and private sectors together shaped black Philadelphians' search for homes.

⁶ John Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987).

⁷ Ibid, 150.

Historian Beryl Satter, daughter of a deceased Chicagoan attorney, landlord, and activist, combined a personal interest in the exploration of her father's life with a thoughtful study on race and housing in her work *Family Properties: How the Struggle over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America*, published in 2009.⁸ Satter's work investigates the underexplored phenomena of "contract sales" in 1950s and 1960s Chicago. She argues that, in the context of Federal Housing Authority (FHA) policies that grossly reduced black Americans' abilities to obtain traditional mortgage loans on the basis of race, predatory white contract sellers and investors exploited black Chicagoans' need for housing, made excessive fortunes, and contributed to the proliferation of slum conditions while doing so. Her work not only explores how private sellers exploited black home buyers by selling homes at high interest rates and above market prices, but recounts black community activists' resistance to such practices and to the wealth gained by Chicago civic leaders by investing in such sales. She traces the formation of the Contract Buyers' League, which advocated against these discriminatory contracts and for credit access for black homebuyers. The League faced resistance from Chicago's political establishment, many of whom benefitted from investments in contract selling. Satter ultimately finds that the economic hardships caused by contract selling extracted such wealth from black Chicagoans that their neighborhoods were subject to disrepair or, because of the need to take on tenants to meet high payments, serious overcrowding. Her work expands our understanding of the depth of discrimination black home buyers and city residents faced across the United States.

Kevin Kruse's *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, published in 2013, examined the private housing industry in a different light. He explores the motivation

⁸ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: How The Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America* (New York, NY: Picador Press, 2009).

behind “white flight” from center city Atlanta from the 1940s to 1970s and argues that white southerners’ move to the suburbs was a form of resistance respondent to the gradual integration of public services, schools, and white neighborhoods brokered in part by a political coalition led by the city’s mayor.⁹ Throughout the book, Kruse focuses on how whites maintained racially exclusive communities within the city, how integration broke them down, and how they maintained segregated communities when they entered the suburbs. Kruse lightly touches on the ways in which federal housing policies backed residential segregation, but largely focuses on interpersonal and local structures of racism.

Richard Rothstein’s 2017 work *The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* makes the case that the U.S. government at federal, state, and local levels played a key role in preserving and enabling segregation in housing through both public and private endeavors.¹⁰ Rothstein ties together many previously explored complexities of housing discrimination to compellingly argue that, without the government’s explicit and complicit support for segregation, it would never have been so expansive.

Few monographs and articles have been written on the history of Trenton outside of those discussing its role in the Revolutionary War. One exception is John T. Cumbler’s 1989 work *A Social History of Economic Decline: Business, Politics, and Work in Trenton*, a 20th-century history of labor in the manufacturing-heavy city that includes some commentary on race focused on the 1940s through 1960s. Cumbler saw housing segregation in Trenton both as an economic side effect of its declining tax base and job market and as a product of racism. These economic issues, he argues, put pressure on whites to “protect” their property values and fueled white

⁹ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright Press, 2017).

resistance to black integration.¹¹ However, he does not interrogate white Trentonians' assumptions that black residents would bring down the property values in a white or mixed-race neighborhood. He writes that black Trentonians were confined to specific areas of the city, to their own churches and schools, and would have at least one of their own bars.¹²

I build on these works by examining how racially-motivated federal, state, and city public and private housing policies coalesced with the private housing industry's segregationist practices to structurally limit black Trentonians' options in the housing market. The few options still available were usually segregated and public or exploitative of the limitations placed on black buyers. This thesis argues that the introduction of federal public housing programs in the 1930s, intended to increase quality housing access, allowed Trenton's government officials to place black residents in segregated projects, thereby reinforcing existing segregated residential patterns. Simultaneously, financial institutions and realtors infringed upon black Trentonians' agency in the private market through discriminatory lending and realty practices that discouraged integration. City leaders' segregationist attitudes furthered systemic racial discrimination, confining black Trentonians of all socio-economic classes to poor quality, overcrowded housing or to public units. This structured the housing market to economically benefit white sellers in the private market while limiting black home buyers to properties that would generate less wealth over time, or to rented public housing units that would never generate wealth or ownership. Black and desegregationist activists resisted segregationist and discriminatory practices by asserting their right to fair representation as taxpayers through letters, community meetings, and public

¹¹ John Cumbler, *A Social History of Economic Decline: Business, Politics, and Work in Trenton*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 154.

¹² Cumbler, *A Social History*, 150.

demonstrations. By the 1960s, they gained an ally in Trenton's mayor, but the mass exodus of white Trentonians in the postwar period prevented integration efforts from coming to full fruition.

Unlike many prior works, this study focuses on the combined effects of the public-private housing market. It does not only find that laws and policies contributed to the maintenance and spread of segregation. Rather, it finds that they coalesced with racial discrimination functioning in local lending institutions, county-wide professional realty organization, and individual sales transactions to form a nearly impenetrable barrier to residential racial integration, even beyond the disintegration of legal segregation. Such a barrier to integration allowed for long term residential segregation when Trenton's white families left the city center for its surrounding suburbs. Trenton's story, especially as one of a mid-size manufacturing city, suggests that severely limited access to housing for black Americans was a widespread phenomenon across U.S. communities of all sizes.

Before 1938: How the U.S. Government Entered the Housing Market

Early in the twentieth century, Trenton city officials and citizens joined Americans across the United States calling for an increased housing supply. A 1919 letter to the editor of the *Trenton Evening Times* indicated that the national housing crisis was common knowledge and that Trenton's mayor had stated that the capitol city was 2,000 houses short. "The whole structure of the city," he wrote, "...is affected by those who are not properly housed."¹³ Many black Southerners who had arrived in Trenton during the mid-1910s were likely among the new black New Jerseyans who experienced a worsening of housing conditions during the Great Depression. The war jobs for which they had come to the city waned as the state and country saw rising

¹³ Unknown Author, "Letter to the Editor," *Trenton Evening Times*, October 10, 1919.

unemployment and poverty, resulting in “dilapidated and overcrowded housing at a high cost.”¹⁴ As the country turned to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal to revive its economy, the city’s options for expanding housing offerings and quality to low-income residents grew.

Prior to President Roosevelt’s New Deal package, housing was a private industry.¹⁵ The New Deal introduced small-scale public housing projects as part of the Public Works Administration.¹⁶ Historian John Bauman identifies the private sector’s failure to provide quality low-income housing for workers after the Great Depression as the federal government’s impetus to enter the industry on a larger scale.¹⁷ After the Housing Division of the PWA was created, many housing activists pushed for a permanent federal housing division. In 1937, Congress answered these calls with their passage of the Wagner-Steagall Act.¹⁸ Also known as the 1937 Housing Act, it established the United States Housing Authority, sometimes known as the Public Housing Authority (USHA or PHA), a federal agency empowered to approve and subsidize local housing authorities’ (LHAs) proposed projects.¹⁹ The act was intended to help states build housing “to remedy unsafe and insanitary housing conditions” and create better housing opportunities for low income families—so long as they could afford to pay the subsidized rent costs.²⁰ LHAs could plan public housing projects, apply for federal financing, and were the administrators of such programs. From USHA’s inception, they approved local housing authorities’ proposals for segregated housing projects. Arnold Hirsch writes that they “gave carte blanche” to LHAs, “affirmatively supporting explicit policies of racial separation in the South and accepting its reinforcement

¹⁴ Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey*, 54-58.

¹⁵ Bauman, *Public Housing*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bauman, *Public Housing*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ Housing Act of 1937, Public Law 93-393. US Statutes at Large (1937); Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

elsewhere through tightly controlled site- and tenant-selection practices.”²¹ Some early public housing advocates also argued that the creation of USHA and LHAs was a lost opportunity for the United States to adopt an economically comprehensive central housing policy and were disappointed that, instead, the U.S. created a bifurcated system with different policies dependent on the beneficiary’s economic resources.²²

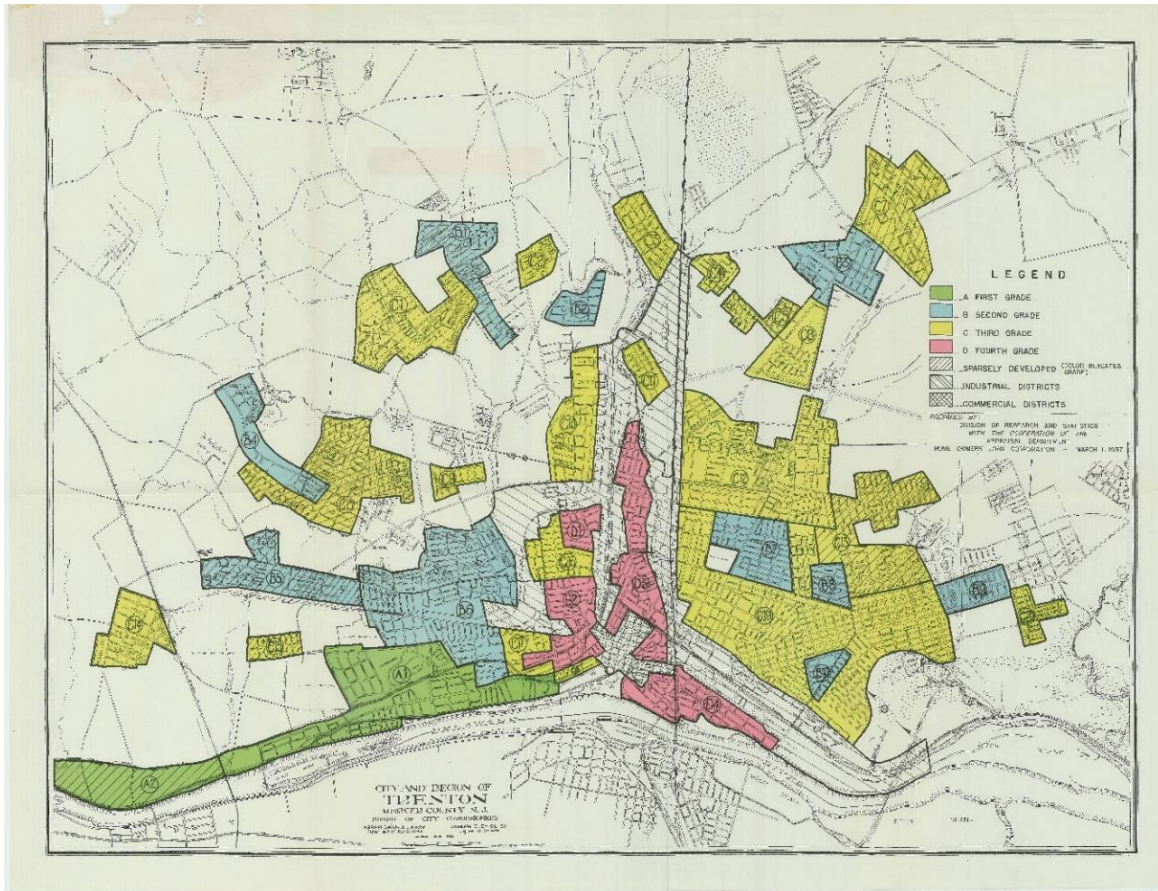
In addition to the USHA, the New Deal included policies that encouraged homeownership through federal backing of private mortgage loans administered through banks on behalf of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC). Federal loan policies, created to promote homeownership as part of the New Deal, were detailed in the FHA’s 1936 *Underwriting Manual*. The manual encouraged white homeowners to insert racially restrictive covenants into the deeds of their home; such covenants restricted ownership of a home from any nonwhite buyers.²³ Loans were made based on the assessed stability of a neighborhood and its home values; “[I]f a neighborhood is to retain stability,” the FHA wrote, “it is necessary that propertied shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes.”²⁴

²¹ Arnold R. Hirsch, “Containment on the Home Front: Race and Federal Housing Policy from the New Deal to the Cold War,” *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 2 (2000), 158.

²² Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²³ Louis Lee Woods II, “Almost ‘No Negro Veteran... Could Get A Loan’: African Americans, the GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917-1960,” *Journal of African American History* 93, no. 3 (2013): 392-417.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 400.



HOLC/FHA Maps (“First Grade” is green; “Fourth Grade” is red). From Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., *Mapping Inequality*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed April 23, 2018,

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/40.2312/-74.7585&opacity=0.8&city=trenton-nj>.

Through a tactic called *redlining*, the HOLC maps, used by some FHA-approved banks, appraised the “grade” of a loan based on the stability of a neighborhood.²⁵ Some studies have found that red areas, which correlate with minority and low-income groups, were avoided by FHA loan officers or awarded higher interest rates before the maps themselves were utilized.²⁶ Residents of red areas were already denied loans at higher rates before the maps were published. FHA policies, however, encouraged white homeowners and lenders to live in all-white neighborhoods in order to continue

²⁵ Amy E. Hillier, “Redlining and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 4 (2003): 395.

²⁶ Hillier, *Redlining*.

to access federally-backed loans, avoid awarding loans to black families, and discourage mixed-race and -class neighborhood formation.²⁷

The passage of the Housing Act of 1937 empowered Trenton's City Council to establish the Trenton Housing Authority (THA) and begin to expand quality low-cost housing. Many poor families in the post-Depression era lived in old, dilapidated housing. The goal of early housing programs were not only ethical, but moral and economic. In addition to providing subsidized housing for families that met application requirements, public housing had a larger goal of engineering a community in which its residents became model citizens. Some housing advocates were displeased that the U.S. had adopted a bifurcated housing assistance program that assisted low-income and middle-income families in separate functions and spheres rather than adopting a class-blind, European-style system that fostered inclusion.²⁸ Instead, new public housing propaganda promoted the image of "slum clearance" and encouraged hopeful residents to see public housing as an equalizing force that allowed poor Americans to partake in the country's freedoms.²⁹ This was proliferated through LHA's advertising of open applications with movies and talks within communities.³⁰ Rents would be subsidized but payment was still required; public housing was not intended for the poorest of the poor, but for working families who had difficulty finding good quality housing at an affordable price. With better housing, Congress hoped, these individuals would live in a cleaner, safer environments.

As public housing became a viable offering for cities across the U.S., Trenton's need for increased housing—especially for black families, already restricted in their options—deepened.

²⁷ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*; Satter, *Family Properties*.

²⁸ Radford, *Modern Housing*.

²⁹ "Negroes Hear Talk about New Housing," Trenton Evening Times, April 05, 1940: 7, accessed October 12, 2016.

³⁰ "Urban Slums: Housing in Our Time – 1930's Educational Film," YouTube video, 20:35, posted by "Tomorrow Always Comes," Aug 31, 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxdEzBTnPgk>

The housing needs of Trenton's black community grew with its population, which rose from 3.2 percent in 1930 to 7.5 percent in 1940, and grew to 11.6 percent by 1950, all whilst the city's total population expanded.³¹ An increased population also presented the opportunity for more powerful and weighty community campaigns and organizations.

Public Housing Comes to Trenton

Following the Housing Act of 1937, the City Commission, referred to at times as the City Council, passed an ordinance establishing the Trenton Housing Authority in April of 1938.³² Trenton Mayor Connor was tasked with appointing members to the five-person board. Two weeks after the passage of the ordinance, "a large delegation of Negro residents" attended a meeting of the city council and asked for "appointment of Hilmar L. Jensen, colored community YMCA secretary."³³ Mayor Connor ultimately chose not to appoint Jensen, and made his final selection in late April. Ultimately, he chose Judge J. Conner French, David L. Kelsey, Peter Pulone, Walter O. Lochner, and Sheriff Herbert W. Bradley.³⁴ The article did not specify whether any of the appointees were men of color, but due to the support that Jensen and no other candidates garnered from Trenton's black community, the THA appointees were likely all white.

The Mayor Donnelly and Lincoln Homes

The THA quickly got to work planning two public housing projects: The Mayor Donnelly and the Lincoln Homes, intended for white and black families respectively.³⁵ Building multiple,

³¹ U.S. Census Data, Trenton Census Data on Race 1880-1990, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NJtab.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html>.

³² Unknown Author, *Trenton Evening Times*, April 11th, 1938.

³³ "Housing Board Will Be Named: Negro Representative is Urged—To Consider Public Ownership" *Trenton Evening Times*, April 27 1938; accessed Sept. 25th, 2017.

³⁴ "Housing Authority Is Named; First Move Is Bid for Cash: Trenton Committee to Select Type of Housing, Extent of Construction and Location of Project; Early Action Contemplated" *Trenton Evening Times*, July 1, 1938.

³⁵ Unknown Author, *Trenton Evening Times*, August 1939.

segregated housing projects was not uncommon during the late 1930s and the 1940s. Cities often built separate housing project for white and black residents, placing white residents' housing in white neighborhoods and black residents' in predominantly black neighborhoods. Often, sites selected by LHAs for black residents were adjacent to unattractive industrial zones or were in some other way less desirable sites on which to live.³⁶ Across the nation, urban communities battled over public housing site selection. Historians have examined stories of white community resistance to public housing projects intended for black residents on the grounds that they were "too close" to white neighborhoods. This happened in Philadelphia, where an early proposed public housing project site for black residents was deemed a threat to the racial composition of a nearby white neighborhood.³⁷ Around the same time, the Philadelphia Housing Authority received complaints when a project proposed for white residents was intended on a site some deemed too close to an integrated neighborhood.³⁸ In Chicago, the Chicago Housing Authority built projects mainly in white neighborhoods and for white residents until their city council intervened in 1950.³⁹ White Trentonians certainly reacted in line with the national trend, reportedly "up in arms" when the first public housing projects proposed included a site for black residents near some of their residences.⁴⁰

However, Trenton's major disputes over site selection instead stemmed from black Trentonians who were actively resisting the THA's intentional segregation of Trenton's black community. In November of 1938, Dr. Leroy Morris of Trenton took a stand against the THA's plans six months into their operations.

³⁶ Rothstein, *Color of Law*.

³⁷ Bauman, *Public Housing*, 46-50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Lawrence J. Vale, *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 200.

⁴⁰ "Lively Hearing Looms on City Housing Plans," *Trenton Evening Times*, November 29, 1938.



Dr. Leroy Morris. Courtesy *Trenton Evening Times*, January 9, 1946.

Dr. Morris lived on Spring Street and practiced medicine in the city after he graduated from Harvard Medical School.⁴¹ He had been born in Virginia just as his parents were, but moved to Trenton with them; the Morris family was present for the 1910 census which revealed that Leroy, born in about 1896 and aged 14, lived on Belvidere Street.⁴² The street's occupants were largely black but it was a mixed race neighborhood.⁴³ He and his parents lived with his father's brother, his wife, and Leroy's paternal grandfather, William Morris, who worked as a cook. By 1930, the family had moved to 88 Spring Street, where he remained for some time, and from where he was interning at a hospital.⁴⁴ Come 1940, Morris still lived on Spring Street and was married to Rhonda R. Morris, a teacher.

The Spring Street community was the longtime home of “a number of notable black Trentonians,” including attorney Robert Queen, who helped found African-American community pillar Shiloh Baptist Church in 1902 and went on to argue and win Trenton's 1944 school segregation case, *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Trenton Board of Education*, before the New Jersey

⁴¹ “Extended Illness Fatal for Doctor: Leading Negro Citizen Dies at Jersey City; Rites Saturday,” *Trenton Evening Times*, January 9, 1946.

⁴² United States Census Bureau, 1910 Trenton, NJ Census Roll, *United States Census Bureau*. Accessed April 16, 2018. Ancestry.com.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ United States Census Bureau, 1930 Trenton, NJ Census Roll, *United States Census Bureau*. Accessed April 16, 2018. Ancestry.com.

Superior Court.⁴⁵ Another notable Spring Street resident was David Dinkins, who became New York City's first African-American mayor.⁴⁶ As a member of Trenton's growing black population and its civic-minded black middle class, Morris organized his community for better access to quality housing for black Trentonians across class lines.

Morris and his supporters were opposed to the site selected for THA's black housing project. Located at Old Rose Street and Holland Avenue in an industrial zone, the disputed site was adjacent to the New Lincoln School.⁴⁷ At the time, the school was the only Junior High open to Trenton's black students.⁴⁸ Black children from all over the city were assigned to attend the New Lincoln School, regardless of where they lived in proximity to it.⁴⁹ The area was a working class neighborhood with a high concentration of black families.⁵⁰ Morris and his fellow protestors took issue with its location, as it did not allow for expansion, and argued that it was not convenient to workers. In addition to its location, the project's plan included less community activity space than the larger site intended for white residents.⁵¹ Morris organized the delivery of petitions protesting the site to the THA, brought together and chaired a 7-member committee, and recruited Trentonians to attend meetings at City Hall. The *Trenton Evening Times* reported that they made "it plain that this undertaking [the public housing project] must be approached with greater regard for public sentiment if it is to enjoy the kind of support necessary for satisfactory fulfillment."⁵²

⁴⁵ Jennifer B. Leynes. *Three Centuries of African-American History in Trenton: A Preliminary Inventory of Historical Sites* (Cranbury, NJ: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. Cultural Resource Consultants, 2011). http://www.trentonhistory.org/THS--Trenton_AA_report-2.pdf

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "More Protests Mark Housing Site Selection: Names Being Checked; Board Plans Meeting This Week," *Trenton Evening Times*, Nov 23, 1938.

⁴⁸ Leynes.

⁴⁹ Laura Wells, *The History Behind Brown v. Board of Education: Schools, Segregation, and the Legacy of the Hedgepeth-Williams Court Case in Trenton, New Jersey on the National Desegregation Movement in Public Schools, 1943-1954*, (Unpublished Undergraduate Honors Thesis, The College of New Jersey, 2011).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Local Housing under Fire," *Trenton Evening Times*, November 30, 1938.

⁵² Ibid.

Unfortunately, the THA appeared to have little regard for public sentiment when that sentiment arose from black Trentonians.

