

(image/video background)

# Drawing Discrimination

Exploring redlining and discriminatory New Deal housing policy's lasting imprint on homeownership, home equity, and wealth building opportunities across New York

## HOW HOUSING BECAME AMERICA'S BIGGEST WEALTH BUILDING ENGINE

Around two-thirds of middle-class American wealth is tied up in home equity. The government had a direct hand in making housing into the lucrative wealth building engine it is today.

(if this intro section becomes too long, I can hide it behind a navigation pane or have an option to jump right to other section)

Facing a stagnant housing market and an impending foreclosure crisis during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration made mortgage credit cheaper and more accessible than ever before. His New Deal housing agencies offered emergency refinancing for millions of homeowners at risk of default and insured mortgages for new home purchases at these cheaper rates. By subsidizing and stabilizing lower- and middle-class participation in the housing market, these policies created the biggest wealth-building engine of the last century.

## HOW RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WAS ENTRENCHED IN THE HOUSING MARKET

What these policies failed to reimagine were the discriminatory practices littered throughout the housing market. The newly created governmental housing agencies refused to insure mortgages that were deemed too risky, and they adopted race as a signal for real estate risk. Non-white and immigrant neighbors were considered a threat to property values, so the government made it official federal policy not to insure mortgages in areas where there were more non-white families.

FHA Underwriting Manual image highlighting racial language

Government housing agencies also created color-coded maps documenting creditworthiness and determining housing values in neighborhoods across over 250 American cities. Grades were determined based on race, and the areas where more non-white families lived were colored red – the lowest grade, denoting a “hazardous” neighborhood – in a process known as “redlining”. This process reinforced the notion that houses in redlined areas occupied by non-white residents were riskier investments that were worth less, thereby also making it harder to secure mortgages in these areas.

Image of Redlining map

## HOW THIS HOUSING POLICY CONTRIBUTES TO THE PERSISTING RACIAL WEALTH GAP

By reinforcing prevalent discriminatory practices in federal policy, redlining spurred the growth inequality in the decades to come. These policies made it next to impossible for minorities to get a mortgage and kept home values low in redlined areas in a self-reinforcing cycle that “set the rules for nearly a century of real estate practice” (*Mapping Inequality*).

I wanted to understand if the structures of housing discrimination within federal policy still shape New York's current housing market, one of the most lucrative in the United States. To do this, I looked at changes in racial composition, homeownership, and home values over time in redlined neighborhoods across the city to see if these gradings are connected with how each neighborhood was able to build wealth in the housing market since the Great Depression.

