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## DISSERTATION

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UNMASKING THE CITY: BLACKS, ASIANS AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST  
SEGREGATED HOUSING IN 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY SEATTLE

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by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation maps the roots of systemic inequality within Seattle's housing market, zeroing in on the residential mobility of Japanese and African Americans over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It analyzes the experiences that have led Japanese and African Americans to occupy distinctive positions within the city's housing market, as they fought for belonging in a segregated city. Though they shared the burden of living in segregated neighborhoods through much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese and African Americans occupied distinct economic positions within the city. While Japanese Americans far outnumbered African Americans until World War II, the segregation of African Americans within the city followed a separate trajectory. Shaped by the legacy of slavery and the nation's Jim Crow order, African Americans became increasingly set apart within the housing market. Seeing how Japanese and African Americans have navigated a segregated housing market is crucial to understanding the racial dimensions of Seattle's development.

While the ghettoization of Japanese Americans facilitated their incarceration during World War II, the city's fixation on restricting black mobility during the 1950s and 1960s opened up spaces for Japanese Americans. Rather than simply refuting the model minority image, this dissertation examines how it came to shape Seattle's housing market after World War II. The city's open housing movement brought about fair housing laws but also a renewed commitment to property rights and the exclusion of African Americans. Weak and unenforced fair housing legislation – though it opened doors to those of a particular class – led to growing divides. These divides are explored in the last part of this dissertation, which highlights the dimensions of post-civil rights era segregation and the struggles waged by low-income black renters to challenge the city's raced, classed, and gendered boundaries.

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## Introduction

Seattle was not Louisiana, as Helen Gordon discovered. An aura of pride was infused in the Emerald city's more refined approach to building the walls of segregation. One of 24 black students to integrate the University of Southwestern Louisiana in the fall of 1954, Gordon was well acquainted with the practices of segregation. But when she moved to Seattle with her husband in the early-1960s, she expected to find a different ethos. Instead, the racial isolation that she encountered left her disappointed. Three days after moving to their new home on Seattle's Mercer Island, Gordon and her husband were invited over to a neighbor's house. After sitting down for coffee with their hosts, neighbors from the area filtered in and were introduced to the Gordons. But before bringing the night to a close, their hosts blindsided them with a question. They wanted to know if the Gordons were "blockbusting" the neighborhood. Such an admixture of hospitality and prejudice left Helen Gordon bewildered:

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But somehow my husband and I explained we had bought a home there because the price was right, the schools were good and we had been told we would have no trouble. But I could not help thinking that in the South no one would have invited you into his home and then asked a question like that. It was very subtle.<sup>1</sup>

As Gordon found out, race was a powerful but elusive force in Seattle's housing market. The lines of segregation could be made clear over a cup of coffee. Indeed, what had attracted Gordon to the neighborhood was advice from friends who portrayed Mercer Island as a haven for liberals. Yet, even on a wealthy island that was more than 99 per cent white, as of 1960, residents stood on guard. Even when only 23 blacks lived on the island, out of a total population of more than 12,000, the presence of a black family triggered alarm. One realtor who dared to show homes on Mercer Island to blacks was told that she would be fired if she continued to do so. The incident with Gordon took place in 1964, the same year that Seattle held a referendum on an

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Majury, "An Integrated Black Looks Back," *Seattle Times*, January 3, 1971.

open-housing ordinance. She became an outspoken advocate for the ordinance, only to see it defeated at the polls by a 2-1 margin.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation examines the systems that produced and reinforced racial segregation in Seattle's housing market even as the city adopted a more inclusive rhetoric. While social movements came and went, cultural trends emerged and fluttered away, racial segregation in housing remained. Though the prevalence of racial discrimination in housing lessened over time, a logic that equated African American neighbors with lowered property values was maintained. Racial discrimination was enacted through realtors, homeowners, landlords, financial institutions and government policies. Exclusions that targeted Japanese Americans in the early twentieth century became locked on African Americans by the 1950s and 1960s. In Seattle, opponents of an open housing law used the alleged progress of the Civil Rights movement as evidence of a growing freedom for non-whites. Many were willing to declare the Civil Rights movement a fait accompli by the early 1960s. Their conception of freedom was built on property rights and an ever-expanding free market.

As blacks and Asians in Seattle struggled for an economic and residential foothold in a white city, they contested and learned to work around the systems that segregated. They enjoyed a relative degree of freedom, largely because of the fact that they constituted such a small percentage of the overall population. Yet the valuing of white bodies and the properties they controlled and the fear of miscegenation directed on to black and Asian bodies became a cornerstone of the housing market by the early twentieth century. The size of the city's non-white population mattered less than the ideologies produced by struggles over space and property.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid; U.S. Census Bureau, Total Population: Black, White, Other Race, Census 1960 Tracts Only Set, Prepared by Social Explorer (accessed July 6, 2016); Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 202.



In a multitude of ways, and often under the radar, blacks and Asians exposed the dividing lines of race. Though racial and ethnic solidarity were an important part of community building and played a role in maintaining segregation, this dissertation zeroes in on a particular element of the history. Namely, it looks at how African and Japanese Americans responded to a segregation that was imposed upon them and continually altered to fit the city's changing demographics and ideologies. Looking beneath the political category of Asian American and into the particular experiences of Japanese Americans serves as a way to sharpen the discussion. As this dissertation shows, Japanese Americans were divided in their approach to dealing with racial segregation in housing. It becomes all too easy to miss these important distinctions when the focus is spread too thinly across the broad swath of Asian American experiences. In order to move beyond archetypal ideas of black/Asian experiences, it is vital to focus on particular interactions and locales. In Seattle, Japanese Americans were the group most singled out as model minorities, an image that became ingrained in Seattle's housing market. Their incarceration during World War II was part of a distinct trajectory, in terms of their relationship with the state and other ethnic and racial groups. Opening up the issue of civil rights, protests against segregated housing in the 1950s and 1960s challenged Japanese Americans in a particular way, coming on the heels of incarceration and later resegregation.<sup>3</sup>

Those living in the city's white neighborhoods experienced the effects of racial segregation in more indirect ways – making it easy to miss and ignore the rumblings, protests and rebellions that it produced. That these everyday struggles have gone unnoticed, and in the case of more visible episodes and movements been erased, has made it difficult for Seattle to come to grips with the effects of racial segregation, played out in neighborhoods, schools,

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Spickard, "Whither the Asian American Coalition?" *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (November 2007), 585-604.

courtrooms and jails. These contests over race, space, property and belonging have produced extreme wealth and inequality. The city's "melting pots of the poor" and its wealthy white neighborhoods are a testament to this history. Race, class and gender continue to play outsized roles in determining who inhabits the city's oldest and most hazardous structures.

One of the overarching goals of this dissertation is to bring to light some of the hidden ways in which racial segregation has been and continues to be reinforced in Seattle. Contrary to popular opinion, the reality of racial segregation in housing did not meet overwhelming resistance – either from city officials or private citizens. And within the resistance that arose, many more were against segregation in principle than they were in practice. Laws against racial discrimination in housing introduced in the 1960s cut against the grain of public opinion. Racial segregation in housing has consistently been re-imagined as natural and inevitable, the product of individual choices. Yet, all levels of government have supported and maintained segregation. Segregated housing remains a divisive issue, clouded by the nation's sanctification of property rights and token government efforts to reduce racial segregation.

In the 1960s, civil rights organizations in Seattle worked to chip away at Seattle's white neighborhoods, directing their energies and resources to fighting against racial discrimination in housing. Pushing the city to pass an open housing law in 1968 was only a minor part of the battle. The more long-running, elusive goal was changing public opinions regarding African American neighbors. The ultimate litmus test – given the employment barriers faced by African Americans – would be the residential mobility of low-income renters. By the 1970s and 1980s, low-income African American renters were largely left to fight their own skirmishes against racial discrimination. They received little in the way of organizational help. The fight against segregated housing, which began with intense activism led by middle-class homeowners, quickly

narrowed. Documenting the search for affordable rental housing during Seattle's housing crisis sheds light on the civil rights struggles waged by black women and others on the margins of society. Theirs was a segregation easily overlooked as more non-white homeowners spread across the city.

Numerous entities continued to portray racial segregation as natural; the “fundamental problem” was the “crumbling” black family, led by single mothers. Racial segregation had become, through removing history and context, a problem perpetuated by a deviant personality.<sup>4</sup> Those who sought to uphold racial segregation in Seattle saw it as a reflection of individual character and ambition; the market did not provide for those who failed to earn freedom. The implication that freedom could be earned in the housing market was used as a way to distinguish African and Japanese Americans. This was an argument that borrowed heavily from a warped interpretation of Japanese American incarceration during World War II. In this line of reasoning, Japanese Americans had earned their freedom by proving their loyalty – most visibly through the heroism of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. Wiped away were the images of Japanese Americans as unassimilable aliens and threatening neighbors.

This woefully inaccurate reading of history ignored the segregation experienced by Japanese Americans, who were the city's largest non-white population until World War II. While Japanese Americans only made up a fraction of the city's population in the early twentieth century, their exclusion was pivotal as far as the making of race in Seattle. Though small numbers of African Americans had migrated to Seattle in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese Americans and later Japanese Americans were seen as the preeminent economic threats. The eclectic labor force that moved Seattle from village to city was drawn from local Native

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127.

populations, including the Duwamish, as well as Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, African American and European workers. Non-white workers – shuffling between the city and the region’s railroads, salmon canneries and coal mines – became relegated to the bottom of a dual labor system. The fact that they were migrant workers made their racial segregation easier to erase from historical memory. In turn, Seattle’s early efforts to segregate were conveniently smoothed over under the guise of the “frontier.”

This mythical frontier was mapped on to the housing market, with white home-owning families settling north of Yesler Way and non-white laborers occupying hotels and lodging houses to the south, beginning along Yesler.<sup>5</sup> They inhabited the region known as “Skid Road,” the abode of those “who achieved success without becoming respectable,” as one local historian phrased it.<sup>6</sup> Dispossession and displacement was a regular feature of life for the city’s non-white population. While the city depended upon their labor, officials and private citizens continually fought to keep them from becoming permanent residents.<sup>7</sup>

As University of Washington Professor Roger Sale wrote in 1976, much of the racial dimensions of Seattle’s early years had been erased by the time of the civil rights era. “The deepest of our racial sins is ignorance,” wrote Sale. “People here were uninterested in the Chinese in the 1880s, in the Japanese in the 1940s, in the blacks in the 1960s.” As a result, Seattle lagged well behind Southern cities when it came to dealing with the issue of race. Sale, interestingly, did not mention Seattle’s Indian population, upon whose lands the city had been built.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Megan J. Asaka, “The Unsettled City: Migration, Race, and the Making of Seattle’s Urban Landscape,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Murray Morgan, *Skid Road* (1951; repr., Seattle: Comstock, 1960), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Asaka, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 246.

Yet, African Americans who migrated to Seattle during World War II had settled in neighborhoods that were bounded by segregationist policies and practices. Japanese and African Americans had lived together in central city neighborhoods for decades; when they sought housing in outlying white neighborhoods, they were met with resistance. But, as the war continued and Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps, African American migrants were squeezed into the spaces left behind. They doubled up, kept from moving too far outward and disrupting established housing patterns. But even as the theme of dispossession and displacement continued and Japanese Americans saw their lives uprooted, the city's changing racial demographics were characterized as a new problem drawn onto a blank slate. The city, according to sociologists, was in a prime position to solve its "new" racial problem. As a laboratory for the nation's evolving race relations, Seattle assumed an "importance beyond its size" as "one of the few remaining frontiers in race relations."<sup>9</sup> This propensity to recreate the frontier, over and over, was a defining feature of Seattle's racial climate. It was a tendency fought by some, who recognized the erasure accomplished by such a narrative. Others, as had been the case before, saw a reason for optimism in the frontier ethos. By seeing the city's race "problems" as distinct from each other, the cumulative impact of racial hostility and segregation was muted.

Blacks and Asians fought from multiple angles to claim the city as their own. On March 27, 1909, Gunjiro Aoki and Helen Emery were married at Seattle's Trinity Church. Their wedding garnered national headlines. Journalists had hounded them up the West Coast as they attempted to circumvent the region's anti-miscegenation laws. Aoki, described by the *Seattle Times* as the "brown-skinned husband," refused to abandon his marriage plans after the couple was denied a marriage license in their home state of California. After experiencing the same

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<sup>9</sup> Robert W. O'Brien and Lee M. Brooks, "Race Relations in the Pacific Northwest," *Phylon* 7, no. 1 (1946), 24.

rejection in Oregon, they finally arrived in Washington State. Although Washington State did not have an anti-miscegenation law, the couple also faced enmity there. They thought of continuing their journey north into Canada but when Emery heard reports of anti-Japanese riots in Vancouver, they decided to stay put. Having married in Seattle, and with journalists still feeding stories to a nation titillated by the sexual threat of Aoki, they set out house-hunting in Seattle. According to the *Times*, the couple “tramped over half the countryside of Rainier Valley before finally alighting on the ideal spot” in Hillman City to build their home. Their search for property continued to make national headlines. Waiting for their home to be built, they found temporary housing at the Great Northern hotel. When journalists came knocking at the Japanese-run hotel, they were informed that the Aokis “had gone to Bellevue for a week-end visit to the Japanese colony across the lake, where there are two or three white women married to Orientals.”<sup>10</sup>

As can be gathered from the story, Japanese Americans and other Asian groups, did not simply acquiesce as opposition to interracial marriage grew. By the 1920s and 1930s, however, anti-miscegenation sentiment and law were increasingly directed toward other groups, such as Filipinos. Led by the Seattle NAACP and an interracial cohort of organizations, opponents succeeded in thwarting anti-miscegenation bills brought by state legislators in 1935 and 1937. A similar bill had been defeated in 1921.<sup>11</sup> But even without the support of anti-miscegenation law, the need to protect white property from the dangerous sexuality of “the colored classes” was

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<sup>10</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 85-91; “Aokis Find Home in Seattle Suburb,” *Seattle Times*, April 10, 1909; “Morning Paper Fakes Story of Aoki Separation,” *Seattle Times*, March 31, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 89-95.

established.<sup>12</sup> Anti-miscegenation ideology was rooted in an effort to keep white property – including white womanhood and real estate – out of the hands of non-whites.<sup>13</sup>

As I show in this dissertation, fears of miscegenation were used to restrict the residential mobility of African Americans even through the 1980s. On the other hand, by the 1950s and 1960s, interracial marriage with whites climbed among Japanese Americans as they slowly moved into white neighborhoods and social spaces. This dissertation delves into the complexities of the late-1960s by examining how a disparate group of actors, including African and Japanese Americans, made sense of the violence and turmoil of the period. Effective government response to black unrest was impeded by the desire to see African Americans as just another immigrant group. The narrative that I piece together foregrounds the role of racial discrimination in housing and police brutality in order to properly contextualize the violent responses they provoked.

While there remains much work to be done in numerous facets of Seattle's historiography, housing stands as one of the most glaring needs. Employment and education, core concerns for African and Japanese American residents, have received much more attention from historians. By narrowing the focus to housing, this dissertation aims to complicate Seattle's image as a white city. While it is certainly so in terms of demographics, Seattle's neighborhoods were racialized through ongoing contests over space and property. This dissertation traces out a civil rights struggle, within the housing market, that often received little attention within the media. It brings together the interconnected histories of Japanese and African Americans, focusing on questions related to their residential and social mobility. This dissertation focuses on a few key lines of inquiry. How were neighborhood housing patterns impacted by Japanese and African Americans and how did these two groups respond to changes in the housing market?

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<sup>12</sup> The phrase "colored classes" was used by the *Seattle Times* to describe the target of the state's anti-miscegenation bill; see "Here's What Legislature Did, Did Not Accomplish, *Seattle Times*, March 20, 1935.

<sup>13</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 3.

How did the relationship between these two groups change over time? How did complex racial theories, often formulated by sociologists, relate to conversations on the ground in the realm of housing? How did federal and state policy come to bear on local conditions? What were the broader forces, beyond the local, that moved Seattle's racial boundaries? By wrestling with these questions, I hope to illuminate a layer of the "urban palimpsest" that is Seattle. I hope to bring back the stories that have been erased and written over in the making of a "white" city.<sup>14</sup>

### **Historiography**

In terms of historiography, this dissertation bridges the fields of African American, Asian American, and urban history within the broader framework of Western history. Long understood as a "frontier" city, historians tended to treat Seattle and the Pacific Northwest as a place where "whites met the wilderness," to quote Richard White.<sup>15</sup> In the 1990s, numerous scholars took heed of White's call to place minorities at the center of the region's history. Quintard Taylor's, *The Forging of a Black Community* put Seattle on the map, as it concerned African American urban history. Taylor's study, published in 1994, emphasized the importance of black community-building within a multiracial setting. In a city where Japanese Americans were for a long time the city's largest minority group, African Americans had difficulty carving out economic opportunities. Taylor's approach to the dynamics between the two groups relied on a framework of "competition and cooperation." Honing in on the Central District, he contrasted Seattle's black community with those in other northern cities. Overall, he found blacks in Seattle to have avoided most of the "social anomie" that plagued other African American communities in the north.

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<sup>14</sup> Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Richard White, "Race Relations in the American West," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986), 397.



Ending his study in the 1960s, Taylor referenced but did not explore the city's growing "underclass" or situate Seattle within what he called the "contemporary urban crisis."<sup>16</sup> When it came to the issue of segregated housing, Taylor ended on an optimistic note. He interpreted the city's passage of an open housing ordinance as evidence of a "dramatic decline in white opposition to residential segregation over the decade of the 1960s" – a claim that this dissertation aims to complicate.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to Taylor's pivotal work, I also build on the foundations laid by scholars like Arnold Hirsch and Thomas Sugrue, who have detailed the centrality of housing in explaining the nation's "urban crisis."<sup>18</sup> For northern black communities, forging networks, building businesses, and accumulating property after the migrating from the South was a formidable task. After decades of community building, they faced upheavals galvanized by urban renewal. That black communities were "not merely the victims of the 'second ghetto'" is true, though the fact that they were forced to rebuild, time and again, because of discriminatory government policies is still an integral part of the story.<sup>19</sup> In a city like Seattle, home to such a small non-white community for much of its history, the role of the state and white actors must stand out. Without them, it is impossible to make sense of the power at play in the city's racial dynamics. This dissertation seeks to foreground the perspectives of blacks and Asians without losing sight of their political status as "minorities."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 6-10.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 208.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (1983; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>20</sup> "Arnold R. Hirsch, "Second Thoughts on the Second Ghetto," *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 3 (March 2003), 305-306; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Revisiting the Second Ghetto," *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 3 (March 2003), 286.

For scholars of U.S. history, the last two decades have seen a wealth of attention devoted to moving discussions of race beyond a black and white binary. Where culture once did most of the explanatory work in comparing blacks and Asians, the field has now moved in more expansive directions.<sup>21</sup> The “margins” and “mainstreams” were thrust together in dialogue, bringing together more nuanced discussions of race, class, and gender.<sup>22</sup> Assimilation, already a loaded term, was complicated even further. As Henry Yu showed, Robert Park and his team of University of Chicago sociologists had grown perplexed by the inability of Asian immigrants to “assimilate” into West Coast cities and towns. The histories of Asian immigrants and African Americans were of course distinct, but what both groups held in common was their inability to shed their “racial uniforms.” One key difference, however, was that Chicago School sociologists held out much more hope for the eventual “assimilation” of “Orientals.” The change would begin in the areas of “spirit/mind/culture/.” Then, slowly but surely, a physical transformation would ensue. “Oriental” bodies would serve as the perfect “measuring devices” for the study of assimilation and the race relations cycle. Black bodies, however, remained a conundrum. Though the Chicago School emphasized the transition of African Americans upon arriving in northern cities, their alleged assimilation lagged well behind that of Asian Americans. Rather than gaining an advantage, however, climbing the ranks of the assimilated yielded little for Asian Americans. “For Asian Americans,” Yu argued, “whether you dance an exotic dance or try to waltz like everyone else, you are still exotic.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Examples of early work that emphasized culture include: Ivan H. Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare Among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942*

<sup>22</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65-67; 203; Joe W. Trotter, “The Great Migration, African Americans, and Immigrants in the Industrial City,” in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 86.

By the late-1960s, images of an Anglo-Saxon male stirring a giant melting pot were seemingly smashed by the rhetoric and actions of those espousing Black Power and Third World liberationist ideologies. The many rebellions of the late-1960s and early-1970s represented what historian Russell Kazal has termed a “frontal assault” on white, middle-class, Protestant cultural values. These values were thought to be at the core of assimilation, but they were seemingly swept aside by a collection of groups challenging white authority. Into the 1970s and beyond, cultural pluralism ascended into dominance. “Black Pride” could exist alongside “integration” and affirmative action. It was just a question of balance. The glue holding it all together was an expansive and ever-growing civil rights movement.<sup>24</sup>

But, as this dissertation shows, there are many assumptions about the civil rights era and the progress that was made that do not stand up to scrutiny. Ideologies were far slower to change than laws. People of all races, but mostly whites, held on to old notions of assimilation – accepting the premise that those on the margins needed to fold themselves into a white mainstream. “Assimilation” has been wrapped up in grand narratives of U.S. history. As such it has been difficult to entangle. The popularity of “assimilation” during the nineteenth and twentieth century, and even into the present, has much to do with what Dorothy Ross calls the “liberal grand narrative.” Driven by “stories of modernization, market expansion, or growing social and political democracy in the United States,” the liberal grand narrative has always made room for “assimilation.” The idea that there can be a “liberal happy ending” in a land full of diversity has always been alluring.<sup>25</sup> What makes “assimilation” particularly fluid is that it is

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<sup>24</sup>Russell Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History,” *American Historical Review*, 100, no. 2 (April 1995), 451; Sundiata

<sup>25</sup>Dorothy Ross, “Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty,” *The American Historical Review*, 100, no. 3 (June 1995), 668.

both a grand narrative and a paradigm, flowing back and forth between academia and public discourse and shaping both.

Over the course of the twentieth century, scholars have fallen in love with, rejected, and then returned to the concept of “assimilation” for many different reasons. All the while, the term has remained relevant, a part of the national conversation. As David Hollinger has argued, “the national culture of the United States will always include a semiofficial national narrative, no matter what historians do or do not do in relation to it.”<sup>26</sup> In the case of “assimilation,” a chasm developed between the ways in which the concept was engaged by academics and the general public. While some scholars like Russell Kazal have argued that “assimilation,” in the sense of “recasting newcomers in a uniform American mold” went out of style among “historians and the general public alike,” it seems more accurate to argue that “assimilation” became more of an implicit concept in both realms after the 1960s.<sup>27</sup>

A perfect example of this shift can be found in the rise of Asian Americans as “model minorities,” a term meant to signal the acceptance of a new group that had once been imagined as the “Yellow Peril.” The fact that Asian immigrants had “assimilated,” as evidenced by their supposed economic and educational success, not to mention their success in marrying outside of their race, meant that other groups, like African Americans, had simply squandered the opportunities that existed for all “minority” groups to achieve the “American Dream.” If Japanese Americans could shed their “Oriental” ways – thanks in no small part to being incarcerated during WWII – and “Americanize,” other groups could follow suit. This was a discussion of “assimilation” that bloomed when all talk of “assimilation” was supposed to have been squelched. These are not concepts that can simply be swept under the rug. They were

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<sup>26</sup> David A. Hollinger, “National Culture and Communities of Descent,” *Reviews of American History*, 26, no. 1 (March 1998), 326.

<sup>27</sup> Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation,” 437.

employed in strange but powerful ways by those who sought to reinforce racial segregation in Seattle. This dissertation builds on the work of Ellen Wu, who points to the idea of the model minority as a “simultaneously inclusive *and* exclusive reckoning.” Whereas in the past scholars have focused on poking holes in a white-driven “myth,” Wu has demonstrated the importance of foregrounding Asian American agency. Asian Americans resisted and contributed to the model minority image; they did not simply stand back and watch it come alive.<sup>28</sup>

The scholarship of Claire Jean Kim, outlining the theory of “triangulation,” has been particularly generative for those writing about blacks and Asians. In analyzing how Asian Americans “have been racialized relative to and through interaction with whites and blacks,” Kim provided a template for thinking through race, resistance, and accommodation among multiple groups.<sup>29</sup> As these ideas churned, scholars began to set their sights on California as the locus for dismantling a persistent black/white binary. Using the theory of triangulation, Scott Kurashige’s research argued for the importance of “finding the fragments of interethnic history.” Within these fragments, hidden beneath the surface of Los Angeles’s history, were the seeds of an emerging “multiethnic” city. His work continued the call for a move away from the theory of “ghettoization” and toward an understanding of “the political dynamics that arise when people of color become the majority.” Within this new world, the politics of integration – a failure many

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<sup>28</sup> For discussions of the model minority image, see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) and *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 9; 255.

<sup>29</sup> Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999), 105-38; Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

times over – would give way, hopefully, to new black, Asian and Latino coalitions that transcended a shallow multiculturalism.<sup>30</sup>

Visions of Afro-Asian solidarity have a long history, as a number of African American intellectuals viewed the early-twentieth century rise of Japan as a symbol of hope. Japan, in the most optimistic renderings, took on the role as “champion” of the colored world. Looking back on the 1930s, historians have pieced together connections between interracial activists that endured the conservative political climate of the 1950s. Studies of World War II, a fertile ground for interracial histories, have contributed to new understandings of relationships between African and Japanese Americans. Mostly on the individual level, bonds were formed in protesting the incarceration of Japanese Americans. African Americans held a variety of attitudes toward incarceration, though many were sympathetic and saw it as an injustice. Intellectual connections were developed in cities like Chicago as some Japanese Americans were allowed to leave internment camps to pursue university education. The postwar resettlement of Japanese Americans in cities like New York, Cleveland, Washington, Chicago, and along the West Coast led to shared central city neighborhoods, civil rights organizing, disconnection and a variety of other interactions. In the mid-1950s, Japanese Americans began to leave the “ghetto,” moving into white neighborhoods. By the late-1960s, many of the connections between Japanese and African Americans had eroded. This dissertation engages the question of why this occurred, focusing on discussions of crime, violence and police brutality during the late-1960s.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 12; 286-287.

