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Racial Conflict and Home Segregation in the 9-County Region

In America, racism has affected many individuals and groups. It is a problem that has been brewing within our nation since the beginning. Racism has affected minorities and immigrants in America and is especially visible in the city of Rochester. In the city of Rochester, New York, it is evident that there is segregation between minorities within the city and the suburbs. The poverty cycle of minorities in Rochester, especially African Americans and Latinos, has made it difficult for them to find a settlement. Moreover, what truly explains the reason why segregation exists in the Rochester region is the employment rate and income of minorities, as well as real estate agents.

In the Greater Rochester area, the groups that are the most unemployed are Latinos and African Americans. The unemployment rate of African Americans in Rochester is 3 times more likely to be unemployed when compared with Caucasians in the same area. Moreover, Latinos experience a similar problem, where the unemployment rate of Latinos is around 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed when compared to Caucasians (Doherty A). In a study where the United States recorded data for unemployment rates for races in the 9-County Region, African Americans had a 13.8% unemployment rate and Latinos had a 10.8% unemployment rate. Meanwhile, on the lower end, Asians had a 3.9% unemployment rate and Caucasians had 4.4% (U.S. Census 18). Without a job, African Americans and Latinos don’t have a source of income. They can’t feed their families or be able to afford to live in a safe environment. Those who become desperate to feed their families or for money will engage in criminal activities. This is shown in the mapping inequality of the city of Rochester, NY. Otherwise known as redlining. In a redline map of Rochester in 1935, the majority of African Americans lived in hazardous areas. Hazardous areas are described as having an abundance of detrimental influence or an undesirable population (Mapping Inequality). The dangerous areas are observed to be more central and more prevalent within downtown Rochester. Class D is appealing to the laboring class who cannot afford to live in a better settlement. In addition, section D5 has the most African Americans with a count of 75. The “Hazardous” areas take up 11% of Rochester. NY. Then, the most common grade for Rochester, NY is “Definitely Declining” with 58%. Class C has cheap, unattractive homes and is populated with lower-class citizens. In section C14, there resides one African American. Then, outside the downtown area are Class B and Class A. These are the areas in Rochester best suited for living and are the safest regions. There are lots of attractive homes and the entire region is populated by Caucasians. There are no reports of any foreign nationalities that live in Class A. The redlining data is based on reports and information from the 1930s. This reveals that from the beginning, immigrants and minorities were being segregated. The majority of minorities could not afford homes in Class A or Class B regions, resorting to having to reside in Class C and Class D regions. The average income for African Americans amounts to less than 50% of that of Caucasians (Doherty B). The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) was made in 1933 to assist homeowners during the Great Depression from foreclosure. The colored redline maps the HOLC made stood as a visualization of the government participating in housing segregation. Class A or Class B, which were colored green or blue, were the safest for investment. The worst rating was Class D, which was red. Class D was located southwest and northeast of Downtown, which held the majority of African Americans. The population would be small but steadily grew. Banks would refuse to lend to people in class D regions (Murphy, 2020). The information provided in Chart 21 indicates that minorities who live in poverty and have a high unemployment rate also have the lowest income. Then, the average income for Latinos is slightly higher than 50% of that of Caucasians. The information included in Chart 21 states the median income for African Americans is $30,182. For Latinos, $32,606, Caucasians with $61,627 and Asians make $61,918 (U.S. Census 21). The main reason for segregation and poverty in Rochester is the low income that African Americans and Latinos have to survive on. They cannot afford to live in suburban neighborhoods and can only pay rent within Downtown Rochester. Latinos and African Americans experience poverty at a rate that is more than three times that of Caucasians (Doherty C). According to Chart 24, Caucasians have the lowest poverty rate of 10% and Asians follow with a poverty rate of 17%. Latinos have a poverty rate of 32% and African Americans’ poverty rates are at 34% (U.S. Census 24). In Rochester alone, the poverty rates of African Americans are 42% of what is experienced by African Americans in the United States. African Americans in Rochester experience poverty rates 55% higher than the NY state mark (U.S. Census 25). The poverty rates for Latinos in Rochester have a 52% higher rate than Latinos in the United States and 33% higher than in NY (U.S. Census 26). These poverty rates are due to the racially-based segregation and discrimination located in systems that originated in Rochester.

