Twenty-First Century American Segregation

Akouvi Aholouvi, Webster University – Saint Louis

Abstract

Racism is about power and control of resources, which allows for negative influences of social, cultural, political, and economic organizations on American life. It grants specific people privileges that are denied to others, such as the enjoyment of basic human rights such as civil and political rights. Segregation allows racism to flourish in relation to housing restrictions and educational opportunities. This concept has a nefarious effect on African-Americans and other people of color because it is based on prejudicial attitudes based on skin color. This paper will use a human rights framework to investigate how the 1950s anti-segregation laws were (and still are) manipulated to undermine the intent of the laws to protect minority citizens from isolation and discrimination. In addition, it will expose clandestine practices that continue to segregate and deny African-Americans access to adequate housing and educational prospects.

Segregation is the method used to put racism into action. As a result, segregation has played a significant role in the corrosive sublimation of African-Americans through denial of access to housing and education. Although the United States has moved from 250 years of slavery to 90 years of Jim Crow Laws, to 60 years of "separate but equal" laws and 55 years of segregated housing policies (Coates, 2014), it continues to negatively impact a substantial number of African-American and other citizens of color. The problem revolves around how segregation becomes a weapon to deny particular citizen groups access to their constitutional and human rights. In fact, segregation is the product of state and

federal policies that support traditional racial prejudices. Although desegregation laws were passed in the 1950s, segregation perpetuates the impediments that negatively impact opportunities and lives of a substantial number of American citizens (California Newsreel, 2003).

The question is: Why is America still segregated even though desegregation laws were passed in the 1950s? To answer this question, this paper will provide an overview of U.S. segregation, specifically focusing on housing and educational segregation. Using the city of Saint Louis as a case study, the paper will explore why Saint Louis is one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in America – including discussing how structural and institutional segregation play a part in housing and education discrimination. Organizations and policies such as the Home Owner Loan Corporation (HOLC), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the GI Bill, and even realtors continue to play significant roles in Saint Louis segregation. Looking at segregation from a human rights perspective allows for open conversation about realities and appropriate solutions, as well as a deeper understanding of the historical roots of these issues. Hopefully this will also lead to personal transformation and community dialogue; whites are often too frightened to talk about segregation, people of color are too angry to talk about it, and the middle ground in this conversation remains elusive. Human rights in the United States – particularly related to civil and political rights – is a complicated and emotionally charged issue because the Constitution has not fully expanded, in practice, to protect all segments of the population. Violations against human rights have deep roots in the country's history. The basic reasons seem to be so deeply entrenched in local, regional, and national prejudices that laws have fostered segregation by not evolving at the same rate as citizens' attitude towards race. Therefore, human rights issues become buried beneath special interests that benefit social and economic entities.

Housing and educational discrimination are human rights issues because they are covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), among

others. When it comes to housing discrimination, Article 13(1) of the UDHR guarantees freedom of residence and Article 17 states that everyone has the right to own property and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their property. Article 25(1) of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including goods such as adequate housing (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The ICCPR supports these fundamental rights, guaranteeing states freedom to choose one's residence (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976a), while the ICESCR protests various property rights and resource rights necessary for an adequate standard of living (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976b). When it comes to education, Article 26 of the UDHR contends that "Everyone has the right to education," and that education shall be free in the elementary and fundamental stages (United States General Assembly, 1948). This is supported by the ICESCR, which protects the fundamental right to education (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976b) and is reinforced by international law such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, it is noteworthy that the United States has not ratified a number of these legally-binding international treaties.

History of segregation in America: How it all happened

A history of slavery and legally-sanctioned segregation help to explain current human rights violations within the United States. Slavery was introduced into North America in 1619 and extended into the 18th century. By its very nature, slavery denies human beings their humanity and reduces them to the status of things that had only economic value. When the American Civil War ended and abolished slavery in 1865, Southern states put in place laws that legally separated African-Americans from the whites in an effort to contain the recently freed slave population. These laws were known as the Jim Crow Laws and they legally supported segregation of public facilities such as restaurants, drinking fountains, public transportation, military units, neighborhoods, and places of employment because

many members of the white majority considered blacks as sub-human. This separation also leaked into democratic politics, where the majority of citizens were able to legally exclude African-Americans from voting, denying them access to basic social services such as housing and education along the way (Coates, 2014). Legal segregation made it impossible for Americans of color to fully enjoy their rights as citizens and as humans because schools, public transportation, employment, and political aspects of life were systematically denied to them (Lawson, n.d.).