<sup>31</sup> Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Matthew M. Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

In terms of scale, scholars have begun to illuminate the process of “regional racial formation,” linking urban centers to suburban metropolitan contexts. Not simply places of wealth and homogeneity, areas like the San Gabriel Valley offered a locale where whites were “peripheral to the main act,” played out between Asians and Latinos. Place and scale still mattered, within a swirl of transnational history. These were spaces where place-specific knowledge and interactions worked within and collided against dominant understandings of race.<sup>32</sup>

As scholars focused on California wrestled with the words of Carey McWilliams that the “color of America has changed,” the Golden State came into focus as the nation’s “civil rights frontier.” Though in some cases a boon to civil rights organizing, the state’s racial and ethnic diversity also brought about challenges. Efforts to undue the legal framework of racial discrimination encountered obstacles as blacks and Asians, for example, did not typically see their problems as interrelated. The issue of fair housing, a top civil rights priority for African Americans, did not command the same attention from Japanese Americans. Dismantling legalized segregation in courts was only the first step; enacting and enforcing antidiscrimination laws was another battle that only got tougher amid a rising tide of colorblind conservatism. However entangled, racial segregation in housing and schools, alien land laws and anti-miscegenation legislation were often fought as separate problems.<sup>33</sup> When it came to identifying the trajectories of blacks and Asians within the housing market, foreign policy fused with the local. The nation’s Cold War imperatives opened up spaces as Asian American “foreignness” –

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<sup>32</sup> Wendy Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 10-19; Becky M. Nicolaides and James Zarsadiaz, “Design Assimilation in Suburbia: Asian Americans, Built Landscapes, and Suburban Advantage in Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley Since 1970,” *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2, 2017, 332-371.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5-7; 91; 125.

once a catalyst for discriminatory laws – facilitated white acceptance. The alien status that once ghettoized Chinese and Japanese residents in cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco was replaced by a limited, racialized acceptance.<sup>34</sup>

When contrasted with Los Angeles and San Francisco, Seattle has received less attention in terms of its racial geographies, though this is rapidly changing. A major reason for this disparity stems from demographics. Los Angeles, by 1960, was home to 462,000 African Americans, 577,000 Latinos and 77,000 Japanese Americans.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Seattle's total non-white population was around 45,000 – led by African Americans (26,901) and Japanese Americans (9,351).<sup>36</sup> Along with the work of Quintard Taylor, Asian Americanists have reframed Seattle as more than just a white city. Transnational histories have brought Seattle into conversation with Vancouver, B.C. and other Pacific Rim hubs. A protracted battle over Asian migration within a globalizing world led to border policing and surveillance. A multiracial migrant workforce, crucial in the development of the Pacific Northwest, encountered racial violence and a “culture of cosmopolitanism” in Seattle. This was a cosmopolitanism fostered by the desire to enhance economic ties to the Pacific Rim that helped to elevate the status of Japanese Americans. It was not a brand that enhanced the position of African Americans. As Eiichiro Azuma has argued, Japanese Americans in places like Seattle “selectively took in and fused elements of nationalist arguments, modernists assumptions, and racist thinking from both imperial Japan and white America.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, 242-243.

<sup>36</sup> Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 245.

<sup>37</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.



For the many migrant workers who shuffled between the city and Alaskan salmon canneries – among other seasonal work – the detritus of an elite cosmopolitanism hardly touched their lives. These migrant workers – Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Native, and African American – were easily overlooked components of the city’s urban development. They formed the foundation for interracial organizing in Seattle – a project that bore far more fruit in the field of labor than it did in housing.<sup>38</sup>

As Seattle’s glossy, inclusive image becomes further complicated by historians, it is easier to see the “geographies of inequality” hidden behind technological progress.<sup>39</sup> There is still, however, a pressing need to historicize the many civil rights struggles that have shaped the city. Chief among those was the struggle against segregated housing, which generated a firestorm in the 1960s and then took a backseat to other civil rights issues. As the city and nation made racial progress in other areas, segregation persisted in the housing market. There is a need to move beyond the heroic imagery of the Civil Rights movement and to contextualize the rise of the “underclass.” Housing is an ideal venue for exploring, on the ground, the link between the growing “underclass” and the ascendance of neoliberal policies in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>40</sup> As N.D.B. Connolly has argued, “Whites, through decades of ongoing disfranchisement, violence, apartheid, and still-vibrant arguments about the sanctity of private property, ensured that access to objects would, indeed, define citizenship.” Though the 1960s saw radical challenges mounted

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<sup>38</sup> Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway Pre-War Seattle and Japanese America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned Salmon-Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Michael Schulze-Oechtering, “The Alaska Cannery Workers Association and the Ebbs and Flows of Struggle,” *Amerasia* 42, no. 2 (2016), 23-48; Trevor Griffey, “Black Power’s Labor Politics: The United Construction Workers Association and Title VII Law in the 1970s,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2011); Megan J. Asaka, “The Unsettled City: Migration, Race, and the Making of Seattle’s Urban Landscape,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> The phrase “geographies of inequality” is used by Matthew Kingle in *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 10; 249-250.

<sup>40</sup> Clarence Lang, *Black America in the Shadow of the Sixties: Notes on the Civil Rights Movement, Neoliberalism, and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

against white supremacy, it was also a time when “many black people...sought the same kinds of privileges, protections, and instruments of exclusion that seemed like a commonsense entitlement for white homeowners.” Indeed homeowners of all races were swayed by the markers of class and status. And landlords of all races, though they arrived at controlling capital in different ways, invested in and profited from racial segregation.<sup>41</sup>

What makes housing a particularly powerful vehicle for exploring ideas related to citizenship and belonging is that the housing and neighborhoods in which we live condition our views of the world. The images and resources tied to condominiums, high-rise public housing, and palatial suburban developments both reflect and move political decisions. Suburbs, in the 1950s, came to represent stability and growth. Undergirded by FHA-insured mortgages and racist policy that denied loans to African Americans, the nation’s wealth rapidly shifted from cities to suburbs.<sup>42</sup> While other studies have focused on what changes within the post-industrial landscape meant for homeowners, this dissertation ends by discussing the bottom end of the housing market during the 1970s and 1980s. It pays particular attention to the impact of gender and kinship among those who lived in rental housing, building on the work of Rhonda Williams and Annelise Orleck.<sup>43</sup>

My work aims to place the histories of African and Japanese Americans in conversation within the understudied urban context of Seattle. It narrows in on the theme of housing, a crucial

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<sup>41</sup> N.D.B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Making of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 4; 9-10; 237.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon, 2005).

aspect of the city's civil rights struggle. The chronology of this dissertation allows me to address the convergence of the model minority and underclass images in the 1970s and 1980s.

## **Sources**

This project was constructed using a range of sources, most notably the records of civil rights organizations and government agencies. Records of civil rights organizations, led by the Seattle Urban League, helped to catalogue and pinpoint formative moments and episodes. In addition, the University of Washington has archived a wonderful collection of personal papers from various civil rights leaders. Correspondence from city officials and civil rights leaders also highlighted important discussions. Census data, as well as information and reports compiled by government agencies, provided snapshots of how the status of blacks and Asians changed over time. Complaints from blacks and Asians fielded by various city departments also yielded important documentation. In particular, the case files of the Seattle Human Rights Department, housed at the Seattle Municipal Archives, were a rich resource. Newspapers and magazines, some published by blacks and Asians, offered critical perspectives on the internal workings of these communities.

Beyond archival collections, I benefitted greatly from interviews compiled in two online oral history collections. The Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project and the Densho Digital Repository together contain hundreds of fascinating interviews with a varied group of subjects. The latter website, Densho, focuses on documenting the history of Japanese American incarceration during World War II, though interviews extend well beyond that particular topic. I also utilized interviews conducted by Madeline Crowley posted on her blog "People of the Central Area." A resident of the Central District, Crowley's interviews provide wonderful local detail and often contain historical photos shared by the interviewees.

I also conducted more than 30 oral history interviews for this dissertation. Several of the subjects I interviewed multiple times, as their answers continued to lead me down unexplored avenues. While the purpose of these interviews was usually to gain understanding of a particular event or issue, I made an effort to structure the interviews much more broadly. When possible, I tried to create an environment where subjects could share their “life histories,” to use the terminology of historian Alexander von Plato. When combined with other research, such as documentary sources, life histories obtained through interviews help historians track change over time in more comprehensive and dynamic ways. In an ideal interview, von Plato argues, those sharing their life histories are given freedom to “spin a narrative web,” without the interviewer forcing the subject into a particular format. Giving the interview subject narrative freedom helps them forge connections between events and stimulates their memory as the web is constructed.<sup>44</sup> It also helps to expose the contradictions that have been smoothed over in our minds as coherent memories are produced.

Oral histories, as Kenneth Bindas has argued, provide historians with a glimpse into the relationship between an individual narrative and collective memory. The structure, how the narrative is shaped and developed, is critical. The “discursive nature” of oral history interviews is part of the negotiation taking place between the interviewer, the interviewee, and their notions of collective memory.<sup>45</sup> Though some of the interviews I conducted did not make it into the dissertation, they were invaluable nonetheless. They exposed me to new ways of seeing the city as well as experiences that could never be documented in the archives. Moving back and forth

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander von Plato, “Contemporary Witnesses and the Historical Profession: Remembrance, Communicative Transmission, and Collective Memory in Qualitative History,” transl. Edith Burley, *Oral History Forum* 29 (2009), 1; 20; 27.

<sup>45</sup> von Plato, 26; Sarah Maza, “Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History,” *The American Historical Review*, 101, no. 5 (December 1996), 1505; 1514-1515; Kenneth J. Bindas, “Re-Remembering a Segregated Past: Race in American Memory,” *History and Memory*, 22, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010), 114-116.

between interviews and archival documents helped to sharpen the questions I asked. What struck me most was how many interview subjects, including African and Japanese Americans, saw racial discrimination in housing as an element of the past that had been left behind. Few Japanese Americans remembered the open housing movement and even fewer could speak of its significance within the city's history. What had been debated and what had been settled was unclear, though most felt discrimination had subsided. Neighborhoods really opened up in the 1960s and beyond, facilitating the dispersal of the community. Among African Americans, the most prominent theme that emerged was displacement from the Central District. Holding on to property and passing it on to the next generation was a sore spot. Dispersal into outlying more affordable suburbs in the 1980s and 1990s had meant shrinking political power. The city's open housing movement was also a distant, vague memory, if a memory at all.

As the interview process unfolded, some historical figures were difficult to track down. The numerous poor and working class individuals who filed housing discrimination complaints during the 1970s and 1980s were of particular interest. Though they were a fleeting presence in the archives, attempts to track them down for interviews led to numerous dead ends. Unlike the city's established leaders, they were inconspicuous, save for a few glimpses. This was no accident of history; it was a layer of the city's past melded within the present.

## **Chapters**

Divided over five chapters, this dissertation traces the history of African and Japanese Americans in Seattle's housing market from the early-1900s through the 1980s. Chapter 1 details the migration of Asian and African Americans throughout the first half of the twentieth century, as the lines of racial segregation were gradually drawn. While restrictions such as racial covenants initially targeted Japanese Americans, over time the focus shifted to African

Americans. The orbit of slavery and the ideologies it spawned were integral to the development of Seattle's housing market. Met with the growing energy of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, Seattle reaffirmed its commitment to segregation through a web of private and public decisions.

The terrain for Chapter 2 revolves around the city's open housing movement, which came to life in the 1960s and represented the epicenter of Seattle's civil rights struggle. African Americans led this movement, though the actions of Japanese Americans are also foregrounded. The early 1960s marked a moment where the issue of housing captivated the city. Though many saw the passage of open housing laws in the late-1960s as a monumental achievement, they signified the beginning and not the end of the battle. Chapter 3 examines the urban rebellions of the late-1960s, scaling down from the drama that seized national headlines and on to the systems that produced anger and violence. Segregated housing and police violence produced the bedrock on which urban rebellions were built. As the chapter shows, Japanese Americans were a significant part of the dynamic. Their decisions, in the midst of turmoil, also helped to reshape the city. Chapter 4 explores the issue of school desegregation, showing how the city committed itself to reshaping the demographics within schools, while allowing racially-segregated housing patterns to persist. Chapter 5 analyzes the many threads that combined to produce a housing crisis during the 1970s and 1980s. Redlining and disinvestment, subsidized housing, the resettlement of refugees and the fight for equality within the rental market form the main themes. Taking a close look at Seattle's rental market shows how the lines of race, class and gender were contested and reinscribed during this period.

By delving into the comparative racialization of Japanese and African Americans in Seattle across the twentieth century, this dissertation helps to explain how structural inequalities

were woven into the housing market. Through the experiences of these two groups, this study peels apart the layers of segregated neighborhoods, showing how they have changed over time. It draws out a disparate collection of voices, from grassroots activists to slumlords, analyzing the effects of segregation across a broad spectrum of Seattle. Though Japanese Americans are no longer associated with ghettos, their histories remain bound up in changing perceptions of segregation and freedom. Their increasing residential mobility – beginning in the 1950s – cannot be disconnected from the ongoing segregation of African Americans.

## Chapter 1: Far From a Free Market: Housing in Seattle Before the 1960s

For much of its history, Seattle enjoyed the reputation of being a place where race relations had yet to “crystallize,” an assumption carried into World War II. Surveying the city in 1945, University of Washington sociologist Robert W. O’Brien worried about the influx of Southern migrants. He saw them as “unconscious” importers of a “caste pattern of human relations from the Southern states.” O’Brien forecast a lengthy struggle between the “democratic tradition” of the Pacific Northwest and the evils of caste, flowing out of slavery. He believed that the outcome of these battles, waged in cities throughout the Pacific Coast, would determine the nation’s future.<sup>1</sup>

As tens of thousands of migrants drawn from states like Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri filtered into Seattle, the relationship between the city’s black and white residents took center stage. This would be the epic struggle that would determine the racial dynamics of the region, with Southern migrants – both black and white – as the catalysts.<sup>2</sup> But O’Brien’s perspective glossed over the experiences of Native, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans, not to mention the African Americans who made the city home well before World War II. Turning the focus on these groups reveals the longstanding tensions surrounding race, class and space wrapped up in the city’s development. As the historian Coll Thrush has argued, Seattle is a city “haunted by urban conquest and its many Native pasts.” It is a place where non-whites were already familiar with a racial caste system, ever on edge about their status within a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. O’Brien, “Profiles: Seattle,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 19, no. 3 (November 1945), 147; 156.

<sup>2</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).



white city. Indeed, O'Brien's optimism regarding the city's race relations came only a few years after the mass removal of Japanese Americans.<sup>3</sup>

Japanese Americans, well before they were incarcerated during World War II, had long experienced the regional variant of the nation's racial caste system. As Andrea Geiger has argued, "the race-based hierarchies established in the U.S. and Canadian West, and the legal mechanisms used to enforce it paralleled those of the caste system with which Meiji immigrants were more familiar."<sup>4</sup> Far from living in a region where race relations had yet to be "crystallized," Japanese immigrants in the U.S.-Canadian borderlands were deeply aware of the "Jim Crow" status of African Americans and fearful of falling into it. The exclusion laws, head taxes and border controls that had curtailed Chinese migrant labor had also left their imprint on the racial order.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter tracks the housing patterns of African and Japanese Americans in Seattle from the early twentieth century through the 1950s, examining the ways in which segregation was constituted, challenged, and reinforced. By the 1920s, the U.S. had put in place a legal framework that justified the exclusion of Asians, the forced assimilation of Native Americans and defacto segregation in the North. On the ground in Seattle, Japanese and African Americans felt the weight of these developments in the housing market. As this chapter shows, creating and maintaining segregated neighborhoods was a multi-pronged effort that fused together conversations about race, class, culture and citizenship. Though they were segregated into many

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<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, "Profiles: Seattle," 147; 156; Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 16; Joe W. Trotter, "The Great Migration, African Americans, and Immigrants in the Industrial City," in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage, 2004), 87.

<sup>4</sup> Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste, and Borders, 1885-1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 80-81; Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 53.

of the same neighborhoods during the era of restrictive covenants, Japanese and African Americans were racialized in distinct ways. Local, regional and transnational currents combined to make their positions within the housing market unstable. Though the nation's Jim Crow order (including restrictive covenants) constrained Japanese Americans in Seattle, they were not the group racialized in opposition to property rights within national debates. They were, however, racialized as aliens, a status that led to their ghettoization and later their incarceration during World War II.

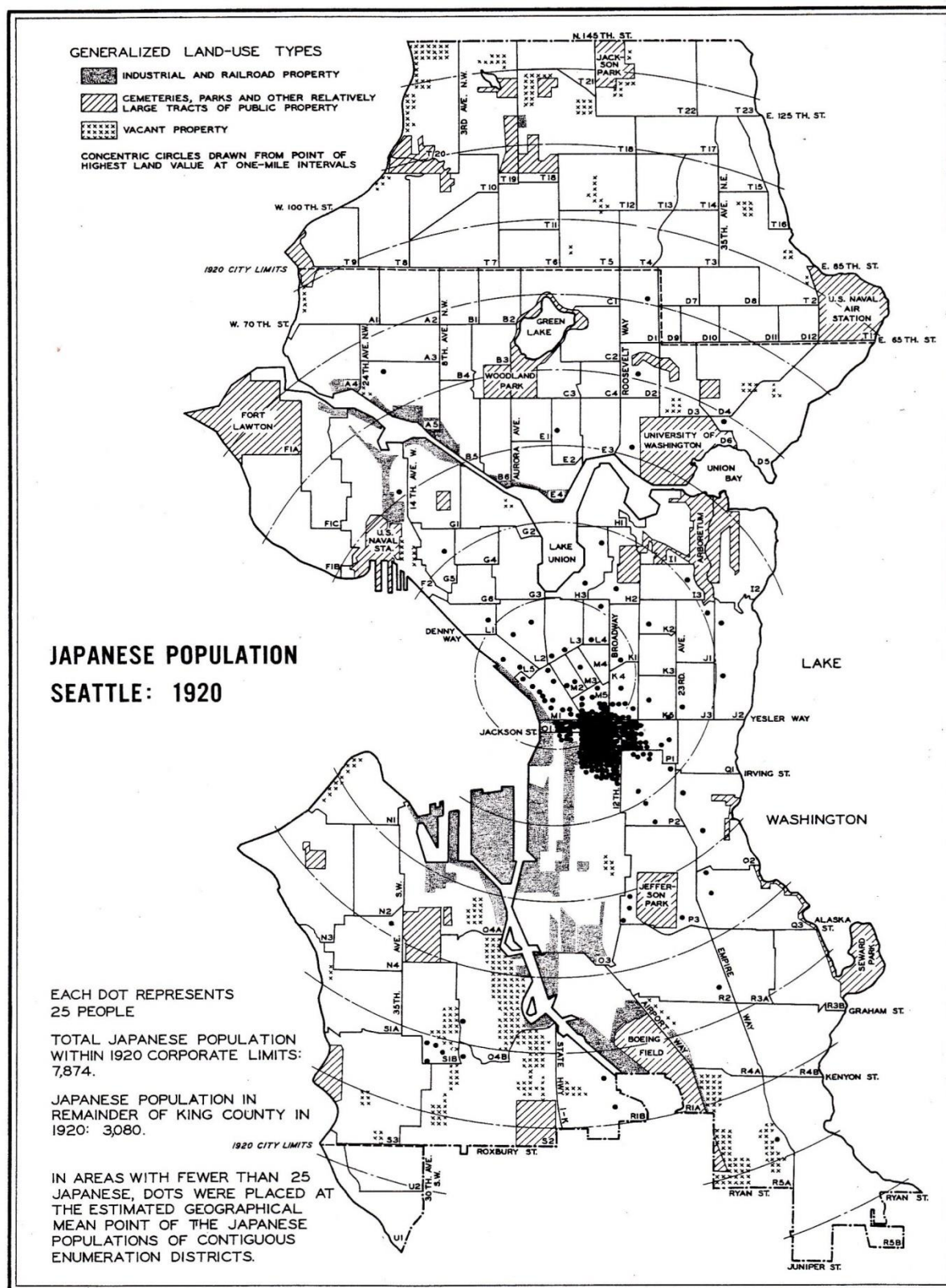
As Japanese Americans moved back into Seattle's segregated neighborhoods following World War II, their racial segregation was reinforced. Yet by the 1950s – after the campaign against restrictive covenants opened up spaces for middle-class minorities – Japanese Americans were in a better position to expand their access to housing than African Americans. They had become the racial minority most able to secure the class-based rewards derived from civil rights victories. The need to maintain a lucrative trade with Japan and other Asian countries was at the heart of the economic divide between Japanese and African Americans. The vast majority of foreign trade out of the Port of Seattle before World War II was done with Japan. Peaking at \$241 million in 1925, foreign trade with Japan led to a degree of economic incorporation for Japanese Americans.<sup>6</sup>

### **Black and Asian Migration**

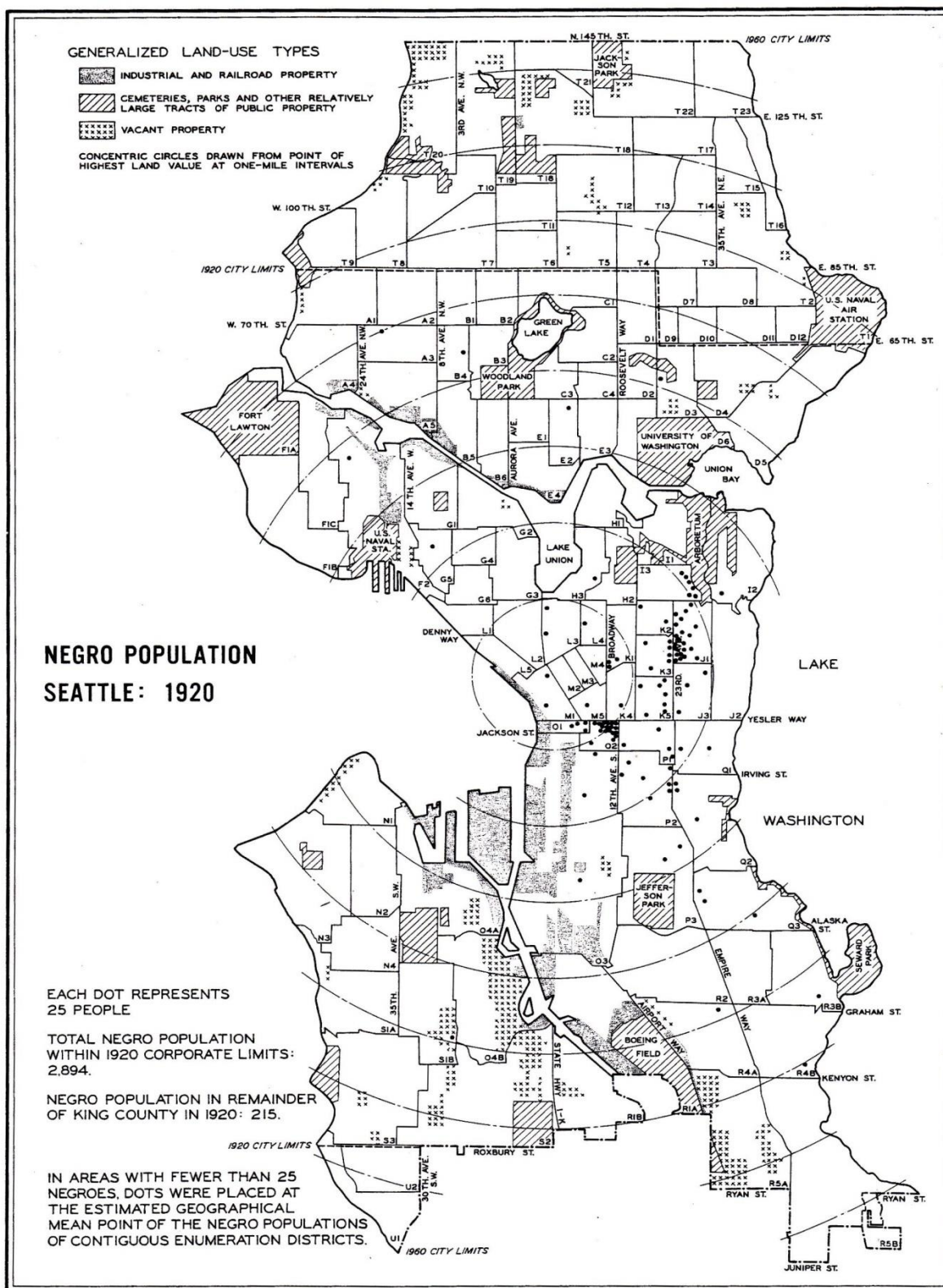
Located south of the downtown business district and running east, starting a few blocks from the waterfront, Jackson Street was at the center of a geography shaped by exclusion. It would become the heart of Seattle's "ghetto," a neighborhood associated with Seattle's growing itinerant labor force. Non-whites in Seattle were concentrated in this neighborhood, though they made up only 4.8 percent of Seattle's population between 1900 and 1920. Japanese and African

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<sup>6</sup> Richard C. Berner, *Seattle, 1921-1940: From Boom to Bust* (Seattle: Charles Press, 1992), 154-155.



Source: Calvin F. Schmid, Wayne W. McVey, Jr., *Growth and Distribution of Minority Races in Seattle, Washington* (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1964), 16.



Source: Calvin F. Schmid, Wayne W. McVey, Jr., *Growth and Distribution of Minority Races in Seattle, Washington* (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1964), 4.

