

On The Line

How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs

Jack Dougherty and contributors

2018-06-02

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About the book

describe book-in-progress

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Contributors

Jack Dougherty has no idea how Bookdown works, but he will crib as much as possible from GitHub open repositories by Shawn Graham and Lincoln Mullen. . .

Other contributors to come. . .

How to Cite

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On The Line



How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs



Figure 1: Caption and source info, with option to insert static reference, and add link

Chapter 1

My Introduction to the Lines

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1.1 Bringing the History Gap

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1.2 Outline of the Book

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¹Jack Dougherty, "Shopping for Schools: How Public Education and Private Housing Shaped Suburban Connecticut," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (March 2012): 205–24, <http://juh.sagepub.com/content/38/2>.

Chapter 2

Defining City and Suburban Lines

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2.1 The Richest City in the Nation

Over a century ago, the press declared Hartford as “the richest city in the United States” per capita, a label from the past that seems strange to anyone familiar with its extreme poverty in the present day. That tagline came from journalist Charles Clark, who wrote a cover story on Connecticut’s capital city in 1876 for *Scribner’s Monthly*, one of the most popular illustrated literary magazines of its time. While Clark may not have invented this slogan, he certainly popularized it, based on some loose arithmetic of the city’s accumulated wealth, relative to the size of its population, approximately 40,000 people. His essay opened by surveying the value of vast financial and industrial corporations based in the downtown area. The city’s well-known insurance companies, including The Hartford and Aetna, held more than \$113 million in assets, which rebuilt Chicago after its disastrous 1871 fire. Added together, the city’s numerous banks amassed over \$50 million in deposits and capital. Five railroad lines fed Hartford’s extensive factories, including Colt’s Arms Manufacturing Company, “perhaps the most famous in the country” for its rifles and revolvers during the Civil War. Summed together, these businesses pushed the city’s taxable property value to more than \$200 million.

In addition its financial assets, Clark also praised Hartford’s abundant cultural riches. The nation’s best-known authors, Samuel Clemens (more commonly known as Mark Twain) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (whose best-seller, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, influenced the Civil War), both took up residence in the city, alongside many of their literary companions, editors, and publishers. In addition to serving as the state capital, Hartford prized its extensive libraries, museum, and hospital. “The Hartford school buildings are said to be the finest in the State,” Clark added, and called special attention to his alma mater, Hartford Public High School, the second oldest in the nation, which also enjoyed “a reputation with all the leading colleges as one of the best of all the preparatory schools.”¹ In fact, the education that young people received in the city’s public school system far surpassed what was available in the outlying rural towns, known today as the suburbs.

Today we recognize Clark’s “richest city” slogan as boosterism. The twenty-eight-year-old son of a local congressman was a rising reporter at the *Hartford Courant*, the nation’s oldest continuously published newspaper, and would later become its editor and owner. Clark “had an investment in the city,” observes

¹Charles H. Clark, “The Charter Oak City,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 13, no. 1 (November 1876): 1–21, https://books.google.com/books?id=2q_PAAAAMAAJ/&pg=PA1/#v=onepage/&q/&f=false.

historian Steven Courtney, and later served on the boards of corporations and philanthropies his essay praised.² He did not offer a definitive statement on Hartford's total wealth per capita, nor any direct comparison to financial statistics for other cities, to the extent they were available. Today, the idea of measuring a city by the wealth of its total corporate wealth, rather than the assets actually owned by individual residents, makes little sense. In 1903, nearly four decades after Clark's essay, skeptics questioned some of its claims. One critic was Alexander Merriam, a Hartford Theological Seminary professor in the brand-new field of sociology. Although Hartford was still "computed as one of the richest cities of its size in the country," he observed, "local wealth is not so large and available as the statistical aggregate might seem to indicate." Residents included both "wealthier citizens. . . scattered in different parts of the city" and also "a slum of almost the first magnitude" of the poorest citizens along the banks of the Connecticut River. While Hartford still had significant pockets of wealth, they were not uniformly distributed. In fact, while Samuel Clemens lived in Hartford, he and his co-author satirically named this era the Gilded Age, referring to a thin gold layer that symbolizes wealth, but masks underlying social problems.³

2.2 Carving Up Town Boundaries

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2.3 A Golden Age for City Schools

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2.4 Challenges for Rural and Suburban Schools

