

HOUSING

Housing is very important in the lives of families.

Where you live often determines where children go to school. It also can affect the quality of the house or apartment you live in. And it can affect what kinds of city services you receive and how frequently you receive them.

Throughout the history of the United States, city and town neighborhoods have often been segregated—divided into areas by ethnicity, race and culture.

Over the years, one of the greatest challenges to the civil rights movement has been to integrate neighborhoods and win rights for minorities to buy homes or rent apartments wherever they choose.

It is a battle that continues today, despite victories in cities like Washington, D.C., that have given middle class or wealthy minorities more choice in housing.

In poorer areas, especially in many cities, neighborhoods remain divided up by race or ethnic background, block by block, or even street by street.

Who Lives Where?

Segregated housing sometimes came about because new immigrants would settle in a certain area and would encourage other immigrants from their native land to live nearby.



Thurgood Marshall led the fight against private agreements restricting housing by race.

Sometimes it came about because people living in a neighborhood would limit who could live near them—either by law or by private agreement.

In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that cities and states could not force people by local laws to sell or rent to minorities seeking to move into an area.

After that ruling, some communities began creating restrictive private agreements, or covenants (COV-e-nants), to prevent some minorities from buying real estate in certain neighborhoods.

Such covenants were most often drawn up to block home-buying by African-Americans and Jews.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, faced with arguments by future justice Thurgood Marshall and others, said restrictive covenants were illegal. But many covenants continued to exist.

Another obstacle to black home ownership was red-lining: a banking approach that made it difficult for minorities to borrow money to buy homes in certain areas. It was called red-lining because it was as if someone drew a red line around the minority neighborhoods



Segregated housing is sometimes the result of people choosing to live with others of similar backgrounds. But this free choice does not allow someone to prevent anyone else from living in a neighborhood.

where a bank would not loan money.

On top of that, real estate agents in the 1960s sometimes practiced block busting. That means they would go into a white neighborhood, tell residents that blacks were moving in, buy the houses cheaply and then turn around and sell the houses to African-Americans at much higher prices.

In some areas, residents fought

this effort. In Washington, D.C., for example, residents formed a group called Neighbors Inc., that successfully discouraged real estate agents from busting blocks and encouraged the friendly integration of their neighborhoods.

Martin Luther King Jr. tried but failed to integrate housing in Chicago in the 1960s. Some consider his housing efforts to be his largest failure as a civil rights leader.

Today, even in areas where wide freedom of housing exists, neighborhoods are not always integrated. Many people choose to live with others who have similar backgrounds.

Civil Rights Timeline (1800 - 1849)

1800 U.S. Congress rejects, 85 to 1, an antislavery petition offered by free Philadelphia blacks.

1802-1805 Ohio constitution abolishes slavery, then prohibits free blacks from voting and passes the first Black Laws, restricting rights of blacks in North.



1809 New York legally recognizes marriage within black community.

1810 U.S. Congress prohibits blacks from carrying mail for postal service.

1814 Two black regiments formed in New York to fight in War of 1812; the African Free School in New York City is burned.

1815 Levi Coffin establishes Underground Railroad.

1807 U.S. Congress prohibits importation of new slaves into U.S., effective Jan. 1, 1808. Between 1808 and 1860, approximately 250,000 slaves are illegally imported.

1820 Missouri Compromise enacted—Maine enters union as a free state; Missouri as a slave state. Slavery banned in Louisiana Purchase territory.



1821 Missouri law disenfranchises blacks—takes away voting rights; New York restricts black male voting.

1822 Denmark Vesey, free black carpenter, organizes plot to seize Charleston, SC.

Land now known as Liberia colonized by black American settlers from American Colonization Society.

1827 Slavery officially abolished in New York; 10,000 blacks freed.

1828 William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist writer, attacks slavery in Bennington, VT, periodical.