Americans formed the bulk of Seattle's non-white population during this period. Most who lived in the area were male laborers; as late as 1940, the ratio of men to women was more than 7 to 1. Labeled Seattle's "cosmopolitan center," by historian Shelley Lee, Jackson Street's culture was molded by a series of migrations. A first wave of Chinese laborers arrived in the Pacific Northwest from California – many making their way north to mine for gold along the Columbia and Fraser Rivers. In the 1870s and 1880s, Seattle became a central node within an "empire of extraction." From gold mining to salmon canning and timber production, Washington State's natural resource industries placed it within an expanding orbit, linking cities like Seattle to transpacific ports in China, Japan, Hong Kong and the Hawaiian Islands. While 3,260 Chinese had arrived in Seattle by 1890, only 359 lived in Seattle. Anti-Chinese riots in 1885 had reduced the city's Chinese population by about half. A small Chinatown evolved in Seattle, as labor contractors like Chin Chun Hock and Chin Gee Hee connected Chinese workers with railroad companies, mine owners and farmers around Puget Sound.<sup>7</sup>

As Seattle's Chinese community found itself reeling from the Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1885 riots, Japanese immigration reshaped the city. By 1910, Seattle's Japanese population stood at 6,127. The city's Nihonmachi (Japan town), ran eastward on Main Street, starting from Second Avenue. From Fifth Avenue, eastward, it opened up to include Washington, Jackson, King and Weller Streets. Many early Japanese immigrants to Seattle arrived after working on sugar plantations in Hawaii. Anti-Chinese immigration policies opened up Seattle and other mainland cities as potential destinations once their labor contracts in Hawaii expired. A similar

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<sup>7</sup> Lee, "Cosmopolitan Identities," 30-37; Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 20; 24; 35; Doug Chin, *Seattle's International District: The Making of a Pan-Asian American Community* (Seattle: International Examiner Press, 2011) 22-23.

racial hostility was soon directed at Japanese laborers, leading to the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907.<sup>8</sup>

The migration of African Americans to Seattle peaked between 1900 and 1910, with the city's black population increasing from 406 to 2,296 residents. This surge saw the city's black population climb by 446 percent. Neighborhoods like East Madison, home of the extensive landholdings of William Grose, soon became contested terrain. The city's second black resident, Grose had purchased a 12-acre farm from Henry Yesler in 1882. Blacks looking to migrate there during the early twentieth century were met with some opposition. White property owners refused to rent but in some cases were willing to sell their homes or apartments to African Americans. The sale of the Douglas Apartment in 1911 to a group of black "real estate men" opened up housing opportunities, as did the sale of several other apartment buildings in the early 1920s.<sup>9</sup>

When it came to employment, Seattle's shipbuilding industry provided menial jobs for black migrants, while others worked in the lumber and salmon canning industries. Many did manufacturing, domestic, or service work, piecing together an income. As had become common for black migrants escaping the strictures and violence of the South, better opportunities were often tied to filling in as strikebreakers. A prime example, the Longshoremen's Strike of 1916 opened the door to 1,400 nonunion dockworkers. A number of Asians and 400 black longshoremen from New Orleans, St. Louis and Kansas City came in as strikebreakers. Black strikebreakers encountered violence on a daily basis. While World War I provided an uptick in employment, African Americans remained marginalized in the local economy and in the housing market. As a result, black migration to Seattle dwindled in the 1920s, a decade that saw only 598

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<sup>8</sup> Chin, *Seattle's International District*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 16; 35; Calvin Schmid, *Social Trends in Seattle* (New York: Greenwood, 1944), 137-140.

new arrivals. African Americans were pushed out of industrial jobs, helping to limit the city's allure.<sup>10</sup>

For Japanese Americans, the 1920s was also a decade that produced a wellspring of white resentment. Thousands of acres of Japanese-owned farm land were lost in the White River Valley (outside of Seattle) after the state passed an Alien Land Law in 1921.<sup>11</sup> The Japanese status in the U.S. was further diminished by the 1922 *Ozawa v. United States* Supreme Court decision. In it, Takao Ozawa, who had lived in the U.S. and Hawaii for more than 20 years, was denied the right to naturalize based on his status as a “Mongolian” – existing somewhere between a free white person and a person of “African” descent. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 introduced a quota system based on national origin and also excluded aliens ineligible to citizenship from immigrating to the U.S. For Japanese immigrants, it was seen as the “culminating act of rejection by the United States.”<sup>12</sup>

The circumstances by which many Japanese immigrants entered Seattle's hotel industry epitomized their place within Seattle's economy. After the Great Seattle Fire of 1889, the local fire department was given a new mandate thanks to a 1911 ordinance. The fire department wielded its expanded authority and power to conduct inspections, forcing many hotel owners to either finance the necessary upgrades or risk losing their buildings. Unable to thwart city regulations through the legal process, many hotel owners began to unload their hotels on lessees. These lessees often ended up responsible for most of the upgrades required by the city. From 1910 to 1920, 110 hotels were leased by whites to Japanese.

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 50-58; 244.

<sup>11</sup> David A. Takami, *Divided Destiny: A History of Japanese Americans in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Wing Luke Asian Museum, 1998), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 220-226; 234-235; 244-248; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 37.



Japanese in Seattle who gained a foothold in the hotel industry often did so on exploitative terms. The most onerous contracts even prevented Japanese operators from setting foot on the property. Their financial investments and labor were necessary in order to keep numerous hotels running, though their presence was relegated to the shadows. Japanese who did sign leases were targeted for particular scrutiny by the fire department. They received a disproportionate number of citations for allegedly violating the city's fire codes.<sup>13</sup> While the terms were restrictive, these contracts did provide an opportunity for Seattle's Japanese community to expand its geographic and social influence. As Megan Asaka has argued, Japanese hotel operators "attained an astounding degree of geographic mobility during the 1910s..." This was a growing reality, running counter to the prominent image of a "spatially bounded Japantown."<sup>14</sup>

What was once a city with a small Chinatown, growing up around Jackson St., came to include Japanese and later Filipino populations, along with African Americans. Seattle's black population settled primarily in two neighborhoods – Yesler Jackson and East Madrona. The former, a working-class haven for itinerant laborers, the latter a more middle-class hub. By 1930, Seattle's non-white population was made of the following groups: 8,448 Japanese, 3,303 blacks, 1,614 Filipinos, 1,347 Chinese, and 172 Native Americans.<sup>15</sup>

### **Pushing Back Against Black Homeowners**

What relative obscurity African Americans had enjoyed began to disappear in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Writing in the *Seattle Republican* in 1909, Horace Revels Cayton Sr. lamented a lawsuit brought against him by Seattle "real estate shark" Daniel Jones. Currently winding its way through court, Jones' suit was aimed at preventing blacks in Seattle from buying

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<sup>13</sup> Asaka, "The Unsettled City: Migration, Race, and the Making of Seattle's Urban Landscape," 141-180.

<sup>14</sup> Asaka, 172.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 34; 82; 245.



property in “exclusive communities.” Such transactions caused property values to depreciate, Jones argued. Cayton Sr. crafted a sharp response to what he saw as a “foolish” argument. “Every foot of land in America, since it was stolen from the Indians by the white men, is or was in fee simple owned by some white person...” argued Cayton Sr. Had the nation followed Jones’ logic, “the black man would still be as homeless as a March hare.” But instead not all went to such lengths to erect racial barriers as Jones, Cayton Sr. explained. For African Americans owned and lived in homes in exclusive areas, including Queen Anne Hill, Renton Hill, Beacon Hill, Capitol Hill, and Washington Park, among others. Real estate values in these neighborhoods had not fallen but rather increased after blacks moved in. After six years of living at the Capitol Hill residence in question, Cayton Sr. had seen nearby lots increase in price from \$1,600 to \$16,000.

Cayton, though he despised this particular brand of exclusionism, admitted that some segments of the population needed to be kept at bay. Few blacks, he surmised, would want Jones, “or any white man of his stripe, as their neighbors.” “Poor white trash, who have accidentally gotten a little wealth are dangerous characters for any community and should be avoided to a greater extent than the toiling, struggling Negro.”<sup>16</sup> This was not an insignificant, trivial slight. Class was a central part of Cayton’s claim to the neighborhood. African Americans who had made or were trying to make their way into exclusive white neighborhoods during the early twentieth century were often of a higher class than their white neighbors. This was part of what made their rejection or expulsion from such neighborhoods even more of an affront.<sup>17</sup>

Although Cayton won his case, the trend continued as whites staked their claim to the city’s neighborhoods. Later in 1909 a lawsuit of the same ilk was filed to prevent a lot from

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<sup>16</sup> “Only the Negro Not Wanted,” *Seattle Republican*, April 9, 1909.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 59.

being sold to a black family in the Mount Baker Park area. They had obtained the plot through a white intermediary. Although F.H. Stone and his wife, Susie, were able to win their particular case, efforts to restrict black housing opportunities were gaining momentum.<sup>18</sup> Cayton wondered if the “cruel war” on blacks would ever end. Should the “constitution of the United States be broken into smithereens in order to enhance the value of a few town lots?” asked Cayton.<sup>19</sup> After 1910, Seattle and other cities answered Cayton’s question by way of racial restrictive covenants, which proliferated during the 1920s and 1930s. From “Negroes” and “Orientals” to “Jews” and “Armenians,” non-whites found themselves barred through such covenants.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Rarefied Air of Mount Baker**

A closer look at the Mount Baker neighborhood, the site of legal battles to restrict black homeownership, draws out this point. Advertised as a place for those “inclined toward select society,” who wanted their homes and surroundings to be “on par” with their “character,” the Mount Baker Park Addition pioneered land restrictions in Seattle, beginning in 1907.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Jones, the nemesis of Horace Cayton, Sr., was in charge of the development as owner of the Hunter Tract Improvement Company. He maintained a watchful eye, riding out on his horse each day to sell and inspect properties.<sup>22</sup> Jones and his team wrote a number of restrictions into the deeds. These included a minimum value for homes to be built, as well as prohibitions against the subdivision of large lots and the building of nonresidential properties. In 1915, the Mount Baker Community Club formed a Restrictions Committee, whose primary task was to monitor

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<sup>18</sup> “Negress Wins Suit in Highest Court,” *Seattle Times*, June 8, 1910.

<sup>19</sup> “Another Phase of Negrophobia,” *Seattle Republican*, November 12, 1909.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Stanley Hobbs, “The Cayton Legacy: Two Generations of a Black Family, 1859-1976,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1989), 138-139; Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 73-74; Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 82.

<sup>21</sup> Advertisement for Mount Baker Park Neighborhood, *Seattle Daily Times*, March 30, 1907.

<sup>22</sup> Helen N. DeFreece, “Reminiscences of Early Years in Mt. Baker Park,” *Seattle Times*, August 16, 1959.

compliance with these restrictions. According to a club newsletter from 1919, opposition was “unanimous” in wanting to keep Japanese from moving into the neighborhood. Club members felt Japanese immigration should be fought based on the following reasons: “1) Japanese do not intermarry with the white race and are never assimilated, 2) they have a birth rate in excess of the rate of this country, 3) the white race cannot face them in economic competition.” A petition was circulated, as members were encouraged to sign a pledge assuring that they would sell only to those of the “Caucasian race.” Japanese visitors, many residents felt, were becoming far too comfortable using the neighborhood’s public spaces.<sup>23</sup>

Residents of Mount Baker were in part responding to what they viewed as mercurial U.S. foreign policy decisions. The 1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan was a particular object of scorn. This arrangement halted Japanese labor migration across the Pacific – though it allowed Japanese residents in the U.S. to bring family members across. This paved the way for the wives and (to a lesser degree) children of male Issei to join them, enabling the formation of Japanese families.<sup>24</sup> At a mass meeting held in the Mount Baker clubhouse in November 1919, residents took issue with the Gentlemen’s Agreement and the provision allowing entry to Japanese students. “These Japanese students come here to study the hotel business as bell hops and the sewer business as ditch digger,” explained resident G.B. Swinehart. The fact that the city’s Japanese community had ascended beyond the ranks of bell hops and ditch diggers perturbed Swinehart. Though club members did not mind dressing up in stereotypical garb for their annual ball –particularly blackface and Indian attire – seeing Seattle’s non-white residents step beyond racial boundaries evoked anger. In advance of the meeting, letters had been sent to “all real estate

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<sup>23</sup> “1918-1919 Summary of Events”; “1919-1920 Summary of Events”; Mount Baker Park History, scrapbook, housed at Mount Baker Community Club, Seattle, Washington.

<sup>24</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9; 41; Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, “Cosmopolitan Identities: Japanese Americans in Seattle and the Pacific Rim, 1900-1942,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2005), 41.

men in the city,” imploring them not to sell homes in the neighborhood to Japanese people.

Along with promoting vigilantism in order to maintain housing restrictions, the club also policed the voting patterns of residents. A club meeting held in 1921 allowed community leaders to express indignation that 50 votes in the area had been “cast for a colored man for Legislature.” Some residents, the meeting made clear, needed to be “better informed” lest such careless voting become a pattern.<sup>25</sup>

By 1927, the committee had introduced an agreement to keep “Negroes” and “Mongolians” from living in the neighborhood. Fear of a “Japanese invasion of the district” and “colored” buyers persisted through the 1950s. The area’s location, just on the periphery of black and Asian enclaves, kept residents vigilant. They fought against carports and apartments, as well as non-white neighbors. These were elements best contained to other lower-class neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

At times, city officials stepped in to the breach where private agreements failed to ensure racial segregation. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Mount Baker Park beach continued to draw in unwanted visitors from throughout the city. Like many of the neighborhood’s residents, James Wheeler, the president of the Mount Baker Improvement Club, was vexed by the influx of outsiders. The presence of Japanese bathers had become “an extreme source of irritation,” wrote Wheeler in a letter to James Gibbs, the president of the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners. After all, the city’s Japanese population was barred from renting or owning property in the Mount Baker Park area. Writing in the summer of 1938, Wheeler acknowledged that it was a

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<sup>25</sup> “Mt. Baker Residents to Use Law and Moral Suasion in Fight Upon Japanese,” *Seattle Star*, November 19, 1919, Mount Baker Park History, scrapbook; “1920-1921 Summary of Events,” Mount Baker Park History, scrapbook; Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 30-31.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Pugel, “There Was Nobody to Do it But Us,” *Seattle Times*, January 16, 1977; Caroline Tobin, “Mount Baker Historic Context Statement,” May 2004, City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/HistoricPreservation/HistoricResourcesSurvey/context-mount-baker.pdf> (accessed July 14, 2017).

public beach and that “certain civil rights” might make it “futile to suggest restrictions.” Instead, he envisioned a circuitous plan, “that would allow segregation” without curtailing the rights of Seattle’s Japanese residents. The most practical solution, Wheeler argued, was to bring in a new float. Signs restricting its use would send the desired message in a quiet manner and “would hurt no one.” The existing float would be left for the general public. City officials differed in their perspective only in that they wanted to introduce a “makeshift” raft to keep the costs down. Embedded in the exchange was the idea that segregation need not be trumpeted on signs. With the right cues in place, it would appear natural and obvious.<sup>27</sup>

Sociologists like E.B. Reuter provided a template for understanding racial segregation as a natural phenomenon. Writing in the late-1920s, Reuter, trained at the University of Chicago, described the “segregation movement” within the U.S. as “a process by which individuals in a free society redistributed themselves in accordance with natural ability and personal interest...”<sup>28</sup> As evidenced by the advertisements promoting Mount Baker Park, it was all too easy to see residence as a reflection of character. A lack of “natural ability” was said to repel non-whites from elitist neighborhoods, even as the machinery of racial segregation operated in plain sight. Another University of Chicago-trained sociologist, Roderick McKenzie, fixed his eyes on Seattle’s landscape, observing the “ecology” of various neighborhoods. Married “settlers,” more “civic-minded” and “law-abiding,” migrated away from the city toward “hill-tops.” These more affluent neighborhoods contrasted with those located downtown and in valleys, where “less responsible adults” tended to “herd together in the hotel and apartment regions.” Those living on

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from James Wheeler to Mr. James A. Gibbs, July 2, 1938, Department of Parks and Recreation, Don Sherwood Parks History Collection, Accession no. 5808-01, Seattle Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA); Letter from James A. Gibbs to Mr. James Wheeler, July 28, 1938, Department of Parks and Recreation, Don Sherwood Parks History Collection, Accession no. 5808-01, SMA.

<sup>28</sup> President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, 201.

hills were persistently on the lookout for the invasion of “incongruous units” that would lower property values.<sup>29</sup>

Writing in 1926, Henry F. Daily, a former Mount Baker Park Improvement Club president, described the sense of commitment it took to maintain the area as Seattle’s most exclusive: “We urge every lot owner to consider himself a committee of one to ever be on guard at any and all times to see that no one be permitted to commit any act that might jeopardize the validity of our restrictions and mar the beauty of our district.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Proliferation of Restrictive Covenants**

As can be seen from the above episodes, exclusive white neighborhoods tried a range of strategies before racial covenants emerged as the backbone of segregated neighborhoods. In the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, white residents in a number of U.S. cities had tried to keep out African Americans using nuisance laws. It was a tactic that fell flat in court. Progressive era zoning plans provided a more useful tool for separating various land uses and classes from each other. Racial zoning ordinances, beginning in Baltimore in 1910 and spreading to other Southern and lower-Midwestern cities, were far more effective. The prevention of violence and the maintenance of property values were main rationales in the development of racial zoning. They fit well into the separate but equal doctrine enshrined in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. A related bonus was that they afforded white neighborhoods protection from the alleged desire of African Americans to “amalgamate” with whites.

Although the Supreme Court’s *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917) decision struck down racial zoning, the practice continued in numerous cities. The court’s commitment to “freedom of

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<sup>29</sup> R.D. McKenzie, “The Ecological Approach to the Study of Human Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 3 (November 1924), 300-301; Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 185-189.

<sup>30</sup> Daily, quoted in Jane Pugel, ““There Was Nobody to Do it But Us,” *Seattle Times*, January 16, 1977.

contract” determined the decision, rather than a desire to protect the rights of African Americans. Nevertheless, the legal foundation for racial zoning had been overturned.<sup>31</sup> As racial zoning lost some of its power, racial covenants began to spring up as the most useful tools to enforce segregation. In its 1926 *Corrigan v. Buckley* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court opened the floodgates for racial covenants. The court ruled covenants, which were private contracts, beyond its jurisdiction. Invalidating them would infringe on an individual’s right to enter into private contracts. While they were implemented by local actors, racial covenants followed a relatively uniform national script championed by the real estate industry.<sup>32</sup> That is why in Seattle and its suburbs, where the Japanese American population far outnumbered that of African Americans, many of the covenants singled out only “Negroes” for exclusion. Others made clear their objection to all non-“Caucasians.” Though enforcing racial segregation in housing depended on local factors, it remained a national project. From 1926 through the late-1940s, the adoption of racial covenants was commonplace in Seattle and throughout the nation.<sup>33</sup>

Restrictive covenants, according to a 1932 report by the national Committee on Negro Housing, helped to accelerate the pace of racial segregation in Northern cities. What “custom accomplishes” in the South, the report argued, the North achieved through restrictive covenants. Though covenants were allegedly geared toward reducing racial “friction,” the committee found they had the opposite effect. Support for restrictive covenants often “involved campaigns of vilification and emotional appeals which had little or no reference to the simple fact of housing.” Debates over housing served as a proxy, a venue for ongoing contests regarding the meaning of

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<sup>31</sup> Richard R.W. Brooks and Carol M. Rose, *Saving the Neighborhood: Racially Restrictive Covenants, Law, and Social Norms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 32-46; Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 39-47.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey D. Gonda, *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>33</sup> A detailed database containing more than 400 covenants from a range of Seattle neighborhoods is available at “Restrictive Covenants Database,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants\\_database.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_database.htm) (accessed October 29, 2017).

race. In Chicago, Detroit, D.C., and cities in New York and Philadelphia, covenants were buttressed by violence directed at blacks unwilling to adhere to the color lines. Blacks in Seattle did not have to endure the extremes of racial violence commonplace in other cities. Mobs did not set fire to the homes of black families who moved into white neighborhoods. But there were other more subtle means of achieving racial segregation that worked in tandem with restrictive covenants.<sup>34</sup>

### **Working Around Racial Boundaries**

That racial restrictive covenants targeted both blacks and Asians was clear. There were, however, cracks in the edifice of closed white neighborhoods. In the 1930s and 1940s, some blacks were able – with the help of white friends – to move into white neighborhoods. For the most part, blacks and Asians were hemmed in to the central city by restrictive covenants, along with a substantial Jewish population.<sup>35</sup> Poor blacks and Asians tended to live in close quarters in Chinese or Japanese-owned rooming houses in the Jackson Street area. Many blacks felt exploited by the high rents, while Asian landlords sometimes complained that blacks were bad tenants who destroyed the properties. Overcrowding was a perennial problem in many of the rooming houses.<sup>36</sup>

Japanese Americans, while also limited by restrictive covenants, managed to find housing in white neighborhoods in small numbers. Frank Miyamoto, a sociologist, documented the outward migration of Japanese Americans during the 1930s, as those with growing incomes “quit the central district.” Albeit in very small numbers, Japanese Americans who were able to leave

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<sup>34</sup> President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, Nannie H. Burroughs, chairman, Washington D.C., 1932, 40-41; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Jane A. Avner and Meta Buttnick, *Historic Jewish Seattle: a Tour Guide* (Seattle: Washington State Jewish Historical Society, 1995); *Our People, Our Resources: A Demographic Study of the Jewish Population of Greater Seattle* (Seattle: Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 86-87.



the central city were “rather evenly scattered over a large part of the city,” according to Miyamoto. Small numbers of Chinese, Japanese, and African American families headed south from the central city to settle up in North Beacon Hill during the 1920s and 1930s. For the most part, North Beacon Hill was home to working and middle class whites. Miyamoto’s family was one of the first in the Japanese community to move up to Beacon Hill, doing so in the 1920s. Only a couple of Japanese families lived there at the time.

Once the Miyamotos moved in they were subjected to harassment, most notably in the form of junk being strewn on their porch by vandals. “The resistance to our moving into that area was fairly noticeable, although it was not by any means severe,” recalled Miyamoto in a 1998 interview. For Japanese Americans and other non-white groups, Seattle’s racial boundaries were often left untested. Many chose to look for housing within the confines of segregated neighborhoods in an effort to minimize rejection and overt discrimination. According to Miyamoto, there was a “very definite understanding” within the Japanese community that wealthier neighborhoods like Laurelhurst or Mount Baker were off limits. Going North of Madison Street and South of Dearborn Street could invite trouble.<sup>37</sup> Japanese Americans, while their residential mobility increased during this period, tended to move into transition zones. These areas, often near transportation lines, contained enough business and industry to make the homes less desirable. A mix of property types made it more difficult to clamp down with housing restrictions. Businesses owned by Japanese Americans, such as grocery stores or dye works, typically paved the way into these areas.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Miyamoto, interview I segment 4, by Stephen Fugita, Bellevue, Washington, February 26, 1998, Densho ID: denshovh-mfrank-01-0004, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx> (accessed July 18, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Frank Miyamoto, interview II segment 11, by Stephen Fugita, Seattle, Washington, March 18, 1998, Densho ID: denshovh-mfrank-02-0011, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx> (accessed July 18, 2017).

By 1940, around 7,000 Japanese Americans and 3,800 African Americans lived in Seattle, out of a total population of over 368,000. Though both groups made up a tiny percentage of Seattle's overall population, Japanese Americans played a significant role in the city's economic life. For example, by 1940 there were 206 hotels and 56 apartments owned or operated by Japanese. Before 1900, they had owned or operated 3 hotels. Also, in 1940, Japanese Americans owned 225 restaurants, 90 dry cleaning shops and 140 groceries. Japanese Americans were able to capitalize on the city's ambitions to leave behind a frontier past and become an urban metropolis. Commercial trade with Japan and other Asian countries opened avenues for inclusion within the city for Japanese Americans. Seattleites began to see the city's Japanese as a "successful minority," known for their business acumen and for establishing a range of community organizations. For African Americans, weaving their way into the city's economy proved much more of a challenge.<sup>39</sup>

While the economic distance between Japanese Americans and African Americans was significant, the latter group enjoyed considerably higher rates of homeownership. In 1930, the African American homeownership rate was 38.8 percent; the percentage dropped to 29.2 percent in 1940, cut into by the Great Depression. For those listed under the category of other "races," the bulk of whom were Japanese during this period, the homeownership rate was 5.8 percent in 1930; in 1940, the number climbed to 11.8 percent, still well below that of African Americans. That many were aliens ineligible to citizenship stands out as a key factor in limiting homeownership among Japanese. As of 1935, 53 percent of the city's Japanese population was Issei. In his study of Los Angeles, Scott Kurashige noted even lower rates of homeownership for Japanese Americans. According to Kurashige, "Japanese immigrants were reluctant, because of

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<sup>39</sup> S. Frank Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 13-18; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 108; 245; Lee, "Cosmopolitan Identities," 44-50; 71-75; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 77; Takami, *Divided Destiny*, 31.

their marginal legal status, to enter into the detailed negotiations required for home purchases, especially from whites.”<sup>40</sup>

### **An Interracial Haven**

Widely denigrated as an area where non-whites and vice ran amok, Jackson Street’s racial geography looked very different to those who lived in the area. A 1933 column in the *Northwest Enterprise*, a black newspaper, spoke to these contrasting images. For many outsiders, Jackson Street was “the butt of jokes.” Those who traversed its streets regularly, however, knew it as Seattle’s version of State Street in Chicago, Wiley Avenue in Pittsburgh, or Central Avenue in Los Angeles. It was a “Poor Man’s Playground,” full of colorful characters. Some of the more adventurous liked to strut around in “brightly colored suits with enormously wide pants, and Stetson hats with extreme crowns.” Dotted with Japanese restaurants – along with a few black and Chinese ones – it was a bustling business area where “all races” came together as equals. “Filipinos, Japanese, Negroes, and whites mingle in the same hotels and restaurants and there is an air of comradeship,” explained the writer.<sup>41</sup> Interracial relationships were far from extraordinary within Jackson Street’s working-class culture. At times, these relationships could extend into the more elitist circles of politics. In the late-1920s and early 1930s, African American and Japanese candidates for the state legislature reached out across ethnic lines, recognizing the need for political alliances between the two groups. When Horace Cayton ran for a seat in 1928, he could comfortably remind readers of the *Japanese American Courier* that he

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<sup>40</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the U.S., 1930, Population*, vol. 6, Families, p. 1402; *Sixteenth Census of the U.S., 1940, Housing*, vol. 2, pt. 5, p. 731; Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle*, 14; Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> “Jackson Street is Quiet Thoroughfare on Sunday,” *Northwest Enterprise*, October 12, 1933.

had spent the last 18 years living in the 37<sup>th</sup> district, growing up and attending school alongside many Japanese.<sup>42</sup>

By 1939, Jackson Street and its environs had become a “truly cosmopolitan area,” according to a University of Washington graduate student. Studying an area bounded by Marion Street to the north, Lake Washington to the east, Dearborn Street to the South, and Fifth Avenue to the West, Paul Kitchener Hatt marveled at the mix of peoples and cultures:

The importing businesses, the Kendo gymnasium, the Suki Yaki restaurants of the Japanese; the family houses, chop suey restaurants, and language school of the Chinese; the restricted dance halls, pool halls and rooming houses of the Filipinos; the Jackson and Cherry Street communities of the Negroes; the Synagogues and Kosher markets of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, are all to be found here.