Race is unimportant until societies manipulate it and put in place public policies and private actions that act upon racial characteristics. America is an example of a country where history has been racialized by slavery and the conquest of Native American's land and enslavement (Churchill, 2004). More economic opportunities and freedoms are granted to the whites rather than other racial groups. It is vital to understand this because most social scientists in the early 1900s believed that black people were poor because they were inferior as a result of Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006), and indeed these prejudices are still sometimes expressed today. After the abolishment of U.S. slavery in 1865, segregation (a by-product or symptom of racism) was introduced to legally discriminate against citizens of color. Segregation is a system by which one group deliberately keeps another group in subordinate status by denying them access to public facilities and civil rights. The whites had certain advantages that the blacks did not enjoy – and still do not enjoy full, as this paper will explore. Legal segregation made it impossible for African-Americans to fully enjoy their rights, and these practices led to many of the problems that people of color currently face in today's American society (California Newsreel, 2003).

Programs following World War II sought to improve the lives of veterans, but also reinforced prejudices and discrimination. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the GI Bill, was passed to aid veterans and help them to reestablish themselves in their communities. The benefit was supposed to help veterans with living expenses, matriculation in vocational schools and universities, obtain low

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interest rates to start their own businesses, and secure low down payments for houses and low cost

mortgages. Before the GI Bill, people could not afford to buy a home because they could not afford

down payments. This was a disadvantage for most people of color and poor white people, since it made

it impossible for them to purchase a house even though homes at that time were relatively inexpensive.

Most people of color were happy when they heard about the GI Bill, but the government failed them

again. The GI Bill came at a time of legal redlining, restrictive deed covenants, and racial zonings

(Gordon, 2008). For instance, the program allowed whites to move into newly constructed homes built

with the money from the GI Bill. When people of color applied for a loan, they were denied the same

access to the low mortgage rates that were offered to the whites. When people of color eventually were

accepted to move into some of the newly built homes, it caused the whites to relocate to other

locations that were exclusively white – a practice known as "white flight" (Avila, 2004). Despite the

promise of the GI Bill, many African-American veterans from World War II had nothing to fall back on

and could not get help from the country for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives. Most black

veterans went back to doing some of the most dangerous and lowest paying jobs in America. The

benefits of this program allowed whites to create and enjoy an ever-widening wealth gap over their

African-American counterparts (Shapiro et al., 2013).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s eventually ended legal segregation[1], but people of color

still face problems because of the social and economic structures that are still in place (Shapiro et al.,

2013). Redlining is a discriminatory practice by which banks, insurance companies, and financial

institutions refuse or limit loans, mortgages, insurance, within specific geographic areas, especially

inner-city neighborhoods (Gordon, 2008). Redlining is one of the reasons people of color, especially

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[1] The Civil Rights Movement began to gain momentum in 1954, culminating in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It was a social movement to end racial segregation and discrimination against African-Americans. This movement secured legal recognition and federal protection for citizens regardless of race. These changes were the result of civil resistance, nonviolent protest, and civil disobedience promulgated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others (Chong, 1991).

African-Americans, currently face socio-economic hardships. This is the case because race is a social and economic construct (Omi & Winant, 1994). African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians often do not have the same advantage and privileges as whites. Laws alone cannot solve problems that these marginalized people are facing. Social, economic, and cultural structures needs to change in order for people of color to have the same opportunities and privileges as whites. Individuals and institutions play a major role in problems facing non-whites. For instance, the 1980s introduced other forms of structural and institutional racism that put people of color at a disadvantage – including broad acceptance of the so-called "broken window theory". Introduced in 1982, this aimed to prevent crimes before they occurred by monitoring "anti-social behaviors" in the city. This evolved into the Stop and Frisk program, which gave police officers the right to stop and search people whom they believed were acting "suspicious" – mostly African-Americans and other people of color. This encouraged racial profiling and presents people of color as obvious criminals, even though research shows that whites commit as many crimes as black people (Moses, 2010).

Housing segregation in America

Though some whites argue that there are no laws stopping people of color from advancing, it's important to understand how policies have privileged white citizens. For instance, it was mostly whites that benefited from the GI Bill, helping them accumulate wealth and further create opportunities for their children and grandchildren. This created the gap that currently exists between blacks and whites in relation to housing. At the end of the Civil Rights Movement, people of color still faced housing segregation. When the people of color moved into a previously exclusive white neighborhood, the value of the homes dropped, and the Home Owner Association (HOA) would encourage white people to sell by offering cash for their homes. Many whites obliged because HOA was the expert in selling and buying homes, so the whites believed that what HOA was telling them was true. However, the problem was

that since whites were privileged, they took the resources, political influence, and financial power with them. This perpetuated the downward cycle of oppression and poverty in black communities. When the whites left, good schools closed, businesses moved, and people lost the ability to maintain and improve their neighborhoods. This hurt communities at the individual level, as well, since people gain equity by buying a home, not by renting. Wealth comes from home equity, which helps fund education for children and eventually helps them to save money and pass it down to their children and grandchildren; people of color who cannot pass wealth down to children aren't able to provide the same opportunities to their families members compared to wealthier white citizens. The average black person only has one eighth of the net worth of the average white person. Even with similar incomes, white families have twice the wealth of black families, and this comes from the value of their homes, which most black families do not have (Shapiro et al., 2013).