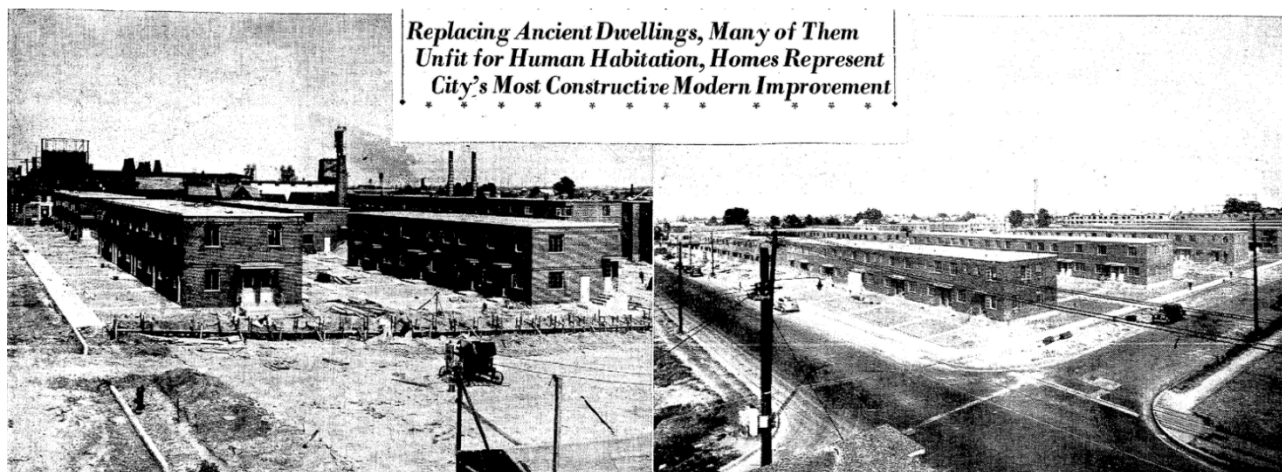
A few days after massive attendance at the City Hall meeting, THA Chairman Herbert Bradley announced that the board would meet to make final decision on protestors' demands.⁵³ Meanwhile, Dr. Morris asked for a delay of 10 days to assess other sites, requesting that the closing signatures from United States Housing Authority be delayed "pending recommendations for an alternative site."⁵⁴ Morris and his fellow protestors were not granted their request. The Executive Director of THA, Samuel Haverstick, announced that the delay was impossible as the THA plans were intertwined with Board of Education plans for an addition to the Lincoln School, and that a delay would "endanger a Public Works Administration grant for the school addition."⁵⁵ Furthermore, the THA and the USHA announced multiple reasons why the site was chosen over others. USHA Administrator Nathan Straus, replying to Dr. Morris' committee's efforts, announced that a "major factor" in site selection "was the need to find sites...that would involve minimum displacement of families, irrespective of race."⁵⁶ With that, Dr. Morris and his fellow community members' efforts to push for better quality housing were defeated and construction began on both the Lincoln and Mayor Donnelly sites.

⁵³ "Housing Grand Signed, Clearing Way for Start: 82,429,000 Allowed: Trenton Board To Meet Tomorrow On Site Protest," *Trenton Evening Times*, December 5, 1938.

⁵⁴ "Negroes Desire Housing Delay: Continued Opposition to Site Selected by Project Authorities," *Trenton Evening Times*, December 9, 1938.

⁵⁵ "Housing Project Delay is Refused: Request Denied to Prevent Any Confusion in Plans," *Trenton Evening Times*, December 11, 1938.

⁵⁶ Unknown Author, *Trenton Evening Times*, January 3, 1939.



The Lincoln Homes (left) and the Donnelly Homes (right) featured in the *Trenton Sunday-Times Advertiser* in August 1940.

Little over a year later, in March of 1940, the THA began to accept application for the newly built housing units with preference given to applicants who had inhabited the construction sites prior to their razing. That August, the *Trenton Evening Times* featured a large spread on the newly constructed projects (see *Fig. 3*). There, the THA presented a more transparent case for why each site was selected.⁵⁷ Imperative, according to former THA treasurer Mr. Lochner, was a low assessed valuation of site properties—so that high-value tax generators wouldn't be removed from the tax rolls—and the THA's ability to find comparable living quarters for former site residents. The Lincoln site was located in a low income neighborhood, which helped reduce the potential negative impact to the city's tax rolls.⁵⁸ This was inevitably due in part to the fact that the neighborhood was home to a high number of nonwhite and working class residents. In New Jersey, black families had been severely economically impacted through the Great Depression; black unemployment in 1932 was “nearly twice that of whites,” and black workers made up a

⁵⁷ “Trenton’s Housing Units Await Influx of Tenants: Replacing Ancient Dwellings, Many of Them Unfit for Human Habitation, Homes Represent City’s Most Constructive Modern Improvement,” *Trenton Evening Times*, August 25th, 1940.

⁵⁸ Wells.

disproportionately high number of relief recipients in New Jersey.⁵⁹ The Lincoln site formerly held 33 families; 17 white and 16 black, with \$80,000 in valuation destroyed. The Donnelly site was the former home of 105 white families and 11 black families, clearly home to a majority white neighborhood.⁶⁰ Nationally during this time period, 89 percent of projects built with USHA loans were built on “slum sites” therefore displaced the residents of those sites; only 11 percent were built on vacant lots.⁶¹

Before anyone moved into either of the new buildings, the Trenton Housing Authority began an outreach campaign to market their new services to Trenton’s black populace. They hosted events at mainstays such as the Community YMCA, which served nonwhite Trentonians, and Shiloh Baptist Church, the city’s primary black church up to present day.⁶² In April of 1940, the THA held one such promotional event at which the short promotional film “Housing in Our Times” was shown. The film, produced by USHA, espoused the merits of public housing and USHA’s victory over slums through public housing’s proliferation. “The United States is the most prosperous nation of modern times,” it begins. “It promises to every citizen equal rights, to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁶³ Throughout its twenty minutes, an equal right to opportunity is posited as justification for the construction of public housing. Public housing was marketed as a tool for the U.S. promotion of equal rights and pursuit of happiness as it provided a basic need—shelter—to those who were so poor as to qualify for available housing. However, nearly all actors in the film were white. Those who were not white are included in the portions of

⁵⁹ Wright, 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Vale, 11.

⁶² “Negroes Hear Talk about New Housing,” *Trenton Evening Times*, April 05, 1940: 7, accessed October 12, 2016; Leynes.

⁶³ “Urban Slums: Housing in Our Time – 1930’s Educational Film,” YouTube video, 20:35, posted by “Tomorrow Always Comes,” Aug 31, 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxdEzBTnPgk>

the film that list the problems of “slums” rather than in the portions that display a positive future for those who obtain better housing conditions through LHAs. Further, public housing was not actually intended for the poorest of the poor. Rather, federal policy was built to accommodate the working poor, whose affordable housing needs were not met by the private market.⁶⁴ In reality, these supposed sites of equalization of opportunity—the Lincoln Homes—practiced segregation, thereby legitimizing the idea that black and white U.S. citizens were inherently different and needed to live in separate spaces. That November, 188 black families would move into the Lincoln Homes.⁶⁵ Notably, after construction was finished on both sites, the Trenton Housing Authority moved their offices to the Mayor Donnelly homes. The THA was previously been located at 235 East Hanover St.⁶⁶ In July of 1940, it was moved to 875 Willow Street, in the Administrative Building of the Mayor Donnelly homes, the white-only housing project.⁶⁷

From the inception of public housing, THA officials treated black Trentonians as second-class citizens. Not only did they intentionally segregate black Trentonians into a separate housing project located in a predominantly black neighborhood, but they refused to alter the project when they received negative public input. They then defended their projects by claiming that site selection occurred “irrespective of race.” Dr. Leroy Morris and his supporters attempted to resist segregation’s institutionalization into the public housing sector but were defeated by public officials who denied wrongdoing and brushed aside detractors rather than listen to their constituents. The THA’s early actions set the stage for a contentious relationship between the THA and black Trentonians for years to come.

⁶⁴ Bauman, *Public Housing*.

⁶⁵ Cumbler, *A Social History*, 149.

⁶⁶ Unknown Author, *Trenton Evening Times: Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser*, March 31, 1940.

⁶⁷ Unknown Author, *Trenton Evening Times*, July 14, 1940.

WWII, the Great Migration's Second Wave, Prospect Village, and the Growth of Trenton's Black Community

During World War II and its aftermath, the second wave of the Great Migration occurred when a large number of black Southerners moved north in search of war industry jobs. Many of them made Trenton their permanent home.⁶⁸ The city's status as a manufacturing city—and its history in steel and ironwork—made it an attractive option for Southern migrants.⁶⁹ In 1940, right before the war broke out, black Trentonians comprised 7.5 percent of the population.⁷⁰ By 1950, the year in which the city's total population peaked, that number had grown to 11.4 percent. By 1960, black Trentonians comprised 18 percent of the city. About 54 percent of black Trentonians owned a home in the early 1950s, and over 70 percent of them had purchased that home between the years of 1941 and 1950.⁷¹ As Trenton's black population grew, the needs for increased access to quality housing grew, and did the community's capacity to organize against racial discrimination.

Historian John Cumbler identifies the 1940s as a decade of growing racial tension, evidenced by the increased policing of the black neighborhoods of Five Points and Coalport.⁷² It was during this period that the national Double Victory campaign ignited, committed to “victory over our enemies at home and victory on the battlefields abroad,” written in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the largest circulation African American newspaper in the country, after the bombing of Pearl

⁶⁸ Trenton Council of Social Agencies, Study of Northeast Trenton: Population, Housing, Economic, Social and Physical Aspects of the Area, April 1958. Folder: Study of Northeast Trenton. Box: TCHR (unnumbered). Trentoniana Collection. Trenton Public Library.

⁶⁹ Cumbler, *A Social History*, 149

⁷⁰ *Ibid*; U.S. Census Data.

⁷¹ “Negro Housing in Trenton,” Trenton Committee on Human Relations, Box: Trenton Council on Human Relations, Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Public Library, 7.

⁷² Cumbler, 155.

Harbor.⁷³ In Trenton, a local civil rights organization, the Trenton Committee for Unity, later known as the Trenton Council for Human Relations (TCU/TCHR) was established in 1944.⁷⁴ Early on, they identified housing as an issue of primary importance.⁷⁵ They described themselves as “a group of interested citizens with the aim to improve relationship “between races, between minority groups and between those of different religious faiths” in the city so that “all may be integrated and function as respected members in a democratic society.”⁷⁶ They worked primarily on desegregation. They offered educational events pertinent to their mission, performed research to support their advocacy efforts, and engaged in community organizing work. They successfully worked alongside other organizations to desegregate Trenton schools by 1946 and, the same year, published a memorandum on the state of housing for black Trentonians.⁷⁷ Their Housing Memorandum made a strong case against segregation by outlining “the housing situation” on local and national levels, pulling quotes from organizations and scholars on issues such as white neighbors’ resistance, racial covenants, and providing many examples of successful integration efforts and outcomes.⁷⁸ The quality of available housing constituted a major concern; by 1940, 63 percent of nonwhite-occupied homes in Trenton were identified as “in need of major repair” by the U.S. Census. Only 23 percent of white-occupied homes were considered as such.⁷⁹

⁷³ Beth Bailey and David Farber, “The ‘Double-V’ Campaign in World War II Hawaii: African Americans, Racial Ideology, and Federal Power,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1993), 817.

⁷⁴ 1945 “Trenton Committee for Unity” Informational Flyer, Trenton Committee for Unity Collection, Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Public Library.; Note: The Trenton Council for Human Relations (TCHR) is not to be confused with the later Advisory Committee for Human Rights, which was organized under and by Mayor Holland’s administration in 1963.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Housing Memorandum, 1-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Housing Memorandum, 2; The 1940 Census was the first to survey the quality of the nation’s housing. See: U.S. Census Bureau, “History: Through the Decades: Index of Questions: 1940,” United States Census Bureau. Web. Accessed April 20 2018.