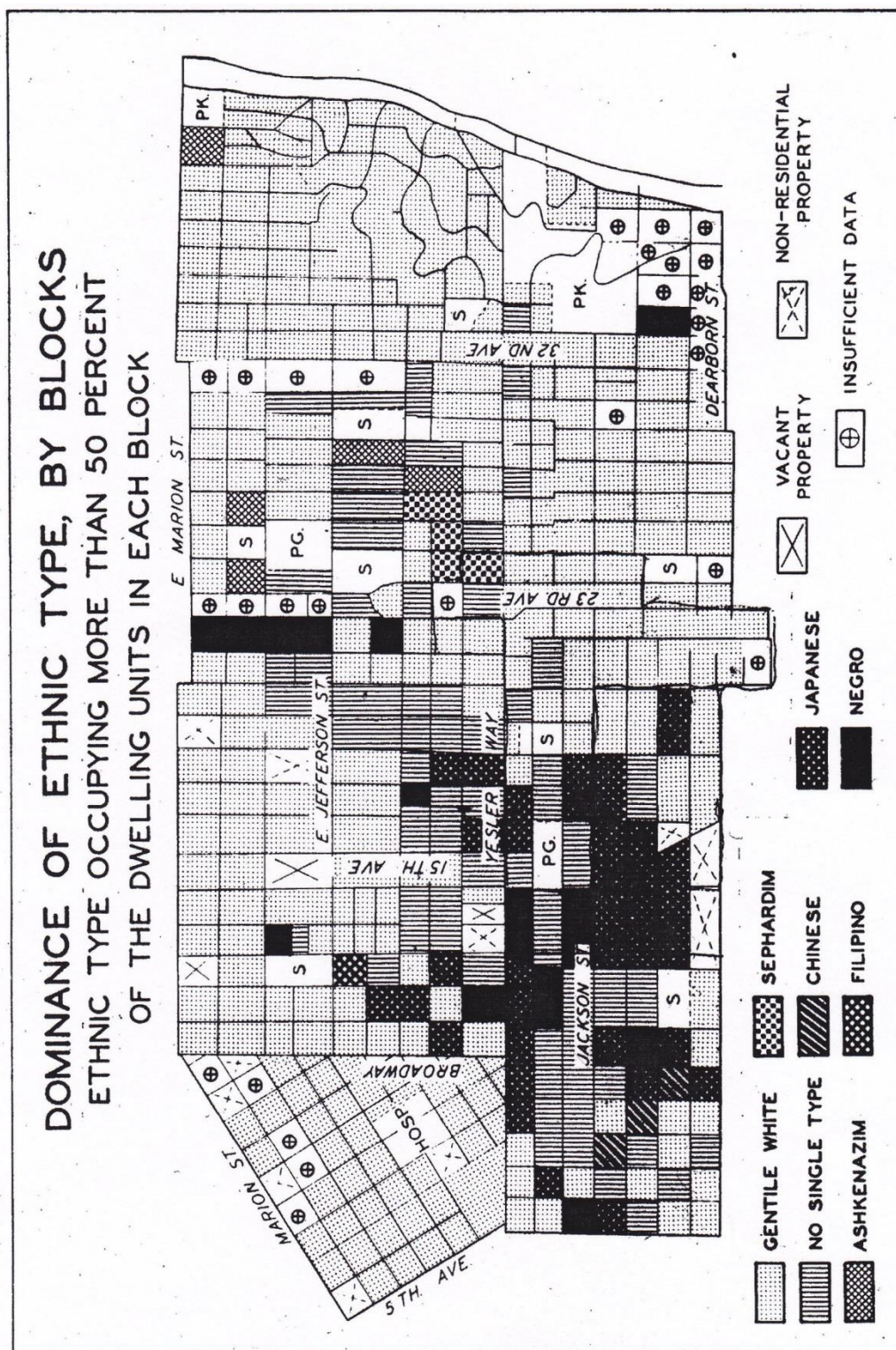
Land use in the area was also mixed, with certain sections containing exclusive homes and others dotted with brothels, gambling houses and “illicit liquor establishments.” Lower-end hotels, known for their permanent residents could also be found along with some of the city’s “worst slum conditions.”<sup>43</sup>

Though the neighborhoods were composed of definite ethnic sub-sections, non-white groups were incredibly interspersed throughout the area. In particular, black and Japanese residents tended to live in close proximity, usually in substandard housing. The only stark separation existed between whites and blacks. According to Hatt, “even in blocks of very poor housing there seems to be marked refusal on the part of white populations to live in the same blocks with Negroes.” Jewish and “Gentile” white residents in the CD tended to occupy housing in better condition than non-white groups. Most black and Japanese residents lived in housing that needed “minor” or “major” repair, as did Chinese and Filipinos. Blacks were the most likely

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<sup>42</sup> Lee, “Cosmopolitan Identities,” 66-67.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Kitchener Hatt, “A Study of Natural Areas in the Central Residential District of Seattle,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1945), 21; 25-26. Although Hatt’s dissertation was completed in 1945, his data was based on the 1939 WPA Real Property Survey of Seattle.



Source: Paul Kitchener Hatt, "A Study of Natural Areas in the Central Residential District of Seattle," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1945), 78.

to live in housing “unfit for use.” Thirty percent of the housing occupied by blacks fell under this category; 24 percent of Japanese, 22 percent of Chinese and 20 percent of Filipinos lived in structures “unfit for use.” Most who lived in the CD were renters, save for the Jewish population, where homeownership rates were just under 50 percent. Homeownership rates for the other groups were as follows: 20 percent for Chinese; 17 percent for blacks; 11 percent for “Gentile” whites; 7 percent for Japanese; and 2 percent for Filipinos. The study did not include the East Madison area, the city’s “highest status” black neighborhood, where the rate of homeownership would have been higher.<sup>44</sup>

Japanese Americans, while they lived crowded together in the western half of the CD, were beginning to establish a base for community services to the east “in an area removed from the polyglot, mobile, and vice-ridden area presently the location of many homes and businesses.” The eastern edge of the CD was mostly home to “Gentile” whites, who were separated from the “polyglot” western edge by the centers of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish communities. Although these two Jewish communities shared some overlapping services, the Sephardim tended to live south of Yesler Way and the Ashkenazaim to the north. Whites living in the eastern section of the CD tended to own their homes.<sup>45</sup>

By the 1940s, what had once been known as the Jackson Street neighborhood – among other monikers – had evolved into what became known as the Central District (CD) or the Central Area. Part of this transformation involved the gradual melding of two black neighborhoods, Yesler-Jackson and East Madison. The two had expanded and come together during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1940, forty acres of land in the Yesler Hill neighborhood was razed to make way for Seattle’s first public housing development. Yesler Terrace, when it

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<sup>44</sup> Hatt, “A Study of Natural Areas in the Central Residential District of Seattle,” 67; 96-110.

<sup>45</sup> Hatt, “A Study of Natural Areas in the Central Residential District of Seattle,” 57-59; 72-75.

opened in the early-1940s, earned the distinction of being the nation's first racially-integrated project. Along with that reality, however, the demolition that made room for public housing displaced more than 1,000 residents. Asian and African Americans and many working-class or poor Seattleites were evicted from the area, few of whom were able to secure housing in Yesler Terrace when it opened.<sup>46</sup> Designated by the city as a slum clearance project, the Yesler Hill neighborhood that was wiped away had been home to several Japanese churches, a Japanese language school, an African American social club, as well as shops, groceries and restaurants. As Megan Asaka has argued, it "remained one of the few districts in Seattle open to Asian and African Americans, prostitutes, mixed-race couples, and others in non-normative living arrangements." One third of the population had been black or Asian, an incredibly high percentage in such a white city.<sup>47</sup> By the end of 1944, in the midst of a severe housing crisis, Yesler Terrace stood as a beacon of urban renewal, a force that had obliterated a once diverse neighborhood. Of Yesler Terrace's 2,671 residents, 2442 were white, 155 were black, 36 were Chinese and 38 were listed as "other."<sup>48</sup>

The making of Yesler Terrace exposed the vulnerability of Seattle's non-white residents. When it opened in 1941, shortly before the U.S. entered World War II, defense workers had already been pouring into Seattle. The ensuing housing shortage left those in the rental market with few options. When the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) built public housing developments in white neighborhoods, local businesses and residents were quick to call for racial segregation. Though the SHA was proud of its "integrated public housing," only a small percentage of African Americans were able to secure public housing in its early war-time incarnations. "The

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<sup>46</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 35; Asaka, "The Unsettled City," 232-242.

<sup>47</sup> Asaka, "The Unsettled City," 238.

<sup>48</sup> Annual Review, Yesler Terrace, December 1944, Annual Reports, 1945, 1960-1986, box 1713, Seattle Housing Authority Collection, Puget Sound Regional Archives.

crux of the problem...is that there was virtually no building for rent in the entire West after the start of the depression, except in Los Angeles,” explained a field worker with the Office of Price Administration passing through Seattle in 1941. Encountering auto and trailer camps with “no vacancy” signs, some newcomers to Seattle sheltered in garages and attics. Even with a housing crisis on the horizon, a mayoral committee on defense housing insisted that no more public housing be built. “We know private business can take care of the needs,” assured the committee chairman. Seattle’s non-white population, steered to the lowest levels of the rental market, would shoulder the consequences of such unfounded optimism.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Incarceration of Japanese Americans; a Sliver of Space for African Americans**

Though integral to the city’s economy, Seattle’s non-white population, led by Japanese Americans, was politically powerless. That reality crashed down on Japanese Americans as their rights steadily eroded, paving the way for their incarceration. The dismantling of Japanese communities along the West Coast during World II would have profound and long-lasting effects. Of the 12,892 Japanese from Washington State incarcerated during the war, many were Nisei and thus American citizens. In Seattle, Nisei accounted for two thirds of the nearly 7,000 Japanese residents. In April 1942, following President Roosevelt’s issuance of Executive Order 9066, Seattle’s Japanese residents rushed to find buyers, lessees or caretakers for their businesses and homes. Many were forced to sell the bulk of their possessions for a pittance. Roughly 600 to 900 farms in King County were “abandoned” by Japanese, taken over by whites and Filipinos.<sup>50</sup> Ads in local newspapers broadcast the desperate circumstances of business owners. “Japanese evacuation gives you fine opportunity to take over an established business at a fraction of its

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<sup>49</sup> “City Housing Shortage Rapidly Nears Crisis,” *Seattle Times*, November 30, 1941; Howard A. Droker, “Seattle Race Relations During the Second World War,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (October 1976), 166.

<sup>50</sup> Takami, *Divided Destiny*, 50; Roger Daniels, “The Exile and Return of Seattle’s Japanese,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (Fall 1997), 166-173.



value,” read one ad by a management company. The following were listed as options: 5 barber shops, 6 dry cleaning stores, 3 grocery stores, a flower store, along with several hotels and apartments. All came “fully equipped.” Hundreds of Japanese invested in hotels, apartments and grocery stores were forced to part ways with their businesses or find lessees or caretakers.<sup>51</sup>

The transition from Japanese to white management in Seattle’s hotel and apartment industry left many black tenants in the lurch, according to the *Northwest Enterprise*, a black newspaper: “Co-effective with the order evacuating the Japanese is the unwritten ultimatum of the landlords, lessors, and government, in hotels and apartment houses that no Negroes may be accepted as tenants.”<sup>52</sup> Worried black tenants living in hotels formerly run by Japanese Americans, called on the NAACP to address the housing shortage. Many others had been kicked out of their lodgings recently by new white management, who had begun to post white-only signs. “We are not trying to fight the Japanese’ battle, but we have to admit they did not refuse us a place to live,” explained a black defense worker at an NAACP meeting.<sup>53</sup>

By the summer of 1944, when wartime employment peaked, there were 1,600 black workers at Boeing. Between 1940 and 1944, Seattle’s black population was estimated to have doubled, from under 4,000 to over 8,000. In an April 1944 report, Jesse Epstein, director of the Seattle Housing Authority, figured that 3,440 additional black migrants had been forced into the same buildings that had housed 3,789 black residents back in 1940. “We know that additional private housing, whether used or new, is virtually unattainable for Negroes...” explained Epstein.<sup>54</sup> As historian Harold Droker argued, Seattle’s “Jim Crow policies multiplied along with

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<sup>51</sup> Advertisement for “Business Opportunities,” *Seattle Times*, April 6, 1942; Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> “U.S. Evacuates Seattle Japanese; Lessors, Custodians Evacuate Negroes,” *Northwest Enterprise*, March 20, 1942.

<sup>53</sup> Arlene Paiys, “Housing Problem Attacked by NAACP,” *Northwest Enterprise*, April 3, 1942.

<sup>54</sup> Howard Alan Droker, “The Seattle Civic Unity Committee and the Civil Rights Movement, 1944-1964 (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1974), 17.

the black population.” Black migrants drawn to wartime employment were also greeted with suspicion and disdain by established black residents. Those who had been part of a small and somewhat inconspicuous community chafed at the heightening scrutiny now directed toward the city’s black population.

After being evicted from Japanese-run hotels in 1942, by 1944 African Americans living in the CD were able to lay claim to some of the businesses and neighborhoods formerly inhabited by the Japanese.<sup>55</sup> As the city’s population and neighborhood boundaries expanded, some African Americans like Thursel Boylis, looked to find housing in less established areas of the city. Shortly after the war ended, Boylis purchased eight vacant lots around Columbia City. She then signed a contract with a construction company to assemble a prefabricated home on her new property. Once completed, she was hoping to share the home with her elderly aunt, who would be joining her from Michigan. Upon hearing that a “colored” woman had purchased the lots, a group of white neighbors called a meeting of the Empire Way Community Club. Although a contingent of neighbors organized to exclude blacks from the neighborhood, they were met with resistance. A rival group of white neighbors contacted the Seattle Urban League, asking for “counsel and advice.” In the end, the standoff did not appear to have dissuaded Boylis from moving into her new home.<sup>56</sup>

By the 1950s, the city’s non-white neighborhoods were evolving, as more affluent minorities were trickling out of the central city. Some, like Boylis, refused to be denied housing in outlying areas. Though controversial, the conglomeration of Chinatown, a reconstituted Nihonmachi and Filipino enclaves slowly came to be known as the International District (ID).

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<sup>55</sup> Droker, “Seattle Race Relations During the Second World War,” 164-165; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 172-174.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Dean E. Hart to George W. Greenwood, March 7, 1946, box 11, folder 17, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC.

The new name reflected relationships formed across racial and ethnic lines during the first half of the twentieth century, though many hung on to the moniker of Chinatown. Both the CD and the ID were increasingly imagined as ghettos. Overcrowding during World War II played an outsized role in this transformation. For those looking to escape, however, most of Seattle's housing stock beyond the CD and the ID was littered with racial restrictive covenants. The surrounding suburbs were no exception.<sup>57</sup>

### **Confinement After Internment**

After Japanese Americans returned to Seattle from the internment camps, the search for housing could be arduous. Most Japanese Americans in Washington State were incarcerated in the Minidoka internment camp during the war, which reached a peak population of 9,397 in 1943. Some were held in the desolate Idaho internment camp for as long as 1,176 days. From 1942 to 1944, some incarcerated at Minidoka were allowed to "relocate" for education, employment, and to reunite with family. Around 2,400 were "relocated" in 1943 and 2,100 in 1944. After the Army lifted restrictions in January 1945, many Japanese in Minidoka returned to Seattle. According to historian Roger Daniels, they "found both hostility and support" upon arriving back in Seattle.<sup>58</sup>

Peggy Tanemura and her family were one of many who crowded into the Japanese Language School after their release from the internment camps. Leaving Tule Lake with only \$14 in his pocket, Tanemura's father decided to bring his family back to Seattle. Initially, the family had been sent to Minidoka but after her father applied for repatriation to Japan they were sent to Tule Lake. They lived in the language school for a little less than six months, before moving into a studio apartment. They lived in a series of small apartments for several years,

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<sup>57</sup> Chin, *Seattle's International District*, 76.

<sup>58</sup> Daniels, "The Exile and Return of Seattle's Japanese," 169-70.

always close to the school. Her father found work as a meat-cutter at Bar-S, while her mother did piece work for the Seattle Glove Factory. Initially denied a job due to his height, Tanemura's father was eventually hired and worked in a profession that most Japanese Americans had avoided. Only "burakumin" (outcasts) tended to work as meat-cutters in Japan.<sup>59</sup>

Herb Tsuchiya and his family followed another common path back to Seattle, living temporarily at the Japanese Baptist Church's Fujian Home. Intended for missionaries, it became a temporary home for numerous Japanese American families. Eventually, Tsuchiya's mother moved the family into Stadium Homes and later Rainier Vista, war-time public housing. Tsuchiya's mother Momoyo experienced a "nervous breakdown" shortly after returning to Seattle and underwent electric shock therapy. In 1941, her husband had left the family, intent on returning to Hiroshima to work on his family's rice farm. He had wanted to bring their youngest son Herb with him but Momoyo refused to split up the family. During the war, she had endured the additional trauma that came with four of her sons serving in the military. Two were members of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. Her eldest son, Joezu "Joe," earned two Purple Hearts but came back a bitter man, particularly toward white people. Momoya worked as a domestic in order to support the family, with help from her older boys after they finished up their military service. Around 1948, Carl Junso Tsuchiya, the third eldest son, purchased a home for the family at 18<sup>th</sup> and Dearborn St. He bought it for \$9,000 from an Italian American family.<sup>60</sup> Others were not so lucky in dealing with white landlords and property owners. June Takahashi recalled knocking on doors only to be met with a rejection once the owner or landlord noticed she was

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<sup>59</sup> Peggy Tanemura, interview by Elmer Good, segment 17, Seattle, Washington, May 20, 1998, Densho ID: denshovh-tpeggy-01--0017, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx> (accessed July 24, 2017); Tanemura interview, segment 9, Densho ID: denshovh-tpeggy-01-0009; Tanemura interview, segment 1, denshovh-tpeggy-01-0001 (accessed July 24, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Herb Tsuchiya, interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, August 13, 2015.

not white. Takahashi and her husband had been interested in the Mount Baker and Montlake neighborhoods but to no avail. They ended up renting a house in the Rainier Valley before purchasing a home near Garfield High School in the CD.<sup>61</sup>

In 1947, less than 4,700 Japanese Americans lived in Seattle, a drop-off from the pre-war population of 6,975. Some had slowly begun to reestablish themselves in the CD. In a 1947 survey, sociologist Frank Miyamoto noted that businesses on lower Jackson and Main Streets, taken over briefly by African Americans, were now being run by Japanese. A housing shortage and high rental costs meant that many Japanese Americans lived in overcrowded units. Facing housing and employment discrimination, some Japanese with the financial means leased hotels, apartment buildings and rooming houses. These buildings provided a place to live and rooms to rent out, particularly to other Japanese. According to Miyamoto, the housing crisis also produced a newfound willingness among some within the Japanese community to venture into white neighborhoods. “Occasional discussions of experiences with restrictive covenants and property holders’ resistance” were popping up within the community.<sup>62</sup>

Louise Kashino and her husband Shiro, were appalled by the brazen attitude of white realtors when searching for a house shortly after World War II. They were ignored by realtors in the North End before trying their luck in West Seattle. There, a realtor informed them that the housing was being saved for veterans. Shiro, who had been a member of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, had earned six Purple Hearts, a Silver Star, and a Bronze Star. He became irate after realizing that his decorated military career meant nothing to the agent, who refused to work

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<sup>61</sup> June Takahashi, interview by Beth Kawahara and Larry Hashima, segment 35, Seattle Washington, November 17, 1997, Densho ID: denshovh-tjune-01-0035, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx> (accessed July 24, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Frank Miyamoto and Robert W. O’Brien, “A Survey of Some Changes in the Seattle Japanese Community Resulting from the Evacuation,” 1947 or 1948, box 35, folder 7, Central Seattle Community Council Federation Records, Accession no. 1801-001, UWSC.

with the Kashinos. They eventually lived in the Madrona neighborhood (CD) for 8 years before outgrowing their house. In the late-1950s, they spent about a year searching for a new home, running into the same treatment once again. After checking out an open house south of Rainier Beach, the couple was left fuming. The realtor refused to even look at them, even though they were the only ones in the house at the time of their visit. After that incident, they avoided checking out neighborhoods where they were clearly not wanted.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Politics of Respectable Integration**

Moving into white neighborhoods on the northern edge of the CD was not impossible, though it took some prodding. Civil rights organizations engaged in organized efforts to convince reluctant whites to accept non-white neighbors. Their efforts were geared toward finding homes for “respectable” minorities, leaving many who did not fit such criteria to fend for themselves. The city’s Civic Unity Committee, founded in 1944, was indicative of the cautious approach favored by the political establishment. The Committee, created by Seattle Mayor William F. Devin, was part of a national “civic unity movement” that arose in the aftermath of the Detroit riot in 1943. Seattle’s CUC relied on volunteers and did not have the backing of city council. Aimed at improving race relations by following the path of least resistance, the CUC “bent over backwards to understand the position of the discriminator,” according to one local historian. Early on, pressure was applied to try and persuade homeowners in the Sand Point area of Northeast Seattle to revoke their restrictive covenants. In general, the committee focused on education, seeking to assuage the fears of those living in “transitional neighborhoods.” The

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<sup>63</sup> Louise Kashino, interview by Alice Ito, segment 26, Seattle, Washington, March 15, 1998, Densho ID: denshovh-klouise-01-0026, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx> (accessed July 24, 2017); Antoinette Alexander, “Shiro ‘Kash’ Kashino, Decorated War Veteran,” *Seattle Times*, June 17, 1997.

activism of the CUC was largely stifled by its desire to appease both civil rights organizations and the housing industry.<sup>64</sup>

In 1946, volunteers with the Civic Unity Committee were dispatched to help the Handas, a Japanese American family of five. With the help of a black realtor, they had found a home in the Madison Valley neighborhood that suited their tastes. But they became reluctant to purchase the house when their realtor informed them that white neighbors had pressured the homeowner not to sell to Japanese. They were wary of moving into a neighborhood where they were not wanted. Their daughter Constance brought her concerns to the committee, requesting that they interview the neighbors who voiced the complaints.

A volunteer acting on the request found that the two couples in question were from Sweden and Holland respectively. The Swedish family, though remaining steadfast in wanting to avoid white neighbors, made it clear to volunteers that they thought highly of Japanese people. Their son had attended high school and college alongside a Japanese boy, “who was one of his closest friends,” read a report compiled by a volunteer. They recognized the hardships that Japanese Americans had endured during the war and “were in sympathy” with those who were “loyal.” The basis of their resistance was not personal but economic. The neighborhood was quickly becoming “mixed,” which from their perspective would reduce the value of homes. Just recently, a black family had moved in on the same street, as had a Filipino man, along with his white wife. The couple agreed that non-white families were prevented from moving into neighborhoods until they had already decayed, but felt it was a problem beyond their control. Living in the U.S. had made them “a victim of these patterns.” “While we have no prejudice in our heart, we have to consider our own security,” explained the husband. “We have put so much into this home for the past 30 years.” Over the course of their conversation with the volunteer,

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<sup>64</sup> Droker, “The Seattle Civic Unity Committee and the Civil Rights Movement,” 33-41; 147-151.

the couple gradually moved away from their initial stance. “They need not be afraid,” the husband assured as the volunteer was leaving their home. “We will be happy to have them as neighbors. I know how they will bring that dead garden to life.” Although the husband had struck a more positive tone in the final moments of the conversation, he ended by expressing resignation that he would probably sell the house. Unfortunately, he reminded the volunteer, there were just too many people unwilling to do the right thing. He did not want to be left in the lurch as everyone around him fled. Blaming an omnipotent market allowed many to remove their own agency from the equation.<sup>65</sup>

In West Seattle, the furor over non-white neighbors was as intense as anywhere in the city. One evening in August of 1947, a white woman was strolling along Alki Beach when she bumped into a black woman she knew from volunteering with the Christian Friends for Racial Equality. She invited the woman, who was accompanied by two friends, to stop at her home nearby for coffee. Soon after the black women arrived, neighbors began to gather outside. They eventually took their protests to the landlord of Mrs. Kirts, the white woman who was hosting the guests. In unveiling her complaint to the Civic Unity Committee, Mrs. Kirts noted that her landlord had been especially bothered because he thought it “was illegal for a white person to entertain colored people in their home.” The morning after the incident, neighbors in the area had reconvened their gathering outside her home, continuing to vent their displeasure. When a volunteer with the Civic Unity Committee contacted Mr. Owens, they discovered that he worked as a realtor in West Seattle. Speaking with a thick German accent, Mr. Owens attempted to enlighten the volunteer, as to the “strong feeling against members of minority groups” existing in West Seattle. He mentioned that a little while back a homeowner had been willing to sell their

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<sup>65</sup> Report by unknown author, August 30, 1946, box 11, folder 17, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC.



property to a Japanese family but that he, as the realtor, had decided against it. Although the Japanese family had been ready to pay with cash, Owens opted to pass in order to avoid a “wave of hysteria.” Not long ago, a Japanese family renting a nearby building for their flower shop had been evicted. The bank that owned the property had received protests from other tenants in the building, threatening to move if the family was allowed to remain. Meanwhile, a black family who had purchased a hillside lot was refunded their money after a Ku Klux Klan cross was placed on their property.

