

# An Examination of Segregation in Westchester County

Senior Capstone Project

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**Abstract:** Westchester County, despite being politically liberal and valuing diversity, remains extremely segregated. More than twenty of its towns and villages have a Black population of only less than 3%; meanwhile, the city of Mount Vernon has a black population of over 60%. This paper explored how Westchester originally became segregated and remains with such stark disparities in racial demographics across towns that are often right next to each other. The hypothesis for this research was that the current segregation reflects a history of intentional de jure and de facto segregation. The findings indicated de jure segregation in Westchester County, though the existence of discriminatory housing deeds could not be verified. However, Westchester County has steadfastly resisted integrated housing (affordable housing) until now by its strict restrictive zoning enforcement. Current resistance to integration in the County may reflect more overt classist attitudes than racist attitudes, though the two are tightly interwoven. Significant instances of de facto segregation were found both historically and presently. The consequences of segregation are material, psychological, philosophical and moral at once.

## Introduction:

This research began as the result of an invitation from the poet Claudia Rankine when she came to visit SUNY Purchase. She invited us to each look at our individual lives and our own windows of experience into the world with a curiosity and willingness to uncover the structures of white dominance that lay beneath. I knew that my hometown was very white, 80% to be exact (Census Reporter), which throughout my life wasn't much brought to my attention and when it was I chalked it up to coincidence<sup>1</sup>. This paper started out as an investigation into the question "Why is Larchmont so white, and how did it get this way?". I was especially curious because my town, like New York City, is very liberal politically and outspokenly values diversity and civil rights. Throughout school we were taught a very clear distinction between the North's tolerant and unprejudiced attitudes, embrace of emancipation and the Civil Rights Movement versus the South's vitriolic and violent racism. It was abundantly obvious to us all that to be racist was to be a bad person, and we found solace in the fact that we were the "good whites". Slavery, racism, segregation, Jim Crow - those were the products of the American South, not us. But the very classrooms where we learned about racial inequality were filled with almost entirely white students. This inquiry later expanded to explore Westchester County as a whole and its apparent patterns of segregation. Westchester County is among the top ten wealthiest counties in the United States. Its racial make-up is 57.4% White, 21.8% Hispanic or Latinx, 15.6% African American. (Wikipedia, Westchester County)<sup>2</sup>. Westchester appears to be more diverse on the County level, but the racial demographics within Westchester's towns and villages show a stark division among where white citizens live versus African American and Hispanic/Latinx citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> The 80% white statistic is as of the 2016 census. This census has a margin of error of at least 10%.

<sup>2</sup> The remaining racial make-up is as follows: 7.6% other races, 3.2% mixed race, 5.4% Asian, 0.4% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander.

Of its forty-eight municipalities (Wikipedia, Westchester), more than twenty of the County's towns and villages have an African American population of less than 3%. (Anti-Discrimination Center). Meanwhile, the majority of Westchester's Black and Latino population are packed into certain areas, like Mount Vernon which has a Black population of over 60% and Port Chester which has a Hispanic/Latinx population of 62.6%. (Cheating on Every Level) (Neighborhood Scout). Nestled right up next to cities densely populated with people of color, near entirely white communities have been carved out, as if by design.

How did Westchester County manage to segregate itself so effectively, and does this segregation reflect a series of intentional decisions, or mere coincidence? To research this question, I was interested in two forms of segregation: De jure and de facto. De jure segregation is defined as segregation by law and public policy (Rothstein, p. viii). This area of research was framed by Richard Rothstein's research, which makes the case for intentional de jure segregation that was enforced by U.S. governments on the local, state and the federal levels<sup>3</sup>. The first section of this paper will outline Rothstein's account of how de jure segregation played out in the U.S. generally. The research into de jure segregation within Westchester led to an understanding how public housing, suburbanization, and redlining operate to prevent integration, and provided insight into how Westchester fits into this historical picture. For a specific example, I discuss the contentious battle against integrated housing in Yonkers during the 1980's. I will also bring the paper to present day, where I review the Anti-Discrimination Center's Case Against Westchester, a lawsuit against the County for falsely and fraudulently claiming to Affirmatively Further Fair

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<sup>3</sup> Drawn from the book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*

Housing (AFFH). But in order to understand all of this, it is essential to first have a grasp on the history of the racial wealth gap and property ownership gap.

De facto segregation, on the other hand, exists outside of the law and is the result of private practices by individuals, such as a realtor refusing to sell to an African American couple (Rothstein, p. vii). For this area of research, I recounted the racial intolerance that erupted when famous Jazz singer Adelaide Hall moved to Larchmont in 1932. This section will also reflect on the history of Larchmont and the ways in which it is racially implicated, grappling with the towns liberalism and forgotten history of slavery and white supremacist propaganda.

Additionally, I will speak from personal experiences witnessing the segregation of my middle school into “teams”, and highlight an investigation into a local Larchmont school for allegedly segregating their kindergarten classrooms.