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1940_housing.html

Some contemporaries suggested that the higher rate of substandard conditions of black-occupied housing were the inevitable result of economic inequity. In a front-page story on the Donnelly and Lincoln Homes, the *Trenton Evening Times* stated that black families “have been condemned to live in dwellings needing major repairs, lacking adequate light and ventilation,” but attributed it to “small incomes.”⁸⁰ Meager incomes may have contributed to some black Trentonians’ housing conditions. Nevertheless, the explanation as to why these poor conditions were so widespread is much more complex and direct. A complex interplay of public and private sector discriminatory practices exacerbated economic inequities to severely limit housing supply



available to black Trentonians and, more broadly, black Americans across the nation. In response to their predicament, black Trentonians and desegregationists in TCU/TCHR and the Trenton NAACP utilized their growing power to fight segregationist and discriminatory practices.

As Trenton’s black community expanded with war workers and their families, the

Prospect Homes in the *Trenton Evening Times*, August 25th, 1940.

⁸⁰ “Trenton’s Housing Unites Await Influx of Tenants: Replacing Ancient Dwellings, Many of Them Unfit for Human Habitation, Homes Represent City’s Most Constructive Modern Improvement,” *Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser* August 25th, 1940; accessed September 25th, 2017.

city added some additional housing for war workers. In December of 1943, THA Chairman J. Connor French announced the groundbreaking of their Prospect Village project.⁸¹

Prospect Village was built solely for black migrant war workers. Notably, there was no project built for white war workers, possibly indicating that they had less difficulty finding affordable housing, or that they were smaller in numbers. “Only persons employed at certified war plants will be eligible,” announced Joseph S. Tysowski, the Director of Tenant Relations for THA as of August 1944, as they presented their call for applications.⁸² The project’s first residents moved into their homes in October 1944. The construction of a war workers’ housing project demonstrates not only the sheer volume of black war worker migrants but their intensified need for adequate housing. As the war came to an end, however, the ways in which racial discrimination influenced housing segregation came to greater light.

Postwar Legal Progress

In the post-WWII period, New Jersey made significant legal headway in formally outlawing racial discrimination. New Jersey was one of the first states to adopt fair employment laws when they passed the NJ Law Against Discrimination in April 1945.⁸³ The NJ LAD prohibited employment discrimination and “marked a watershed” in the history of civil rights legislation.⁸⁴ It established a Division Against Discrimination, housed under the NJ Department of Education, which was tasked with handling employee complaints. In 1949, the law was amended to prohibit discrimination “in places of public accommodation” and, in 1954, was amended to

⁸¹ “Prospect Village,” *Trenton Evening Times*, December 19, 1943; accessed March 15th, 2018.

⁸² “Call for Applications,” *Trenton Evening Times*, August 13, 1944.

⁸³ Leynes.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

prohibit discrimination in public housing.⁸⁵ Outside of legislation, in 1949, a New Jersey Superior Court case set the precedent that it was illegal to restrict black residents to a “separate but equal” housing facility after a Veterans’ Housing Committee in East Orange intentionally segregated veterans’ housing. Despite a legal environment in which legislators and courts made progress against racial discrimination, postwar Trenton continued to see segregationist tactics and rhetoric along with desegregationist resistance. At times, city officials failed to uphold progressive legislation and case law. Here, activist groups stepped in to argue that black Trentonians were being unfairly—and unlawfully—denied their rights as taxpayers and citizens of the city. However, such assertions did little when elected and appointed city officials chose to disregard their complaints and abrogate state law in practice.

Veterans’ Housing

In 1946, the Trenton Housing Authority served as a conduit for the execution of a national project to house the returning veterans of World War II. First, THA built temporary housing, then began on more permanent accommodations for veterans and their families. In order to advise the THA on veterans’ housing, Mayor Duch formed a Veterans’ Housing Committee.⁸⁶ The THA applied to build 125 to 400 units of housing in February of 1946; they announced that over 10 buildings would be built at multiple locations, including Barclay Street, Girard Avenue, and Oakland Street.⁸⁷ By June of 1946, THA had already begun construction when TCU got involved. One June 6th, TCU member Addie Webber stated that they had been “asleep when the selection was made,” but were seriously concerned about the site selection. They believed that some of the

⁸⁵ Clement Alexander Price, *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Joint Project of the New Jersey Historical Society and New Jersey Historical Commission*, (Newark, NJ: New Jersey Historical Society, 1980), 258.

⁸⁶ “Veterans’ Housing Assignments Look as Major Headache,” *Trenton Evening Times*, June 6, 1946; accessed March 13th, 2018.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

buildings' locations were undesirable and would be used to house black veterans. Of particular concern were the housing units on Barclay Street, which "adjoined the city crematory" and was bordered by Pennsylvania Railroad freight yards.⁸⁸ White veterans, they argued, would be placed into "more desirable" Oakland Street location.⁸⁹ In response to such allegations, Mayor Duch stated that the Barclay Street and Girard Avenue sites were the only ones available that "would not cost the city huge sums to get in shape."⁹⁰

The next day "a score of persons," including representatives of the Trenton Committee on Unity, attended the city commission meeting to protest the Barclay Street location, labelling it an "unbelievable slum area." Reverend Charles W. Nelson of St. Monica's Church testified to commissioners that asking anyone, black or white, "to live in such a filthy unhealthy demoralizing slum area" meant that they were "breaking faith with the veterans."⁹¹ However, with 6 units already complete, the city commission, THA, and Mayor's office went forward with the project. Mayor Duch assured TCU that the THA would not discriminate against black veterans in the assignment of apartment space in these projects, but that assignments would be base "on the basis of need." J. Conner French, THA Chairman, proposed several tactics intended to prevent the perception of discrimination.

In October of 1946, the THA had received over 900 applications for about 150 apartments. French had proposed that 15 percent of apartments be assigned to black families, proportionate to the percentage of black Trentonians occupying the city that year.⁹² French also suggested a fish-

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "City Officials Halt All Work On Barclay Street Housing After Scores Protest Site," *Trenton Evening Times*, June 7th, 1946.

⁹² "Meet Tomorrow To Determine Plan of Assigning Apartments In Veterans' Housing Project," *Trenton Evening Times*, October 1, 1946.

bowl style lottery to assign housing spots once applicants had been accepted. While perhaps fair to some on the surface, such assignment tactics would not only place an arbitrary limit on the number of black families who could be placed regardless of need, but surely did not factor in the difficulties that black Trentonians families—even black veterans—encountered in securing housing in the private sector. It's unclear if those tactics were utilized or not.

Across the county, black veterans faced difficulty in securing access to non-dilapidated housing; they did not have appropriate proportional access to the veterans' housing construction programs. "By 1947 in the Southern states," historian Louis Woods II writes, "for every four housing units constructed 'for white veterans, only one' was built for African American veterans, despite the fact that 'the ratio of white to Negro veterans was two to one' in the region."⁹³ Further, VA mortgage loans were rarely given to black veterans; their underwriting practices were extremely similar to those of the FHA, and some loans were joint VA-FHA loans.⁹⁴ Black veterans were one portion of the black community that faced difficulty in securing housing, but their status as veterans makes the United States' failure to house them especially ironic. America had just won a war billed largely as a war against threat to democratic ideals of freedom and democracy, while failing to secure for black veterans the freedom to live where they may choose and to fully benefit from the democracy who they had defended with their lives. While THA might have appeared to be meeting TCU halfway, their actions in the assign of housing spots for permanent veterans' housing projects would prove that segregationist practices remained alive and well within the agency and that the black community faced inequitable barriers to housing access.

⁹³ Woods, 405.

⁹⁴ Woods, 406.

After they finished the temporary housing project, THA made quick work of getting permanent housing projects underway. The Leo Rodgers Home project, named after a Trenton WWI veteran, was originally intended to be comprised of 8 buildings which would house around 200 apartments, but the project was expanded with a state grant and totaled 9 buildings and a capacity of 234 families.⁹⁵ Construction began in the summer of 1947 and THA began accepting applications for residents in spring of 1948. For 234 apartments, 1,600 applications were submitted.⁹⁶ As summer began, the issue of tenant selection and apartment assignment was yet again a major concern of the Trenton Housing Authority.



Leo J. Rodgers Homes construction site featured in *Trenton Evening Times*; second to the left is Joseph S. Tysowski, Director of Tenant Relation for the THA. *Trenton Evening Times*, July 28, 1948.

⁹⁵ "Work to Start Soon on City's Rodgers Homes," *Trenton Evening Times*, June 13, 1947; "Trenton Will Boost Housing Units to 234," *Trenton Evening Times*, July 31, 1947.

⁹⁶ "1,600 Seeking 234 Apartments in Rodgers Homes Development," *Trenton Evening Times*, June 13, 1948.

A Veterans' Housing Committee, still in existence after it was pulled together by Mayor Duch, was again utilized to assist in tenant selection and assignments. By this time, Trenton had a new mayor: Mayor Donal J. Connelly. Connelly and the Trenton NAACP soon became engaged in a dispute that would last for several months. According to a letter published in the *Trenton Evening Times* by Charles Williams, the Trenton NAACP's Housing Committee Chairman, the NAACP contacted Connolly on August 24, 1948 to make him aware of "segregation attempts" at the Rodgers Homes.⁹⁷ Those attempts included the separation of applications "according to veterans' color."⁹⁸ In the letter, the NAACP asked Connolly to "be certain that the buildings be integrated."⁹⁹ Though he did not reply with a letter response, Connolly attempted to meet with the group a few weeks later; in response to his request, the NAACP asked him, "does the City of Trenton intend to establish a ghetto system in the Rogers Homes such as a 'Negro' wind, section or units?" He did not reply.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the initial process of accepting and processing applications, Mayor Connelly cancelled three appointments between THA, the City Commission, and the NAACP to "establish housing policy."¹⁰¹ Only after placements had been made and segregationist practices had already been enacted was the NAACP granted the opportunity to sit down with those city stakeholders.

In January of 1949, a meeting was held between Trenton NAACP chapter leaders, THA members, and Mayor Connolly. The Veterans' Housing Committee was not present.¹⁰² At that

⁹⁷ Charles Williams, "The Segregation Issue," *Trenton Evening Times*, January 21st, 1949; accessed March 14th, 2018.

⁹⁸ Open Letter to the Citizens of Trenton about Veterans Housing at Leo J. Rogers Homes, *Trenton Evening Times*; accessed March 15th, 2018.

⁹⁹ Williams, "The Segregation Issue."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Open Letter."

¹⁰² Ibid.

meeting, held on January 3rd, Joseph Tysowski of the THA, who was formerly tenant relations director, admitted “that he and Arthur Sypek had segregated colored veterans after consultation with the Veterans’ Housing Committee,” apparently thinking that black veterans would be “happier among themselves”; throughout the meeting, he insisted he did not realize that placing all black veterans together counted as discrimination or segregation. For an organization that had been so publically careful about avoiding the appearance of discrimination after the building of the temporary veterans’ housing projects, it seems unlikely that they would be blind to appearing to support segregation should apartments be intentionally assigned by race. Tysowski’s acknowledgement of s segregation to a public group did not drive Mayor Connolly to act swiftly to rectify the situation, though in 1949, the East Orange court case from earlier that year would have provided precedence for legal action against the THA.¹⁰³ In their meeting, Tysowski and Sypek admitted they had limited authority over tenant placement—that their superiors were the ones who actually assigned units to applicants.¹⁰⁴ However, the NAACP eventually found out that the letter Mayor Connolly had promised to send to THA to address this segregation was addressed only to Arthur Sypek rather than his supervisors. The failure of the city’s leaders to actively begin desegregation was not only a violation of their responsibility to fairly represent their city’s residents, but a genuine breach of case law. The East Orange case concerning a Veterans’ Housing Committee, in which the committee had been used to select applicants and assign housing units—much like the way Trenton’s veterans’ housing committee functioned in the Rodgers Homes—had resulted in the finding that the VHC was not officially established by a city ordinance or resolution. As such, they were not legally authorized to do their work. The Trenton VHC and its shaky legal

¹⁰³ Williams, Segregation Issue.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

standing then became the next object of the Trenton NAACP's campaign to desegregate public housing.