Though Owens could probably have continued with more stories that outlined the various ways in which whites worked to drive out and exclude minorities in West Seattle, he stopped short of endorsing such actions. But the most pressing issue, he believed, was that property values “definitely went down when a Negro family moved into a neighborhood.” One needed to be realistic about trying to change prevailing attitudes. Most black people “were much happier by themselves.” As far as whites in Seattle, Owens figured the committee was fighting a losing battle; the majority of Seattleites were committed to racial segregation. He ended with the following assurance: “I will explain to the Kirts that it would be most unwise to consider bringing Negroes into their home again.”<sup>66</sup>

### **The Fight Against Restrictive Covenants**

Even after the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court ruling prohibiting judicial enforcement of racial covenants, many remained in place. An editorial in the *Chicago Defender* shortly after the landmark decision singled out racial covenants as having been “responsible for more human misery, more crime, more disease and violence than any other factor in society.” Fighting the evil of racial covenants had consumed the NAACP’s attention for the past 31 years. Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, figured the legal battle had cost the

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<sup>66</sup> “Complaint,” August 1947, box 11, folder 17, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC.

organization a total of \$100,000 over the three decades. According to the *Defender*, the court's unanimous decision had brought to a "dramatic close one of the ugliest developments in American history." White was less sanguine in his assessment, pointing to the legion that had fought on behalf of the covenants. Real estate boards, newspapers, neighborhood associations, and the "vast resources of many banks, trust companies, holding corporations and insurance companies" had rallied to protect their investment in racial segregation.<sup>67</sup>

Teaming with the NAACP, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) filed an amicus brief in *Hurd v. Hodge*, a companion case to *Shelley v. Kraemer*. JACL lawyers detailed the inability of Nisei veterans to find housing, forcing them into ghettoized conditions in "Little Tokyos." They also underscored the significance of restrictive covenants in perpetrating the idea that Japanese Americans were "clannish" and "unassimilated," a perception that streamlined their incarceration during World War II. The American Indian Citizens League of California and a number of Jewish organizations also filed briefs outlining the impact of racial covenants on other minorities.<sup>68</sup>

Against the backdrop of World War II and the atrocities carried out against a ghettoized Jewish population, the case against restrictive covenants was mounting. For African Americans and many other racial and religious minorities, the covenants cases were part of an ongoing struggle against fascism.<sup>69</sup> After the legal battle was won, however, the path forward against racial covenants was treacherous. The resistance to the *Shelley* ruling was swift and intense. Though the NAACP had formed important interracial alliances that provided momentum for the

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<sup>67</sup> Editorial, "Let Freedom Ring," *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1948; Clement E. Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (1959; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 213-214.

<sup>68</sup> Brief of the Japanese American Citizens League as amicus curiae, *Hurd v. Hodge*; Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 202-208; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 194.

<sup>69</sup> Gonda, *Unjust Deeds*, 150-155.

fight against segregated schools, the use of racial covenants continued to spread. Nevertheless, the NAACP remained optimistic on several fronts. After all, tens of thousands of African American families enjoyed access to previously-restricted areas, though in many cases they were moving into areas with older housing stock. The downside was that many poor and working class African Americans remained stuck in ghettos. Ultimately, however, the NAACP fight against restrictive covenants was aimed squarely at breaking down the walls for black homeowners. As Jeffrey Gonda has argued, NAACP strategy “often privileged class-based advancement, viewing middle-class individuals as better ambassadors of respectability in the process of integration.” Although the NAACP had hoped the campaign against covenants would open up new neighborhoods for public housing and alleviate crowding, these would be secondary benefits.<sup>70</sup>

Writing shortly after the *Shelley* ruling, the Seattle Civic Unity Committee published an informational pamphlet documenting the ills of restrictive covenants. The battle, in a sense, had just begun and would play out largely beyond the courtroom. According to the committee, property owners found the covenants were necessary to “keep members of minority groups out of residential areas in order to protect the value of their property.” The link between property value and race was unfounded but held incredible sway, according to the committee: “White people are apt to associate ill kept and unsightly neighborhoods with Negroes without recognizing that the Negroes inherited these areas only after the dwelling units were in the last stage of usefulness.” As the committee’s report suggested, the history of neighborhood development and decline was easily forgotten. The timing, however, was critical. Too often, black residents were assigned singular responsibility for the neighborhoods in which they lived. Few bothered to ask what types of neighborhoods were open to blacks and the conditions they encountered upon arrival. The condemnation of black neighborhoods and the protecting of white

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 194-218; 206.

neighborhoods had become a cornerstone of the housing market. This was the case, in spite of the fact that until World War II blacks made up less than one percent of the city's total population.<sup>71</sup>

While Japanese Americans and other minorities had suffered under the weight of restrictive covenants, they were not the primary targets. Those who sought to enforce the power of covenants in court had overwhelmingly focused on African Americans. This was a national battle and although Japanese Americans figured in the debate (particularly along the West Coast), they were not the main focus. Racial covenants were ultimately a response to increasing African American mobility during the Great Migration. After the legal foundation of the covenants was eroded, the focus on limiting black residential mobility intensified.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Color of Postwar Suburbanization**

Whether through hanging a "Negro effigy" in protest of a housing development for "colored tenants" in the North End or other blatant protests aimed at keeping out minorities, most Seattle neighborhoods fought hard to maintain their whiteness.<sup>73</sup> Although non-whites lived in almost every census tract in 1950, the percentage of those living in tracts north of the Lake Washington Ship Canal declined between 1940 and 1950. The North End of Seattle was becoming whiter, while 80 percent of the city's non-white population lived in 22 of the city's 94 census tracts. By 1950, most census tracts north of the canal, contained fewer than 25 non-white

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<sup>71</sup> Seattle Civic Unity Committee, *Racial Restrictive Covenants*, August 1, 1948, Box 33, Folder 33: Civil Rights Coordination Committee, 1948, 1951, 1965, Central Seattle Community Council Federation Records, 1945-1971, Accession no. 1801-001, UWSC; "Racial Restrictive Covenants," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants.htm> (accessed March 2, 2016); Catherine Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants: Enforcing Neighborhood Segregation in Seattle," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants\\_report.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm) (accessed March 2, 2016); Taylor, *Forging a Black Community*, 245.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89-105.

<sup>73</sup> Complaint from Mrs. A.L. Zobrist, August 15, 1947; Letter from Henry Elliott to Russell Young, August 22, 1947, box 11, folder 17, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC.

residents. Overall, roughly half of Seattle's census tracts were home to a non-white population of less than 1 percent. The containment of Seattle's non-white population during this period meant that many missed out on the postwar building boom. Between 1950 and 1960, most of the area's growth was taking place outside of the city limits. There, the population increased by 46 percent over the decade. Within the city limits, the population increased by only 0.7 percent.

As Robert Self has argued, segregation, particularly during the 1950s "was naturalized among white policymakers as a common-sense dimension of healthy property markets." Tax abatements for suburban development, interstate highway construction, and a range of government-funded projects in outlying areas fueled the white migration away from cities. The rhetoric of the free market resounded, even as whites-only suburbanization was financed by the Home Owners Loan Corporation and later the Federal Housing Administration.<sup>74</sup> FHA underwriting standards encouraged racial homogeneity and discouraged banks from lending in urban neighborhoods, redlining areas with black and other non-white residents.<sup>75</sup>

The logic and language of racial exclusion following World War II was distinct from that of the early twentieth century. Though earlier biological reasoning still lingered, defending property rights could now be accomplished without necessarily singling out black inferiority. Where African Americans were now found wanting was in their alleged unwillingness to adhere to the rules of the free market. While many Americans came to adopt the myth that racial segregation was simply a product of private decisions, this was not the case. As David Freund puts it, the federal government "created a new kind of discriminatory marketplace, one that

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<sup>74</sup> Percent of Non-White Population, Ranked by Census Tracts, Seattle, Washington, 1950, box 10, folder 28, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC; Census Tract Base Map of Seattle, Washington, 1950, Office of Population Research, University of Washington, box 11, folder 20, Civic Unity Committee Records, Accession no. 479-001, UWSC; John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 260; Self, *American Babylon*, 104; 130-131.

<sup>75</sup> Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 64-65.

subsidized private housing markets, demanded racial exclusion, and simultaneously popularized an illusory story about the origins of both growth and inequality.”<sup>76</sup>

By the late-1950s, just two percent of the homes built with FHA support since World War II were occupied by minorities. But suburban development during this period was not simply about racial exclusion. The politics of home-ownership and suburbanization was also about class. Apartments and affordable housing were increasingly anathema to suburban development. This would become a significant factor when suburbs gradually opened up to non-white residents.<sup>77</sup> Blacks and Asians who were able to enter Seattle’s more exclusive neighborhoods and suburban developments may have been interested in challenging racial boundaries. But there is little reason to believe that they held the same type of interest when it came to the markers of class. As Andrew Wiese has argued, middle-class blacks during this period “drew implicit contrasts between the types of neighborhoods to which they aspired and those in which they had been ‘bottled up’ with other African Americans before the war.” Leaving the ghetto was not simply about fighting racial exclusion. Often times, there was also a bootstrap story waiting to be told.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Interracial Pockets of Southeast Seattle**

For Seattle’s black and Asian communities, Southeast Seattle was one of the few areas where neighborhoods were somewhat open to non-whites. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and African American residents slowly migrated into Southeast Seattle neighborhoods during the 1950s and 1960s. Restrictive covenants were used to some extent in Beacon Hill and Rainier Valley neighborhoods, but they were less common there than in other parts of the city. As one

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<sup>76</sup> David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1-42; 37.

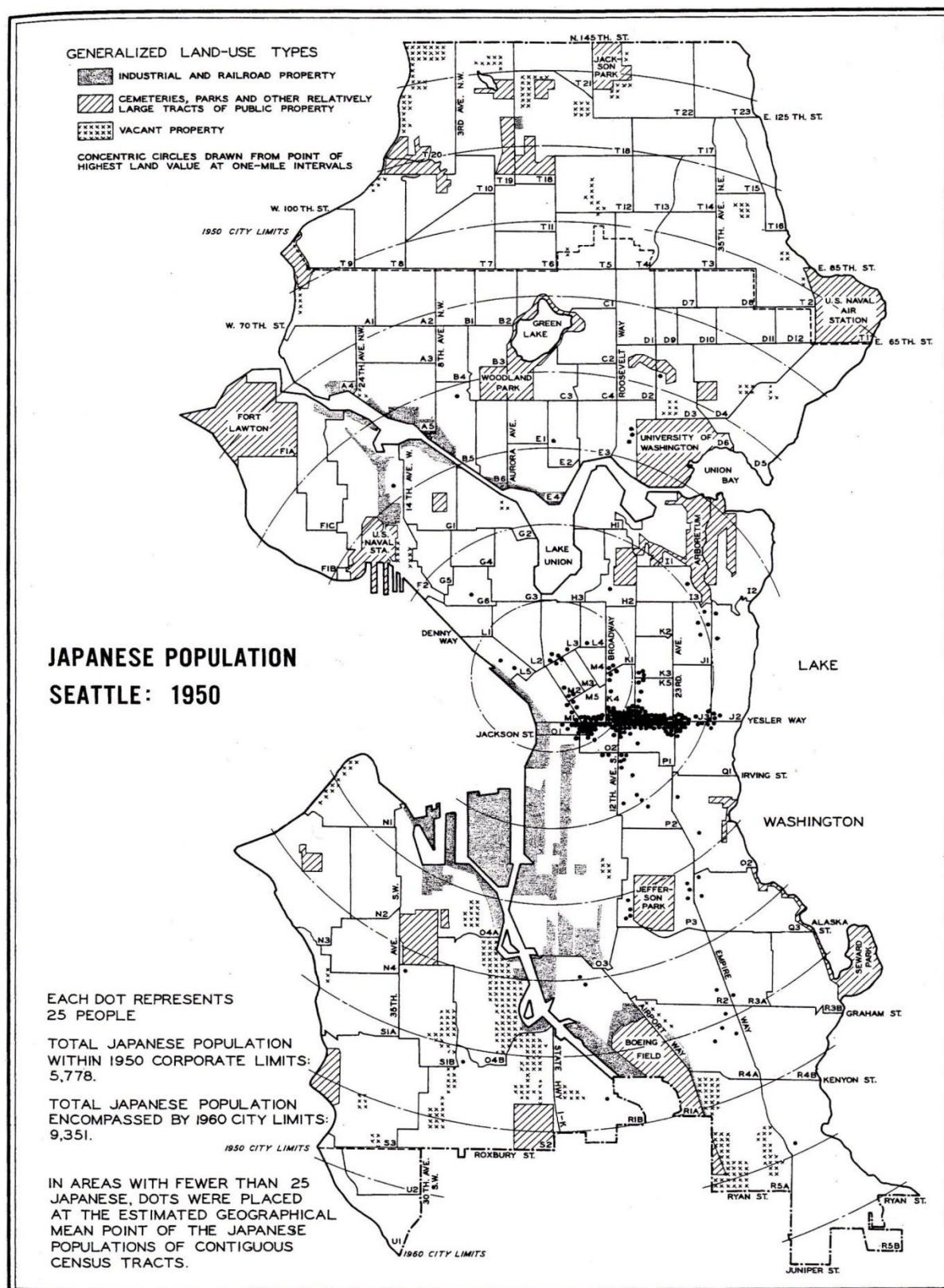
<sup>77</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 101-105.

<sup>78</sup> Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 106.

Seattle historian phrased it, “only to the South, toward Rainier Valley and Beacon Hill, could the ghetto expand without running into full-scale opposition.”<sup>79</sup> James Matsuoka, a Nisei who had grown up in a farming family in the Kent area, opened up International Realty on Jackson Street in the CD in 1946. Matsuoka, who was incarcerated at Tule Lake Internment Camp during the war, initially settled back in to farming in Montana. Sam Emanuel, of Olympic Realty in Seattle, was a friend of Matsuoka’s father and wrote a letter inviting Matsuoka to move to Seattle. There, Emanuel could help him enter the real estate business. Matsuoka accepted Emanuel’s offer and sold his farming equipment for \$12,000 before heading to Seattle. His options were limited early on. “The first property I sold was to the Chiba family for \$3,500 on Mount Baker,” Matsuoka

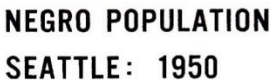
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<sup>79</sup> “Racial Restrictive Covenants,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants.htm>, accessed May 12, 2016; Caroline Tobin, “Beacon Hill Historic Context Statement,” City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, 2004, 46; Sale, *Seattle: Past to Present*, 218.



Source: Calvin F. Schmid, Wayne W. McVey, Jr., *Growth and Distribution of Minority Races in Seattle, Washington* (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1964), 17.





EACH DOT REPRESENTS  
25 PEOPLE

TOTAL NEGRO POPULATION  
WITHIN 1950 CORPORATE LIMITS:  
15,666.

TOTAL NEGRO POPULATION  
ENCOMPASSED BY 1960 CITY LIMITS:  
15,719.

IN AREAS WITH FEWER THAN 25 NEGROES, DOTS WERE PLACED AT THE ESTIMATED GEOGRAPHICAL MEAN POINT OF THE NEGRO POPULATIONS OF CONTIGUOUS CENSUS TRACTS.

recalled. “Central Area, Mount Baker and Beacon Hill; that’s about the only places I was able to work. Other places they wouldn’t let me.”<sup>80</sup>

Most Beacon Hill neighborhoods were free of restrictive covenants and enjoyed a reputation for racial tolerance, though there were limits to this ethos. In the 1950s, Nellie Carter, a black grandmother who was widowed, took note of a two-bedroom brick home being built on Beacon Hill. Carter liked the house but knew that as a black woman she would run into difficulties if she tried to buy it outright. Instead, she arranged for an acquaintance to buy the house. After Mr. Kay Yamaguchi, a Japanese American businessman, purchased the house from the sellers, he signed a quitclaim deed. He handed it over to Carter on May 1, 1954. Carter’s path to home ownership was telling, as African Americans faced an increasingly hostile reception within the housing market. Japanese Americans, though they still lived in segregated neighborhoods, were not as constricted in their search for housing.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Growing Ghettoization of African Americans**

African Americans facing the difficult task of finding housing in Seattle during the 1950s appealed to the conscience of a city and nation mired in the Cold War. Betty Reese, in a 1953 letter to the *Seattle Times*, made a forceful appeal:

I am a Negro mother of two small children and I have been saving for a home. Now that we have a small amount in the bank, I have been calling ads listed in the papers for small-down-payment houses. Immediately, sellers or agents ask what my race is. When told, they invariably reply that the district is restricted, or they cannot sell to minorities. I ask why. Is my money different from yours? We are respectable, quiet and intelligent American-born citizens. They say they personally do not object to having us buy the house, but their neighbors resent us living near them. Races other than white will depreciate the value of the district, they say. What are they trying to say? We don’t get it.

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<sup>80</sup> Matsuoka quoted in Cassie Chin, “Asian Pacific Islander Americans in Southeast Seattle: Narrative Report and Annotated Bibliography,” Neighborhoods, Community History Project: Southeast Seattle, City of Seattle, Department of Neighborhoods, Historic Preservation Program, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Frederica Merrell and Mira Latoszek, *Seattle’s Beacon Hill*, (Seattle: Arcadia, 2003), 42; U.S. Census Bureau, Total Population: Black, White, Other Race, Census 1960 Tracts Only Set, Prepared by Social Explorer (accessed August 3, 2016).

Is this the democracy we're trying to sell abroad? Is this the democracy our boys fight and die on battlefields for? Did the enemy bullets miss them because their skin was darker than their buddies?<sup>82</sup>

African Americans who could afford some of Seattle's pricier neighborhoods also encountered obstacles. Those looking to escape Seattle's "ghetto" in the 1950s could spend years trying to finding their way out. Tim Martin, who had grown up in the South, moved to Seattle in the early 1950s after his discharge from the Army. He had recently married a white woman from Portland, Oregon, though the only place open to them was the CD. They lived in several apartments before they were ready to buy their first home in 1954. Once again, they were restricted to the CD. By the late 1950s, they had outgrown their house and were once again hoping to broaden their search beyond black neighborhoods. Martin had been hired as a designer at Boeing in 1956 and supplemented his income by freelancing on the side. He spent about a year searching in vain for a house outside of the CD. Most realtors refused to show him houses outside of the area. After experiencing enough rebuffs, he enrolled in a real estate school, eventually becoming his own agent after 16 weeks of study. The seller of the house in Bellevue that Martin eventually bought in 1959 seemed "astonished" to meet a black man. Martin, expecting this, took along all the necessary legal papers and a personal check. He wanted to swoop in and buy the place before neighbors could protest. The seller, though shocked, came to like him and sold him the house right away.

It took several months for neighbors to finally introduce themselves. Profiled by *Seattle* magazine, Martin was described as "the first Negro ever to have upped and moved to Lake Hills or any tract development in the whole Seattle area." Upon settling in Bellevue, he found himself continually reminding his neighbors that he was not an "exceptional Negro." Such reactions to

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<sup>82</sup> Letter to the editor from Mrs. Betty Reese, *Seattle Times*, November 2, 1953.

his presence were unsurprising, though Martin had spent some time agonizing over the decision to “pioneer” a white neighborhood:

My decision was purely selfish. I sought broader horizons for my kids than the Central District would have offered them. I’ve lived there. I’ve seen too many lives go down the drain because the future seemed too hopeless. Believe me – all because they were Negroes and had no choice of where to live.

Raised in Spartanburg, South Carolina by a mother who worked as a domestic, Martin wanted to offer his children a better experience than one delimited by racial segregation. He remembered running back home across Spartanburg, “often under great pressure” because he was unable to use a restroom downtown.

In Bellevue, Martin’s children were initially subjected to racial slurs from their classmates. Over time, the taunts subsided. Martin also noticed that his freelance business picked up, as far more clients were willing to travel to his new home. He discovered that some white customers had been unwilling to search out businesses in the CD. While there were some perks to living in a prestigious area, Martin remained skeptical that his presence had altered the racism so prevalent in the area:

Some people who finally accepted me think that proves they are real, 14-carat liberals. It makes them feel oh so very proud. But if and when more Negroes move in, they’ll get the same treatment I did – and all the white residents will use their acceptance of me as living proof that they aren’t bigots.<sup>83</sup>

This was an imagining of racial diversity all too prevalent among whites in Seattle, making it difficult to address the systemic nature of racial inequality. While blacks were the primary targets of racial discrimination in housing during the 1950s, their increasing segregation over the course of the decade was not without parallel. As Cole Thrush has argued, the 1950s were a decade when “federal Indian policy enthusiastically encouraged assimilation into mainstream society.” Provided with “few, if any resources,” many Indians struggled to find

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<sup>83</sup> “A Pioneer’s Lonely Path,” *Seattle Magazine*, April 1964, 1, no. 1.

housing after arriving in Seattle for wartime employment. As the wartime economy winded down, the largest contingent of urban Indians could be found on Skid Road, with many sheltering in doorways and condemned buildings.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Shockwaves of Segregated Housing**

While frustration with segregated housing propelled Seattle's Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the movement to desegregate local schools was slower in arriving. Seattle newspapers barely registered a reaction following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. According to one local historian, most Seattleites felt "segregation" was not a word that applied to Seattle. The Seattle School Board did not even address the ruling at its first meeting following the Supreme Court's decision. Although black students were concentrated in six elementary and three secondary schools, the board did not consider any of its schools to be segregated. Housing patterns were to blame for Seattle's racial segregation; therefore, it was a matter far beyond the board's purview. Early attempts to promote racial integration had focused on hiring minority teachers, beginning in the late-1940s. By the late-1950s, the school board was being drawn into debates about school boundaries, transfers, and the increasing segregation of black students. In general, white parents had begun to transfer their students from schools that had "tipped" toward black enrollment. If transfers failed, they were often willing to move. The CD's Harrison Elementary, which was 75.6 percent black by 1957, was one of a number of schools rapidly losing its white population. In May 1957, the Harrison PTA sent off a letter to the Seattle School Board, requesting that it take more aggressive steps to deal with racial segregation: "...we are faced with an increasing problem of de facto segregation, the consequences of which are just as real as if segregation were a policy," explained the worried PTA members. It was time to heed

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<sup>84</sup> Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle*, 165.

the work being done in other cities to alleviate the problem of segregated schools. Seattle had much to learn, though its small non-white population made the city's problems easier to ignore.<sup>85</sup>

Speaking in Seattle in the summer of 1954, a few months after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Charles Abrams framed the issue of school desegregation as a matter to be settled by housing patterns:

For it will be in the pattern of America's neighborhoods and in the composition of their populations that the issue of school segregation will be determined in the long run. Around housing revolves the whole question of social, economic and political egalitarianism. Let there be no mistake about it. The battle on the housing front looms into focus as the decisive battle on which the whole issue of equality will be fought. As long as housing discriminations prevail – and I do not mean by discrimination, racial segregation alone – the whole series of rights will be violated.

Without a “right to a home,” which enabled health, security and freedom, all other rights were merely “phantom,” argued Abrams. One of the most critical issues, Abrams believed, was how cities would use funding for public housing, if they used it at all. He lashed out at the “real estate lobby,” which had “succeeded in limiting federal funds to a trickle” in most cities. By opposing public housing, the real estate industry was engaging in “the worst form of discriminatory activity,” by keeping minorities from the only housing many of them could afford.<sup>86</sup>

Though the Housing Act of 1949 authorized 810,000 units of public housing to be built throughout the nation within six years, lower limits were enacted on a regular basis during this period. By 1959, only 230,000 units had actually been built. Public housing was “moribund” by the end of the 1950s, unable to offer much aid for non-whites shunned by the private market.<sup>87</sup> Seattle's public housing developments, by the end of 1959, were a powerful example of how

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<sup>85</sup> Doris Hinson Pieroth, “Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1979), 3-10; 36-37; 45-49.

<sup>86</sup> Text of Speech by Charles Abrams, July 16, 1954, Seattle, Washington, Sampled Reports, Publications, and Ephemera, 1938-1958, box 1714, Seattle Housing Authority Collection, Puget Sound Regional Archives.

<sup>87</sup> Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race*, 316.

little the city was willing to serve its non-white residents. Of the 11,545 Seattleites living in public housing, 77 percent were white, 18.2 percent were black, and 4.8 percent were listed as “other.”<sup>88</sup> In March 1950, a measure aimed at securing federal financing for 1,221 units of public housing was resoundingly defeated by Seattle voters; 57,732 cast votes against it, while only 33,529 voted in favor. According to the *Times*, “conservative forces” celebrated the win as “indicating a turning of the political tide in Seattle against government handouts.” Opponents of public housing had gained such momentum that they “may well have put an end to public-housing expansion here for a long time to come.”<sup>89</sup> The Seattle Home Ownership Council, the Seattle Committee for Home Protection, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the Seattle Master Builders and the Seattle Real Estate Board combined to quash plans for more public housing.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

Until black migration in the 1940s, Japanese Americans were Seattle’s largest non-white group. Until 1980, they were the largest Asian group within the city. As a result, Japanese Americans played an outsized role in shaping the dynamics of black and Asian interactions within the city. As Seattle’s black population grew at a rapid rate in the decades following World War II, the overwhelmingly white population came to see African Americans as the main threat to economic and racial stability. This shift in focus afforded Japanese Americans a racialized status above African Americans.

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<sup>88</sup> Donald O. Stutsman, Annual Tenant Census, September 30, 1959, Research Report Series, Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, Annual Population Reports, 1945, 1960-1986, box 1713, Housing Authority of Seattle Collection, Puget Sound Regional Archives.

<sup>89</sup> “Public Housing Plan to be on March Ballot,” *Seattle Times*, December 13, 1949; Ross Cunningham, “Conservatives Call Defeat of Public Housing ‘Turn of Tide,’” *Seattle Times*, March 15, 1950.

<sup>90</sup> “Public Housing Foes to Launch Campaign Here,” *Seattle Times*, February 14, 1950; “Vote ‘No’ on Housing Plan, C. of C. Urges,” *Seattle Times*, February 27, 1950; “Public Housing in County Rural Areas Opposed,” *Seattle Times*, October 31, 1949.