Another option available to black families has been public housing, which comes with a variety of problems. Even though it sounded like a good idea at its inception, it was actually a trap for black families – and they immediately fell into it. The reason public housing was called "projects" was because it was a social project; the government built large housing complexes to see how many black families they would accommodate. Large numbers of white people had fled the cities for the suburbs to isolate themselves from the projects and the people who lived there (Avila, 2004). Yet the criteria for entering public housing often contributed to poverty rather than fighting it. There were and still are specific rules when a person applies to live in a "project." They can only make a certain amount of money per month. This causes some people to stop working in order to get accepted into public housing. When people are living on the economic edge, they sometimes do whatever they can to better their situation and the project became a holding place for single mothers who live on the economic edge (Friedrichs, 2011). Housing became a vicious circle, constantly spiraling downward. Consider a struggling family denied housing because they are not living below the poverty line. If a person quits their job to get accepted,

they also becomes eligible for medical insurance, food stamps, and will also get help paying their utility

bills. In this way, the public housing system encourages some people to quit their jobs. These people

only make decisions based on the options that are available to them. Public housing also hurts black

families and helps perpetuate the cycle of poverty and oppression because of familial income

constraints. In some cases, black men can't live with their children because of income constraints,

making it impossible for their children to get the full paternal support that they actually need (Friedrichs,

2011).

This paper uses Saint Louis, Missouri, as a case study to understand racism and segregation, but

it is necessary to note that the issues in Saint Louis can also apply to other states and cities across the

United States. For example, during the 1940s in Chicago, organizations like the Home Owners' Loan

Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) instituted restrictive deed covenants.

Once this was placed into public policy, "about half of all residential neighborhoods in the city were

effectively-off limits to blacks" (Coates, 2014, p.27). Before these restrictive covenants were put in

place, white people did not want to live with black people. This was because of their personal prejudices

about black people, as well as the impacts of "separate but equal" laws. The legal ability for black people

to move into any neighborhood of their choice did not occur until 1968, with the passage of the Fair

Housing Act (FHA) (Jackson, 1985). The FHA prohibited housing discrimination on the basis of race, color,

religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, and other types of discrimination that were not

specifically outlined in the document. This was supposed to cover every type of housing including

private housing, where buyers received federal financial assistance, including state and local

government housing (Coates, 2014).

Despite seemingly progressive policies, housing segregation continued in the United States

because the government failed to enforce these laws. Ironically, after the FHA was passed in 1968, the

Chicago city government started their urban renewal program, which focused on "cleaning" cities across

America (Gordon, 2003). This enabled government officials to invest money into public housing. On February 10, 1969, Chicago's federal district judge Richard B. Austin issued an order for the building of Chicago's biggest public housing complexes. Not surprisingly, these housing complexes were built in the inner city, or the so-called "ghettos". American history documents that the majority of the people who have lived in the "ghetto" were often people of color. This means that the public housing complexes were being built in large part to house people of color. In a way, governmental agencies were and are still playing mind games with the blacks. The building of the public housing complexes in Chicago further continued the issue of residential segregation. Many might argue that Richard B. Austin did not order the building of the public housing complexes because he wanted to separate the white people from the black people, but (intentionally or unintentionally) residential segregation was the result of his actions. Critics contend that he must be held accountable for his role in perpetuating the cycle of oppression and poverty in the black communities in Chicago for more than 40 years (Bogira, 2011). It was not until March 2011 that Chicago razed the last two public housing complexes, the Cabrini-Green towers. These two complexes were considered "the notorious, crime-ridden public housing that had come to stand as a failed experiment in urban planning" (Currier & Hickman, 2012).

