Background Notes for Black History Month

<https://population-and-demographics-seattlecitygis.hub.arcgis.com/pages/neighborhood-change>

The disparities and displacement risks people of color are experiencing today in Seattle are deeply rooted in historical discriminatory policies and practices that have segregated people and limited opportunities based on race and ethnicity. Creating a more equitable future requires understanding how we got here, rooting out continued inequities, and ensuring that new policies, programs, and investments advance racial equity

From the 1865 ordinance barring indigenous people from residing within Seattle, to the introduction of racially restrictive covenants in the 1920s, to the formalization of redlining in 1934, to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, to predatory lending in the lead up to the Great Recession, a long history of exclusion and discrimination has prevented communities of color from living in areas of opportunity, owning homes, and building wealth.

In spite of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that deemed racial restrictive covenants unenforceable in 1948, Ornstein’s case reveals that this ruling yielded little power over the application of these restrictions on the individual level.

The National Housing Act of 1934 also played a part in popularizing these covenants.  Passed during the Great Depression to protect affordable housing, the Housing Act introduced the practice of “redlining,” or drawing lines on city maps delineating the ideal geographic areas for bank investment and the sale of mortgages.

Social enforcement had always been as important as legal enforcement by the courts in upholding racial restrictions.

The biggest names in land development were also the biggest names in Seattle’s segregation industry. The Goodwin Company,  South Seattle Land Company, Seattle Trust Company, Puget Mill Company, Crawford & Conover Real Estate partnership—these firms subdivided hundreds of acres and laid out neighborhoods throughout the region, always with racial restrictions permanently following the deeds. No name was bigger than W.E. Boeing, the founder of Boeing Aircraft Company

Between 1935 and 1944, Bill Boeing and his wife Bertha set aside a massive tract of land north of Seattle city limits for subdivision, including the future communities of Richmond Beach, Richmond Heights, Innis Arden, Blue Ridge and Shoreview.

The best example of this occurred in Capitol Hill.  Worried that African American families might seek housing north of Madison Ave, a group of white homeowners in the upscale neighborhood of Capitol Hill began a campaign in 1927 to change all of the deeds in the area. This was a more complicated undertaking than adding a restriction to newly subdivided property. An extensive effort was required to convince the hundreds of homeowners to sign on to the restrictive covenant that would bind their property and limit their freedom and that of future owners. Just who led the campaign is not clear, but it seems to have been associated with the Capitol Hill Community Club. In a letter written 20 years later, Martha B. Cook, a club leader, stated that “a small group of interested people worked and kept 90 blocks [of Capitol Hill] safe through racial restrictions.”[23](https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm" \l "note23)  She went on to extol the “mutual benefits, protection, preservation and promotion of the value of that land and properties” achieved through the covenant campaign.

White residents also failed to create effective covenant campaigns in other areas of Seattle.  To date, few deed restrictions applying to Wallingford or Fremont neighborhoods have been discovered.  It is not clear why Whites did not produce covenant campaigns in these areas.  They may have had other means of maintaining exclusivity, as few non-whites managed to find homes in either area. In 1960 only 27 African Americans lived in Wallingford or Fremont, along with 21,823 Whites and 335 persons identified in the census as “other races.”

Racial restrictive covenants affected non-White individuals in death as in life.

Chart, timeline

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* Migration of African Americans (starting in late 1800s)
* Puget Sound Region
* Drawn by opportunity in different industry sectors
* [African Americans in the Modern Northwest](https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Pacific%20Northwest%20History/Lessons/Lesson%2021/21.html) African American migration to King County, Seattle, and the Central District
* [Charles Mitchell, Slavery, and Washington Territory in 1860](https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/charles-mitchell-slavery-and-washington-territory-1860/)
* [Black Heritage Survey of Washington State](https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Black_Heritage.pdf) (pages 6, 13, 15, 17, 23-26) - Study of African American migration in Washington between 1845-1935 to identify and evaluate historic sites and documented information to fill the gaps in the history of the state.

eople of color have generally moved to the American West for the same reason that other groups came—in search of opportunities that, they believed, would be greater in the region than elsewhere. In 1925 James Weldon Johnson, national secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), said during a speech in Denver: "Your West is giving the Negro a better deal than any other section of the country. I cannot attempt to analyze the reasons for this, but the fact remains that there is more opportunity for my race, and less prejudice against it in this section of the country than anywhere else in the United States."