As a “badge of slavery,” the housing discrimination faced by African Americans in Seattle was very much a part of a national story linking North and South, East and West. All regions fell within the orbit of Jim Crow. In addition, the nation’s ever-changing geopolitical alliances inspired contrasting views of Japanese Americans and African Americans. With the U.S. cultivating ties with Asian nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan during the Cold War, the image of “Orientals” living in cities like Seattle was reshaped. As Madeline Hsu and Ellen Wu have argued, many in the U.S. “embraced the argument that treating Asians more equally at home would strengthen America’s appeal abroad.” Social scientists like Franz Boas emphasized “culture” rather than “race” as the main driver of difference, opening up spaces for Asians to be racialized as hard-working and loyal. Assimilation and integration were now possible. Although Cold War politics played a role in the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the end result was more of a backlash against than an embrace of African Americans. The “conditional” acceptance of Japanese Americans and the growing animosity toward black protests and civil rights victories was reflected in Seattle’s housing patterns.<sup>91</sup> Instead of sinking the “racialized economic value” of white neighborhoods, Japanese Americans could now uphold it. The cultural differences between Asian and African Americans were critical to this gradual re-conceptualization; they were amplified in order to provide a narrow window of opportunity for Asian Americans.<sup>92</sup>

Geographic proximity did not automatically produce a shared history between Japanese Americans and African Americans in Seattle. While they may have lived in the same neighborhoods, even into the 1950s and 1960s, their reputations within the city certainly did not

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<sup>91</sup> Madeline Y. Hsu and Ellen D. Wu, “‘Smoke and Mirrors’: Conditional Inclusion, Model Minorities, and the Pre-1965 Dismantling of Asian Exclusion,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 34, no. 4 (Summer 2015), 43-44; Mary L. Dudziak, *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004), 40.

<sup>92</sup> Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 221-223.



align. Assuming a shared history for these two groups, arising out of racially-segregated neighborhoods, is dangerous. It does nothing to explain the yawning statistical divides that emerged between Japanese Americans and African Americans. Too often, statistics are left to tell the story, illuminating differences but not the systems that lead to inequality. An absence of historical context leaves the door open for explanations that extoll Japanese culture while denigrating African Americans and the neighborhoods they inhabit.

## **Chapter 2: Earning Freedom: Blacks and Asians in Seattle's Open Housing Movement**

This chapter examines the evolving place of Japanese and African Americans within a racially-segregated housing market, honing in on the city's open housing debates during the 1960s. On the surface, the question of open housing centered on how exactly black residents fit into a white city. Japanese Americans, somewhere along the way, were lost in the reshuffling. But a closer look at the historical record shows that Japanese Americans and other Asian Americans were an important part of the debates surrounding open housing and discrimination. Their increasing residential mobility elicited comparisons with African Americans, whose mobility consistently lagged behind.

The central plank of Seattle's Civil Rights movement, the fight for an open housing law forced whites, blacks, and Asians to reexamine the extent and meaning of racial segregation. As civil rights organizations worked to frame the fight against racial segregation as a Cold War imperative, realtors, white homeowners and other opponents argued that protecting the civil rights of African Americans would hobble the free market. In order to bolster their claims that the free market could incorporate worthy non-whites, opponents of open housing pointed to the increasing residential mobility of Japanese Americans. Without any government intervention, they had been welcomed into white neighborhoods. Though Japanese Americans still encountered racial discrimination in housing, they understood the city's intense commitment to racial segregation. Most were reluctant to challenge the unfolding narrative, which singled out the exclusion of African Americans as an exceptional problem. There were, however, some who spoke out forcefully about the racial discrimination in housing that continued to hinder Japanese Americans. Though they gained little traction at the time, their stories show that Japanese Americans were divided on the issue of open housing, not simply inconsequential bystanders.

The easier access to outlying white neighborhoods that Japanese Americans enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s was in part a product of the changing racial discourse reflected in the city's open housing debates. Residents, realtors and local officials were not simply describing the realities they encountered. They were also actively re-imagining the city's racial boundaries, paving the way for increasing Japanese American suburbanization and growing black ghettoization. While the city eventually passed an open housing ordinance in 1968, the debates that preceded its passage revealed the widespread support for maintaining racial segregation in Seattle, with or without the cover of law. In 1964, residents shot down a citywide referendum on an open housing ordinance by a 2-1 margin. Though open housing debates seemed to hinge on the meanings of black segregation, they also helped to solidify the image of Japanese Americans in opposition to the ghetto, as property owners with a stake in white neighborhoods. While the "stigma of blight" followed African Americans within the housing market, Japanese Americans came to be seen as the city's most "assimilated" minority.<sup>1</sup>

What most black, white and Asian residents agreed upon during the 1960s was that legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in housing would be largely symbolic. For some middle class African and Japanese American homeowners, racial discrimination in housing was already a force that could be evaded. Persistence and the resources to move away from black and Asian enclaves had allowed growing numbers of non-whites to move into white neighborhoods. While legislation would streamline the outmigration of non-white middle-class homeowners, civil rights organizations recognized the conundrum that remained. By the time that fair housing legislation arrived in the 1960s, culminating in the Fair Housing Act of 1968, it marked a significant compromise. Aimed at managing black protests and reinforcing the sanctity of white

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, 245; Calvin F. Schmid, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington*, Washington State Planning and Community Affairs Agency, 1968, 131-132.

property rights, it did its job remarkably well. Meanwhile, race, class, and gender combined to keep low-income renters, who were disproportionately African American, locked in to the Central District. Though low-income African American renters were overcharged for substandard housing if they stayed, it was still a more promising alternative than searching for housing in hostile white neighborhoods. Their persistent inability to find decent, affordable housing played a crucial role in unraveling the Civil Rights movement, demonstrating the hollowness of legislative victories.

### **Seattle's Changing Neighborhood Demographics**

By 1960, Japanese Americans had already begun to leave the central core of neighborhoods in sizeable numbers; most were moving southward but the North End was also opening up. Their slow migration into North End neighborhoods and other white enclaves stood in contrast to the black community, which was still heavily concentrated in the CD. If blacks were migrating out of the CD, they were heading south, albeit in very small numbers.<sup>2</sup> A close look at census records from 1960 shows that Asians in Seattle, led by Japanese Americans, were far more of a presence in Southeast Seattle's wealthier and whiter neighborhoods, such as Seward Park. Where Japanese Americans formed small but growing cohorts in white neighborhoods throughout the city, African Americans remained much more of an anomaly in such areas. For Japanese Americans, their place within the city's racial hierarchy stood a notch above African Americans.<sup>3</sup>

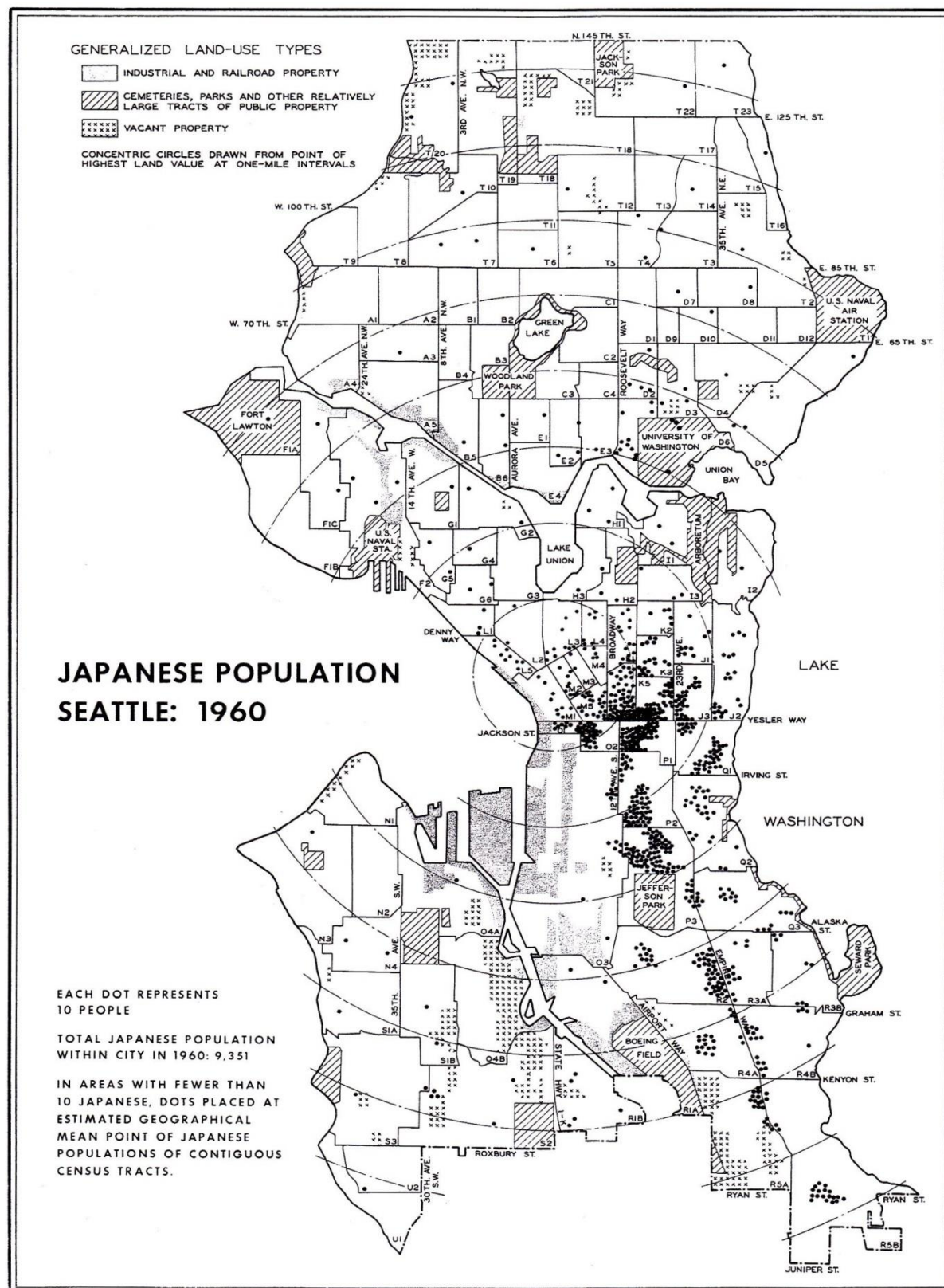
Housing discrimination against Japanese Americans continued during the 1960s, but much of the backlash against Seattle's growing non-white population was channeled toward

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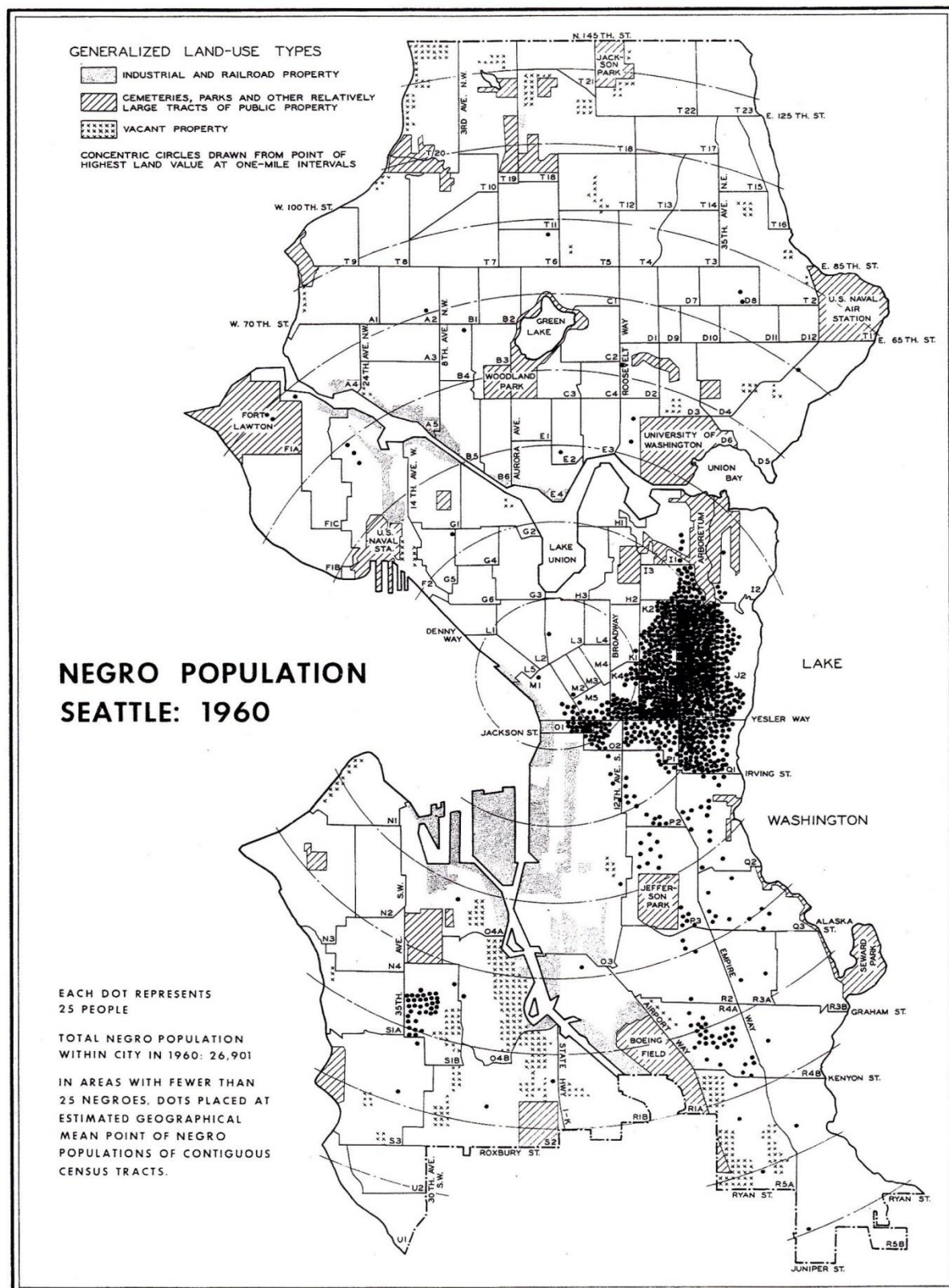
<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *Forging a Black Community*, 201-202; 285, footnote 1; Calvin F. Schmid, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington*, Washington State Planning and Community Affairs Agency, 1968, 59; 64.

<sup>3</sup> Frederica Merrell and Mira Latoszek, *Seattle's Beacon Hill*, 42; U.S. Census Bureau, Total Population: Black, White, Other Race, Census 1960 Tracts Only Set, Prepared by Social Explorer (accessed August 3, 2016);

**Location of Central and Southeast Seattle neighborhoods, prepared by Social Explorer.**



Source: Calvin F. Schmid, Charles E. Nobbe, and Arlene E. Mitchell, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington* (Olympia: Washington State Planning and Community Affairs Agency, 1968, 64.



Source: Calvin F. Schmid, Charles E. Nobble, and Arlene E. Mitchell, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington* (Olympia: Washington State Planning and Community Affairs Agency, 1968, 59).



African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Explosive growth during World War II saw the black population in Seattle increase from 3,789 in 1940 to 26,901 by 1960. Seattle's Japanese population also expanded in the postwar period, though it only reached 9,351 by 1960.<sup>5</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans in Seattle found themselves trapped in the CD. They were "like a fly buzzing about in a closed jar," according to one black realtor.<sup>6</sup> In 1960, 75 percent of the city's 26,901 black residents lived in four census tracts, all within the CD. By 1965, 80 percent of the black population lived in the same four tracts, still unable to make much of a dent in the city's 114 other census tracts. Restrictive covenants were not the only tools used to promote segregation in housing. Realtors and homeowners worked together to ensure that blacks did not move too far out of the CD, at least not in large numbers.

For African Americans looking to buy a home, it was sometimes not enough to win over the seller of a house. In the mid-1960s, Ralph and Elaine Hayes were eager to move into the Ravenna neighborhood (West Seattle) and had reached a deal to buy a house from a friend. When neighbors heard of the agreement, they began a petition to block the sale of the house to a black family. They presented the petition, signed by 11 families, to the bank where the Hayes' were trying to get a loan. When the bank caved in to the pressure, the couple was forced to look elsewhere for a loan. The Hayes scrambled and finally secured a loan in order to complete the move before the start of the school year. Over the next few years, the Hayes slowly gained the trust of their neighbors. Many years later, a neighbor shared the story about the petition with Elaine Hayes. The couple had been unaware of the organized effort to thwart their entry into the

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<sup>4</sup> Dee Goto, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, May 25, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> The realtor, Gerald Hatcher, was quoted in Taylor, 201-202.



neighborhood. Many obstacles, known and unknown, made moving beyond the CD a major challenge for African Americans.<sup>7</sup>

### **Legal Support for Segregation**

The question of whether segregated housing embodied a free market or undercut U.S. democracy hung over the 1959 *O'Meara v. Washington State Board Against Discrimination* case. Established in 1949 after the passage of a state Fair Employment Practices Act, the state's anti-discrimination board was tasked with "encouraging compliance" with the new act.<sup>8</sup> In 1957, the board saw its mandate enlarged by the passage of a state omnibus civil rights bill. The 1957 bill targeted discrimination in publicly assisted housing and places of "public resort, accommodation, assemblage, or amusement." Far from being a sword in the civil rights struggle, the bill stressed the goal of "conference, conciliation and persuasion" rather than punishment. Prior to its passage, the state senate amended the bill to prevent civil rights groups and other organizations from bringing complaints on behalf of victims. This was a move designed to keep civil rights violations at the level of the personal. To make such violations a broader issue could upset the state's racial dynamics, of which many legislators were proud.<sup>9</sup>

The issue that brought about the 1959 lawsuit began when John O'Meara and his wife tried to sell their house in the spring of 1958. A commander in the U.S. Coast Guard, O'Meara was being transferred to Washington, D.C. A newspaper ad for his North End home caught the attention of Robert L. Jones, an African American postman. O'Meara and his wife had bought the home in 1955, financing it through a private loan insured by the Federal Housing Administration. After a tour of the house, Jones offered to buy the house for the listed price of

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<sup>7</sup> Mark C. Hayes, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, July 19, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 172.

<sup>9</sup> Dwight Schear, "State Gets Comprehensive Civil Rights Legislation; Emphasis on Conciliation," *Seattle Times*, March 17, 1957.

\$18,000. The O'Mearas, who were white, refused to sell their property to a black buyer. After Jones brought his complaint to the Washington State Board Against Discrimination (WSBAD), the board tried to persuade the O'Mearas to go through with the sale. When that failed, a WSBAD tribunal ordered the couple to sell their home to Jones and his wife. Unmoved by the board's ruling, O'Meara appealed his case.<sup>10</sup>

The board's argument, as presented in King County Superior Court, described racial discrimination as a detriment to the nation's image abroad. Appointed Assistant Attorney General for the State of Washington in 1957, Wing Luke, a Chinese American from Seattle, served as chief legal counsel for the WSBAD. Luke had been active in the legal battle to protect the fishing rights of the state's Nisqually and Puyallup tribes. The product of a Chinese immigrant family that operated a laundry in the University District, Luke was an incredible advocate for civil rights. He and his team built a strong defense, directing the court's attention to the arena of international politics. James E. Johnson, former director of the World Affairs Council, was brought in as a witness to highlight the importance of geopolitical alliances. He argued that "uncommitted countries" in Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan and the Middle East "scrutinized" U.S. race relations and that the nation's segregated housing patterns could undermine evolving potential alliances. Communist propaganda fed on the injustices experienced by African Americans.<sup>11</sup> John Milton Yinger, a prominent Oberlin sociologist and a visiting professor at the University of Washington, added to the sense of urgency permeating the state's

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<sup>10</sup> Arval A. Morris and Daniel B. Ritter, "Racial Minority Housing in Washington," *Washington Law Review* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1962), 132-140.

<sup>11</sup> "Race Bias Hurts Foreign Policy, Says Witness in Housing Trial," *Seattle Times*, July 28, 1959.

argument. As minorities “piled up” in ghettos, overcrowding and substandard conditions could lead to “riot and bloodshed” if cities failed to take action.<sup>12</sup>

Takeshi Kubota, president of the Jackson Street Community Council, an interracial civil rights organization, provided additional testimony. Though O’Meara’s attorneys portrayed violence as an inevitable outcome if various races in Seattle were forced to mix, Kubota provided a counterpoint. He acknowledged that racial discrimination against Japanese Americans had subsided after World War II, a product of white guilt related to the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Kubota also singled out the valor of Japanese American soldiers during World War II as a driving force in breaking down the barriers of discrimination.<sup>13</sup> Though Kubota intended to support the state’s argument, his logic mirrored that of those advancing the model minority image.

O’Meara’s lawyers shot down the idea that American democracy and its image abroad were at risk due to housing discrimination. Such a perspective was “poppycock,” they argued. The state, in its lust for power, threatened to eviscerate one of the country’s most sacred rights. “A man is born with his relatives but certainly he has no more valuable right than that of choosing his friends and neighbors,” they argued. Private discrimination remained beyond the purview of the state. Any state that insisted on meddling in such intimate affairs risked going against the tide of history. Private discrimination, O’Meara’s legal team argued, had existed “in every culture in the span of history.” It had been practiced by “people of different races, different colors and different creeds.” It was an issue best left to individual consciences. “Patently, it is not an evil – not a concern of or an evil cognizable by government,” they argued. O’Meara’s team characterized African Americans as an “unscrupulous minority;” they were the “tail” now

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<sup>12</sup> Bettie Sing Luke, “Wing Chong Luke: A Chinese American Change Agent and Pioneer in Northwest Politics, 1925-1965,” (Master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 2002), 62-67.

<sup>13</sup> “Decision Expected Friday in Racial-Housing Case,” *Seattle Times*, July 29, 1959.

“wagging the dog.” Most African Americans in Washington State, they argued, were “not even interested in such a law,” since it would single them out as a “dependent, inferior group” and provoke anger among whites.

Superior Court Judge James W. Hodson claimed to be “fully cognizant of the evils which flow from discrimination.” He also accepted the premise that potential U.S. alignment with the “uncommitted peoples of the world” was hindered by racial discrimination and segregation. But he insisted that “sociology” was “not law.” In witnessing a “head-on collision between two rights,” the court needed to ensure that the concept of private property was not obliterated. The right to equality would have to be sacrificed in order to preserve the private right to discriminate. With that, the omnibus civil rights bill of 1957 was essentially laid to rest.<sup>14</sup> The Washington State Supreme Court also ruled in favor of the O’Meara family while the U.S. Supreme Court denied a petition to review the case. In responding to black protests, multiple legislative bodies endorsed racial discrimination in housing.<sup>15</sup> Moved by the real estate industry, Seattle prioritized the right of property owners to discriminate throughout the 1950s. In the process, the city sacrificed the rights of its non-white population – a decision that by then had become habit.

### **The Open Housing Movement**

Stung by the setback of the *O’Meara* case, civil rights organizations in Seattle continued the fight against housing discrimination, enlisting the help of liberal whites willing to purchase land in hostile neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup> In 1963, the question of open housing spilled into a rancorous

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<sup>14</sup> *O’Meara v. Washington State Board Against Discrimination*, no. 535996 (Superior Ct., King Country, Washington, July 31, 1959).

<sup>15</sup> “*O’Meara v. Washington State Board Against Discrimination*,” Seattle Municipal Archives, Office of the City Clerk, <http://www.cityofseattle.net/CityArchives/Exhibits/Housing/panel3.htm> (accessed December 4, 2012); Taylor, 179; 194; 203; “Primary Documents: *O’Meara v. The Washington State Board of Discrimination*, 1961,” Blackpast.org, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primarywest/omeara-v-washington-state-board-against-discrimination-1961> (accessed December 4, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Joan Singler, Jean Durning, Bettylou Valentine, Maid Adams, *Seattle in Black and White: The Congress of Racial Equality and the Fight for Equal Opportunity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 101-107; Jeffrey

debate that divided the city. Open housing in Seattle became largely a referendum on the place of blacks within the city and whether they had earned the right to move beyond segregated neighborhoods. The voice of Japanese Americans within this debate would be muted. Whether they remained “ghettoized” in the Central and International Districts or had cautiously migrated into white enclaves, Seattle’s Japanese Americans were well aware of their racialized status. With incarceration seared in their memories, they feared that any gains could easily be stripped away.<sup>17</sup> Housing discrimination against Japanese Americans still existed in the 1960s but not to the degree experienced by African Americans. Most real estate agencies in Seattle refused to even interact with blacks, other than to provide a “token showing.” One Seattle Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) project aimed at bringing prospective black buyers to visit Seattle real estate offices was met with widespread rejection. Around 95 percent of real estate offices in Seattle shut their doors in anticipation, refusing to do business with black customers. Seattle, like other cities, had reached the moment where blacks were being targeted as a particular evil.<sup>18</sup>

Black organizations, led by CORE and the NAACP, pushed the open housing movement into the mainstream. Perhaps their most important ally was Wing Luke, one of the few liberal voices on city council. Luke, who began his term on council in March 1962, was the state’s first Asian public officeholder. His support went against a conservative city council and Mayor

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Gregory Zane, “America Only Less So? Seattle’s Central Area, 1968-1996,” PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2001, 81-83; Sidney Gerber to Mayor Clinton, January 11, 1963, folder: Minority Housing 1963, box 14, Seattle Office of the Mayor Records, 5210-01, SMA.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Sant, “Asian Americans and Seattle’s Open Housing Movement,” *Georgetown Journal of Law and Modern Critical Race Perspectives*, 1, no. 1 (2009), 168; 180.