My focus on Larchmont specifically was a choice I made to keep this paper personal, a decision that rests upon the belief that in order to understand systemic racism and to participate in the ongoing process to undo it, one must reflect on themselves, as we are all racially implicated in the world.<sup>4</sup>

#### Color of Law Overview:

Richard Rothstein’s research lays out how the United States’ local, state and federal governments deliberately segregated America. This de jure segregation took the following forms: public housing that purposefully segregated previously mixed communities; subsidies for builders to create whites-only suburbs; undisguised racial zoning; tax exemptions for institutions

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<sup>4</sup> Provide Yancy and Rankine citations that develop this idea

that enforced segregation; official support for violent resistance to African Americans in white neighborhoods; state licensing of real estate brokers whose code prohibited racial mixing; state and federal court orders evicting African Americans who moved to white neighborhoods; and routing of highways to separate African American and white neighborhoods. (Monarch Housing). For this paper I will be focusing on the first three machinations of segregation. [Let it be known that ] any and all histories of de jure segregation following the Thirteenth Amendment (Abolition of Slavery) are automatically *unconstitutional*.

During the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. federal and state governments developed many public housing projects across the country in response to the severe housing shortage (p.18, Rothstein). Public housing in its inception was built for white workers, specifically for returning war veterans, who could afford homes but there were simply none available. These public housing units were built in residential areas and cities alike. Around World War II there was a huge housing shortage in conjunction with the baby boom era, and so, under President Truman there was a vast expansion of public housing for returning war veterans - the American Housing Act of 1949. This act was part of Truman's program of domestic legislation, the Fair Deal (Wikipedia, Housing Act 1949). The act was too socialistic for many in Congress, so they fought it using the poison pill strategy (also known as a wrecking amendment) - a tactic that deliberately adds an "innocuous" amendment to the legislation that they know makes the entire bill unpalatable, thus defeating it. For the Housing Act of 1949, Republicans proposed that all public housing must *prohibit* segregation and racial discrimination, knowing full well that this amendment would have Congress up in arms. Indeed, many liberals in Congress voted to *reject* integration and nondiscrimination in public housing. (Rothstein lecture) Sure enough, the

integrated housing amendment was voted down by Congress and then used as a justification by the federal government for segregating all of its programs for the next 15 years. (Rothstein, p.31) Housing projects continued to be explicitly segregated into White projects and Black projects. [cite specific projects here]

Not before long, most white families were moving out of White urban public housing, and their projects developed large numbers of vacancies. Meanwhile, all of the urban Black public housing projects accumulated long waiting lists.<sup>5</sup> (Rothstein, p.34) It was no longer feasible for the White projects to bar African Americans from moving in as the situation had become untenable. Meanwhile, industry - no longer dependent on railroad terminals or ports with the advent of the highway system - left the cities to rural areas. (Rothstein). Thus there were fewer and fewer jobs in metropolitan areas, where many of the projects had been built. The residents in the public housing projects - now predominantly African Americans - became poorer and poorer in the face of rising unemployment. (Rothstein) As time went on, investment and maintenance for public housing declined and they became the degraded projects we know today.

But why did all of the white projects become suddenly vacant? The U.S. Government had long been advocating for white families to move to single-family homes<sup>6</sup>, but many middle-class white renters were unable to afford a home. Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934 to address this issue. The FHA insured bank mortgages that covered 80% of purchase prices for the next twenty years, so white families could get loans for properties with very low interest rates. The caveat was that the

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<sup>5</sup> Different factors contributed to this, such as job opportunities for whites but not for blacks, or real estate agents who would only sell to whites. (source?)

<sup>6</sup> Own-Your-Own-Home Campaign, The better homes manual, Home Owners loan Corporation (HOLC) under Roosevelt (p.61-63, Rothstein)

FHA's appraisal standards included a whites-only requirement. (Rothstein, p. 64-65). Homer Hoyt, the principal housing economist of the FHA, was openly resistant to integration, concluding that "racial mixtures tend to have a depressing effect on land values" (Rothstein, p.94). This stance of the FHA included not just African Americans *in* white neighborhoods but *near* white neighborhoods. The phenomenon of white city dwellers moving to the suburbs in fear of Black residents (threatening property values or otherwise) is referred to as White Flight. The Federal Housing Administration even had a poster depicting a black man being led away by police that read "Escape crime, move to the suburbs". (Rothstein) <sup>7</sup>

The federal government issued a massive subsidy program to builders to create giant whites-only suburbs everywhere<sup>8</sup>. The largest of these suburban housing developments was Levittown, a development of 17,500 homes. The suburb was built by Levitt & Sons, created by William Levitt, and located east of NYC. (Rothstein, p.70) Levittown was such a sweeping success that many suburbs were modeled after it. At every step of the way, William Levitt and other subsidized suburban developers had to submit every detail to the FHA for approval; this included construction materials, design specifications, neighborhood zoning restricts, and a commitment not to sell to African Americans written in the deed of every home. This was an unconstitutional federal requirement. The FHA would not approve any development if they were even nearby neighborhoods with African Americans present. (p.71) <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> To what extent does the "public safety" that suburban communities boast stem from White Flight?