Housing segregation meant that many African-American families were trapped in dangerous communities with few options for escaping the cycle of poverty – often partly in order to make life more convenient and profitable for whites. Currier and Hickman (2011) wrote that "Chicago's ghettos in the 1960s were notorious for their shootings, robberies, rapes, fires, joblessness, single-parent families, dreadful schools and high dropout rates, rampant alcoholism and heroin addiction, abandoned buildings and vacant lots" (p.2). It is not that white neighborhoods did not have similar problems, but there were social factors that especially contributed to the problems that black neighborhoods faced in Chicago. With Chicago being the first example of how many black people suffered from segregated housing policies, New York City also created social strife for black people because of its segregated housing

policies and urban planning. When New York City began its urban renewal and urban planning programs

in the early 1920s, the people who benefited the most were the whites (Scott, 1998). One way in which

the people of midtown Manhattan suffered during the urban renewal and planning program in the early

1920s was through the construction of expressways. The expressways were supposed to help the people

who lived in New York at the time. Unfortunately, this could not aid people of color because most of

them did not own vehicles, forcing them to find work and schools in their neighborhoods. The

expressways were also designed to bypass black neighborhoods by not constructing access ramps that

would lead in and out of the neighborhoods. This in effect isolated the black community. In an effort to

make life convenient for whites, blacks had to pay the ultimate price by losing their homes, jobs, and

schools. In addition, blacks lost their jobs because the expressways were built to economically destroy

their neighborhoods (Berman, 1983).

Urban planning often paid little attention to minority populations in some of America's largest

cities. In 1929, the Swiss-French architect and urban planner, Le Corbusier, looked at New York City and

said, "I will eliminate all those things. That's my starting point. I insist on right-angled intersections"

(Scott, 1998, p.108). The governor of New York allowed Le Corbusier to carry out his plan of creating

expressways through the city of Manhattan, where a majority of the residents were blacks. The white

people did not have to worry about becoming homeless or jobless. Instead, they were happy since they

could now afford to get from point A to point B more easily (Berman, 1983). Another urban planner and

architect, Robert Moses, left a negative imprint in the lives of the people of the Bronx, New York. About

Moses' work, Marshall Berman (1983) wrote:

> Everything big that got built in or around New York seemed somehow to be his work:
> the Triborough Bridge, the West Side Highway, dozens of parkways in Westchester and Long
> Island, Jones and Orchard beaches, innumerable parks, housing developments, Idlewild (now
> Kennedy) Airport, a network of enormous dams and power plants Niagara falls; the list seemed
> to go on forever. He had generated an event that had special magic for me: the 1939-40 World's
> Fair, which I had attended in my mother's womb, and whose elegant logo, the trylon and
> perisphere, adorned our apartment in many forms- programs, banners, postcards, ashtrays -

and symbolized human adventure, progress, faith in the future, all the heroic ideas of the age into which I was born" (p. 291-92).

Many historians considered Moses an innovative urban planner and architect. However, from a human rights perspective, his achievements caused hardship for many poor people, especially people of color. Most of the structures that Moses constructed were built through poor neighborhoods. Berman (1983) pointed out that the people who endured these hardships were Jews, Irish, and African-Americans. People were given short notices to vacate their residencies, and there was no compensation for losing their residencies. Thus, the American government failed its citizens again. The building of these structures further fragmented the lives of impoverished black and Hispanic families and attributed the increasing number of crimes that the community faced (Berman, 1983).

In an effort to rectify the chaos of the urban planning, the New York City government introduced a public housing program that even further segregated black people from white people. Rothstein (2012) noted that "of 300 large subdivisions built from 1935 to 1947 in Queens, Nassau, Westchester counties in New York, eighty three percent had racially restrictive deeds...whereas the Federal Housing Administration requires that the existing mortgages on the said premises the subject and subordinate to the said racial restrictions" (p. 1-2). With this, it seems as if the American government did not care about people of color and always passed policies that kept them segregated from the whites and excluded them from enjoying the same rights and freedoms that the whites enjoyed (Rothstein, 2012).

Housing segregation: Saint Louis as a case study

The issue of segregated housing is a problem for many cities across America, including the city of Saint Louis. The city is diverse on the surface, but it is in fact segregated along racial lines. In his book *Mapping Decline,* Colin Gordon (2008) recalled attending a 2002 academic conference and realizing that his hotel was actually in Clayton, Missouri – not Saint Louis. He wrote: "St. Louis, as I discovered on my

first foray east into the city, seemed to consist largely of abandoned houses and boarded-up storefronts-

interrupted, only a few blocks from the Mississippi, by haphazard commercial development. This was a

bad first impression (my route took me through the most neglected neighborhoods), but it stuck" (p.1).

Gordon did not observe many vacant buildings in Clayton, a wealthy (and white) suburb of Saint Louis,

and the social problems facing the city of Saint Louis are also not prevalent in predominantly white

neighborhoods such as nearby Ladue. Yet the effects of housing segregation are readily apparent in city

neighborhoods such as North City, South City, and Ferguson.