<sup>18</sup> Mrs. G.L. Esparza, “A Report on Seattle CORE’s First ‘Sit-In’ Demonstration at a Real Estate Office,” Box 3, Folder: CORE et Al. ADV. Seattle Real Estate Board (Discrimination in Housing), Leonard Schroeter Papers, Accession no. 5036-002, UWSC; Affidavit of Harold T. Martin, Seattle Real Estate Board v. Seattle Congress of Racial Equality, Box 3, Folder 2: CORE et Al. ADV. Seattle Real Estate Board (Discrimination in Housing), Leonard Schroeter Papers, Accession no. 5036-002, UWSC; Affidavit of Mrs. Gilbert Esparza, Seattle Real Estate Board v. Seattle Congress of Racial Equality, Box 3, Folder 2: CORE et Al. ADV. Seattle Real Estate Board (Discrimination in Housing), Leonard Schroeter Papers, Accession no. 5036-002, UWSC; Advertisement for the Seattle Real Estate Board, *Seattle Times*, July 28, 1963.

Gordon Clinton, who did their best to stall the movement for an open housing ordinance.

Knowing blacks in Seattle were becoming increasingly frustrated and outspoken, especially in light of the *O'Meara* case, Mayor Gordon S. Clinton called for a Citizen's Advisory Committee to address the issue of housing discrimination. This, another attempt to delay unpopular legislation, was followed up with the establishment of a 12-member Human Rights Commission (HRC) in July 1963. In response, 400 demonstrators flooded the steps of city hall before a public hearing at a city council meeting. A group of about 35 youths began the city's first sit-in, organized by the Central District Youth Club. The contingent of black and white youths camped out in the mayor's office for about 24 hours.<sup>19</sup>

As Clinton employed a range of dilatory tactics, black leaders became acutely aware of an emerging pattern, as city officials seemed all too eager to use Japanese Americans and other Asians as a wedge. In a move that infuriated many black leaders, the mayor appointed Y. Philip Hayasaka as the executive director of the commission. While Hayasaka's switch earned him an annual salary of \$10,000, the two blacks appointed to the HRC, the Reverend Samuel McKinney, and Johnny Allen, a painting contractor, would not receive salaries for their work.<sup>20</sup> Black leaders decried the mayor's appointment of a Japanese American as executive director, given that the main impetus for open housing came from the black community. "We feel that in his recommendations the mayor has closed his channel of communication with the Negro community," said the Reverend Mance Jackson, "and that his action shows he is not willing to let the Negro take an active part in reaching solutions to inequality."<sup>21</sup> Giving Hayasaka the

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<sup>19</sup> Droker, "The Seattle Civic Unity Committee and the Civil Rights Movement, 1944-1964," 156-160; Singler et al., *Seattle in Black and White*, 101; Lane Smith, "Racial Unrest in Seattle: Focus is on Housing," *Seattle Times*, June 23, 1963; "Sit-in Begins in Mayor's Office Here," *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> "Douglas Willix, "Mayor Names 12 to Rights Commission," *Seattle Times*, July 17, 1963; Dan Coughlin, "Municipal Rights United Created by Council," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 16, 1963.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Droker, "The Seattle Civic Unity Committee and the Civil Rights Movement," 163.

executive director position was a way to blunt the impact of black protest. It also signaled to blacks in Seattle that the city could achieve a solution to its housing problems without the insights of those most affected by the evils of a segregated market. Hayasaka, finding himself in a bit of a bind, was eventually able to gain the trust of black leaders like Jackson.<sup>22</sup>

With only three cities – New York, Pittsburgh, and Toledo – having enacted open housing ordinances, Mayor Clinton proceeded with caution.<sup>23</sup> As city councilors stewed over their next line of action, Seattleites flooded them with letters and petitions. Their pleas fell on both sides of the debate. All told, they received 10,000 letters, cards, and petitions relating to the proposed ordinance. Roughly 10,000 people signed their names in favor of an open housing ordinance; 2,300 opposed it. Councilors were bombarded with wide-ranging screeds, as many were eager to weigh in on what they saw as a momentous issue.<sup>24</sup> The nature of rights and the general character of the city's African Americans were common themes. Mixed in to the mounds of correspondence were telling details that sketched out the city's racial hierarchy.

Several letters written to city council members illustrate the way Japanese Americans were used as a weapon to chasten the city's black population. "The real issue is not a person's color...it is his character," wrote Herb Reichert, a resident of West Seattle. "Throughout our city minority races have experienced favorable integration, such as the Japanese, who have demonstrated good character and outstanding citizenship." Reichert argued that a "forced housing ordinance" would polarize the city, creating distrust between the various races. Typing in all caps, Reichert hammered home his point on what set African Americans apart: "THE

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<sup>22</sup> Phil Hayasaka, interview by Trevor Griffey and Morgan Banks, Seattle, Washington, December 6, 2005, Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/hayasaka.htm> (accessed February 20, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Lane Smith, "Racial Unrest in Seattle: Focus is on Housing," *Seattle Times*, June 23, 1963; "Sit-in Begins in Mayor's Office Here," *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> "Negroes Walk Out After Brief Speech," *Seattle Times*, October 25, 1963.

NATURE OF MEN IS ALWAYS THE SAME, BUT IT IS THEIR HABITS THAT SEPARATE THEM.”<sup>25</sup>

For Reichert and others, Seattle’s racial harmony risked being torn apart by African Americans insistent on government intervention. Rather than upsetting the racial dynamics within the city, he called for blacks in Seattle to demonstrate the character and the culture modeled by Japanese Americans. In what would become a fixture of debates through the 1960s and beyond, Reichert argued that race had no place in the housing market. His implicit belief was that the city’s market operated in a natural way, separating the wheat from the chaff. Habits and culture afforded Japanese Americans growing mobility, while African Americans were simply unfit to enjoy full freedom of movement. Drawing from a similar paradigm, Fauntleroy (West Seattle) resident Felicia Kelley pleaded with city council to let the public vote on the issue. She found the ordinance superfluous and heavy-handed. After all, residents of Seattle were already free to live wherever they chose. Only those who needed “personality adjustments” and those who could not afford certain neighborhoods faced restrictions. “There are desirables and undesirables in all races and when a man proves himself in this country he is accepted by the average citizen,” wrote Kelley. For her and many other opponents of open housing, the arc of history bent toward justice. Such progress need not be bridled by law. “How come the Japanese, Chinese, and other minorities haven’t needed this type of legislation to be accepted in this city...?” wrote Alexander.<sup>26</sup>

Like many other Seattleites, Alexander was all too eager to lump the city’s Japanese, Chinese, and other “minorities” into one convenient grouping. Their disparate histories

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Herb Reichert to Mayor Clinton, October 25, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249433, SMA.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Felicia Kelley to Mr. Paul J. Alexander, October 12, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249433, SMA.



discounted, they made a convenient prop. Muddled together, they held up ideas of freedom and equality within a city full of virulent racism and injustice. Other letter writers were quick to challenge the exceptionalism that permeated Seattle when it came to issues of race. Capitol Hill resident Monte Adair called for city council to use the ordinance as a way to counter some of the myths. “I am ashamed of racial discrimination here, especially when so many think this evil exists only in the South,” wrote Adair. “Not to pass the ordinance would seem to condone the kind of racism that is so popular here.”<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the paranoia that circulated among many whites in Seattle at the thought of African Americans enjoying greater freedom of movement. Numerous letter writers voiced fears that an ordinance would lead to a loss of safety for white women and children. A few expressed trepidation that black men might use any increased freedom to commit rape and other forms of violence against white women. Many were outraged by the idea that government would even consider granting rights to those who had not “earned” them. They felt the tide had turned to the point where whites were the ones being discriminated against. These opinions, delivered to Seattle city councilors in 1963, portrayed civil rights as a zero-sum equation and placed African Americans beyond the bounds of citizenship. In the words of Bud Williams, another North End resident, “no other group in history (i.e. Jap, Indian, Chinese)” had “cried for more” rights and “done less” to warrant them than African Americans.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Monte Adair to Mr. Carroll, October 4, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249432, SMA.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Mr. Leon Thompson to Chairman, Seattle City Council, July 26, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 248551, SMA; Letter from Mrs. John H. Reid to Floyd Miller, July 31, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 248551, SMA; Letter from Genevieve J. Mason and Russell H. Mason to Seattle City Council, October 22, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249431, SMA; Letter from Bud Williams to Floyd C. Miller, October 23, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249431, SMA; Letter from Stanley E. Burrill to Floyd C. Miller, October 21, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249431, SMA.

Within the angry letters, some Seattle residents described their exasperation after having to move away from “negro” neighbors. Edward and Rosetta Kreuger wrote to city council, lamenting their move away from the Madrona neighborhood (east central Seattle), where they had lived for more than 15 years. They wanted councilors to read their move to the North End as a sign that whites did not want to live with “the Negro people,” and that they were willing to abandon Seattle entirely should the city implement the ordinance. For other letter writers, such as Stanley Burrill, a North End resident, the city needed to focus less on forcing different races together and more on revitalizing “minority” neighborhoods. Whites in Seattle, Burrill argued, would welcome “minorities” only when they rid themselves of the “stigma of blight.” Based on the letters received by city councilors, Japanese Americans were slowly losing the “stigma of blight,” but for African Americans their image remained intractable.<sup>29</sup>

The sometimes subtle and often blatant use of racialized language made it easier to pit African Americans against all other “minority” groups. Few Japanese Americans and few Asian Americans appear to have written letters to city council indicating where they stood on the matter. But one particular letter from a Japanese couple may have represented the sentiments that many were feeling. Toshio Ito and his wife presented a more nuanced portrayal of what life was like for Japanese Americans in Seattle. The Itos were galled by comments from Donald Haas, president of the Seattle Apartment Operators Association. Haas celebrated the fact that he rented several of his apartments to Japanese families as a sign of his tolerance. After all, “20 years ago, Japanese were not accepted,” Haas explained to the *Seattle Times*. But for the moment, Haas did not feel compelled to allow blacks to rent out units in his Queen Anne apartment building. “I think in a matter of time people will adjust to Negroes as neighbors but only if Negroes follow a

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<sup>29</sup> Edward and Rosetta Kreuger to Seattle City Council, October 21, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249431, SMA.

policy of being good neighbors.”<sup>30</sup> In their letter to city council, the Itos rebutted Haas’ version of Japanese American history:

[Haas] may sincerely believe that because, ‘after 20 years,’ he finally allowed people of the lighter-colored skin races as tenants in his own apartment building, unfair housing practices against us Japanese have been erased. HIS BELIEF IS WRONG. We personally know it to be wrong. Real estate firms humiliated us so in showing us homes that we gave up looking for a decent house to buy and built our own house. WE DID NOT PROTEST against these firms. Many friends who experienced this same discrimination by real estate firms HAVE NOT PROTESTED – for Mr. Haas and those like him who believe that our skin coloring makes us undesirable neighbors, conditioned us for ‘20 years’ to the fact that we had no alternative but to ‘keep still and take our medicine.’<sup>31</sup>

Toshio Ito and his wife were understandably outraged by Haas’ interpretation of Japanese American history. Such an inaccurate and misleading portrayal of the history demanded a rebuttal and the Ito’s provided a forceful one. They also made the important point that the absence of protest did not mean that discrimination against Japanese Americans had been eradicated. Rather, the couple had sidestepped discrimination in order to build their own house in Bellevue, a suburb east of Seattle.

Few other Japanese Americans were as outspoken about the housing ordinance. Sharon Maeda, a Japanese American, recalled being one of the only Asian demonstrators at protests. Speaking of the early 1960s, Donald Kazama, a leader within the Japanese American community, said that “you could have counted the civil rights workers in the Japanese community on one hand – clenched.” Some Japanese Americans saw the visibility of black protests and reasoned that such activity often produced few rewards. If anything, protests stoked a white backlash.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Head of Apartment Operators Opposes Open-Housing Law,” *Seattle Times*, October 20, 1963.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Toshio Ito to Charles M. Carroll, October 21, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249432, SMA.

<sup>32</sup> Ray Inouye, “Should Orientals Join Blacks in Racial Protests,” *Seattle Times*, October 12, 1969, Sant, 175.

Beyond the frontlines of rallies, however, Japanese Americans figured prominently as the owners or operators of hotels and apartments. A cautious note of support for an open housing ordinance reached city council by way of the Seattle Japanese Apartment and Hotel Association. Various members within the association had been “exposed to agitation threats and coercion” from tenants upset by blacks moving into certain units. The association felt the city should pass the ordinance instead of forcing hotel apartment and hotel owners to pay the financial costs of integration. Failure to do so could lead to “disorder or even violence.” Japanese American hotel and apartment owners and operators were wary of challenging the racial order and losing white customers in the process. To guard against this, they came up with a fascinating proposal. They asked the city council to allow them and other hotel and apartment owners to bring charges against other owners who violated any open housing ordinance. It does not appear that council took up their idea. For Japanese hotel and apartment owners, making a profit and keeping their business going meant understanding the danger of a white boycott. They also recognized that, even with laws in place, whites could continue to profit from a racially-segregated housing market. A weak law would only inhibit the ability of Japanese Americans to do the same. That some of these Japanese hotel and apartment owners may have lived in segregated neighborhoods seems likely. Yet such shared experiences with African Americans did not necessitate an aligning of interests.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the hotel and apartment industry remained central to Japanese business interests in Seattle. By 1965, the Seattle JACL listed 239 hotels and apartments that were owned or operated by Japanese within the city. Whereas before WWII Seattle’s Japanese community was heavily invested in the hotel industry, more than half of the

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<sup>33</sup> Petition of Seattle Japanese Hotel and Apartment Association, October 25, 1963, CF 249435, Comptroller Files, 1802-01, SMA; Sant, 174-175.

239 buildings on the 1965 listing were apartments. Of the apartments owned by Japanese in Seattle, 37 were located in Capitol Hill, 31 in the CD, and 22 in the First Hill neighborhood. Only 7 apartments in Beacon Hill and 5 in the neighborhoods of Southeast Seattle were owned by Japanese. All of the 109 hotels run by Japanese were located downtown or in the International District. Many of the hotels in the International District and downtown that were owned by Japanese had deteriorated to the point where they were shut down by the 1970s.<sup>34</sup>

### **Voting Down Open Housing**

By 1964, the city's open housing ordinance was passed along by council for a referendum. The defeat of the measure by a 2-1 margin and the election of a new mayor, J.D. Braman, who had campaigned against open housing, spoke to the racial divides within the city. Leading the opposition was the notorious Donald Haas, president of the apartment operators association. In the buildup to the referendum, Haas sent out a missive to his constituents, urging them to raise funds and organize against the ordinance. Using the baldest language possible, he offered a withering rebuke for those unable to meet the challenge: "May I suggest that if you are not prepared to defend your property and your women folk now is the time to sell and get out of Seattle," wrote Haas. "Your tenants will flee the suburbs as they have in New York, Baltimore, Washington and elsewhere, and the central city will be negro-dominated." Instead of seeing the city as an outlier, Haas placed Seattle squarely in line with East Coast cities and the trajectory of white flight.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Erle Howell, "Seattleites of Japanese Extraction," *Seattle Times*, May 19, 1956; Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter, *Greater Seattle and Vicinity Japanese Telephone Directory*, June 1965; Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter, *Greater Seattle and Vicinity Japanese Telephone Directory*, 1973; Chin, *Seattle's International District*, 80; *Report Submitted to Tolan Congressional Committee on National Defense Migration*, Emergency Defense Council, Seattle Chapter, Japanese American Citizens League, 1942.

<sup>35</sup> Ross Cunningham, "Braman to Seek Standing as Strong Mayor," *Seattle Times*, March 11, 1964; "Editorial," *The Facts*, Week of March 18-25, 1964.

Civil rights leaders were devastated by the defeat of the ordinance. Few, however, were surprised. Fitzgerald Beaver, managing editor of *The Facts*, a local black newspaper, had been a vociferous supporter of the measure. He labeled the tactics of the measure's opponents as "distasteful, to put it mildly." He could not help but wonder "how many persons would have supported the ordinance if they had not been led to believe that they would be jailed or wiped out financially in court for being accused of discriminating against non-whites." Beaver, though discouraged, called for civil rights organizations to regroup. Together, they needed to ensure that jobs were provided for students in the CD during the summer. Beaver also called for a concerted effort to bring whites back into the CD, in part to take advantage of the many positives within the area. In doing so, they could "in effect rejoin the human race," explained Beaver in a comment laden with bitterness. Interracial neighborhoods could work, Beaver argued, benefitting those of all races. Seattleites needed to learn that interracial neighborhoods provided "a mind-stretching experience," and a pathway toward "successful living in a multiracial world." The Reverend John Adams also mourned the defeat of the open housing measure, ruling out a legislative approach to open housing "for a couple of years, at least."<sup>36</sup>

Reginald Alleyne, a leader with CORE, sought to unravel the psychic damage of the defeat. For African Americans like Alleyne, a sea of silent white voters ended up deciding the fate of the open housing ordinance. In the buildup to the referendum, the quietude had been disconcerting, according to Alleyne:

For me, the silence was appalling and ominous in its significance, for I knew, that deep in the recesses of most white persons' minds there existed all kinds of lingering fears and dormant doubts about housing and race in Seattle; that before any beginning steps could be taken toward solving the city's race problem, its citizens first had to acknowledge that the problem did in fact exist.

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<sup>36</sup> Ross Cunningham, "Braman to Seek Standing as Strong Mayor," *Seattle Times*, March 11, 1964; "Editorial," *The Facts*, Week of March 18-25, 1964.

Those latent fears – of interracial marriage, of black inferiority, of crime and delinquency – hid behind superficial debates about property values. Within the context of U.S. history, Alleyne argued, such a simplistic foil was nothing new. He placed it within the long line of intellectual sophistry carried on by white Americans to justify slavery and segregation. In voting down the ordinance, Seattleites adhered to the Northern tradition of enacting a “more benevolent, refined, and successful” version of racial segregation. Its hallmark was a sneering, “self-righteous” disdain for the “shameful,” “unconstitutional,” and “unkind” tactics of Mississippi segregationists. But Seattle’s “social acceptance test,” applied only to black homebuyers, made a mockery of the city’s sanctimonious approach to race. Even so, most whites in Seattle remained deeply ignorant on the issue of racial segregation.

Given the city’s history, Alleyne argued, housing patterns had become so entrenched that “One need not join the Ku Klux or the White Citizens Council or the Seattle Real Estate Board to perpetuate the cycle of discrimination.” All it took was sitting back and doing nothing, so great was the “collective toll” of the nation’s discriminatory history. As for the city’s black population, Alleyne’s assessment was equally blunt. Even if the ordinance had passed, blacks in Seattle were already leery of engaging in the bureaucratic mess of filing racial discrimination complaints. In addition, most African Americans did not “relish the idea of going through some kind of hell to get away from the central district.” Though most opposition to blacks who moved into white neighborhoods eventually died down, the initial “storm” was enough to keep many African Americans from taking on the extra stress. In this sense, Alleyne argued, “enemies of housing integration may have already won their battle.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Reginald Alleyne, “Random Notes on the Defeat of a Fair Housing Ordinance,” box 9, folder: “Housing Reports,” Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter Records, UWSC.

When the final numbers were tallied, 115,000 votes were cast against the ordinance and 54,500 in favor. A study conducted for the YWCA by Research and Action Associates, a New York-based firm, sought to place the numbers in context. One of the more unsurprising findings was that “large blocks of votes cast by native, white American” residents were a significant factor in defeating the ordinance. Most who conferred with the researchers agreed that blacks were “the real targets of much of the opposition and resistance” to the ordinance. Blacks in Seattle held a variety of opinions on the ordinance. Many were in favor, though others “opposed it with equal vigor” and “there were still others who were untouched by the issue.” Although the exact numbers were unclear, the researchers found that “a significant block of votes against the measure was cast by persons of Japanese background.” According to the report, Japanese landlords played an “influential role” in opposing the ordinance. The exact reasons for Japanese opposition were unclear. Researchers found that some Japanese who opposed the ordinance expressed fears that “their post-war ‘gains’ in freedom of residence might be jeopardized if full freedom of movement were accorded to all minorities.” The report also acknowledged that there were Japanese Americans who “worked ardently for the passage of the ordinance.”<sup>38</sup>

Seattle’s Japanese Americans, though unsettled on open housing, were more than just bystanders. They worked on both sides of the issue, even if they were not always conspicuous. In some cases, their silence mattered a great deal. It added momentum to the narrative that racial segregation was simply a black issue, rather than integral to the making of all neighborhoods and the growth of the Japanese American community. Beyond Japanese Americans, the report showed that many Seattleites did not see open housing as a key plank within the civil rights movement. In addition, some who voted against the ordinance had shied away from a movement that only chiseled away at the walls of segregation.

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<sup>38</sup> Rhett M. Arter, *Toward Open Housing in Seattle*, Research and Action Associates, 1964.



Researchers also pointed to the incredible isolation of the city's white population to help explain the numbers and the tone of the debate surrounding the ordinance. The lack of contact with the city's non-white population led to the "acceptance of negative stereotypes, misinformation and misconceptions." The study found 70 census tracts where fewer than 10 black people lived. Almost all of the 70 census tracts were located in North and West Seattle. Of those 70 tracts, 18 did not contain any blacks. The other 52 were home to between 1-9 blacks, some of whom were known to be "live in" servants, according to the report. To put those figures in context, the average Seattle census tract had about 4,000 residents.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most important element of the report lay buried beneath the statistics. In conducting interviews, the researchers found that "minorities" in Seattle were welcomed as consumers by the real estate industry. The warm greeting, however, was for a population that served as an important "reservoir" for the disposal of older, dilapidated buildings. Far from being outside of the free market, segregated neighborhoods were critical elements in the rise and decline of cities. Slumlords renting out property in the CD knew full well the value of racially-segregated neighborhoods. The deteriorating housing stock of the urban core made many rich.<sup>40</sup>

Along with Seattle, a handful of other cities saw their electorates unite against fair housing. At the core of these campaigns was the belief that private property rights were inviolable, whereas civil rights were earned and bestowed by the majority. Led by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the real estate industry led fundraising campaigns that turned popular opinion against open housing. In Seattle, the Real Estate Board campaign fund was built by requiring a \$10 contribution from each broker member. Individual salesmen within each office were required to contribute \$5 to the campaign. Writing in *The Journal of Intergroup*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

*Relations* in 1965, Edward Rutledge characterized the measures, which varied from city to city, as “aimed at the perpetuation and extension of housing segregation.” As in Seattle, opponents of fair housing throughout the country often fought what they saw as “forced” housing. California’s Proposition 14 was an initiative to amend the state’s constitution that drew national attention. Its goal was to guarantee “an owner absolute freedom to deny the sale or rental of his property solely because of an applicant’s race, religion or national origin.” Drawing from the same source of anger that fueled the Barry Goldwater and George Wallace presidential campaigns, the Proposition 14 movement relied on rhetoric that turned the language of rights on its head. The concepts of property and freedom were melded together, allowing segregationist politics to proceed without the burden of direct references to race. There was still plenty of room, however, to resort to the familiarity of blunt, racist language.<sup>41</sup>

Writing about California, historians have drawn connections between the passage of Proposition 14 and the 1965 urban rebellion in Watts. As the historian Greg Robinson has argued, “resentment against Nisei may have been a part of the package.” While some blacks protected the businesses of Japanese American friends, Nisei-owned businesses in Watts lost roughly \$1 million, a figure totaling lost sales, stolen goods and damage. Japanese Americans had lined up both for and against Proposition 14, with many adopting the rhetoric of property rights to support their opposition.<sup>42</sup>

### **The JACL and the Divide Over Open Housing**

Seattle, in its opposition to open housing, was in harmony with the conservative, anti-civil rights wave sweeping the nation. Japanese Americans in the Emerald City were not immune

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<sup>41</sup> “Outsider’s View – Seattle, City With a Chance,” *Seattle Times*, October 27, 1968; Edward Rutledge, “Threat to the Great Society: Anti-Fair Housing Referenda,” *The Journal of Intergroup Relations* 4, no. 4 (Autumn 1965), 209-211; 224.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Robinson, “An Uneasy Alliance: Blacks and Japanese Americans, 1954-1965,” in *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 237-238.

to such toxic rhetoric. They were fully aware of the power of a white backlash against civil rights protests. Phil Hayasaka, the executive director of the HRC, felt deeply discouraged by the defeat of the open housing ordinance. He knew Japanese Americans were a part of the unfolding drama of open housing, even if not by choice. The Seattle JACL had abstained from weighing in on the open housing issue leading up to the 1964 referendum. Ivan King, of the Seattle Urban League, attributed the JACL's inaction to the unwillingness of Seattle's Japanese community to risk its own rising reputation. According to King, the JACL might have been timid "perhaps feeling that growing local acceptance of Oriental Americans would be handicapped by association with a measure identified primarily with the Negro minority's housing problem."<sup>43</sup>

Along with Tak Kubota, a fellow Seattle JACL leader, Hayasaka sought to reenergize the local chapter in the 1960s. A major thrust of their efforts was to bring the local chapter more in tune with the Civil Rights movement. The first edition of the Seattle JACL's *Reporter* newsletter in February 1964 encouraged local Japanese to join the Civil Rights struggle being led by African Americans. "In the vital area of Civil Rights," wrote Kubota, "we strongly advocate that the only way to secure our rights on a permanent basis is to secure the rights of all Americans." For Hayasaka and Kubota, rights and freedoms earned only for Japanese Americans were of questionable value. In a city that pitted non-white groups against each other, qualified rights and freedoms could easily be stripped away. The incarceration of Japanese Americans combined with the calculated embrace of Chinese Americans during World War II exposed the fleeting nature of circumscribed rights. Even closer to home, the state's refusal to do away with its Alien Land Laws unsettled Japanese Americans.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "Seattle's Campaign for a Fair Housing Law," Seattle Urban League, Box 5, Folder 4: Statements-Fair Housing Law Campaign, 1963-1967, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>44</sup> Tak Kubota, "Purpose of JACL," *JACL Reporter*, 1, no. 1, February 1964, box 6, folder "Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1964-1965," Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006,

Passed in 1921, the state's Anti-Alien Land Law prohibited foreign-born Japanese from leasing or owning land. While the measure seriously disrupted the thriving Japanese farming industry at the time, and remained a factor through the 1940s, it was unenforced but still on the books in the 1960s. For the Seattle branch of the JACL, the lingering law stood as an affront. When a 1960 resolution to repeal the law was defeated in a statewide referendum, the measure's supporters were shocked. Led by the JACL, they saw the defeat as a sign of widespread prejudice throughout the state and the city. In 1962, voters in Washington State rejected another measure to repeal the Anti-Alien Land Law.<sup>45</sup>

### **Building Interracial Islands: Working Around Housing Discrimination**

After the defeat of the open housing ordinance, civil rights organizations began to push for other ways to bring about "interracial" neighborhoods, coping with the fundamental evils of a segregated market. In the summer of 1965, the Seattle Urban League (SUL) began its Rental Project, aimed at curtailing the "growth of the ghetto" in the city's CD. The project promoted quality, integrated rental housing for blacks and other "racial minorities."<sup>46</sup> Through surveys with landlords and prospective renters, the findings provided a vivid picture of how issues relating to race, class, and gender impeded black residential mobility. Whereas previous fair-housing listing services targeted those looking to buy homes, the SUL was working to fill a massive void. Roughly two-thirds of all black families in Seattle were renters. Nine out of 10 requests for housing assistance that the SUL received were for rental units. The vast majority of

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UWSC; Phil Hayasaka, "Phil Hayasaka writes," *JACL Reporter*, 1, no. 2, April 1964, box 6, folder "Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1964-1965," Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

<sup>45</sup> Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle*, 12; Nicole Grant, "White Supremacy and the Alien Land Laws of Washington State," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/alien\\_land\\_laws.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/alien_land_laws.htm) (accessed December 4, 2012); Lane Smith, "City Council Stalls on Housing, Negroes Charge," *Seattle Times*, July 2, 1963.