By 1900 the blacks in Washington were increasingly dwelling in cities. More than before they arrived in association with urban-based employment, working aboard ships and trains or serving in the military, and their numbers grew. The African-American population in Seattle climbed from 400 in 1900 to 2,300 in 1910, 2,900 in 1920, 3,300 in 1930, and 3,800 in 1940. The black community was not very large, compared to those in other American cities, and it was not especially prosperous. Union regulations, employment discrimination, and other factors kept the great majority of African Americans at the bottom of the economic ladder in menial and service occupations throughout the first four decades of the century. In 1910 45% of black male employees were servants, janitors, and waiters, and 84% of black female employees were domestic or personal servants; in 1940 the figures were 52% and 83%, respectively. Economic opportunities were hardly improving. Moreover, residential discrimination actually worsened during these years. I

Over the course of the 20th century, more than seven million African Americans left homes in the South to resettle in northern and western states

# *WWII Era (Late 30s and early 40s)*

**Connection to Previous Section:** with policies to established to racially segregate housing across the US, communities of color that moved to the region were met with discrimination, hostility, and difficulty buying homes.

**General events and timeline/Local Examples**

* Population increases due to military involvement: African Americans, Filipinos
  + [History | Pierce County, WA - Official Website (piercecountywa.gov)](https://www.piercecountywa.gov/197/History) – General history of Pierce County, notably the “The War Years & Beyond” section
  + [Lillian Walker: Civil rights pioneer](https://www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/stories/lillian-walker/) – Profile of Lillian Walker, civil rights activist in Bremerton. Established the local NAACP branch and took part in numerous protests to desegregate Kitsap County.
* Racial segregation of units and military housing
  + King County
    - Fort Lawton, Jordan in King

# *Civil Rights Movement, Urban Renewal and The Federal Highway System (1960’s, 70’s)*

**Connection to Previous Section:** Policies formed as early as the early 1900’s continue to disproportionately harm communities of color through segregation, discrimination, difficulty purchasing homes, neighborhood changes

**General events and timeline/Local Examples**

* Transit System
  + White comfort is prioritized in building of transit system (i.e., better amenities and service for white suburban residents using transit system) ([The Legacy of Racism in Transit](https://vimeo.com/617199975))
* Highway System
  + [Mapping the Past and Future of Urban Highways](https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2021-urban-highways-infrastructure-racism/?utm_content=citylab&utm_campaign=socialflow-organic&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&sref=Y5NzbMHF) – Examination of the creation of highways and the demolition of historically Black neighborhoods in the process. Legacy of racist federal transportation policies.