<sup>8</sup> Oak Forest northwest of Houston, Prairie Village in Kansas City, Lakewood south of L.A., Westlake south of San Francisco, Panorama City in the San Fernando Valley, and more. (Rothstein, p.72-73)

<sup>9</sup> I reached out to the Larchmont Historical Society to try to get information of the developers of Larchmont during this post WWII period, and to access property deeds in search of such clauses, but I never heard back.



Once segregation is in place, it self-perpetuates. (Anti-Discrimination Center) Even after exclusionary clauses of housing deeds are removed, a white suburb can maintain the existing segregation through strict zoning enforcement. This, in conjunction with the many financial disadvantages African Americans face, effectively keep communities white.

### Racial Wealth Gap:

In order to understand how segregation operates within Westchester County, it is essential to first acknowledge the reality of the racial wealth gap in the U.S. The racial wealth gap refers to the disparity between the wealth of the average White family versus the wealth of the average Black and Latinx families. Wealth is the sum of savings plus assets minus debts. The median amount of wealth for the average white family households is \$171,000, whereas the median amount of wealth for the average black family household is only \$17,600 (Vox). Despite the seeming progress we've made in terms of extending rights to people of color and embracing a culture that decreasingly tolerates racial discrimination, the average wealth of Black and Latino families has actually been in an *accelerating decline* since 1983, and has increasingly left many families unable to reach the middle class. "Between 1983 and 2013, the wealth of median Black and Latino households decreased by 75% (from \$6,800 to \$1,700) and 50% (from \$4,000 to \$2,000), respectively, while median White household wealth rose by 14% (from \$102,200 to \$116,800)." (Prosperity Now)

Though both racial and gender wage gaps persist, wage gap alone does not account for the disparity in wealth across racial lines<sup>10</sup>. A family of color can earn a middle class income but

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<sup>10</sup> Black men earn 73% of a white man's earnings, and black women earn 65% of a white man's earnings. Hispanic men earn 69% and hispanic women earn 58% of a white man's earnings. (Patten)

are seldom guaranteed middle-class security (Prosperity Now). Property ownership (or lack thereof) is arguably the biggest contributor to the racial wealth gap, as home equity accounts for 2/3 of wealth for the American middle class. (Vox)

Freed slaves during abolition were well aware of this truth. Garrison Frazier, a leader among a group of twenty Baptist and Methodist ministers appointed to establish the terms of abolition in the state of Georgia with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Major-General William T. Sherman. (Freedmen). Frazier asserted “the way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land”.<sup>11</sup> This conference led to an agreement among the African American ministers and General Sherman; Sherman promised to confiscate 400,000 acres of land formerly owned by Confederate land owners and to redistribute it among freed black slaves as a form of reparations. (PBS). This was a truly revolutionary and radical idea.

“Try to imagine how profoundly different the history of race relations in the United States would have been had this policy been implemented and enforced; had the former slaves actually had access to the ownership of land, of property; if they had had a chance to be self-sufficient economically, to build, accrue and pass on *wealth*.” (PBS)

History could have played out very differently had President Andrew Johnson not reversed course and had thousands of freed slaves not been evicted from the land they were promised.

(Vox) Instead, current Black home ownership is as low as it was when housing discrimination was legal. Any progress made since the passing of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 has been

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<sup>11</sup> “*Third*: State in what manner you think you can take care of yourselves, and how can you best assist the Government in maintaining your freedom.

*Answer*: The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor—that is, by the labor of the women and children and old men; and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare. And to assist the Government, the young men should enlist in the service of the Government, and serve in such manner as they may be wanted. (The Rebels told us that they piled them up and made batteries of them, and sold them to Cuba; but we don't believe that.) We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own.” Freedmen

reversed. (Washington Post) As of 2017, white home ownership was at 72%, while black home ownership was at 43% (JCHS). In some cities, the disparity is even more stark. Take Albany, where 68.9% of whites own homes and the African American home ownership is only at 20.1% - a 48.8% gap. (Urban.org). The practice of Redlining is important to grasping this inequality.

### Redlining:

With many families facing the threat of foreclosure after the Great Depression, President Franklin Delaware Roosevelt created the Home Owners Loan Act of 1933 as part of his New Deal<sup>12</sup>. The act gave access to low interest money and refinanced nearly 20% of urban home mortgages in the country. (Wikipedia) Redlining officially began with the National Housing Act of 1934<sup>13</sup>, which gave way to the making of “residential security maps” for 239 cities to indicate the level of “risk” for real estate investments in each city designed by HOLC and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in 1935 (Wikipedia). Desirable areas for lending were colored in green, these were the “Type A” areas - mostly affluent suburbs just outside of the cities. Type B areas that were still desirable were colored in blue, Type C were declining areas, colored in yellow. Type D neighborhoods were the ones deemed too “risky” for loans - these were often black neighborhoods in the center of cities [in older districts].<sup>14</sup> (Wikipedia) Some of these maps were created by private organizations and were designed to meet the requirements of the FHA’s underwriting manual. Lenders had to meet FHA standards if they were to receive FHA insurance for their loans. The FHA underwriting manual recommended that municipalities employ racially

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<sup>12</sup> This act created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC).