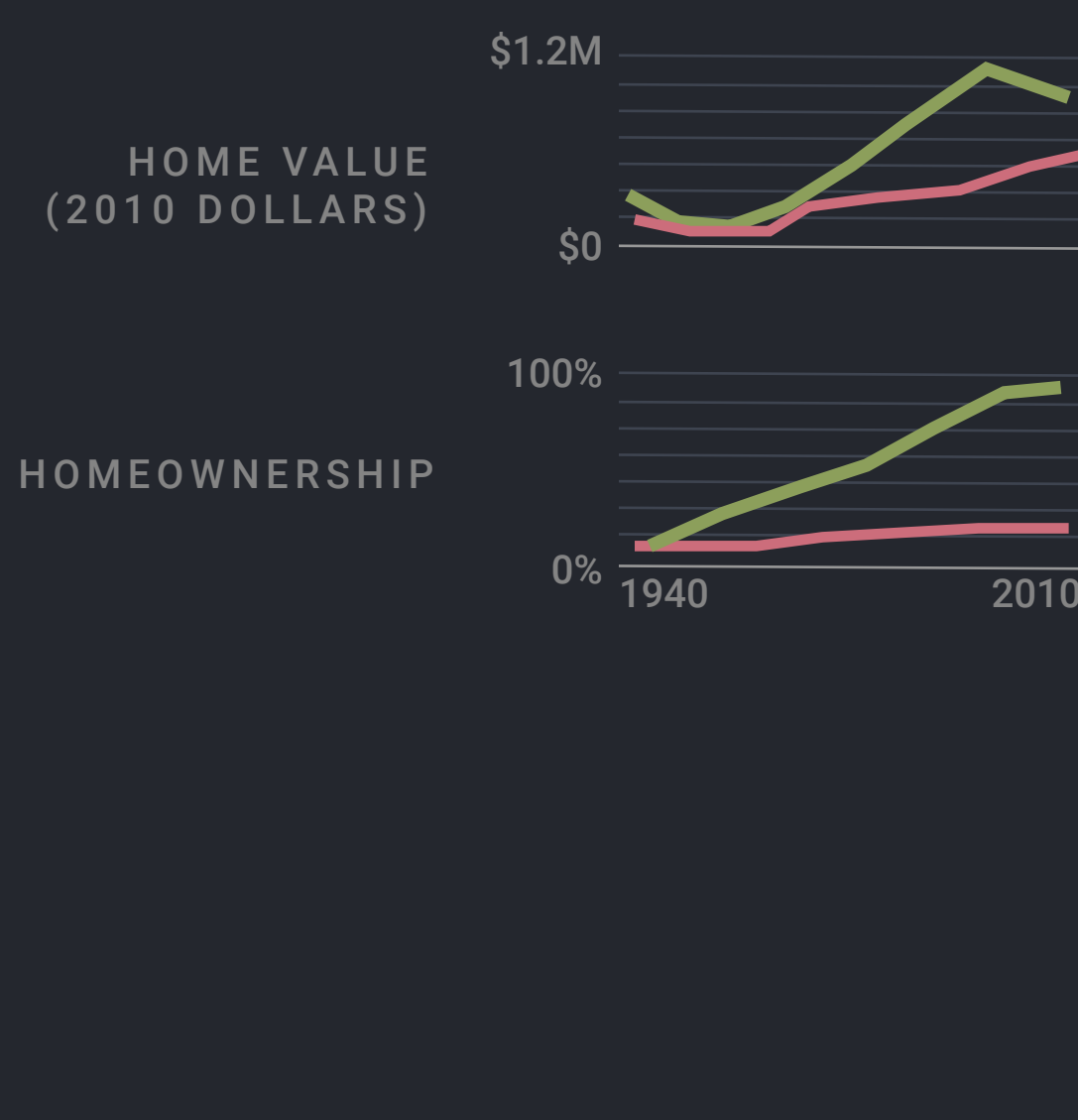
This scrollytelling section should explain again in broad strokes that redlining maps were tools used by the government and private insurers to document and determine creditworthiness, much of which was based on race. People living in lower graded zones (1) couldn't easily get a mortgage and (2) were deemed to be a negative effect on prop values.

(map sticks on page for whole experience)

Grade descriptions will come in scrolly sections, highlighting grades/ examples as I go. I'll provide explanations of what grades mean and examples of zones that were graded that way, along with explanations/text from the area descriptions.