In *Mapping Decline,* Gordon (2008) illustrates how federal housing policies, real estate practices,

municipal zoning, and racism foster inequality and racial segregation in Saint Louis. He used Geographic

Information Systems (GIS) and digitizing historical source data, including the United States census data,

to support his arguments. He traced an actual address in North Saint Louis (4635 North Market Street)

to historically map the home's occupants and their races, showing how those demographics changed

over the years as a result of the racial zoning and restrictive deed covenants that were put in place in

Saint Louis as early as 1911. Gordon also used archival maps of the development of Saint Louis

subdivisions. The 1903 to 1950 building details from Sanborn Company's Insurance Maps of Saint Louis,

for instance, presented pertinent court cases and legal decisions, state and local urban renewal policies,

original maps, information about real estate practices, and federal and subdivision survey data (Gordon,

2008). The methods that Gordon used in *Mapping Decline* are important since history tells stories that

have been forgotten over time. Many in Saint Louis realize that the city is segregated, but few know the

history of segregation that is relevant to their city.

After comparing the diverse South Grand Boulevard from the predominantly white Brentwood

Boulevard, Gordon (2008) highlighted how the policy of "home rule" divided Saint Louis into multiple

municipalities outside of the city but still within the county of Saint Louis. "Home rule provisions gave a

state's largest cities freedom from special legislation and control over the structure and administration

of local government. Home rule provisions gave local governments (first cities meeting varying population thresholds, later counties) the power to shape their own charters, enter into contracts, tax local residents, go into debt, zone and annex land, and provide a range of local services," Gordon (2008) wrote (p. 39). This policy was a nightmare for citizens of color in Saint Louis. Within ten years after the home rule legislation was passed, Saint Louis moved from six municipalities to 91 municipalities. The creation of new municipalities brought about segregation by class, education level, and socioeconomic status. However, racial segregation was at the heart of the creation of the new municipalities. Most municipalities in the city of Saint Louis did not have police, fire personnel, trash service, and health departments and had to contract with the county or neighboring towns for such services. Interestingly, most of the counties had these services and were more developed than the city. Also, the majority of the people who lived in the counties, for the most part, were middle and upper class whites. The driving force behind this was the rapid residential development of Saint Louis County. While the city lacked most resources, its tax money was being used to further the development of the counties. The home rule encouraged and systematically continues to foster the inequalities in Saint Louis (Gordon, 2008).

After the separation of the municipalities from the city, local government officials came up with other methods that impoverished and segregated people of color, including restrictive deed covenants and racial zoning. These kept people of color from moving into any neighborhood of their choice and at times also forced them to move out of their homes and apartments. In 1927, for example, white homeowners dredged up a restrictive agreement covering the 4500 block of Cote Brilliante, an area that at the time was primarily African-American. Suddenly, black tenants and owners faced a court order to vacate their home. Not surprisingly, black residents were not compensated for being forced to leave their places of settlement, since the court saw restrictive deed covenants as valid documents. People of color could not even take their cases to court (Gordon, 2008). Gordon (2008) wrote that "black homeowners fought eviction on essentially the same grounds: that covenants could not be enforced

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where black occupancy had already eroded their legitimacy" (p.78). They had a good argument because it was not reasonable for the court to honor restrictive deed covenants that were drafted only to force black people from their place of residence. It would be more reasonable for the whites to just move out like they had previously done to get away from black people, thereby exercising their freedom of movement to change neighborhoods (Gordon, 2008).

Another aspect of housing segregation was concern about property values. The Federal Housing Administration, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), realtors, local real estate boards, and other organizations were concerned about property values and the impacts of African-American neighbors. The National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) specified that "a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy members of any race or nationality or individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood" (Gordon, 2008, p. 83). In order to understand NAREB, it is crucial to understand what the organization defined as "neighborhood". The American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers defined a neighborhood as an area exhibiting a fairly high degree of homogeneity as to housing, tenancy, income, and population characteristics (Gordon, 2008). These organizations felt that African-American residents were a public nuisance and a threat to property values. The whites had a different motive from the organizations that enforced public policies, which was because realtors and local real estate boards were dedicated, above all else, to the maintenance of property values (Gordon, 2008). The white homeowners, however, argued that racial zoning helped "to prevent ill feeling, conflict and collisions between the white and colored races in the city of Saint Louis" (Gordon, 2008, p. 70).