<sup>13</sup> Established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA)

<sup>14</sup> Include chart of Redlined neighborhoods have the largest share of black residents

restrictive zoning ordinances to encouraged banks to avoid areas with “inharmonious racial groups. (wikipedia, 15,16) Appraisals were written in both coded and explicitly racist language. For example, one appraisal reads: “Colored infiltration a definitely adverse influence on neighborhood desirability.” (NYT upshot) The consequences of living in a redlined neighborhood were many as they deteriorated, starved of investment. To live in a redlined neighborhood created obstacles for obtaining home mortgages, regardless of individual credit history. Without access to conventional home loans, Black families had to turn to contract sales and other schemes with high interest rates. This had a huge effect on family wealth, as home equity (and wealth in general) take time to build, “and people who weren’t able to buy a home never developed the equity that would allow their children (and grandchildren) to buy homes” (Badger).

Fast forward to the 1990s when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) made pushes to open up the mortgage market, including two government sponsored enterprises, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, both of which ‘accelerated easy housing policies and inflated the housing bubble that set the stage for the housing market crash of 2008.’ (Richman) Along with laws like the Community Reinvestment Act, these agencies and enterprises required banks to make loans to people with poor and nonexistent credit histories making widespread homeownership a national goal (Richman). African American Home ownership during this period was on the rise, but the issue was that African Americans were twice as likely to get subprime loans - loans that start out cheap but get more expensive for those with bad credit (Vox). But one-fifth of black borrowers with good credit still ended up with subprime loans. When the recession eventually did hit in 2008 those with subprime loans were hit the hardest.

(Vox) In the year following the recession, average household wealth for White families was \$113,149, whereas for Hispanic/Latinx families it was \$6,325, and for Black families it was only \$5,677. (O’Connell) By 2009, home equity decreased more for black families than it did for white families, and home equity for black families accounts for nearly twice as much wealth than for white families. (White). In addition, Black and Hispanic/Latinx families had less savings in 401k plans and retirement accounts, investments that White families benefited from when the stock market bounced back.

Inequalities in wealth and home ownership not only persist today, but have been expanding. These disparities inform why *affordable housing is essential to integrated housing*. To address this issue, HUD established the legal requirement to Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) , under which federal agencies and federal grantees are obligated to further the purposes of the Fair Housing Act. (HUD Exchange) Among these grantees is Westchester County. But has Westchester really upheld its promise Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing?

#### The Case Against Westchester:

“The city of Rye, nestled along the scenic Long Island Sound in affluent Westchester County, N.Y., represents the best of suburban living. Sprawling mansions perch atop rolling hills. Children attend top-notch schools. Residents browse tony boutiques and sun themselves on café patios in a downtown that manages to be both quaint and chic.

It also happens that nearly everyone who lives in Rye is white. Drive down the road a bit, cross two four-lane highways and you're in working-class Port Chester. Turn near the aging strip mall with the 99-cent store and head onto a street of down-on-their-luck apartments where brown and black children speed past on bicycles. Here, you'll find a tiny sliver of Rye, cleaved from the city years ago when interstates 287 and 95 came through. This is where Westchester County has chosen to put

18 units of affordable housing, part of a deal settling a lawsuit over the county's failure to promote integration as required by the Fair Housing Act of 1968. (Hannah-Jones)

As Richard Rothstein's book lays out, "Prior to World War II and for decades thereafter, housing patterns in the country as elsewhere in the country, were shaped by open and active discriminatory policies engaged in by every category of player in the housing market: governmental entities, private developers, landlords, and individual homeowners<sup>15</sup>. Craig Gurian, executive director of the Anti Discrimination Center, confirms that these same patterns played out in Westchester County. "Once in place, housing patterns tend to remain in place even if nothing further is done to reinforce those patterns. That is especially true when members of a traditionally excluded group continue to feel unwelcome<sup>16</sup>" ... In Westchester, existing housing patterns were powerfully reinforced by municipal zoning restrictions that effectively prevented the construction of affordable housing with desegregation potential. The impacts of these zoning policies are amplified by the county's policy of crowding subsidized housing for lower-income families into areas of minority concentration. (Cheating on Every Level). The maintaining of Westchester County's existing segregation essentially boils down to the fact that most zoning ordinances within these white and wealthy villages and towns only permit single family homes. Potential for multi-family or multi-unit residences - anything from a two family townhouse, to a condominium or apartment building - is extremely limited.

Westchester County strictly enforces these zoning laws that severely limit the amount of Multi-Family residences in its predominantly white communities. And yet, from 2000-2006 the

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<sup>15</sup> I reached out to the Larchmont Historical Society in an attempt to ascertain discriminatory housing deeds and other records, but never got a response.