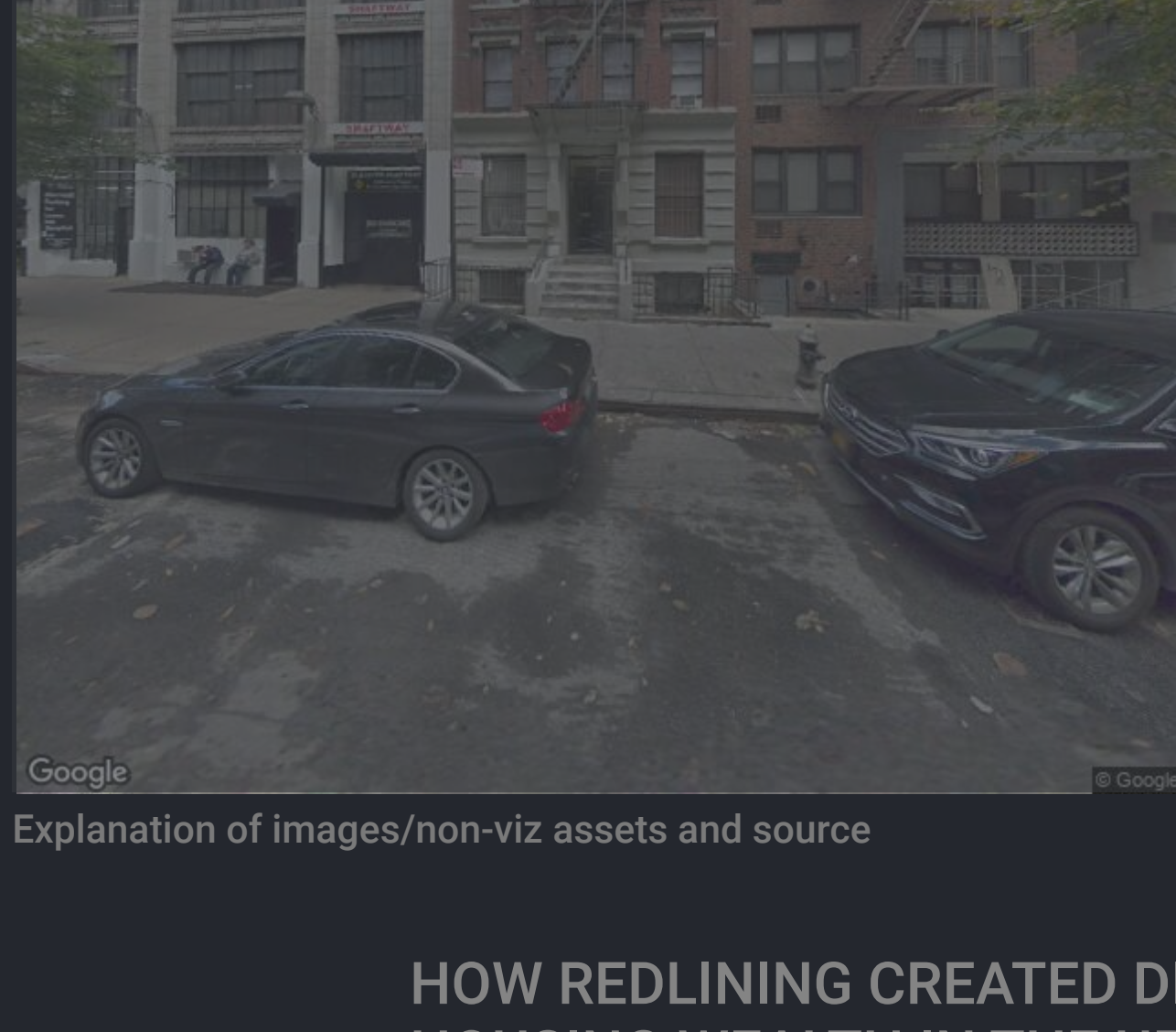
Upper East Side Harlem

(axes stay consistent for all comparisons)