Urban renewal policies and programs also created disadvantages for citizens of color from 1945 to 2000 in Saint Louis. Policies included the Urban Redevelopment Corporation Laws (1943), the Urban Redevelopment Act, the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (1951), Federal Housing Acts of 1937, 1949 and 1954 (funding for public housing), Planned Industrial Expansion (1967), Model Cities

(1967-1972), Tax Increment Financing (TIF) (1982), Enterprise Zones (Missouri, 1982), and Urban

Highway Construction. These programs helped to clean the city and build infrastructures for businesses,

schools, and streets. Yet they also devastated North and Central Saint Louis with the destruction of

many homes and communities. The inner city was considered a "ghetto" and the people who lived in

the ghetto were predominantly black and poor. Most of the infrastructure that was built as a result of

the programs was to help whites, not the people who were living there and were in desperate need of

schools, businesses, and homes. As a matter of fact, most funds that were granted to help the city were

spent on the counties. The programs bypassed the areas that needed them the most. Slum clearance

projects and projects to encourage economic development in other areas of the city caused problems in

existing low income residential neighborhoods as displaced residents moved in from newly-cleared

areas. Urban renewal gave way from focus on residential redevelopment to increasing focus on large-

scale industrial or commercial development and away from the city, leaving most of the destroyed

housing never to be rebuilt. The city has had a dismal record of helping those its renewal efforts

displaced (Gordon, 2008).

After these failures, government officials tried to "fix" some of the problems facing inner city

residents by building public housing complexes, including the infamous Pruitt-Igoe. In his 1951 speech

regarding the city, Mayor Joseph Darst – who was the director of the Federal Housing Administration

(FHA) from 1947 to 1948 and proponent of urban renewal through slum clearance and the construction

of large scale affordable public housing – said: "We must rebuild, open up, and clean up the hearts of

our cities. The fact that slums were created with all the intrinsic evils was everybody's fault. Now, it is

everybody's responsibility to repair the damage" (Friedrichs, 2011). Pruitt-Igoe was a series of 33

buildings built with funds that Saint Louis invested into public housing between 1945 and 1950. Pruitt-

Igoe was designed by the famous architect Minoru Yamasaki, who also designed the World Trade Center

Towers in New York and the Saint Louis Lambert International Airport main terminal. According to the

documentary film *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,* the housing complexes failed early on and became internationally known for segregation, high crime, and poverty. The majority of the people who lived there were poor African-Americans, who often suffered from a lack of employment and educational opportunities. This explained why the crime rate was higher in the complexes; people with few opportunities often turn to criminal activity. The complexes became a place for jobless people, and even those who did work were often confined to part-time, low paying jobs (Friedrichs, 2011). Another issue that led to the downfall of Pruitt-Igoe was the failure to maintain the housing complexes. Only a couple of months after people moved into the public housing complexes, the infrastructure started falling apart as a result of poor maintenance and construction. The lights in the hallways were not replaced and for months elevators would sit out of order, which made life miserable for people who lived on the top floors. Pruitt-Igoe did not just fail people of color by segregating them from the whites; it also failed them by denying them access to resources that whites enjoyed – even basic resources such as a fire department and police protection (Friedrichs, 2011).

Education segregation in America

Education is power. Bell hooks (1994) reiterates this in *Teaching to Transgress*, noting that real education allows students to gain the knowledge needed to free them from the imprisonment of ignorance. Yet hooks also less worthy forms of education where the students were supposed to sit and listen and only speak when the teacher asked them to speak; this form of education could dangerously reinforce structural oppression and discrimination. She wrote: "A white male professor in an English department who teaches only work by 'great white men' is making a political decision, we have to work consistently against and through the overwhelming will on the path of folks to deny politics of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so forth that inform how and what we teach" (p. 37). She noted that many school curricula focused on white history, lacking resources for learning about African-American history

even if other ethnic histories were included. She wrote, "All too often we find a will to include those considered 'marginal' without a willingness to accord their work the same respect and consideration given other works. In Women's studies, for example, individuals will often focus on women of color at the very end of the semester or lump everything about race and difference together in one section" (p.38). This lack of attention and resources already makes it difficult for students of color to learn about their history. Combine that with the issue of school segregation and we discover that the notion of black inferiority is reinforced by the American public education system.

American public schools were segregated until the Civil Rights Movement, when the Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision legally de-segregated education. The argument was that children of color were not allowed to go to the same schools as white children, and this created such problems as African-American students having fewer resources and feeling inferior to their white counterparts. In many cases, the white students used newer editions of textbooks and had better school facilities – leading to varying levels of education and employability in adulthood, perpetuating the cycle of poverty among African-Americans. Yet the argument was also made that, resources aside, the very act of segregating students based on race constituted discrimination against U.S. citizens that was not appropriate according to the U.S. Constitution. United States Supreme Justice Earl Warren concluded that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" should have no place and that separated educational facilities are inherently unequal (Kluger, 2011).