<sup>16</sup> See Adelaide Hall

County received over \$50 million in federal funds in the form of federal housing grants and a Community Development Block Grant. A condition for jurisdictions across the country to be eligible to receive these housing grants is that they must promise to AFFH; “that is, to identify, analyze, and take the steps necessary to overcome the barriers to fair housing choice. When a jurisdiction seeks payment under its grant, it is making an implied representation that it *has* affirmatively furthering fair housing.” (Westchester Case). By the end of 2006, more than 20 of Westchester’s Towns and Villages still had African American populations under 3%. Under the Federal False Claims Act, a non-profit organization called the Anti-Discrimination Center filed a lawsuit against Westchester County. “The evidence was so strong that United States District Courts Judge Denise Cote found that the County had “utterly failed” to meet its AFFH obligations during the period between 2000-2006 and that each and all of Westchester certifications that it had or would were “false or fraudulent”. Westchester settled the case for \$62.5 million and the county was required to initiate legal action against the villages and towns the maintained their zoning barriers to fair housing choice. But since then, Westchester has resisted any structural changes and has gotten away with maintaining the status quo. HUD, the Court Monitor and the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District all had knowledge of Westchester’s fraudulent claims yet did not challenge the County. (Westchester Case) (Propublica Soft on Segregation) Since the settlement, “Westchester County has not adopted legislation that bans discrimination against residents who pay their rent with government vouchers. It has not produced a HUD-approved analysis of obstacles to fair housing. It has not drawn up a strategy to eliminate local zoning laws that make it harder for African Americans and

Latinos to find housing. And it has not launched marketing campaigns to promote integration in the county.” (Cheating on Every Level)

This happens on the level of towns, but zoom in further to the town of Mamaroneck (which is already 71.9% white) and this carving out of whiteness happens within the schools. The Town of Mamaroneck contains the village of Larchmont and village of Mamaroneck. The Mamaroneck Union Free School District contains four elementary schools: Chatsworth and Murray in Larchmont, Central on the border, and Mamaroneck Avenue in Mamaroneck.<sup>17</sup> Below are piecharts representing the racial demographics of each school. White Students are represented in Orange, African American Students are represented in Grey, Hispanic/Latinx students are represented in Blue, Multiracial students are represented in Yellow, and Asian/Pacific Islander students are represented in Light Blue. Chatsworth is ranked #54 best public elementary school; Murray #77th; Central # 95; Mamaroneck #364. Here we see a direct correlation between how well the elementary schools are ranked and how white they are. Students who are barred from Chatsworth or Murray due to zoning restrictions (often times students of color) may not be getting access to as good of an education. There is also a pretty big discrepancy in test scores as you move from Larchmont to Mamaroneck: Chatsworth Average test scores are 93.59; Murray averages 91.61; Central averages 79.27; and Mamaroneck averages 44.85. (Niche)

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<sup>17</sup> Include Pie Charts





Four elementary schools in mamaroneck union free district

Yonkers:

We can look to Yonkers to as an example of how communities respond to attempts to desegregate via AFFH and as setting a precedent for what the actual outcomes of desegregated public housing were. The fight was a success in AFFH, as the subsidized low-income housing was successfully built, but it was a contentious battle spanning the 1980's and 90's during which Yonkers developed a national reputation for racial tension (wikipedia). Did this fight set the precedent for the rest of Westchester County? And what was the outcome and consequences? Did property values actually plummet and crime rise like so many white citizens feared?

The *United States vs. City of Yonkers* suit was originally filed by the federal government and the N.A.A.C.P in 1980. In 1985, the Federal Court found that Yonkers had been purposely segregating housing and public schools based on race for the past 40 years. (Pastore). Federal Judge Leonard B Sand ruled that Yonkers had illegally crammed public housing into a one

square mile area as part of the efforts to segregate the city. (Painful Lessons) Sand pronounced that "the extreme concentration of subsidized housing that exists in southwest Yonkers today is the result of a pattern and practice of racial discrimination by city officials, pursued in response to constituent pressures to select or support only sites that would preserve existing patterns of racial segregation." (Fried) One of the things that made the United States vs. Yonkers case unique was that it addressed housing and school segregation simultaneously, acknowledging that housing is at the heart of school segregation (Pastore) Sand also ruled that the city's decision to intentionally crowd public housing to such a small area, along with private housing discrimination, was tied together with the city's overall resistance to end racial isolation in its public schools. (Yonkers NY) A desegregation order was mandated by Judge Sand, which required that 200 units of scattered site public housing be built in the East Side of Yonkers, which was predominantly middle class and white. It is worth noting the the public housing plan involved not multi-story projects, but rather townhouses with front and backyards, largely hidden from view (Belkin).

Public officials fiercely resisted the ordered public housing plan, "resulting in threatening fines and contempt charges heard all the way to the United States Supreme Court (Pastore)". The public's response was pure outrage. White citizens on Yonkers protested at every official and unofficial meeting, disrupted City Halls with angry chanting (Belkin, p. 53). Nick Wasciscko - the mayor during the this period and eventual advocate for the housing plan - received multiple bullets in the mail (Belkin). Many of these outraged citizens held that their fight against the housing was about principle, not race. "It's about unfairness. While I must struggle to pay my rent to live in east Yonkers, others are allowed to live in the same neighborhood with better

apartments paying lower rent” one citizen voiced (Belkin, p.186). This may have been the case for some citizens, but others were showing up to City Hall meetings in Ku Klux Klan T-Shirts, and “KKK” and “No Nigger” was painted on one of the new townhouses once installed. (Belkin, p. 32 & p.167).