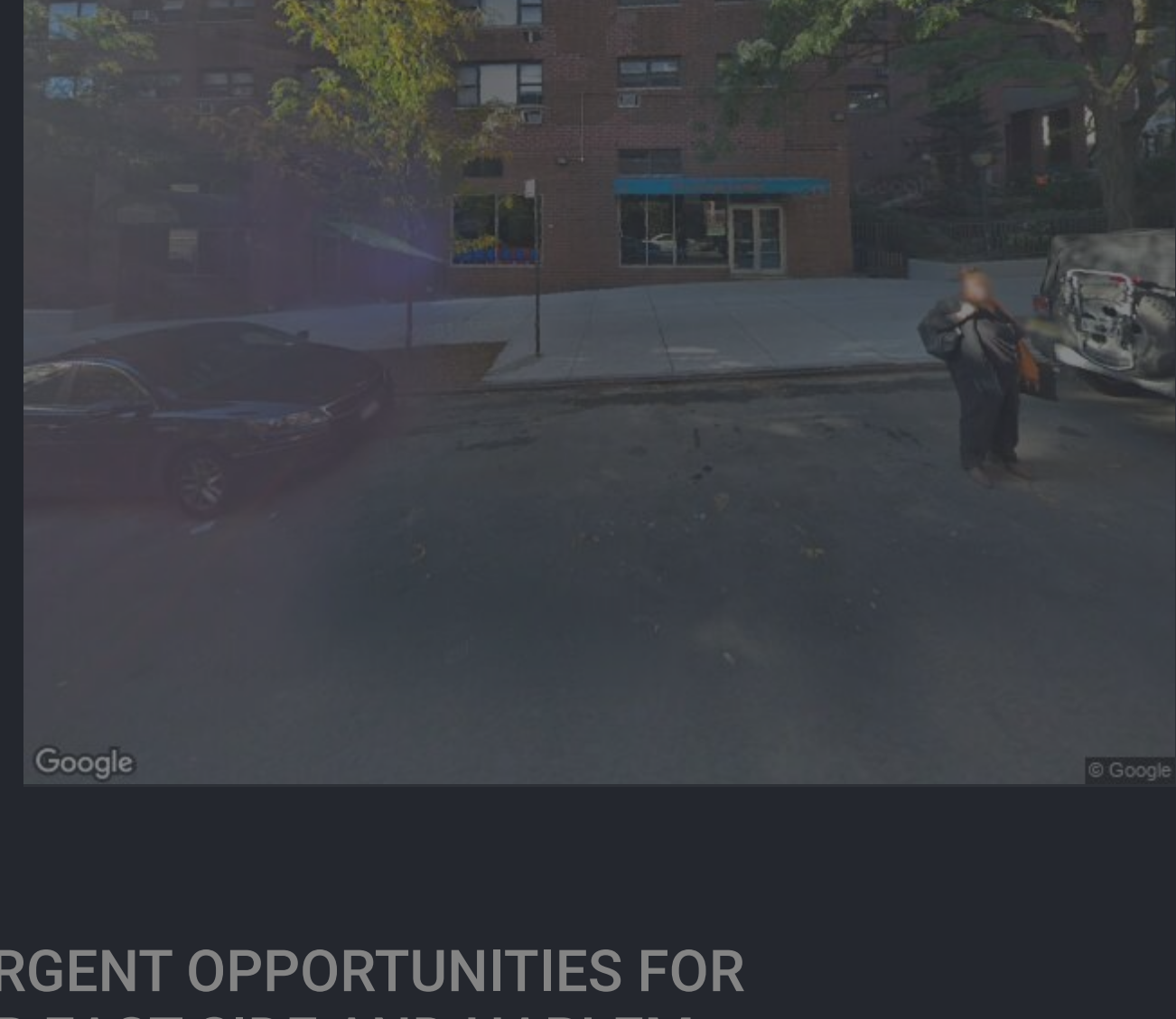


(map zooms to first comparison)

(map fades away - opacity or display - then comes back after the qual comparison is done)



Explanation of images/non-viz assets and source



(place-holder for non-viz / qualitative assets.. pictures of houses in the zones, pictures of area descriptions, housing ads, etc)

## HOW REDLINING CREATED THE DIVERGENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING WEALTH IN THE UPPER EAST SIDE AND HARLEM

Short explanation of the takeaway from this comparison. Pull quotes from Area descriptions? Images of homes? Non-viz qualitative assets that give context to the comparisons above? Maybe additional societal context also comes from adding to the viz-based graphics from the previous section (Daniel's suggestion).