Although educational segregation is no longer legal, today's public school systems are still divided by race and social class. The documentary film *Waiting on Superman,* for instance, is dedicated to highlighting the problems that American public schools face, including the impacts of residential segregation on education. In 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama said: "Maintaining our resource in our leadership and technology is crucial to America's economy. If we want to win the future, if we want innovation to produce jobs in America, and not overseas, then we also have to win the race to educate

our kids. Over the next ten years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a

high school education and yet as many as a quarter of our students are not even finishing high school"

(Obama, 2011). Yet many parents cannot win the race to educate their children because they live in

neighborhoods with poor school districts and poorly trained teachers. In some cases, teachers are

protected by laws that make it nearly impossible for districts to fire incompetent teachers (Kimball,

2011). Some parents try to circumvent residential segregation to protect their children's rights to an

education; Kelley Williams-Bolar of Ohio decided to send their children to a better school district and

was fined $30,000 when authorities learned they were living elsewhere. When she could not pay the

fine, she was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. The school hired private investigators to follow her

over a period of time to establish their evidence against her (Canning & Tanglao, 2011).

Another problem in American public schools relates to racial profiling and discrimination against

students. Critics contend that African-American students are often harassed and controlled through

"security" measures such as searches and screenings. There are also police officers in many school

hallways to intimidate students and control certain behaviors. Nolan (2011) points out that behavior and

interpretations are two different things; many African-American students have records as early as age

five because of the way authorities interpreted their behavior in school. This sometimes discourages

African-American students from completing school, sometimes instead placing them on the path toward

juvenile detention centers (Nolan, 2011). For example, police officers in Saint Petersburg, Florida,

arrested a five-year-old African-American girl in 2005 for creating a disturbance in class. The teacher said

she called the police after attempting different techniques to calm the girl who refused to sit down and

started tearing up the pictures on the classroom wall (Dakss, 2005). Nolan (2011) points out that schools

criminalize certain behaviors for African-American students to intimidate them. She even suggests that a

white student and black student might act in the same manner, but school authorities often interpret

the behaviors differently. This issue was raised with the arrest of the five-year-old girl in Saint

Petersburg, who was sitting at a table (as instructed by her teacher) when police officers arrived and handcuffed the child (Dakss, 2005).

Racial discrimination continues to impact the U.S. public education system, despite laws against segregation. In a 2014 PBS special report entitled "Separate and Unequal," journalists highlighted how white parents in the city of Saint George lodged a petition to build whites-only schools. Critics said that this would create segregation as never before seen in recent U.S. history, but some white parents claimed that having schools for only their children would enable them to control behavior and ensure quality. Many human rights organizations agree that the parents have the right to want a better educational system for their children, but warn that a school for only white children is problematic. Many of the white parents believed that the schools were currently under-performing because there were so many African-Americans in the schools. They believed that without the presence of African-American students, the schools would be less violent and more progressive. They believed that the schools in their neighborhoods were not progressive enough because African-American students were out of control and were making it difficult for white students to get the education they deserved (PBS, 2014).

Education segregation: Saint Louis as a case study

Understanding the history of housing segregation in Saint Louis, as discussed above, is vital for fully acknowledging the causes and negative effects of educational segregation. Residential segregation leads to educational segregation in public schools, from kindergarten and 12th grade, because property taxes and district residency determine what schools get resources, what students can attend what schools, and so forth. Just as neighborhoods in Saint Louis are heavily segregated, so too are the city's public schools. To highlight this point, this paper compares Webster Groves High School and Roosevelt High School. These schools are public schools, but Webster is in Saint Louis County while Roosevelt is in

the city proper. Statistics such as ACT performance and number of seniors who take the ACT, graduation and dropout rates, and disciplinary data were gleaned from the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.) and *U.S. News and World Report.*

According to the *U.S News and World Report*, the total number of minorities enrolled in Webster Groves High School is 31%. Of that minority population, 26% are African-Americans. Webster Groves' student population is predominantly white. In the city, 87% of students are minorities at Roosevelt High School; 77% of that group are African-Americans. The number of white students enrolled in Webster Groves High School is 69%, while the number of white students enrolled in Roosevelt High School is 13%. Thirteen percent of the students at Webster Groves High School receive free lunch, while 85% of the students in Roosevelt High School receive free lunch. Fifteen percent of the students at Webster Groves High School are economically disadvantaged, while 87% of the students at Roosevelt High School are economically disadvantage. Webster Groves High School has 85 full-time teachers, while Roosevelt High School has 60 full-time teachers (U.S. News & World Report n.d.a, n.d.b).