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²Steve Courtney, "Commentary: Was Hartford 'the Richest City in the United States'?" *Courant.com*, October 2014, <http://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-courtney-was-hartford-richest-city-in-america-20141010-story.html>; On Clark, see Norris Galpin Osborn, "Charles Hopkins Clark," in *Men of Mark in Connecticut: Ideals of American Life Told in Biographies and Autobiographies of Eminent Living Americans* (W.R. Goodspeed, 1906), 230–34, https://books.google.com/books?id=ARFh_Sbpg84C/&pg=PA230; Joseph F. Nunes, "The Lasting Legacy of Charles Hopkins Clark," *Hartford Courant*, October 2014, <http://www.courant.com/courant-250/your-moments/hc-courant-clark-profile-20141018-story.html>; Joseph F. Nunes, "Chapter Four: 'Fighting Joe' and Mark Twain," *Hartford Courant*, October 2014, <http://www.courant.com/courant-250/your-moments/hc-courant-chapter-four-20141018-story.html>.

³Alexander R. Merriam, *The Social Significance of the Smaller City* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford Seminary Press, 1903), <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/64385345>; reprinted as Alexander R. Merriam, "The Social Conditions of the Smaller City," *The Hartford Courant*, July 1903, 13, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.trincoll.edu/docview/555173471?accountid=14405>; See also skepticism about the corporate assets underlying the "richest city" claim in "The Richest City," *The Hartford Courant* (1887–1922), October 1903, 10, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.trincoll.edu/docview/555173471?accountid=14405>; Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of to-Day* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1873), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000664544>.

Chapter 3

Separating with Color and Class Lines

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Chapter 4

Selling and Shopping the Lines

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Chapter 5

Challenging the Power Lines

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5.1 Jumping the Line

by Vianna Iorio, JiYun Lee, and Jack Dougherty

In 1984, Saundra Foster, a Black single mother living in Hartford, was searching for a better school for her teenage son, Trevor. She described him as “a good kid” who liked to go to school and learned some topics faster than other students, but ran into problems at Hartford Public High School, which in her view was “geared for special education.” Saundra explained that it was “almost impossible” to get Trevor into more rigorous classes, and he was turned down when he tried to raise the issue with his teacher. Trevor was then referred to the district’s alternative education center for students it deemed not suited for regular classrooms. Faced with this bleak prospect, Trevor considered dropping out of high school altogether. This was the breaking point for the Foster family, and Saundra knew she had to take immediate action. “For a child like that to say that he is contemplating dropping out of school, it’s time to start thinking about alternatives,” she later told a reporter.¹

Saundra Foster decided to “jump the line” by enrolling Trevor, a resident of the city of Hartford, in the suburban school district of Bloomfield, located immediately to the north. Registering her son to attend a public school outside of her legal residence, without permission, was a serious step; although many parents had done it before, her decision could interrupt his education if they were caught. Saundra decided on Bloomfield because he could live with his aunt, who legally resided in the district. Trevor transitioned well into Bloomfield High School by fall 1984 and even became a starting player in the boy’s varsity basketball team [Dave Drury, “Bloomfield Cracking Down on Non-Residents in Schools,” *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1986), March 21, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/hnphartfordcourant/docview/758745359/abstract/13A12CEBBF12C1F05D2/6?accountid=14405>]. There was no record of him getting in conflict with peers or teachers and Saundra believed “he was much better off in Bloomfield” (David Drury, “Bloomfield Police Seek Warrants for Non-Resident Students” March 21, 1985.) Although she had to live apart from her son, “jumping the line” was the right decision in her mind, because city-suburban school district boundaries were unjust. “I didn’t deal this deck of cards,” she later explained, “I just have to play them,” and her son Trevor “should be able to go where he can to get the best education” [Paul Bass, “Case on Residency

¹William Mendoza and Anita Ford Saunders, “Jumping the Line,” *The Public File* (Hartford, CT: WVIT Channel 30 television broadcast, August 1985), <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/jackdougherty/clips/jumping-the-line/>.

and Schools Halted,” New York Times, June 9, 1985, sec. Connecticut Weekly, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/111144867/abstract/13A12D55A3C1001B800/2?accountid=14405>.]

Saundra Foster, mother of Trevor Foster, was accused of stealing a public education from a district where she did not reside. Source: still frame from video, William Mendoza and Anita Ford Saunders, “Jumping the Line,” The Public File (Hartford, CT: WVIT Channel 30, August 31, 1985).