The NAACP's Clifford R. Moore, chair of its statewide legal redress committee, then contacted the Veterans' Housing Committee Chairman Edward G. Dolton via telephone and letters to request a meeting between the NAACP and the Veterans' Housing Committee in early February; the Trenton Committee for Human Relations was included in the request and is carbon copied on several of letters, indicating that the two groups may have been collaborating on housing advocacy issues.¹⁰⁵ Moore's wife, listed as Mrs. Clifford Moore, was a member of TCHR's housing committee.¹⁰⁶ Dolton and the VHC refused to meet with the NAACP; Dolton responded to Moore on February 16th with coarse skepticism towards his request, laid out in four parts, which were written with the authority not only of him but on the advice of his fellow VHC members. Firstly, "it was been the policy of the [VHC]," he wrote, "not to have any dealings with any political, racial, religious, or pressure groups."¹⁰⁷ From the beginning, Dolton makes it clear that he and the rest of the VHC are unwilling to meet the request and of NAACP and hear them out. Secondly, he requested that, should Moore actually have proof and knowledge of any violations of law in the screening of applicants that they be forwarded to him. Thirdly, Dolton stated, it had never been the duties of the VHC to assign accepted applicant veterans to units. Lastly, Dolton criticized Moore for having—mistakenly—send his an unsigned carbon copy of his letter. Dolton's work

¹⁰⁵ Edward G. Dolton, Veterans' Housing Committee Chairman, to Mr. Clifford Moore, Letter, February 16, 1949. . Box: Trenton Committee for Unity. Folder: Housing—1945-1955. Trentoniana Collection. Trenton Free Public Library.

¹⁰⁶ Meeting Minutes of the Trenton Council for Human Relations, October 10, 1955. TCU/TCHR Trentoniana Collection. Trenton Free Public Library.

¹⁰⁷ Edward G. Dolton, Veterans' Housing Committee Chairman, to Mr. Clifford Moore, Letter, February 16, 1949. . Box: Trenton Committee for Unity. Folder: Housing—1945-1955. Trentoniana Collection.

was at once condescending, displacing of potential blame, and unwelcoming of feedback from the individuals whom Dolton allegedly represented.

Moore sent a copy of Dolton's response to Mayor Connolly that same day, as well as Charles Williams, stating that he was "hesitant" to "disturb" the mayor with this, but that he did not see another viable avenue. Dolton, Moore argued, must not understand that "as an official agency of the City of Trenton, he is required to make his committee available to citizens where matters of public issues are involved." Moore then went on to state that Dolton's characterization of the NAACP as a "racial" or "pressure" group was unnecessary: "We are citizens and tax payers of the City of Trenton who have an interest that public funds not be squandered by improper administrative action or that applicable state laws be violated."¹⁰⁸

Moore also wrote back to Dolton, stating that "some of [the NAACP's] concern may be baseless, but there is no means of determination for the very reason that your committee functions in secrecy with no public accounting rendered."¹⁰⁹ He then continued to post a series of questions to Dolton and the VHC, arguing that the NAACP, as a civic group, had the right to answers as taxpayers whose public funds supported their projects. "It has always been the right of taxpayers of a community," Moore wrote, "to demand an accounting of the stewardship of a public agency and no exception or immunity is carved out for your Committee."¹¹⁰ He asked about VHC's application screening process, the instructions it received from "its appointing authority," to whom the applications were sent one screened, who often meetings have occurred, and if there were any reports rendered to a city governing body or non-VHC members involved in screening the process.

¹⁰⁸ Clifford R. Moore to Mayor Donal J. Connolly, Letter. February 19, 1949. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity. Folder: Housing—1945-1955. Trentoniana Collection.

¹⁰⁹ Clifford Moore to Edward Dolton. February 18th, 1949. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity. Folder: Housing—1945-1955. Trentoniana Collection.

¹¹⁰ Clifford Moore to Edward Dolton. February 18th, 1949.

Moore went to on say, without detail, that “there are accusations to be made” against VHC member Wilbur Welch that he wished to discuss with Dolton in “the privacy of a conference,” concerning “public utterances” by Welch that “raise a question as to the validity of the screening process reported to be employed by” the THC.¹¹¹ No further information was included on that matter, and Moore ended the letter by yet again requesting a meeting with Dolton, mentioning that there were “coercive means whereby [they] might secure such a conference” but that he did not seek to embarrass the VHC in a public manner. This campaign was not abandoned and the NAACP again requested an audience with the VHC, or that TCHR be granted a meeting.

In March 1949, Moore wrote Mayor Connolly, sending a carbon copy to Charles Williams of TCHR, stating that after a meeting with Mr. Geiges of the THA on March 15th, they were told that Tysowski had no legal jurisdiction over the Rogers Homes. However, Tysowski and Sypek had already admitted that they intentionally segregated the “first nine” black families in the Rogers homes into a separate wing. They suggested then that the VHC be “directed to meet with representatives of the NAACP and the TCHR or in the alternative, the resignation of its members be disbanded.”¹¹² The VHC, Moore said, had continually refused to meet with them, which Moore argues “should serve as sufficient grounds for its discharge.” He reiterated that the committee was not representative of “all veterans’ organizations recognized by the Veterans Administration and having posts in Trenton.” It had indeed been formed without a representative of Trenton’s all-black veterans’ legion, and it appears that this was not rectified upon its revival under Mayor Connolly.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Clifford Moore to Mayor Donal J. Connolly, *Letter*. March 17, 1949. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity. Folder: Housing—1945-1955. Trentoniana Collection.

**OPEN LETTER TO THE CITIZENS OF TRENTON
ABOUT VETERANS HOUSING AT LEO J. ROGERS
HOMES**

APPLICATIONS SEPARATED ACCORDING TO VETERAN'S COLOR.
NAACP protested to Mayor, August, 1948.

APPLICATIONS OF COLORED VETERANS NOT INVESTIGATED.
NAACP protested to Mayor, August, 1948.

MAYOR PROMISED MEETING WITH PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITIES, CITY COMMISSION AND NAACP TO ESTABLISH HOUSING POLICY.
A broken promise—three appointments cancelled—no meeting.

MAYOR PROMISED NO SEGREGATION.
A broken promise—first nine colored families segregated in one wing—NAACP protested.

MAYOR PROMISED CORRECTION.
A broken promise—nine colored families still segregated.

MAYOR PROMISED NO DISCRIMINATION.
A broken promise—member of Veterans' Housing Committee publicly announced Negro quota of 22 families—NAACP protested.

MAYOR DENIED QUOTA SYSTEM.
Less than 25 colored families admitted.

MAYOR PROMISED MEETING WITH VETERANS' HOUSING COMMITTEE, CITY COMMISSIONERS AND NAACP.
A broken promise — Veterans' Housing Committee refuses to meet with NAACP.

MAYOR PROMISED TO GET ANSWERS TO 14 QUESTIONS.
A broken promise—no answers.

MR. MAYOR, DO YOU KNOW:
That "though the law itself be fair on its face and impartial in appearance, yet, if applied and administered by public authority with an evil eye and unequal hand, the denial of equal justice is still within the prohibition of the Constitution. The fact of discrimination is admitted."

Paid for as a public service by the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People.

MAYOR CONNOLLY, WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS?

1. What specific instructions have the Veterans' Housing Committee received from its appointing authority?
2. What specific regulations govern the screening of applications for the Roger's Homes?
3. What is the procedure followed in screening applications for the Roger's Homes?
4. To what agency does the Veterans' Housing Committee submit screened applications?
5. How frequently does the Veterans' Housing Committee meet?
6. Does the Veterans' Housing Committee keep minutes or other written records of its deliberations, and if so, who is the custodian.
7. Does the Veterans' Housing Committee render any report of its deliberations to any official, agency or employee of the City of Trenton or State of New Jersey, if so, to whom?
8. What persons, not members of the Veterans' Housing Committee, assist in the screening of applications for the Roger's Homes.
9. What provisions have been made for appeal if an applicant for the Roger's Homes contests the classification assigned him by the Veterans' Housing Committee?
10. What provisions have been made for checking the accuracy of the investigators' reports?
11. Have all applications for the Roger's Homes been personally investigated? If not, how many are yet to be investigated?
12. Does the Veterans' Housing Committee personally interview applicants for the Roger's Homes?
13. What provisions have been made for an applicant faced with a higher category classification emergency?
14. What authority does the Veterans' Housing Committee exercise over the administration of the Roger's Homes?

On April 17th, the NAACP published an "Open Letter to the Citizens of Trenton about Veterans Housing at Leo J. Rogers Homes" in the *Trenton Evening Times*' ad space featuring a timeline of the ordeal (see fig. 6).¹¹³ The letter, billed as a "public service," was targeted towards Mayor Connolly, of whom they asked a set of 14 questions centered on the procedures for application screening and the processes of the Veterans' Housing Committee (VHC). The VHC was, quite publicly, under fire from the Trenton NAACP. It was comprised of five

member: Edward Dolton of Post 93 of the American Legion, Edward Thorpe of the VFW, Franklin Buret of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, William Cunningham of the DAV and Wilbur Welsh of the Michael Davis Post of the American Legion. Welsh was the only black man on the committee, though Clifford R. Moore went on to say that though Welsh "represents a Negro legion post, [he] does not have the confidence of the NAACP because he is 'completely incompetent.'"¹¹⁴

Due to their discriminatory behavior and the East Orange court case, Clifford Moore asked that Mayor Connolly disband the "Open Letter from the NAACP," *Trenton Evening Times*, April 11, 1949.

¹¹³ "Open Letter."

¹¹⁴ "City's Housing Unit Renamed despite Attack," *Trenton Evening Times*, August 11, 1949; accessed March 13th, 2018.

Veterans' Housing Committee. This request was then made on the grounds that they were not an official body approved by a City Commission ordinance or resolution. Further, they requested that, should a resolution be introduced to make VHC an official body, a public hearing be held. However, the City Commission authorized the VHC, despite it being "attacked on several occasions for allegedly discriminating" against black veterans—unanimously.¹¹⁵ All members of the original VHC board were renamed and the board could now function as an official body due to the City Commission's actions.

Even in the face of allegations of segregation just a few months prior, the Trenton Housing Authority, Mayor Connolly, the City Commission, and the Veterans' Housing Committee all played a role in the intentional segregation of black veterans. Despite the actions of the Trenton NAACP chapter, local government entities continued to segregate veterans and failed to rectify that segregation even when that information was made public to the city. Black veterans—who already faced decreased access to federal housing loan program due to their race—were illegally segregated by an unauthorized committee which the City Commission then saw fit to reinstate. Further, the Trenton Housing Authority individuals who admitted their pieces in segregating the veterans' housing wings continued to work at the THA, with Tysowski eventually becoming Executive Director.¹¹⁶ Racial discrimination, including now-illegal segregation, was approved by multiple branches of the city government.