The Missouri Comprehensive Data System offers statistics for understanding academic success and disciplinary problems in the two schools. The number of seniors who took the ACT in the last four years at Webster Groves High School was 86.27%, while the number of students who took the ACT at Roosevelt High School was 50%. Since only 50% of seniors took the ACT at Roosevelt High School, this means that only 50% of the students at Roosevelt High School might apply for college, while over 86% of the seniors at Webster Groves High School might apply for college (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.). Interestingly, the attendance rate for both schools is at 95%, which contradicts some of the reports that students often do not go to school because of their geographical area (Nolan, 2011). Since Roosevelt High School is located in the inner city of Saint Louis, it may surprise many people that it has the same attendance rate as Webster Groves High School. The Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education defines a disciplinary incident as a situation in which

a student is removed from the traditional classroom setting for ten or more consecutive days. The total

number of incidents that has occurred in Webster Groves High School in 2015 was 35, while that

of Roosevelt High School was 95. Roosevelt High School has almost three times the incidents that

Webster Groves High School had in mid-2015 (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary

Education, n.d.)[2]. This is problematic because this means that students are not staying in class if they are

on suspension. This data shows us that inner-city Roosevelt High School, a predominantly African-

American public school, has lower rates of ACT test taking and options for college applications, as well as

higher incidences of disciplinary problems compared to the predominantly white Webster Groves High

School in Saint Louis County. These issues are also reflected when it comes to the problem of school

dropout rates, which President Obama (2011) has specifically identified as an educational crisis in the

United States. The total number of students who dropped out of Roosevelt High School by mid-2015

was 248; 164 of those students were African-American. However, the total number of students that

dropped out of Webster Groves High School by mid-2015 was 17; all were African-American (Missouri

Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.).[3]

Recommendations and conclusions

There is structural and institutional racism in America that forces many people of color to live in

some of the poorest communities. Instead of the American government focusing on residential

segregation and working toward giving each racial group the same opportunities, many policies seem to

continue oppressing people of color. Angela Davis (2007) contends that laws create criminals, for

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[2] It is unclear how many students are involved in these incidents overall, since it is possible that the same person could be involved in more than one incident. It would be useful if the database counted number of incidents, as well as number of students involved.

[3] Relatedly, it is important to note that many public schools in Saint Louis push students to the next grade even when they are unable to perform in their current grade. This leads to lower rate of unemployment in many African-American communities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty and discrimination against African-Americans.

instance. This happens when the American government criminalizes behaviors that were once not considered criminal, as was the case with the "war on drugs" and its focus on crack cocaine (often used by African-American drug users) instead of powder cocaine (used by whites). These policies made it possible for the United States to have the largest number of its citizens in prison, and it is not coincidental that a vast majority of the 2.5 million people in prison are African-Americans. They are in prison for nonviolent crimes (Davis, 2007).

There are many potential solutions to help alleviate these problems. One solution is to redistribute the wealth, closing wealth gaps between white and African-American populations and fighting cycles of poverty. The proper distribution of wealth will make the wealth gap between whites and blacks in America reasonable instead of it being so drastic. In order for blacks to have a closer wealth gap with whites, they need the same economic opportunities as whites. They require opportunities like good employment, education, and the ability to live in any neighborhood of their choice. Taxes also needs to be deducted appropriately, lowering taxes for the poor and requiring the rich to pay more for programs such as social assistance and public schooling.

The media also needs to fairly represent African-American communities. It often does not report much about housing or educational segregation on daily news channels. While the media may focus on issues of direct violence, such as police brutality, there is little discussion of structural inequalities such as housing and educational segregation. Critics are concerned that the news is not objective, and reporters only report stories that interest them or what is going to benefit ratings and advertising rates. It is vital that Americans do their own research and check facts instead of relying so heavily on the news media. More attention to fact-checking and rational debate may help to combat ignorance and prejudice.

In order to improve the failing educational systems in many black communities, including Saint Louis, the government needs to collect the right, reliable data. In some cases, data often supports what

interested parties want the public to believe instead of putting everything out for them to read and analyze. Lower income schools are often ignored in research studies, leaving them without data necessary to advocate for resources and appropriate help. The same goes for neighborhoods, which need to change for the better in order to support their public schools. When the majority of people in a certain neighborhood are unemployed or are utilizing public assistance, it is difficult for their school districts to have the resources to properly educate their children. Just because the law says every child has the right to education does not mean every child have access to education.

Lastly, American schools need to educate children not only about African-American history, but also about the issue of race throughout the country's history. America needs to unlearn racism and combat vicious stereotypes. The laws, policies, and the country's so-called justice system are the enemy of many people of color, which is an affront to human rights and all American citizens. It is critical that white citizens acknowledge white privilege and stand up against racism, just as it is important for African-American students to know their rights and their history. The only way forward for America during this crucial time is change. It needs to change its way of thinking, particularly when it comes to segregated housing and education.

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