How have barriers to fair housing changed over time?

Presentation for Impediments to Fair Housing Choice Task Force, State of Connecticut

Jack Dougherty, Associate Professor Cities Suburbs & Schools Project
Trinity College, Hartford CT
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Questions:

• How have barriers to fair housing evolved over the past several decades in the Hartford region?
• What role has government action -- or inaction -- played in this process?
• How does this history affect us today?
Summary:

While racial barriers have become less overt and more subtle over time, local & state government continues to allow exclusionary housing by wealth-based zoning. Both past and present actions shape our communities today.

Evidence from historical sources in Hartford region

The Cities, Suburbs & Schools Project

an undergraduate seminar and community-learning research project with at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut
Racial change in Hartford region, 1950-2010

How do we explain racial differences between towns?  

Explore map and learn more at UConn MAGIC
Racial restrictive covenants, 1940s

Local and state government approved racial restrictions written into official property deeds. US Supreme Court ruled racial covenants to be “unenforceable” in 1948, but legacy continues with us.
“Redlining” home mortgages, 1937

Federal agency and local lenders judged mortgage risks and downgraded neighborhoods based on race, ethnicity, and social class of residents.

Explore map and learn more at UConn MAGIC and essay by Shaun McGann (Trinity ‘14)
Racial barriers to public housing, 1940s

Locally-elected leaders effectively blocked federal government from allowing most black workers into public housing for wartime industry in West Hartford.

Learn more in essay by Emil Meehan (Trinity ‘16)
Racial refusal to rent or sell, 1950s

Cases of property owners or agents refusing to rent or sell by race were widely documented in 1950s, but state government slow to enforce. Samuel Cullers (right), principal planner for Hartford Redevelopment Agency, was told “no vacancies” for Hartford apartment, and won initial discrimination case, but later overturned by CT Court.

Learn more in essay by Emily Heneghan (Trinity '14)
Racial steering into the present

Black/White Courant reporters tested 15 firms in 1989:

- 8 firms treated white buyers more favorably
- 7 of those 8 firms sharply questioned finances of blacks, but not whites
- 2 of those 8 firms would not show homes to black without financial docs
- 6 of those 8 firms steered white and black buyers to different racial areas
- Even at other firms, whites treated slightly better, except in 1 case

More recent news on CT Fair Housing Ctr cases; Need stronger gov’t investigation & enforcement

Some real estate agents discriminate against black home buyers

This story was reported by staff writers Lyn Bidby, Veda Crosby, Grant Howsam, Jeffrey Williams and Larry Williams and researcher Leah Segal. It was written by Bidby.

Hartford Courant, May 21, 1989 - no online database this year, but available on request by email
Rise of exclusionary zoning, 1920s

West Hartford, the first municipality to enact zoning under Connecticut law in 1924, regulated land use to promote more expensive single-family home construction in several neighborhoods. The plan intentionally made affordable multi-family housing “uneconomic” to build, without expressly prohibiting it, thereby blocking most lower-income families.

Explore MAGIC map & see 1924 zoning study
Exclusionary zoning today

Collaborated with CT Fair Housing Center to create Connecticut Zoning Initiative, which compiled and analyzed local zoning regulations across state for exclusionary practices. We did this because state government is not closely monitoring local policies and how they shape our communities.

Explore maps and zoning data
How do past & present barriers affect us?

Housing prices -- and privileges granted by our race or wealth -- are not simply caused by market forces, but also the accumulation of past and present government actions (and inactions).