Suburban districts referred to non-resident students like Trevor Foster as “line jumpers,” and school officials usually took administrative action to “disenroll” them from the district. But this case was different. In April 1985, Bloomfield police arrested Saundra Foster and three other Black parents, and charged them with a first-degree felony for larceny. This highly-publicized action was unprecedented in Connecticut, and perhaps the nation, as no one in recent memory had been charged as a criminal for enrolling their child in a public school outside of their home district.[NOTE: The other three parents arrested were Elizabeth Brown of Hartford, Claude Johnson of Hartford, and Norma Wright of Windsor.] But Bloomfield town leaders were motivated by three factors. First, the school district’s average expenditure per pupil had risen to \$4,000 in 1985, which in their eyes meant that the Fosters were “stealing an education.” Their decision to issue arrest warrants came in the early spring, just before town residents were asked to approve the next year’s school budget. Second, two of the four arrested families included young Black men on Bloomfield’s high-profile basketball team, and school administrators worried that their presence put their interscholastic sports titles at risk. Third, many White Bloomfield residents became increasingly anxious as Black students surpassed 50 percent of the high school enrollment in the early 1980s. Bloomfield leaders’ decision to introduce a felony charge clearly was designed as a scare tactic to discourage Black Hartford families from “jumping the line” into their racially transitional suburban school district. Moreover, town leaders adopted then-President Ronald Reagan’s racist “welfare queen” stereotype to specifically charge Black Hartford parents in the 1980s, but not White parents in prior years, with “stealing an education” from their suburban public school [Drury, “Bloomfield Cracking Down,” Drury, “2 City Parents are Charged [short version if already cited above?], Mendoza and Saunders, “Jumping the Line”].

While the arrests drew the public eye and may have intimidated some parents, they also sparked a civil rights debate on the growing disparity between city and suburban schools in metropolitan Hartford. Saundra Foster’s advocates and civil rights activists capitalized on her arrest to raise pivotal questions on one’s right to an education. Is it possible to “steal” a public education that the state is required to provide to all students? Did the growing inequality between Hartford and its suburbs prove that Connecticut was not meeting its constitutional obligations for equal educational opportunity? These questions were not just important in the abstract. The arrests forced a closer public examination of education inequity, which helped lay the groundwork for the landmark *Sheff v O’Neill* school integration lawsuit in 1989. City-suburban school district boundaries became increasingly contested during the 1980s due to a combination of the rising disparities between urban and suburban schools, increasing costs of public education, and rising white suburban barriers against non-resident students of color, in contrast to more relaxed policies towards non-resident white students a generation earlier. Building on increased public awareness from debate over the Foster arrest and other incidents, the *Sheff* plaintiffs went to court to challenge the legality of these boundary lines.

Line Jumping Over Time

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Chapter 6

Choosing to Cross the Lines

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Chapter 7

Where Do We Draw the Line?

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Chapter 8

How We Created On The Line

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8.1 Sample Bookdown Page

by Jack Dougherty and Co-Author Name

See internal reference (cross-reference) example above with contributor

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Section headings need four hashtags and no-number symbol

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How to write a text-only footnote.⁴

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¹Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson, "Who Owns Oral History? A Creative Commons Solution," in *Oral History in the Digital Age*, ed. Doug Boyd et al. (Washington, DC: Institute of Library and Museum Services, 2012), <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/a-creative-commons-solution/>.

²Mendoza and Saunders, "Jumping the Line"; Sheff Movement Coalition, "Forty Years of Project Concern and Project Choice" (Hartford, CT, January 2008), http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_media/1.

³Jack Dougherty et al., "School Choice in Suburbia: Test Scores, Race, and Housing Markets," *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 4 (August 2009): 523–48, http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_papers/1.

⁴This is a footnote, with no citation.

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Block quote example:

“I thoroughly disapprove of duels. If a man should challenge me, I would take him kindly and forgivingly by the hand and lead him to a quiet place and kill him.”

— Mark Twain

⁵Jack Dougherty et al., “How Does Information Influence Parental Choice? The Smart Choices Project in Hartford, Connecticut,” *National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (NCSPE)*, no. Occasional Paper 189 (April 2010), http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_papers/2/; Jack Dougherty et al., “Who Chooses in the Hartford Region? Report 2: A Statistical Analysis of Regional School Choice Office Applicants and Non-Applicants Among Hartford and Suburban-Resident Students in the Spring 2013 Lottery” (Hartford, CT: Cities Suburbs Schools Project at Trinity College, October 2015), http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_papers/48/.

Chapter 9

Teaching with On The Line

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Chapter 10

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