Clifford Moore and the NAACP revealed this to the public by garnering community support and coverage in the *Trenton Evening Times*. When it became clear that the VHC was unwilling to hear their concerns, they utilized their status as taxpayers as leverage to argue as to

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Trenton's Housing Authority Will Pay \$66,419 to the City," *Trenton Evening Times*, April 11, 1965; accessed February 2018.

why they deserved answers, both from the VHC and from the Mayor. Ultimately, they requested and were denied the removal of the VHC. Trenton's City Commissioners instead officiated the body and failed to assuage the NAACP's concerns. In doing so, the commissioners signaled that they did not care to provide justice or even equitable representation to black Trentonians, but instead that they supported the work of segregationists. By supporting the work of the VHC and failing to appoint additional black veterans to the committee, they maintained the status quo of racial segregation in the city. Further, by legitimizing an unauthorized, segregationist body, the commissioners strengthened the systemic barriers to equitable housing access faced by black Trentonians.

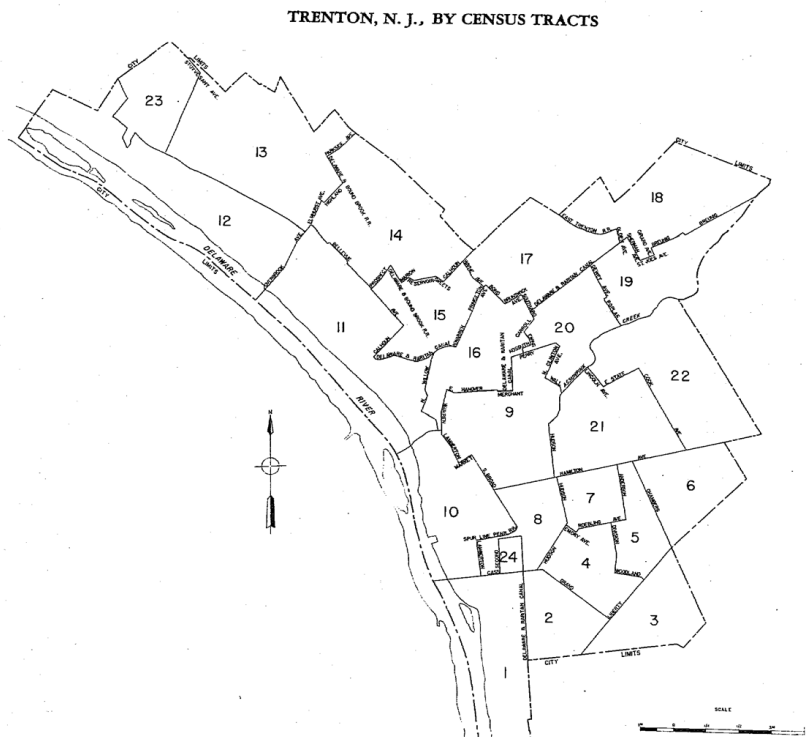
Private Sector Practices

The public sector was not the only area in which black Americans faced discriminatory practices and policies. After TCU and local civil rights activists had won a major civil rights victory against school segregation before the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1944's *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Trenton Board of Education* case 8 years before *Brown v. Board of Education*,¹¹⁷ TCU focused many of their efforts on compiling reports that reveals a variety of discriminatory practices that black Trentonians encountered in the private housing sector. In the postwar period, TCU and the NAACP unearthed significant evidence of discrimination in private sales, realty, and financing practices. These include financial exploitation of black homebuyers through "contract sales," white neighbors' intimidation efforts against potential or new black neighbors, discrimination in mortgage loaning on both local and federal levels, and discrimination by the national and county-wide realty boards. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, TCU/TCHR compiled another report on the state of housing for black Trentonians, in which many surveyed responses that housing problems

¹¹⁷ Wells.

were the “most serious of all types” faced by their community.¹¹⁸ “Practically no new housing has been made available in recent years for Negro occupants,” they wrote, “with the exceptions of units added through public housing.”¹¹⁹ In combination with public sector discrimination, these practices seriously limited the quality and quantity of housing available to black homebuyers and renters alike.

The few hundred units of public housing could not have provided sufficient relief for the 4,532 nonwhite residents who called Trenton home by 1950. While the local rate of homeownership among black residents was slightly higher than the national average—58 percent as compared to 52 percent nationally—that does not necessarily indicate better economic or housing conditions relative to most black Americans. Rather, black families tended to live in



homes that were significantly older, in worse quality, and that had lower average values than those of white-owned homes in Trenton.¹²⁰ Predominantly, black Trentonians were concentrated into three city tracts: tract 10, where 14.5 percent of the black population had resided,

United States Census Bureau, “Census Records: 1950 Census Tracts,” Trenton Historical Society. Web. <http://www.trentonhistory.org/Records/Census.html>

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ “Negro Housing in Trenton,” 11.

tract 15, where 23.5 percent resided, and tract 20, which held 15.6 percent of the population.¹²¹ Notice that these particular tracts overlap with the red sections of the HOLC map used to determine eligibility for FHA loans.

While 78 percent of white owned dwellings were worth \$5,000 or more, 67 percent of black owned dwelling were valued below \$4,000.¹²² In tracts 10, 15, and 20, an average of 95.3 percent of houses were built in or before 1919 while the total city average was 76.4 percent. In addition to all of this, overcrowding of homes was a major issue. As in many cities, black Trentonians were pushed to occupy the homes that white Trentonians did not want—to the benefit of white sellers' bank accounts through exploitative practices.

Contract Sales

One facet of private market discrimination was the exploitation of black homebuyers through “contract sales.” Contract sales were a mortgage alternative in which a contract was agreed upon between the home buyer and seller. The contract set a designated monthly payment amount, plus a hefty interest rate.¹²³ Should the buyer meet all payments every month without a single fault of lateness or partial payment, the buyer would eventually own the home upon completion of the payment period. However, should a buyer miss a single payment or deadline, ownership of the home would immediately default to the seller, who also kept all funds paid towards the contract. In Trenton, TCU uncovered that about 58 percent of black Trentonians owned their homes and 61 percent of black home owners had financed their purchase through contract sales.¹²⁴

¹²¹ “Negro Housing in Trenton,” 11.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Satter, *Family Properties*.

¹²⁴ “Negro Housing in Trenton,” 8.

Trenton was not the only city in which contract sales occurred. Historian Beryl Satter's work on contract sales in Chicago provides a useful explanation of the practice and a harrowing description of its function in Chicago. Generally, homes sold through contracts were in extremely poor condition, but the fact of their availability to black sellers generated their appeal.¹²⁵ Satter responds to claims that black Chicagoans could not afford better housing by examining the costs of homes sold through contracts. In Chicago, it was not unusual for contract sellers to buy poor quality homes cheaply, not repair any of their physical faults, and resell them to black home buyers at exorbitantly high prices far beyond their actual value.¹²⁶ Due to the usage of contract sales as a statistical category within TCU's Housing Memorandum, it seems likely that the term and therefore the practice was widely understood across the country.

Some might ask why anyone would enter into such an agreement. According to census data interpreted by TCHR, Trenton's disparities in nonwhite population and nonwhite housing supply numbers were significantly higher than those of other cities, such as Chicago and Detroit.¹²⁷ While "nonwhites account[ed] for 11.4 percent of the total city population...the dwelling units they occup[ied were] only 7.7 percent of the city's housing supply."¹²⁸ One possible cause of this is that contract sales encouraged families to take on additional boarders as to ease the burden and threat of their high monthly payments.¹²⁹ Trenton's short supply of housing available to black residents, emphasized in many different TCU/TCHR and Trenton NAACP documents, seems to have exacerbated that phenomenon. Of course, contract sales were only one part of a much larger private housing market in which black individuals searching for housing faced discrimination at every

¹²⁵ Satter.

¹²⁶ Satter.

¹²⁷ "Negro Housing in Trenton," 3.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Satter.

level. Despite the exploitative nature of contract sales, the poor quality of available housing, and the limited amount of public housing available, local and national policies and practices indicate that black Trentonians had few, if any, superior alternatives.

Private Market Loans & Realty

Should black homebuyers look to traditional mortgages in order to avoid exploitative contract sales, they would likely have severe difficulty in securing such a loan. It was rare for black home buyers to secure traditional mortgages as the FHA's loan policies encouraged residential segregation. When the New Jersey Division Against Discrimination compiled a study on real estate firms, they found that 10 of 73 surveyed firms had lost sales because the buyer had been unable to obtain a mortgage loan due to their race.¹³⁰ NJ DAD stated that there was a consensus among many successful agencies that one must know "where to send people to get mortgages for minority buyers as some lending firms were more liberal than others."¹³¹ Should black home buyers obtain the necessary financing, they also had to find a realty company both willing to work with black clients and who had homes they were willing and able to sell to black clientele.

Many realty companies refused to serve black clientele or complied with stipulations, written or unwritten, that they not sell properties to them. The National Association of Real Estate, the governing body of realty boards across the country, made discrimination the official practice of realtors by holding them to a code that they would not sell a home if they believed that its buyer, due to race or ethnicity, would cause the home's value to depreciate.¹³² In 1952, a TCHR report included an anonymous survey of Mercer County real estate and housing firms; 38 of the 150 firms

¹³⁰ NJ Division against Discrimination of the Department of Education, "Real Estate Questions" *Report*, January 1957. Folder: Integration in Public Housing. Box: TCU Box 3. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library, Trenton, NJ.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Kruse, *White Flight*, 60.

sent inquires replied.¹³³ Five of the 38 who replied had never done business with a black client. When asked about the primary problems that encountered when working with black clients, they reported: “poor background” that caused trouble in securing loan financing; “segregation of residential areas,” and “deterioration of property values.”¹³⁴ These responses further confirm TCU/TCHR’s prior findings and connect the attitudes of white Trentonians with those of white communities across the United States. In the NJ DAD report, only 43 of the 73 surveyed agencies had ever sold a home to a black family.¹³⁵ Many agreed that there was an unwritten rule that a realtor should not sell a white family’s home to a non-white family, thereby integrating the neighborhood by way of the sale.

Some individual realtors did work with black families, but would only agree to show black families homes in predominantly black areas, even when requested to show homes in other areas. One Trenton realtor, “Mr. Miller,” was working with a well-to-do black minister who requested to view 317 Bellevue Avenue, home of the white Gunther family, but Miller instead showed him a home on the 100 block, where most occupants were black.¹³⁶ The Gunther family had not actually requested that Miller sell only to white families, but Miller abided by realty principles and “unwritten rules.”¹³⁷

The realty profession itself was rife with racial discrimination. The Mercer County Realty Board, a professional organization which provided members of its organization with home listings for the county’s towns, including Trenton, refused black realtors entrance into their membership

¹³³ Negro Housing in Trenton, 13. Note: Trenton is located within Mercer County, New Jersey.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 14-15.

¹³⁵ New Jersey Department against Discrimination.