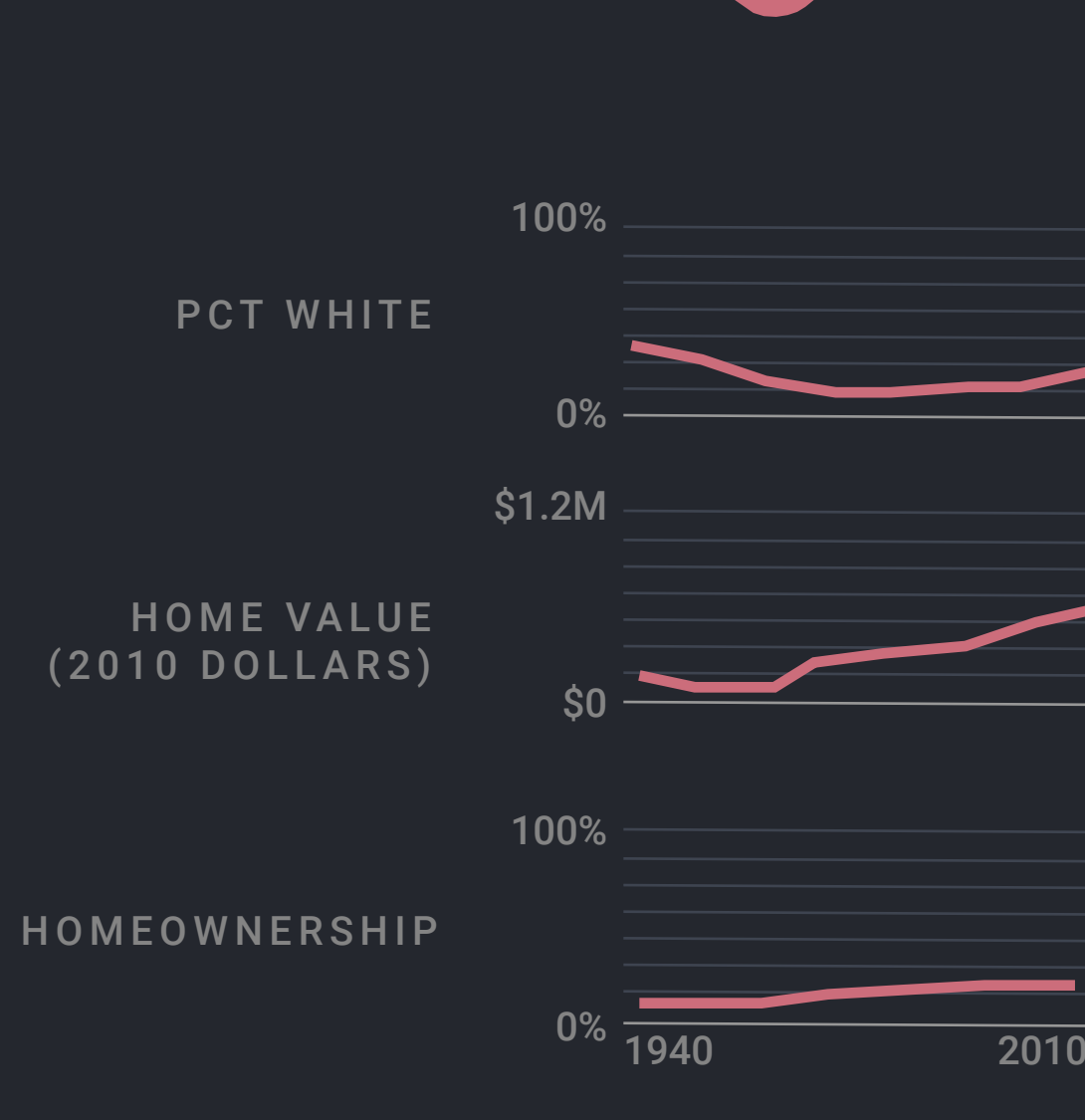
(reintroduce the map, make the next comparison... plan on making 2-3 comps)

After my comparisons are done, I want to mention how understanding the current context of these maps helps us understand how economic value of different real estate values today is rooted in these discriminatory practices by the federal government, which preserved racial segregation, generational poverty, and the racial wealth gap. And how these maps show the interplay between discrimination, economics, and government.

Per Christian's feedback, this section needs to have some comment on actual populations (using broad overall stats, either for New York (ideally) or nationally) and people's opportunities for wealth building in housing. Some kind of simple graphic on the racial wealth gap, the homeownership gap, home value, etc.

Then mention how New York has no one housing market or landscape, and changes dramatically from year to year and avenue to avenue. The housing market hasn't evolved since the Great Depression in the same way across the entire city – some redlined neighborhoods stayed white and property values stayed high, others didn't. Then open it up to explore the map.

(hovering over a zone displays it on the left hand side until you move onto another zone. clicking a zone keeps those stats on the left hand side until you click another zone)



(after my comparisons I open it up to interactivity and exploration)

(map will need to be pannable and zoomable – I'll need to execute this by updating the scale and translate of my d3 projection function like I have with responsiveness now)