The fear of property values plummeting with affordable housing continues to be a very real one for communities in Westchester today. (SOURCE). A report by the Center for Housing Policy reviewed numerous studies on impacts of affordable housing on public values in a wide variety of circumstances. What they found was that the vast majority of studies indicated that neighboring property values did not depress, in fact, in some cases property values even rose. (p.1, Don’t Put It Here).

#### Larchmont’s History:

The village of Larchmont can be found on many “Best places to live” lists. It ranked as the 24th wealthiest place in the United states and the fourth wealthiest in NY. (Bloomberg). It’s a small village taking up only 1.1 acres of land and lush with trees and decorated with charming colonial homes, some over hundreds of years old. Much of what the community prides itself in is its long and rich history. The Larchmont Manor House is a true historical gem, widely known to be the oldest house in the village. Local historian Judith Doolin Spikes has gone so far as to say one “could reconstruct American History through the Manor House” (Samon). The house was built in 1797 by Peter Jay Munro, nephew of John Jay<sup>18</sup>. Folklore has it that the Manor House was even a part of the underground railroad.

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<sup>18</sup> Another eminent figure that resided in the Manor House was Edward Knight Collins, the famous steamship tycoon.

Larchmont was originally inhabited by an Algonquian tribe who called themselves Lenape, meaning “the people” (source.) The Dutch began colonizing Larchmont in 1614, and in 1661 a merchant named John Richbell purchased the land in exchange for a minimal amount of goods and trinkets (wikipedia, larchmont). It’s worth noting that the Native American population today is 0.4%. (census).

Contrary to the rumor that the Larchmont Manor House was part of the underground railroad, despite being nephew of abolitionist John Jay, resident Peter Jay Munro owned slaves. The Mamaroneck Township, which encompasses Larchmont, as well as the town of Scarsdale are two Westchester towns that were homes to multiple slave owners and their slaves throughout the 16th century and into the 17th (Larchmont Historical Society; Scarsdale Historical Society). To what extent did these slave owners generate their wealth as result of slave labor? How much of this wealth has been passed down and compounded over generations? As two of the wealthiest and whitest towns in Westchester County, what moral obligation exists to pay reparations? And if reparations are due, is acceptance of a couple more townhouses and apartment buildings not the very bare minimum?

#### Adelaide Hall:

Adelaide Hall was a brilliantly successful jazz singer and entertainer. Her career intersected with Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, Josephine Baker and many more; no doubt, she was a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance. (2) She performed and was celebrated all over the world, touring throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, eventually moving to London to become one of Britain’s highest paid entertainers. Her career spanned over

70 years of near uninterrupted success, she even 'entered the Guinness Book of World records as the world's most enduring recording artist having released material over eight consecutive decades'. (2).

At the beginning of the 1930's, Hall had already made quite a bit a money and was looking to invest a large sum in real estate. She fell in love with a property in Larchmont - 11 Kilmer Road. Her purchasing of the property was 'mysteriously leaked to the press before her arrival. Suddenly 'anonymous letters of protest arrived at the local newspaper office.'(p.267, Underneath a harlem moon). Residents of Larchmont "secretly embarked upon a vicious smear campaign to remove Hall and her husband, Bert Hicks from the community". (Williams) This group of residents formed a fighting committee and called themselves the "Kilmer Road Association" and were led by a man named Edward McConnell. Up until now, Larchmont had always been characterized as a sleepy, quiet and peaceful village; never before had such vitriolic behavior been seen.

On the day of the couple's actual move, protesters blocked the roadway to her home, charged toward her car and bashed a stick in the rear window. Mrs. Hall was promised 24 hour police protection. But later that night, Hall and Bert were awakened by the smashing of multiple kitchen windows and the sound of intruders entering her garage. Outside of their front door was a group of Larchmont residents bearing torches with the intent to set the house aflame (Nice People). The police had "incorrectly assessed the situation", and decided not to uphold their promise of 24 hour protection and left the property earlier. Luckily, they arrived before Hall's neighbors could do anymore damage. No police charges were ever filed against the perpetrators of the violence (p. 277).

Hall was often reviled when walking on the streets, eventually the neighborhood deemed her “the Lark on Larchmont Hill”.

Politics of respectability is a response to racist stereotyping by influencing one’s behavior in accordance with “adhering to [strict] hegemonic standards of what it means to be respectable” (3). “The term was originally used in the context of black women and their efforts to distance themselves from the stereotypical and disrespected aspects of their communities.” (Wikipedia, Respectability Politics). These stereotypes often label black communities as lazy, intellectually inferior, loud and immoral. This “deliberate concession to mainstream societal values” is a defense mechanism against the discriminating white gaze.

What is most significant about this incident is the fact that Adelaide Hall was an exemplar of respectability, not necessarily by conscious decision, but simply by her gracious nature. A woman who was elegant, poised, industrious, beautiful, a loyal wife, intellectual, and accomplished. By any standard, Hall met all of the societal requirements placed upon her by the white gaze. And yet, over a hundred years later, this habitually quiet and peaceful community becomes enraged and violent when a black woman of celebrity status moves in.