¹³⁶ Conor Reid, “‘Thoughtless Action’ and ‘Unwritten Law’: Methods of and Response to Housing Discrimination and Intimidation in Trenton, 1950-1959”, Unpublished Undergraduate Research, supervised by Dr. Robert McGreevey, December 2016, The College of New Jersey.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

well into the 1960s.¹³⁸ One of the realtors denied entry was Carolyn Moore, who applied yearly between 1955 and 1965 and was not admitted despite her active presence in state and national realty associations.¹³⁹ Clearly, black Trentonians faced difficulty in securing financial means to purchase a home, and finding both a realtor and seller willing to work with black homebuyers. In addition, they were also often limited to areas of the city in which homeowners and realtors were willing to sell to black families.

Some firms that TCHR surveyed who did work with black clients reported that they dealt with owners who had refused to sell or rent a house “simply on the basis of the client being a Negro.”¹⁴⁰ This was also reflected in NJ DAD’s findings, in which 46 of 73 respondents had been asked by homeowners to sell their property under race-restricted conditions.¹⁴¹ Should they manage to secure financing, find a realtor who worked with black clients, and find a white homeowner willing to sell to a black buyer, black homebuyers then had to face white neighbors’ reactions, which might include discrimination and threats of violence.

Trenton researcher Benito Gonzalez writes that in January 1953, a black family had moved into a white neighborhood on Oakland Street in west Trenton.¹⁴² “White residents of the neighborhood were panicking,” Gonzalez writes, and wanted to maintain their street’s ‘whiteness.’”¹⁴³ Gonzalez found evidence of the Trenton Times “referring to Oakland Street as a mixed neighborhood” as soon as fall 1953, perhaps suggesting that white neighborhood members

¹³⁸ Meeting Minutes of Mayor Holland’s Advisory Committee on Human Rights of April 6th, 1965. Folder: Advisory Committee on Human Rights, Box: Box 3. Arthur Holland Collection at the Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Public Library.

¹³⁹ Reid.

¹⁴⁰ NJ Division against Discrimination, 12 and 16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Benito Gonzalez. “Housing Segregation and Discrimination in Twentieth Century Trenton, New Jersey,” Unpublished Senior Thesis. Spring 2015. The College of New Jersey. 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

had fled and sold to nonwhite families. The New Jersey DAD contacted TCHR to assist in integrating the neighborhood; there are not details on the incident, but it may have been the impetus for the development of procedures for such cases. A documents dated September 1953, titled "Suggested Procedure in Housing Incidents," begins with preparatory measures, and suggests that situations in which a black family was about to move into a white neighborhood be reported to TCHR as early as possible so that the organization could be to compile the names of friendly neighbors and clergy in the area who supported housing integration.¹⁴⁴ Local clergy were to be visited by TCHR so they too could prepare lists of supportive congregants should tension or violence arise. The document makes clear that no actions besides clergy visits are to be taken unless in the instance that an incident occur, but also gives instructions for what to do should a violence situation arise. Firstly, it suggests letting police deal with violent or criminal matter. Next, friendly neighbors are to uncover who is behind discriminatory acts, and should be informed of what other sympathizer in such situations have done to support the targets of racist threats or violence. Finally, the paper suggests that the TCHR Housing Committee hold special meetings about the situation and place pressure on those resistance to desegregation in their neighborhoods by getting their own neighbors to speak to them about why they support desegregation.¹⁴⁵ TCHR, as all documents refer to it by this time, had a comprehensive plan to address cases in which whites' racism and belief in segregation boiled over into violence or conflict. Their plan was community-centered, acknowledging that a potentially apprehensive white homeowner might best be reached by a pastor, preaching racial equality and nondiscrimination from a pulpit, or from a friendly white neighbor assuaging their fears of decreased property values.

¹⁴⁴ "Suggested Procedure in Housing Incidents," Housing Committee, Trenton Committee on Human Relations, Sept 27, 1953. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity, Box 3 Folder: Integration in Public Housing. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Public Library.

¹⁴⁵ Suggested Procedures.

Across the United States, violence against and intimidation of black families who moved into white neighborhoods was commonplace. In Atlanta, some families who moved into white neighborhoods faced threats of physical violence or actual destruction of property.¹⁴⁶ The key goal of such actions—to intimidate black families from “invading” white neighborhoods—did not always work; rather, many white neighborhoods instead entered into panic sales, sometimes encouraged by realtors, in which many white residents’ homes were sold quickly, reducing property values and creating a wave effect through the neighborhood.

Part of the result of residential segregation was that location-based services, such as schools, became segregated as well. Though school segregation was outlawed in New Jersey following the 1944 *Hedgepeth-Williams v. Board of Education* case, many New Jersey schools remained predominantly white or predominantly black afterwards as a result of residential segregation. A 1951 NJ DAD report submitted to the New Jersey legislature found that of 52 schools alleged to be practicing segregation in some way, 9 were comprised entirely of non-white students “as a result of geographical conditions.” Racial segregation resulting in segregated schools was reinforced not only by the realty industry’s practices, which resisted integration, but through the federal loan policies that did not allow black home buyers to join in postwar suburbanization.

Beliefs that black residents would bring down property rates were strengthened by federal financing policies and by harmful stereotypes that fueled discrimination by lending institutions, white realtors, and white homeowners selling their property. In turn, contract sellers exploited the black population’s intense need for housing and further fueled poor conditions and overcrowding. When black families turned to and qualified for public housing, even veterans faced explicit

¹⁴⁶ Kruse, *White Flight*, 48, 52, 56, 85, 89, and 102.

segregation without remedy from the city's government. Every step of the way, however, desegregationists worked to reveal these processes to the public and assert their right to more just treatment.

Urban Renewal in Coalport



Mickle, Paul. "1957: Forecasts of boom and doom," *The Trentonian*, Capital Century Archive. Web. <http://www.capitalcentury.com/1957.html> <http://www.trentonhistory.org/Records/Census.html>

Rather than addressing the serious housing issues faced by black Trentonians, city officials exacerbated those problems through the construction of urban renewal projects in the 1950s. Mayor Donol J. Connolly, elected in 1946, worked alongside "local business leaders" and an appointed city redevelopment officer to organize together a plan intended to reinvigorate the city's declining economy.¹⁴⁷ By the mid-1950s, Trenton leaders settled on a "redevelopment" plan to construct state offices,

build a highway, and redevelop old "mixed-use" land into industrial parks and parking lots. To accomplish this, they bought that mixed-use land, which included houses in the neighborhood of Coalport.¹⁴⁸ Coalport was a black neighborhood;¹⁴⁹ by way of the houses made available to black residents, city planners reported to Connolly that Coalport was a "slum area" in which dilapidation and blight proliferated.¹⁵⁰ This land was to be razed, but no low-income housing was to be built.

¹⁴⁷ Cumbler, *A Social History*, 167.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁵⁰ City Planner's Reports to Mayor Connolly, 1950s. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library, Trenton, NJ.

In September of 1954, the *Trenton Evening Times* reported that Charles Williams, the chairman of Trenton's NAACP chapter, had met with the redevelopment officer, local clergy, and the "relocation specialist of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency" in order to determine if "safe and decent" housing in which they would relocate the residents of Coalport who were set to be displaced by the Mayor's project.¹⁵¹ The group made the determination that there were hardly any spaces in which to build new housing within the city and made an appeal to organizations containing housing groups, including the Trenton Committee on Human Relations, so they might find somewhere to which Coalport residents could be relocated. "If it were found that not enough of them could be placed," they reported, "the entire Coalport redevelopment project might have to be reconsidered and another area decided upon for housing redevelopment."¹⁵² City officials did not keep to their word and, two years after the project began, 40 percent of Coalport residents had not yet been relocated.¹⁵³

The need for housing for black residents was so grave that, in May 1955, TCHR made a plea to New Jersey Governor Robert Meyner that the temporary veterans' housing units, which were administered through a state-city contract and scheduled to be demolished that same year. TCHR President William Borden first requested it be extended for an additional year of residency.¹⁵⁴ "The [housing] situation is particularly acute at this time since there are 400 families which must be relocated from an area of Trenton marked for redevelopment, Coalport," he wrote. "Three of the state-owned houses are in Coalport. Removal of the other 51 unit now, however,

¹⁵¹ "Seek Aid of Housing Groups to Relocate Families Displaces by Coalport Slum Clearance," *Trenton Evening Times*, Feb 15, 1954: 16, accessed October 12, 2016.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Cumbler, 168.

¹⁵⁴ William Borden to Governor Robert Meyner, Letter, May 16, 1955. Folder: Housing – 1945-1955. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity 3. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library. Trenton, NJ.

adds this many families to those...which must be rehoused.”¹⁵⁵ Meyner referred the matter to Joseph McLean, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Conservation and Economic Development.¹⁵⁶ McLean informed Borden that the maximum number of legally permitted extensions—namely, two—had already been applied to the temporary housing buildings, but that he would be willing to accept an offer from the City of Trenton for their purchase.¹⁵⁷ A few weeks later in June, the Legislature authorized municipalities to extend their city-state veterans’ housing contracts and, on August 12th, 1955, the Trenton City Commission passed a resolution extending the units in question for an additional year.¹⁵⁸ This was only a marginal improvement upon the housing situation as all it effectively did was prevent its worsening. However, this series of events demonstrated the depth of need that Trenton’s black community continued to feel throughout the 1950s, even as Trenton entered into the golden age of suburbanization and housing was, for most white home buyers—especially veterans—affordable and plentiful.

Desegregating Public Housing

As one might expect, renewing the temporary housing did not solve all of Trenton’s housing shortage problems. In 1958, the Trenton NAACP accused the THA of continuing public housing segregation—after it had been made illegal in the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination—and jointly, failing the black families who had been displaced in the Coalport urban renewal project.¹⁵⁹ “THA members did not admit they have followed a policy of segregation

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Governor Robert B. Meyer to William S. Borden, Letter, May 18, 1955. Folder: Housing – 1945-1955. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity 3. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library. Trenton, NJ.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph E. McLean to William S. Borden, Letter May 24, 1955. Folder: Housing – 1945-1955. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity 3. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library. Trenton, NJ

¹⁵⁸ Newspaper Cutting, Folder: Housing – 1945-1955. Box: Trenton Committee for Unity 3. Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library. Trenton, NJ.

¹⁵⁹ “THA Pledges It Will Avoid Segregation,” *Trenton Evening Times*, March 26, 1958: 1; accessed November 26, 2016.

regarding the Donnelly and Lincoln Homes and Prospect Village,” the newspaper reported.¹⁶⁰ Even so, the THA chairman claimed that “‘no one would deny’ that the Lincoln Homes and Prospect Village had only non-white residents, the first nonwhite families had only just moved into the Donnelly Homes the previous month.¹⁶¹ “Families,” he reportedly said, “will be placed regardless of race.”¹⁶² Williams responded to the chairman’s claims by asserting that not only did THA place resident based on race, thereby resulting in the all-white Donnelly homes and all-black Lincoln Homes, but that their claims that all Coalport residents had been relocated were false. A THA placement officer, James Fleming, continued to argue that housing units were “assigned without regard to race.”¹⁶³ It was suggested by some that perhaps the only reason any nonwhites moved into the Donnelly Homes were as a result of a meeting a few nights earlier between Mayor Connelly and black community leaders, though THA leaders denied that this was the case.¹⁶⁴

Arthur Holland, Reformist

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² “THA Pledges.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cumbler, 171.