Moreover, in the 1940s, Rochester was not as diverse and homogenous. This means out of the 325,000 residents in Rochester, only 1% were African American and 19% were immigrants. Then, over the years, African Americans from the south began migrating up to the North. Some of them would settle in Rochester. The FHA and HOLC enforced loan restrictions that made it very difficult for redlined locals to purchase a home and build equity. The discrimination shown is evident when talking about lending for housing, although redlining like in the example has faded away. Other forms of discrimination still exist today. In 2015, Five Star Bank drew the lending border to exclude most of the minority neighborhoods and regions in Rochester. Furthermore, a study performed by the Empire Justice Center showed significant results. In 2015, a study showed that African Americans in the same income category as Caucasians were more likely to be denied a loan (Murphy, 2016). This is a major issue that led to the segregation observed in the city of Rochester. Being denied a loan means residents cannot be able to purchase a home. To find a house for shelter, African Americans and other minorities resort to Downtown Rochester or places that allow them to rent. In Rochester, real estate agents, as policy, refused to sell houses in Caucasian neighborhoods to African American families (Murphy, 2020). Howard Coles, a licensed realtor, and publisher of the black newspaper, The Voice, has made a statement. “I am tired of telling falsehoods to people about where they can and cannot buy; I am tired of selling old houses and of never being able to sell new houses to the people with whom I am identified. … Most of all, I am tired of supporting American prejudice that is rampant here in Rochester in this necessary field.” Coles is explaining how discriminatory the real estate business is. According to Coles, houses were being sold at a few thousand above their real value. Many real estate agents have refused to sell to African Americans out of social pressure or personal prejudice. In addition, as Rochester began to expand and more houses were being built, these suburbs would become less accessible to minorities. Real estate agents and neighbors want to keep African Americans from entering their suburbs, fearing that their property and neighborhood would be destroyed. Due to all of these conditions the minorities were put in, they were backed into a corner. They had to live in an artificially restricted and methodically neglected region. The housing in the region was undesirable. According to Olga Edwards, an African American Rochester resident, she stated that conditions were terrible, and some apartments only had one room where the family had to share the one bath and one kitchen. Indubitably, the restriction on the African American housing market that was fueled by discrimination and support developed an unfair and segregated city.

Besides, the education in the 9-County Region is visibly segregated. To start, the child poverty rate in Rochester has shocking results. African American children in Rochester have a 49% poverty rate and Hispanic children have a 40% poverty rate (Doherty C). Meanwhile, Asian and Caucasian children have a 13% poverty rate (U.S. Census 3). In addition, the birth of children under 5.5 pounds is the main cause of future neurological and development problems (Doherty A). Low birth weight leads to developmental issues and the low birth weight in African Americans is 15% and 12% for Latinos. While the low-birth-weight percentage for Whites is 6% (Monroe Public Health). The neurological and developmental problems show in their education and schooling. The poorest children in New York are found in the city of Rochester. Furthermore, the students at Kodak Park School #41 have an appalling English competency. Many Rochester Central School District schools fail to reach conventional levels of education for students. Most of the students in Rochester city schools are in poverty and unable to afford better schooling. 94% of students are economically disadvantaged in the Rochester Central School District, and only 12% of this community is Caucasian (Murphy 2018). Furthermore, Rochester schools have a higher percentage of children who rely on free or reduced lunch programs for nourishment. An increased student population does not alter or increase the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch. According to statistics, schools in Rochester have 81% of students on free and reduced lunch. Furthermore, Rochester has a higher average of Hispanics (26%) and African Americans (59%). In comparison to other school districts, Rochester has a marginally higher rate of students on free and reduced lunch. For instance, Fairport Central School District and Penfield Central School District have 15% of students on the lunch program. Pittsford Central School District has 3% of students on the free and reduced lunch (High Schools). Unquestionably, the minority population in Rochester is pushed into the city due to segregation and poverty. Many of the students who reside in Rochester participate in the free and reduced lunch due to poverty. Moreover, on a list of the best schools in upstate New York, only 9 Monroe County schools are on the list. Out of those schools, none were part of the Rochester school district (Axelson). The list of ranked schools in Upstate New York shows that the schools in the city of Rochester are inadequate.

The segregation in Rochester is explained by the discrimination and prejudice in Rochester. When African Americans migrated to Rochester, many had to live in poverty. Homeowners and real estate agents become afraid to sell their property to African Americans and Latinos, for fear that they cannot pay the full price. Furthermore, suburban residents were fearful of minorities entering and destroying their neighborhoods. With the pressure and rejection of being able to live in the suburbs, minorities like Hispanics and African Americans were forced to live in the ghettos in central Rochester. With many minorities being unemployed, they have no means to provide for their family. Many engage in crime to feed their family, influencing the younger generation. The students in the city of Rochester have lower comprehension and a higher rate of those who are on free and reduced lunch than in other school districts in New York.

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U.S. Census, American Community Survey for 2014-18. Percent of those in the workforce

experiencing unemployment during the 12-month period.