It is worth noting that Larchmont was also home to director of Birth of a Nation, D.W. Griffith. Birth of a Nation was white supremacist propaganda, glorifying the violent actions of the Ku Klux Klan, exhibiting extremely racist depictions of African Americans portrayed by white men in blackface. The overarching message was that blacks could never be integrated into white society as equals (Steven Mintz, wikipedia). The budget for the film was over \$100,000 (\$2,420,000 when adjusted to inflation) and was a sweeping commercial success.

“It became a national cultural phenomenon: merchandisers made Ku-Klux hats and kitchen aprons, and ushers dressed in white Klan robes for openings. In New York there were

Klan-themed balls, and in Chicago that Halloween, thousands of college students dressed in robes for a massive Klan-themed party.” (Southern Hollows)

The incident with Adelaide Hall and the legacy of D.W. Griffith forces us to look deeply at the narrative we tell ourselves about our town (eg. the manor house was a part of the underground railroad). Narrative important in shaping our identity and prepares us in our discussion about race. What kinds of conversations could we have if we had a more honest and holistic narrative about Larchmont and how could we grow from them?

#### Segregated Kindergarten Classroom:

The final instance of de facto segregation was documented in 2011. Central School, a local Larchmont Elementary School, was accused of segregating its kindergarten classrooms. On the first day of school, mother Rina Jimenez noticed that of the twenty children in Ms. Donna Russel’s class, twelve were students of color. “In the three kindergarten classes unaffected by racial segregation, the white population is between 85-90% of a total of 72 students enrolled in kindergarten. In the racially segregated class, the white population is 28% and the Hispanic population is 39%.” (Patch) Additionally, Rina’s request to transfer her child to Chatsworth Avenue School was denied while other white parents were allowed. Rina filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and a near year-long investigation ensued. One of Rina’s allegations was that residents of Larchmont Acres East - a rental complex - were disproportionately assigned to Ms. Russell’s class. The residents of the rental complex “just so happen to be” students of color. The OCR’s report found that while school officials denied having access to incoming students’ races, they did have access to their addresses. School officials denied any discriminations, iterated that they “value the school’s rich

diversity” and that they felt comfortable with the current assigned kindergarten classrooms.

(Kim)

This incident at Central School is not unique. Anecdotally, I remember how my middle school was split up into four teams. Teams were each in different wings of the school and had their own set of teachers, so you never had class with anyone outside of your team. There are not public records of these teams in yearbooks nor was there any explanation as to how the teams were split up, administrators and teachers claimed that it was random. But it was clear to me and other students that teams One and Two were mostly white with students from Murray and Chatsworth, and teams Three and Four had most of the Hispanic/Latinx and Black population with more students from Central and Mamaroneck. The Cafeteria throughout middle and continuing into high school was evidently self-segregated, there was very little mingling between White students from Chatsworth, Murray and Central with Hispanic/Latinx students from Mamaroneck even after the teams dissolved in high school. And while choice is certainly an element in this fact, I do believe that the making of teams in middle school promoted this segregation and prevented friendships and connections that otherwise could have existed.

### Material Implications:

The consequences for people of color growing up in a segregated community are many. An assistant professor at the Harvard School of Public Health found in her analysis of neighboring communities in St. Louis, Missouri that zipcode was a better predictor of health than genetic code. (HSPH) In part because many highways were routed through black communities (Rothstein), Black children are six times more likely to die from asthma than white children



(AAAAI). But it's not just black and white. In a study done on Hispanic metropolitan segregation and health, results indicated that segregation has a consistent, detrimental effect on the health of U.S. born hispanics. (NCBI) Studies have also been done in zipcodes and predicting earning capacity (PBS). Growing up in Mamaroneck, the difference between a 10538 zipcode and 10543 zipcode is the difference between an education at a Chatsworth Avenue School and Mamaroneck Avenue School, which are rated #54 best and #196 best Public elementary school in New York, respectively (Parent).

### Psychological Implications:

There are multiple non-rational cognitive processes that are at play in explaining why Westchester County resists integration efforts - and the consequences of that resistance.

One of these non-rational cognitive phenomena is the Status Quo Bias. It is defined as “an emotional bias; a preference for the current state of affairs. The current baseline (or status quo) is taken as a reference point, and any change from the baseline is perceived as a loss ...”. This bias has been proven to be displayed in behavior various aspects of life, such as retirement plans, health, and ethical choices. One example of this can be found when looking at the auto insurance choices of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The two choices were between a cheaper insurance with limited rights to sue, and a more expensive insurance with full rights to sue. In New Jersey, the default option was the cheaper version, and most citizens selected this. But in Pennsylvania, most citizens selected the more expensive option because that was the default in that state.<sup>19</sup> This can easily be applied to the resistance toward efforts to integrate Westchester

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<sup>19</sup> These were the result of an inadvertent, real-life experiment during the early 1990s when citizens were offered two options for insurance as part of tort-law reform programs.