In 1960, 42-year-old Arthur Holland won Trenton's mayoral race against the incumbent Connelly.¹⁶⁵ Holland was a white "reform-minded liberal" who opposed the way Coalport was handled but continued to place in trust in in urban renewal's potential to renew Trenton's now-



Rinde, Meir. "Harvard Professor plans "truth" lecture in salute to high ethics of Arthur Holland," *The Trenton Times of NJ.com*. October 27, 2009. Web. Accessed March 2018.

http://www.nj.com/mercerc/index.ssf/2009/10/harvard_professor_plans_truth.html

struggling economy.¹⁶⁶ Born Arthur John Holland in 1918, Holland attended one of Trenton's many Catholic schools, Immaculate Conception High School, and graduated in the Class of 1936.¹⁶⁷ After a short stint during which he studied for priesthood, he obtained a Master's in Public Affairs from Rutgers University. He then took on the job of Director of Public Affairs for the capital city in 1951 and, in 1955, won his first city council race.¹⁶⁸

Holland had a vision for his city in which neighborhoods were integrated and its economy prosperous. He and his young family moved into a predominantly black neighborhood during his first few years in office.¹⁶⁹ Trenton historian John Cumber and some of Holland's contemporaries believed that this action signified he was "actively courting black voters."¹⁷⁰ His wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Holland, instead recalled

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ 1936 Immaculata High School Yearbook, Trenton Historical Society, <http://trentonhistory.org/YrB/36Immaculata.htm>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Alfonso A. Narvaez, "Arthur Holland Mayor of Trenton for 26 Years, Died of Cancer at 71," *New York Times*, November 10, 1989. *Historical New York Times Archive*. Web; "Human Rights Group Selected By Holland", *Trenton Evening Times*.

¹⁷⁰ Narvaez, Holland Obituary.

that the move had been based more upon convenience, style of house, and an absence of fear for living on a racially integrated street. Mrs. Holland had lived in the old Georgetown area of Washington, D.C. while working for U.S. Senator Phil Hart; she and Mayor Holland sought to find a house with a similar old style and fix it up.¹⁷¹ That move may have cost him his next election in 1966, in which he lost white ethnic groups—whom he had previously led—by a large margin.¹⁷² He lost to Carmen Armenti for the period of 1966 and 1970, but remained mayor for all of 1960 to 1989, except that period, until he died of cancer.¹⁷³

By 1960, over 22 percent of the city's population was black; the white population had peaked at 115,357 in 1940 and by 1960 had shrunk to 88,315.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the black population had grown from 9,308 to 25,638 in the same years.¹⁷⁵ Whites had fled the city in significant numbers and taken their spending and tax money with them. A similar pattern was seen in Atlanta between 1960 and 1970, when 60,000 white people left the city, then another 100,000 left during the 1970s.¹⁷⁶ Like those in many cities across the United States, Trenton's white population left for the suburbs *en mass*.

Despite legislation outlawing segregation in public housing, sharp divides remained in the racial composition of public housing projects. In August 1961, Holland announced that he wished to arrange a meeting of the City Commission and black community leaders to work towards desegregation in Trenton public housing projects.¹⁷⁷ He announced that the Kearney homes

¹⁷¹ Mickle, Paul. "1964: Neighborhood on the Rise," *The Trentonian*. *Capital Century Trentonian Archive*, Web. <http://www.capitalcentury.com/1964.html>

¹⁷² Narvaez.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ U.S. Census Data, Trenton Census Data on Race.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Kruse, *White Flight*, 234.

¹⁷⁷ "Mayor Hopes to Arrange Housing Integration Talk," *Trenton Evening Times*, August 7, 1961: 15; accessed November 27, 2016.

contained 57 white and 45 black families, but that the Lincoln and Campbell Homes still remained entirely without white families.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, he publically stated that THA chairman, still original appointee J. Conner French, believed that “people can’t be forced to move where they don’t want to go,” meaning that French did not agree to “forcing” whites to live in housing projects that had historically been home to nonwhite residents.¹⁷⁹ Again, we see a segregationist asserting that racial groups are “happiest amongst themselves” as justification for discrimination. In other words, French was unwilling to administer a housing authority in which there were active efforts to desegregate public housing projects through tenant placement. However, Holland felt that segregation needed to be addressed proactively. He also raised the issue of black representation in THA leadership and called out his former fellow City Commissioners, whom he now oversaw as mayor, for failing to pass any of his nominations for potential black appointees to the THA.¹⁸⁰ Holland was set to meet with the other City Commission members and the Trenton NAACP president in September.¹⁸¹ Even by 1961, the THA had still not made an active effort to fight segregation, nor had they attempted to represent the interests of the black community that had become such a significant portion of Trenton’s community, as indicated by their lack of appointment of a black THA member and their ignorance of the needs and wants of the community that had been expressed to the THA prior to Holland’s statements.

By 1962, THA had not yet changed its tune. In March, the Trenton NAACP charged the THA with “maintaining and promoting segregation” and contacted New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes and state Attorney General Arthur J. Sills. The NAACP housing chairman, Deane Goods,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

received a response from the governor that his staff was working on the problem.¹⁸² When he spoke to the *Trenton Evening Times*, Goods reported that the Lincoln Homes were still occupied exclusively by black families, that there was but one white family in Prospect Village, that the Campbell Homes were all black, and that only four black families lived in the Donnelly Homes, which had 376 housing units.¹⁸³ Significant, tangible progress to desegregate public housing projects had not yet been made, but now, the issue received recognition from the mayor and governor's offices.

In October 1963, Holland set up an Advisory Committee on Human Rights to determine "how well Trenton [was] meeting its responsibility for guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens," evoking the language of equal rights in relation to desegregation efforts.¹⁸⁴ He appointed several clergy, the Trenton NAACP president, Mrs. Robert Graham, TCHR chairwoman, Dr. Bertha Lawrence, and City Council president Frank Walsh. Holland had been hesitant to start the committee and originally felt that such issues were already addressed by TCHR and Trenton NAACP. He told the *Trenton Evening Times*, however, that he felt housing and employment remained "problem areas," and explicitly stated that "while Trenton public housing is integrated... 'it is more difficult for non-white people to purchase homes in many sections of our city [Trenton].'"¹⁸⁵ In 1965, Holland's appointment of the first black THA tenant selection officer, James Byard, was approved.¹⁸⁶ This appointment did not, of course, halt all of THA's racial issues.

¹⁸² "NAACP Lists Bias Charge on Housing," *Trenton Evening Times*, March 18, 1962: 2; accessed November 27, 2016.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ "Human Rights Group Selected by Holland," *Trenton Evening Times*, June 30, 1963: 1 and 3; accessed November 27, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ "First Negro Appointed to THA Tenant Office," *Trenton Evening Times*, August 15, 1965: 29; accessed November 29, 2016.

Less than a year later, the NAACP once again alleged racial discrimination by THA officials.¹⁸⁷ Still, the appointment marked an important symbolic victory in a battle that black Trentonians had been waging for years. After decades of actively advocating for right to consideration in housing issues and facing willful ignorance and exclusion from public officials in response, Trenton's black community leaders and desegregationists were finally invited to have a seat at the table—and in the selection office—by the mayor's office and Trenton's City Commission. Years of intentional segregation and denial of racial discrimination by the city government was now met with a more proactive approach to desegregating that city that reflected both the longstanding efforts of the Trenton NAACP and TCHR and the rising national profile of the civil rights movement.

Conclusion

Black families in mid-20th Century Trenton faced a lack of available housing due to realtors who would not sell a house to them if located in a white neighborhood due to their race. Should they find a home available to them, they were often denied traditional mortgage financing. If they were able to find a house on a contract loan, they were forced to enter into a contract that exploited their great need for housing and limited available options. Should they make so little money as to qualify for public housing, they might not secure a spot due to quotas placed on black applicants and, if they did receive a unit placement, were likely placed in an all-black building or wing, even after New Jersey's Supreme Court deemed the practice to be illegal.

The depth of discrimination they faced was routinely unveiled to city officials and members of the public by desegregation groups like the Trenton Committee for Unity/Trenton Council for Human Rights and black activists of the Trenton Chapter of the National Association for the

¹⁸⁷ Carmignani, "Critics Rap Racial Policies," *Trenton Evening Times*, January 9, 1966: 20; accessed November 29, 2016.

Advancement of Colored People. Their activists resiliently asserted the rights of black Trentonians to full access of public and private institutions. As they made legal and institutional gains, however, the flight of white Trentonians left a limited population of white Trentonians with which to integrate. In their wake were black Trentonians who had long been denied the ability to use home ownership as a tool of wealth generation to the fullest extent.

The longstanding effects of residential segregation can be seen up to today. A June 2016 article on NJ.com demonstrated through interactive maps how New Jersey—a state so often lauded for its diversity—remains staunchly divided by race and class in residential patterns.¹⁸⁸ This lack of integration is, in part, a legacy of the systemic racism that limited the housing choices available to black families throughout the 20th century. Much as the NJ DAD uncovered when they investigated segregated schools in the 1950s, residential segregation has populated New Jersey's schools with racial homogeneity. New Jersey's public schools remain “among the most segregated” in the United States according to a UCLA Civil Rights Project. In other works, “10 percent of all students attend [schools] where 99 percent or more of the student body is nonwhite.”¹⁸⁹

Many American journalists and writers today seek to understand the effects of residential segregation on our country. Journalist Nikole Hannah Jones has written extensively on the subject. “There's never been a moment in the history of this country where black people who have been isolated from white people have gotten the same resources,” Hannah-Jones says. “They often don't have the same level of instruction. They often don't have strong principals. They often don't have

¹⁸⁸ Stephen Stirling, “Segregated New Jersey,” *NJ.com*. June 2016.

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/06/seggregated_nj_a_look_at_how_race_still_divides_us.html

¹⁸⁹ Mooney, John. “New Jersey's Public Schools Still among Most Segregated in Nation,” *NJ Spotlight*. 20 November 2017. <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/17/11/20/new-jersey-s-public-schools-among-most-segregated-in-nation/>

the same technology."¹⁹⁰ Jones argues that in order to obtain educational equity and increase the performance of poor and minority children in schools, America should revisit conversations on intentional school and community integration.¹⁹¹ Writer Ta-Nehisi Coates has taken a different angle, arguing that racist housing policies are an economic issue as black families were made unable to accrue wealth through property ownership in the way that white families were. Coates includes this in his widely read piece, "The Case for Reparations."¹⁹²

Ultimately, the legacy of residential segregation created residential patterns that still influence our state and country to this day. The historiography of civil rights would be incomplete if it did not include critical components of racial discrimination in housing policies and practices that go beyond our picture of "Jim Crow" laws in the South and illustrate how our cities and suburbs—and, therefore, the schools we attend and the people with whom we interact—were and are still shaped by racist federal policies, discriminatory city planning, unjust private market practices, and exploitative financial practices. Behind all of these practices and policies were individuals: politicians, public appointees and employees, and neighbors. It was only through the tireless and vigilant work of local civil rights groups and activists that any progress was made.

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¹⁹⁰ Fresh Air Radio Show, "How the Systemic Segregation of Schools is Maintained by 'Individual Choices,'" *National Public Radio*. January 16, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/01/16/509325266/how-the-systemic-segregation-of-schools-is-maintained-by-individual-choices>

¹⁹¹ This American Life, "Episode 562: The Problem We All Live With," *National Public Radio*. 31 July 2015. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with-part-one>

¹⁹² Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

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