**General events and timeline/Local Examples**

* Policies
  + The 1977 Washington state “Mortgage Disclosure Act” and “Fairness in Lending Act”
    - Increase of African Americans in suburbs in 1980s.
    - Increase of white people seeking out the Central district at the same time due to the “attractive” housing prices
    - Further impact of decades of redlining
    - White couples or those with young children having an increased presence or have purchased property in central district.
    - Redlining and racial covenants
* Zoning and Single-Family Zoning
  + Once those policies and practices were prohibited by federal law, local governments and planners used single-family zoning laws to disguise their desire to keep neighborhoods racially segregated. If communities of color are more likely to rent housing in multi-family settings due to systemic wealth inequality, banning multi-family housing in certain parts of the city greatly reduces the number of POC who can move there.
    - Example: 75% of residential zoned land in Seattle is single-family even today.
    - Highlight coded language - “desirable neighborhoods”
  + Introduced in King County around 1920
  + used to further exclusionary practices and discriminatory policies of the past
  + ‘Single family’ zoning was designed to exclude and continues to hurt families and communities struggling with a status quo that doesn’t meet their housing needs
  + Design review process for new developments
  + Exclusionary Zoning
  + “over 80% of land where housing is legal is single-family zoning. That is, it’s zoned to explicitly exclude housing for those that can’t afford detached homes , which right now in Seattle, per Zillow, are running a cool $830,000.”
    - ([Seattle Planning Commission](http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SeattlePlanningCommission/SPCNeighborhoodsForAllFINALdigital2.pdf))
    - [Another Source on Exclusionary Zoning in Seattle-Tacoma](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00988937)
    - ([Crosscut](https://crosscut.com/2018/12/rectifying-seattles-racist-past-requires-denser-future-says-report)) - source includes great visuals we can use
  + Note disparities regarding who lives in single-family neighborhoods ([Beaverton, pg. 8](https://www.beavertonoregon.gov/DocumentCenter/View/32870/HistoryOfRacistLandUsePractices))
* Homeownership
  + In a 2003 study of discrimination in home mortgage lending, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) discovered that Seattle African American loan applicants were 2.56 times more likely to be denied a conventional mortgage loan than white applicants in 2002.
  + a national study by the Center for Responsible Lending indicated in a 2005 study of data released by lenders themselves showed that people of color were more likely to pay high rates for mortgage loans.
  + Seattle had but one “affordable [middle class] neighborhood left,” the remote Georgetown- South Park area.
  + “The productive Japanese farming community in what were once the fertile strawberry fields of Bellevue was displaced by development plans the Freeman family had for a new downtown Bellevue” ([Crosscut](https://crosscut.com/opinion/2021/04/legacy-racism-built-northwest-highways-and-roads))
  + Home appraisal discrimination ([Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate/for-black-homeowners-a-common-conundrum-with-appraisals/2021/01/20/80fbfb50-543c-11eb-a817-e5e7f8a406d6_story.html))
  + Upzoning in areas without protecting against displacement; concentrating growth and density in vulnerable areas ([Portland: Historical Context of Racist Planning](https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-12/portlandracistplanninghistoryreport.pdf), pg 13)
  + Foreclosures in 2008 through 2014 occurred disproportionately in BIPOC neighborhoods in Seattle and South King County.
  + One in 11 Black adults was evicted between 2013 and 2017
  + Big business/tech investments
    - In all of 2013, major investors bought about 3,100 single-family homes, five times more than in 2012.
    - Corporate Landlords Bought BIPOC Homes and Land in King County
    - In April of 2013, Invitation Homes bought an average of 10 homes per day; by year’s end Blackstone had purchased 1,585 homes in the Seattle metro area.
    - 2014, Wall Street buyers snap up thousands of local homes for rentals
    - Barriers prevent people of color from accessing employment opportunities (e.g., segregated education system leads to employment disparities)
    - [Tech Boom’s connection to inequitable growth and housing issues](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10511482.2002.9521448)
  + Transportation investments
    - 2016 ST3 divisive (King “yes,” Pierce and Snohomish “no”)
    - Federal Way Lightrail expansion displacement
      * “If they do build the Federal Way Link extension, the plan they want would destroy 196 homes, 42 businesses, and displace 370 employees… The majority of destroyed homes would be in the Pacific Ridge and Midway neighborhoods, including two apartment complexes and the entire 21-unit Jackson Mobile Home Park south of the Kent-Des Moines Road. These neighborhoods have high concentrations of minority and low-income families.”
    - Othello Station
    - Chinatown-International District
      * Interstate 5 led to the destruction of low-income housing and separated downtown from the hill neighborhoods. Arguments for a lid went unheeded. The massive interchange between I-5 and I-90, and the construction of the Kingdome in the 1970s, threatened the district's cultural identity and viability ([Crosscut](https://crosscut.com/opinion/2021/04/legacy-racism-built-northwest-highways-and-roads))
    - Lake Washington floating bridge, a last link connecting Seattle to the East Coast as part of a transcontinental highway. It opened a new era of suburban settlement and industrial expansion, and encouraged a car-centric Eastside catering to white developers ([Crosscut](https://crosscut.com/opinion/2021/04/legacy-racism-built-northwest-highways-and-roads))
    - Hilltop Neighborhood: ([Seattle Times](https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/as-tacomas-hilltop-changes-residents-are-priced-out/))
    - [Source on Transit Investments and Inequities](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1078087418758959)
* Community organizations
  + Rainier Beach Action Coalition
  + Multicultural Community Coalition

**Impacts**

* illustration of disproportionate impact
  + Less access to high quality schools (Opportunity Mapping)
  + More likely to live in sacrifice zones (The Sum of Us: Chapter 8), leading to worse health outcomes
  + Foreclosures in 2008 through 2014 occurred disproportionately in BIPOC neighborhoods in Seattle and South King County.
  + one in 11 Black adults was evicted between 2013 and 2017
  + Displaced small businesses owned by people of color

**Conclusion**

* + Addressing racial equity is a necessary/effective way to plan for the region’s future
    - Not a zero-sum game
    - Expanding access to resources is frequently associated with an expansion of opportunities
    - Racial barriers are leading to a loss of this innovation and also causing us to be less resilient as a disproportionate number of our BIPOC residents continue to fall through the cracks