through affordable housing - an effort that would require some changes in architecture and community. This reminds me of a quote from a political advertisement for former Mayor of Larchmont, Martin Quigley. In it he cites, "The people of Larchmont have often and loudly voiced their opinions to keep Larchmont as nearly unchanged as changing times permit"

The Status Quo bias interacts with another process called the Mere Exposure Effect, Also known as the Familiarity Principle. The mere exposure effect is defined as "the psychological phenomenon by which people tend to develop a preference for things merely because they are familiar with them". (Wikipedia) This bias is demonstrated with many different kinds of things, including words, Chinese characters, sounds, geometric features and pictures of faces. If we apply this concept to segregation in Westchester, we can see the potential dangers for enforcing racial biases when many white communities are composed of mostly other white faces. Research on the mere-exposure effect has proved not only do people have an emotional preference for what is familiar, but one experiment indicates that exposure to White faces consistently made attitudes towards Black faces more negative (Smith).

### Moral and Philosophical:

Growing up in a segregated community may have a significant influence on how one forms their own identity. Contrary to the belief the idea that there is an essential self (some unchanging you that remains when all social and environmental contexts are stripped away) contemporary philosopher Judith Butler argues that the self is formed only through the recognition of others. "There is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms". (Butler) It is only

through our relationship to otherness that we come to understand ourselves, and the self has already been implicated in the world (a world with ripe with social norms, such as racial and gender constructs). That “self” we understand is a narrative we tell ourselves and others, one that is constantly undergoing revision upon addressal. Butler finds the moment when we are addressed directly by someone else as especially catalyzing in forming narratives about who we are and forming our moral responsibility. *“thus I come into being as a reflexive subject in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself when I am spoken to be someone and prompted to address myself to the one who addresses me” (Butler)*. This theory implies an opacity of the self, a self whose boundaries are not simply contained by one’s own physical body, but rather exists in a dialectical and ever-changing space between one’s mind/body and the people, institutions, ideas, and structures that one interacts with. To live in a white community with limited interaction with people of color, is to limit the possibilities to understand one’s own self in the world because we construct an understanding of the self via our relationship to others. George Yancy, another contemporary philosopher, applies Butler’s theories on subjectivity.

“I want you, white readers, to rethink the distinction between “spectacular” racist events (say, a lynching) and the mundane, everyday types (like shopping [and a Black person being followed by employees expecting them to steal]); both have destructive and detrimental implications for black bodies. I want you to consider the possibility that your white body is relationally entangled with my black body. In fact, I want you to rethink the concept of edges in terms of our bodies ... In the shopping example, as I am stopped and you get to shop, I am impacted - *touché* - by the “innocence” of your white body, by its continued free movement within the store. (Yancy)

Put simply, “the fact that you are not racially profiled and followed (because you are white) is inextricably linked to the fact that the Black person is racially profiled and followed” (Yancy, p.74).

Yancy comes to understand that whiteness functions as an edge (ie. redlining), and whiteness functions to build perimeters around certain freedoms and privileges (like the freedom to shop aimlessly without being suspected of a crime). (Yancy, P.111) Professor at Purchase College Mariel Rodney gave a presentation about the symbolic importance of white picket fences in suburban communities. What is the purpose of a fence: to keep something in, or keep someone out? When we recall how suburbanization of America was effectively employed by the U.S. Federal Government to segregate communities (via fear of black criminals), it's easy to draw an analogy between the exclusivity of whiteness and the white picket fence.

### Conclusion:

This investigation proved the existence of de jure segregation in Westchester County and confirmed instances of de facto segregation in Larchmont. To an extent, the specifics of de jure segregation in Westchester County are still nebulous, as I could never confirm the existence of discriminating housing deeds that Rothstein identified. This exploration also revealed how classism and resistance to integration are deeply entangled. Seemingly benign zoning ordinances and preference for the status quo are instruments in maintaining segregation, regardless if segregation is the intention, and that segregation is harmful.

In a way, this investigations of this paper were of a biased nature, as the inception for this idea was an invitation to look for structures of white dominance. I was not looking for evidence to the contrary. This paper was an exercise in seeing the world through a lens that I, as a white person, am not used to seeing. Arguably, I have been seeing through the lens of an opposite bias for most of my life. Throughout school we learned that there was a very clear distinction between

the North's tolerant and unprejudiced attitudes, embrace of emancipation and the Civil rights movement versus the South's vitriolic and violent racism. The paper illuminated how this assumed framework was - at best - incomplete, and at worst a miseducation that hindered self-reflection and obfuscated pathways to anti-racist work. Additionally, this paper would have benefitted from a more comprehensive analysis of the outcome of the housing projects in Yonkers, as well as a more comprehensive analysis of current segregation patterns across Westchester.

For anyone interested in continuing this research, I would suggest getting: access to local property deeds for white neighborhoods within Westchester; finding out information about the suburban developers of White communities and what federal requirements they had to answer to; and diving deeper into implications of segregation on health and finances, or any other material consequence.

The purpose of this paper is to hopefully open up conversations and self reflection among liberal white communities as a means to encourage anti-racist work.

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