<sup>46</sup> *Rental Project Progress Report: First Year Report On An Urban League Housing Service*, June 15, 1966, Seattle Urban League, Box 56, Folder 12, Rental Project, 1965-66, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

black renters, the SUL projected, “would continue to be restricted to this residential class for some years to come because of economic discrimination.” In comparison, only 40 percent of the white families in Seattle were renters.<sup>47</sup>

While whites flooded out of the CD, for every black family able to leave “some four or five additional Negro families were being packed” into the “advancing Southern edge of the ghetto.” A small number of families were able to purchase homes outside of the CD, but most were stuck in a crowded rental market. As “captive” consumers, blacks in Seattle would continue to be overcharged for substandard housing. Combing through newspapers, volunteers searched for “open areas,” which were “roughly defined as census tracts with less than 1 percent Negro occupancy.” The SUL characterized its project as a way to “spread the risks of discrimination,” as white volunteers canvassed neighborhoods to gauge their openness to black tenants. Black home seekers could save time and energy in their search for integrated housing, avoiding direct confrontations with prejudiced landlords and property owners. Such unpleasant encounters might lead black renters to abandon any attempts to move into white neighborhoods. Based on earlier surveys, the SUL figured that only one-in-three landlords would consider a black tenant.<sup>48</sup>

In its first year, the SUL’s Rental Project secured 36 placements, after receiving 131 applications for housing assistance. Though an incredibly small number, the SUL considered it a “breakthrough,” given how resistant landlords were to black renters. Toward the end of the project’s first year, housing requests from “newcomer” families “upstaged” the initial focus on the city’s existing black community. Many of the families moving to Seattle were headed by well-educated professionals with high-incomes. They were a “landlord’s dream,” families made up of the “ideal Negro.” Many of them could easily afford to buy homes but chose to rent before

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

settling on a neighborhood and home. But, despite the number of high-income African Americans looking to rent homes, the number of landlords willing to take black tenants “plummeted” in 1966. Beginning in 1965 and carrying on through 1966, the city’s economy “was strained in a dizzying way,” according to one chronicler of Seattle history. Boeing’s workforce expanded to record levels by 1968, reshaping the city and its housing market. An influx of new residents meant that few landlords needed black renters to fill vacancies.<sup>49</sup>

As the housing options dwindled, a number of blacks working with the SUL’s Rental Project withdrew their request for integrated housing. Most withdrew due to “personal or financial circumstances.” Some decided to live in the CD temporarily until the mad rush for housing subsided. Several families were “overtaken by illness” and others could not afford to move because of the cost of medical expenses. In one case, a woman who worked as a seamstress withdrew her request because of the irregular nature of her business. She was either too busy or too poor to engage in a protracted search for housing. Many could not afford to wait for a willing landlord in a white neighborhood. Those who were on welfare were reluctant to leave “informal neighborhood alliances.” Welfare grants were roughly half of a person’s actual need, according to the SUL, which meant that responding to an emergency required “an elaborate system of borrowing.” One mother on welfare “felt she could not risk living for a day in a neighborhood where she feared she might be unable to quickly borrow a phone, a car ride, or 25 cents for bus fare in an emergency.”<sup>50</sup>

What the SUL learned was that resource networks and familial bonds allowed many low-income blacks to get by within the CD. Efforts to create interracial neighborhoods one black

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid; Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present*, 216.

<sup>50</sup> *Rental Project Progress Report: First Year Report On An Urban League Housing Service*, June 15, 1966, Seattle Urban League, Box 56, Folder 12, Rental Project, 1965-66, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

neighbor at a time threatened to sever networks and dilute black power. Planting lonely pioneers in hostile neighborhoods was hardly a path to equality in a racially-segregated market. It was only really an option for those with the resources to weather the isolation that accompanied such a move. Race, class, and gender worked in tandem to limit black residential mobility.

Discrimination did not affect Japanese Americans and African Americans in the same way and it certainly did not impact all classes of African Americans in the same way. Any attempt to understand the divergent paths of the “post-civil rights” black middle-class and “underclass” must be grounded in this understanding. Resources and networks provided opportunities to circumvent discrimination, a reality that made it appear as if the doors were now open to everyone.<sup>51</sup>

As the SUL discovered, those willing to rent to non-whites tended to possess properties at the two extremes of the economic spectrum. Many had rentals that they figured would draw few black applicants, because of the high price. Others were trying to unload “junkers.” The SUL avoided listing those in the latter category. The organization did not want to “contribute to the stereotype of Negroes as careless tenants” and feared that neighbors would forget which had arrived first – dilapidation or black residents.<sup>52</sup>

Volunteers who tested out prospective rental properties encountered landlords who used many devious ways of keeping potential black renters away. On some occasions, however, landlords were blunt and “admitted losing the battle with their conscience.” When it came to race, rental policies varied, though SUL volunteers found anti-black sentiment to be widespread. Some landlords and property owners would not rent to blacks but said they would consider “Orientals” as tenants. Others were willing to compromise. One property owner who rented out a

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<sup>51</sup> Clarence Lang, *Black America in the Shadow of the Sixties: Notes on the Civil Rights Movement, Neoliberalism, and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), xii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

room in the Phinney Ridge (North End) neighborhood did not want a black tenant but was willing to rent to an “artsy” white who had black friends. Those who did not want to rent to blacks sometimes indicated a preference for other races. A woman in Ballard said that she might rent her property to someone who was Jewish or “Oriental.” In general, the prospect of Jewish and “Oriental” tenants – Japanese in particular – evoked more positive reactions. Those surveyed espoused a racial hierarchy that placed blacks on the bottom, a step below Asians. A Chinese property owner in the University District bemused SUL volunteers with her policies. She allowed blacks to rent the individual houses that she owned but refused to allow them to rent out her apartment units. Her apartment buildings were closed to non-whites and she “did not even encourage members of her own race to move in.”<sup>53</sup>

SUL volunteers were like many who assumed that ethnic ties and the shared status of being non-white might produce solidarity. But in a system where profits were derived from a segregated clientele, the ideology of white supremacy was reinforced by people of all races. As the historian N.D.B. Connolly has shown, “investment in racial segregation became so great and multifaceted – enabled by every level of government and people of every color, every class – that even when challenged by something as forceful and many-headed as the black freedom struggle, it could not be undone.”<sup>54</sup> For non-white business owners in Seattle, economic stability meant catering to the needs of white customers, many of whom were angered by the very thought of a black neighbor.

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<sup>53</sup> Responses to Rental Resource Forms, Box 56, Folders 16 to 26, Rental Project, Rental Resource Forms, 1965 to 1967, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, 0607-007, University of Washington Special Collections; *Rental Project Progress Report: First Year Report On An Urban League Housing Service*, June 15, 1966, Seattle Urban League, Box 56, Folder 12, Rental Project, 1965-66, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>54</sup> Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 4.



Numerous landlords and property owners were quick to write off all non-white races if a particular “minority” tenant did not meet their expectations. A property owner in the Meridian neighborhood told SUL volunteers that he did not want to rent to non-whites because of a negative experience with some “Indian” tenants. The most common and undoubtedly convenient excuse given by landlords and property owners was that their tenants would react negatively or even move out if they rented to blacks or other non-whites. A fear of being the first to allow a black renter in the neighborhood was often an accompanying excuse.<sup>55</sup>

Occasionally landlords and property managers utilized more devious methods than the outright rejection of black tenants. When Judy Nelson, an SUL volunteer, checked in on an apartment building in Old Ballard (West Seattle), she found a two-tiered system in place. During a conversation with the apartment manager she noticed an application form and picked it up. When she asked about the application process, the manager quickly informed her that white applicants did not need to fill out an application. The intentionally-complicated form was used to prevent blacks from moving in. Using such a form, the manager explained to Nelson, meant that if a black person was able to rent the apartment, “at least we can be assured he’s well educated and of the highest class.” But even blacks of the “highest class” could be turned away from apartments. The SUL staff thought they had lined up an apartment in Capitol Hill for Alfred Cowles, executive director of the Washington State Board Against Discrimination. Their hopes were dashed, however, when the apartment manager found out that Cowles was black.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Responses to Rental Resource Forms, Box 56, Folders 16 to 26, Rental Project, Rental Resource Forms, 1965 to 1967, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC; *Rental Project Progress Report: First Year Report On An Urban League Housing Service*, June 15, 1966, Seattle Urban League, Box 56, Folder 12, Rental Project, 1965-66, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>56</sup> Responses to Rental Resource Forms, Box 56, Folders 16 to 26, Rental Project, Rental Resource Forms, 1965 to 1967, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

What the SUL project revealed was what many blacks already knew: landlords were willing to go to great lengths in order to keep out black renters. The arbitrary, whimsical nature of landlords and property managers testified to the importance of stereotypes. To add to the problem, such devious tactics would be difficult to prosecute, even if a law were in place. Black renters could anticipate a demeaning and ultimately futile search for housing beyond the CD. As the SUL Rental Project reinforced, Seattle was far from exceptional. Researchers in Seattle were forced to come to grips with what St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton witnessed decades earlier in their study of Chicago. “The city assumes,” wrote Drake and Cayton in 1945, “that *any* Negroes who move *anywhere* will become a focal point for another little Black belt with a similar reputation.” Seattle, though it never developed a Black Metropolis, certainly acted as though it had and made every effort to cordon it off. From a civil rights perspective, the question was less about whether African Americans wanted to move into white neighborhoods. As Drake and Cayton explained, many African Americans may have preferred to live in black neighborhoods but resented “being forced to live there.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Japanese American Mobility: A Racialized, Relative Acceptance**

The absence of a fair housing ordinance curtailed Japanese American residential mobility, but their presence in white neighborhoods did not invoke widespread panic. A racialized image of poverty and crime did not shadow them from one neighborhood to the next, as was the case with African Americans. As seen from the SUL Rental Project, stereotypical ideas of peaceful, hard-working “Oriental” neighbors were beginning to reshape white perspectives. In an interview, Diane Narasaki recalled her family’s move from the Rainier Valley to Renton in 1965. A job as an electrical engineer at Boeing had allowed her father, Richard

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<sup>57</sup> St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 211-213.

Narasaki, to move his family into a larger house in the white suburb of Renton. After the “for sale” sign went up in front of their Rainier Valley home, Richard was approached by his white neighbors who begged him not to sell to an African American buyer. He was taken aback by the request.<sup>58</sup> Several other Japanese Americans interviewed were familiar with such stories, as some white neighbors recruited Japanese neighbors in the struggle to limit the encroachment of blacks. They encouraged Japanese Americans to follow their lead and in some cases, Japanese Americans obliged.<sup>59</sup> Arlene Oki, who lived in Beacon Hill during the 1960s, said in an interview that some Japanese Americans with the financial means were already leaving the area during the mid-1960s. They were drawn to more affluent white neighborhoods and eager to withdraw their children from what they saw as “ghetto schools.” Wealthy white suburbs like Mercer Island and Bellevue became popular destinations for Japanese American families with the means to move out of the central city.<sup>60</sup>

Though economic gains helped to increase the residential mobility of Japanese Americans, their move into white neighborhoods and spaces brought a new set of challenges. As Diane Narasaki remembered, attending high school in the white suburb of Renton was a miserable experience. Though her family had been cast as “definitively not-black”<sup>61</sup> upon leaving the Rainier Valley, Narasaki felt a sense of racial isolation in white, suburban Renton:

I didn’t have any racist interactions with the students, and it was - the kind of thing I experienced, I think, was more from stereotyping rather than aggressive and hate-directed activity. Although, on the employment front, I remember during the summer applying for jobs with all of my white friends and wondering why I was never hired, and finally being taken aside by my mother, and it being explained to me that race was a factor that I

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<sup>58</sup> Diane Narasaki, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, June 17, 2015; “Naraski Richd M,” in *Seattle City Directory, 1965*, R.L. Polk and Company; *Seattle City Directory, 1966*, R.L. Polk and Company.

<sup>59</sup> Tsuguo Ikeda, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, June 18, 2015; Dee Goto, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, May 25, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Arlene Oki, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, August 12, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 145-149.

should take into account, because there was such a clear pattern. But I remember having a friend whose father was complimenting my father on having such a fine daughter, and that I was such a fine person that he didn't even think of me as not being white, and that I would probably, you know, be able to marry a white man one day. And my father's reply was, 'We had always hoped that she would do better.'"<sup>62</sup>

While Narasaki's father, Richard, wanted his daughter to be acclimated to Seattle's white majority, he also encouraged his daughter to fight back against such racial discrimination. He would not, however, give in to his daughter's demands that she be allowed to move to a more racially-diverse school. Her mother, on the other hand, encouraged her to chalk up the racial slights to ignorance and move on with her life. There were, as the above story shows, a range of potential responses to the subtle racial discrimination that Japanese Americans could encounter as they moved into white suburban neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup>

As housing opportunities opened up for Japanese Americans, they also achieved an important civil rights victory. For the third and final time, a measure to repeal the Anti-Alien Land Law went before voters in Washington State in November 1966. The margin of victory was slim, even though a host of organizations, including both political parties, spoke out in favor of repeal. The final vote count included 430,984 in favor and 415,082 against repeal. Even though JACL members had done an exhaustive job of spreading the message, sending 400,000 brochures on the issue out to organizations statewide, they barely managed to win enough voters.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Diane Narasaki, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, June 17, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Alien Land Law in State Legislature to be Tackled in January," *JACL Reporter*, December, 1966, box 6, folder "Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1966," Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

## Renewing the Fight for Open Housing

With JACL leaders elated by the victory, both within the state and nationally, Hayasaka continued his work with the HRC and the JACL efforts to enlighten its members on another substantial civil rights issue within the city. As the open housing campaign reenergized in 1967, Hayasaka wanted to ensure that Seattle's Japanese did not forget the fact that many black organizations within the city had supported the repeal movement. In 1964, the Seattle JACL had spent much of the buildup to the open housing referendum equivocating. They had remained neutral then and Hayasaka feared the same would happen again. It appeared the city was headed toward another open housing referendum in 1968. This time, however, the battleground also included the state legislature.

At the end of 1967, Sam Smith became the first African American elected to Seattle's city council after representing the 37<sup>th</sup> district in the state legislature since 1958. Upon his election to the state legislature, he introduced a bill banning racial or religious discrimination in the sale or rental of homes. He continued reintroducing the bill even after it was repeatedly shot down. Speaking on behalf of those subjected to housing discrimination, Smith explained his rationale to legislators: "All we ask is that if we must share the full burden of (taxes) like everybody else, give us the opportunity to enjoy life as much as possible."<sup>65</sup> Finally, before moving on to city council, his bill was passed. By the time it passed in 1967, however, it was a watered-down bill. Targeting real estate agents, it allowed two "free" discriminations per year before a realtor's license could be revoked. More aggressive measures, proposed by Washington State Board Against Discrimination staff members, had been rejected. One of the proposed measures had called for apartment owners to receive rebates on their annual property taxes in

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<sup>65</sup> Jerry Large, "Sam Smith, 'Everyone's Neighbor,' Dies – Former Seattle Councilman was 73," *Seattle Times*, November 17, 1995.

exchange for signing a nondiscrimination agreement. City officials in Yakima, Washington had slammed the proposal, fearing it could seriously damage the city's revenue structures. In a tacit way, they acknowledged the centrality of white supremacy in the city's economic life.<sup>66</sup>

Once again the real estate industry moved the gears, securing enough support to force a referendum on the state's open housing bill.<sup>67</sup> Though acknowledging the impotence of watered-down legislation, a Central District housing committee backed the open housing law as a symbolic gesture. According to a report documenting the housing problems in the area, African Americans were content to live alongside each other in the CD. "But the knowledge that law, custom and practice deny them access to other areas of the city creates the kind of frustration, resentment and anger at the white citizenry that finds expression in civil disturbance."<sup>68</sup>

In spite of Hayasaka's efforts, Seattle's JACL membership continued to favor a neutral position on open housing. Hayasaka turned to contacts within the national JACL, in order to jolt the local branch into action. Writing to several national JACL leaders, Hayasaka explained that the neutrality of Seattle's Japanese community during the last referendum "did not go unnoticed." Some black leaders – Hayasaka did not mention names – were disgusted at the silence or opposition to open housing among Japanese Americans. By the end of December 1967, Hayasaka and others like Toru Sakahara managed to convince the Seattle JACL leadership to endorse open housing. Months of squabbling had finally produced a breakthrough. Hayasaka, trying to put his best spin on the matter, wrote an informational booklet on the proposed open housing measure for the JACL. He predicted a larger role for Seattle's Japanese leading up to the

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<sup>66</sup> "Housing Bill Passed," *Seattle Times*, March 9, 1967; Don Hannula, "Board Extends Public-Accommodation Ruling," *Seattle Times*, February 15, 1968.

<sup>67</sup> Alice Staples, "Committee Hopeful for Referendum 35," *Seattle Times*, June 2, 1967.

<sup>68</sup> Herb Robinson, "Fair-Housing Ordinance 'On Shelf'," *Seattle Times*, November 15, 1967.

referendum in 1968. Japanese Americans, if they so desired, could help to “bridge the chasm of understanding and alienation between the whites and blacks symbolic in this issue.”<sup>69</sup>

Though Hayasaka managed to earn the respect of black leaders, he failed to push Japanese Americans to the forefront of the open housing campaign of 1967-1968. He remained one of the few who was outspoken in his belief that Japanese Americans needed to align themselves with the black freedom struggle. Hayasaka was aware of the potentials risks but felt the alternative of a growing “chasm” between blacks, whites, and Asians could lead to even more problems. As Mark Brilliant has argued, Japanese Americans tended to view their struggle against Alien Land Laws as a “peculiar” one, set apart from other ongoing struggles against legalized segregation.<sup>70</sup> Divergent perspectives on the question of open housing and increasingly dissimilar experiences within the housing market would only add to the feeling that Japanese and African Americans were embarking on peculiar paths.

Seattle city council eventually passed an open housing ordinance in April 1968, wisely including an emergency clause that kept the issue out of the hands of voters. Wing Luke, the initial champion of open housing on city council, died in 1965, before the ordinance was implemented. He was on board a plane that crashed in the Cascade Mountains.<sup>71</sup> Sam Smith sponsored the measure. Violence within the CD following the assassination of Martin Luther

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from Philip Hayasaka to Pat Okura and Jerry Enomoto, October 19, 1967, box 9, folder “Referendum 35-Open Housing, 1967,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC; Letter from Phil Hayasaka to Harry Honda, December 26, 1967, , box 9, folder “Referendum 35-Open Housing, 1967,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

<sup>70</sup> Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Herb Robinson, “Sidney Gerber’s Legacy,” *Seattle Times*, September 2, 1966; “Councilman Luke, 2 Others Missing,” *Seattle Times*, May 17, 1965; “Wing Luke, Sidney Gerber, and Kate Ladue Vanish While Flying Over the Cascades on May 16, 1965,” essay 717, Historylink.org, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=717](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=717); (accessed December 4, 2012); “Luke, Wing,” Historylink.org, essay 2047, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=2047](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=2047) (accessed December 4, 2012).

King, Jr. was a key factor in stirring the council to action in the same way that uprisings throughout the country precipitated the Fair Housing Act of 1968.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Limited Impact of an Open Housing Law**

Seattle's open housing ordinance marked a victory, though its significance was quickly blown out of proportion. The ordinance made it illegal to "discriminate in the sale or rental of housing for reasons of race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin." As a means to level a racially-segregated housing market, it held little power. It required the "aggrieved" to file a charge with the Human Rights Commission, instead of assigning a more proactive role to the commission. For the guilty party, the maximum fine of \$500 was a weak deterrent; housing discrimination against African Americans remained an ongoing crisis. More than anything, the law reflected a desire to quell the unrest and anger emanating from black communities in Seattle and beyond. As the city's Human Rights Commission phrased it, "the intent of the ordinance was not civil rights, strictly speaking, but better social and economic conditions." Left unquestioned by many was the supposed ability of the free market to bring about the requisite improvements. But achieving better social and economic conditions as the rights of African Americans were being violated was a plan destined for failure. Had the main goal been to protect the civil rights of black Seattleites, the ordinance might have been given some teeth and enforcement of the law made a priority.<sup>73</sup>

As Black Power activists throughout the nation framed integration as "political and cultural suicide," the question of whether African Americans had any desire to move into white

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<sup>72</sup> "Outsider's View – Seattle, City With a Chance," *Seattle Times*, October 27, 1968.

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Commission City of Seattle, "Proposed Open Housing Ordinance" pamphlet, 1968, Folder "Open Housing 1968," Box 76, Seattle Office of the Mayor's Records, Accession no. 5210-01, SMA; Carmen Jones to Marlaina Kiner, August 18, 1983, Box 10, Folder "HRD Directorship, Management and Mismanagement," W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, UWSC; *A Sheltered Crisis: The State of Fair Housing in the Eighties*, Conference organized by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington D.C, September 26-27, 1983.



areas remained open. One survey conducted by a University Washington graduate student in 1968, offered a range of answers drawn from interviews with 200 black heads of households in the CD. Only 21 of the 200 said they preferred to live in a predominantly black neighborhood; part of this preference came as a result of feeling like an “alien” around whites, according to one interviewee. When it came to the issue of Black Power, 142 of the 200 respondents agreed that the best way to increase Black political and economic power was to disperse throughout urban and suburban neighborhoods. As one interviewee argued, blacks in Seattle needed “to be in contact with those who hold the wealth and power.” Whether those who saw power in moving beyond the CD would actually move under the present circumstances was unclear. In theory it made sense; in practice, there were many reasons why it was daunting to move into a white neighborhood.<sup>74</sup>

Members of the SUL greeted the open housing ordinance with little fanfare, arguing that the law would not “alter the picture considerably.” Based on its housing surveys, SUL leadership believed “subtle evasions” of fair housing policy would continue to restrict the movement of black Seattleites. Black prospective homebuyers, on average, were shown three houses by realtors. The average white buyer could expect to see 20 homes. Black buyers in the Seattle market were offered “equal treatment” by only four percent of realtors. Unpleasant interactions with realtors marred the home-buying process for blacks in Seattle. When contracts were signed, blacks experienced twice as many “false starts,” as agreements were routinely cancelled. Most black homebuyers could afford properties in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range but were often shown houses in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 range, making the process largely a waste of time. For black

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<sup>74</sup> Herb Robinson, “Central Area Survey Significant,” *Seattle Times*, September 29, 1968.

renters, the SUL warned, the picture was “even bleaker, the opportunities to move out of the ghetto even more limited, the negative factors further intensified.”<sup>75</sup>

The SUL argued that 4.2 percent of black Seattleites could be “said to be integrated in the ‘free choice’ patterns enjoyed by the population at large.” Many moving south were simply being drawn into emerging “ghettos” around the High Point, Holly Park, and Rainier Vista public housing developments. Whereas in 1960, 77.3 percent of blacks lived in the CD, by 1967, the concentration of blacks in the area had grown to 81 percent. During the same period, the population of the CD jumped by 55 percent, while the number of available housing units increased by only 3.89 percent. The shortage of low-income housing in the area would force many poor black families to double and triple-up in substandard housing. Close to 90 percent of the area’s housing was built before 1940. Crowded living situations only exacerbated the neighborhood’s physical deterioration.<sup>76</sup>

Despite such real and obvious hardship, many in Seattle were eager to declare the civil rights battle won by 1968, if not earlier. The passage of an open housing ordinance allowed discrimination to be relegated to the past. In such a narrative, housing discrimination was perhaps the last major barrier standing in the way of black equality. As black protests rocked Seattle in 1968, Dorm Braman, Seattle’s mayor, gave voice to this line of reasoning. Whites, Braman argued, “should not be beaten over the heads with the sins of their grandparents. Ways of the past are not excusable, but they are not reversible either.” Braman’s words came only a few months after the passage of the city’s open housing ordinance. Both the weak law and Braman’s comments revealed that the city was intent on forging ahead, with little regard for the legacy of housing discrimination. He had even less awareness of the ongoing problems with

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<sup>75</sup> Seattle Urban League, *Seattle’s Racial Gap: 1968*, July 1968, Box 8, Folder 26: Urban League, 1968-1970, Central Seattle Community Council Federation Records, 1945-1971, Accession no. 1801-001, UWSC.

<sup>76</sup> Seattle Urban League, *Seattle’s Racial Gap: 1968*.

housing discrimination and the changes needed to transform a racially-segregated housing market. But even if he had been aware, it made little sense to throw resources at a problem that was “irreversible.” Braman and many within the city were content with the bare minimum, letting the victims of discrimination bear the burden of obtaining justice. The smoke-screen of civil rights gains and subtle evasions of fair housing policy continued to shape an evolving but still-segregated Seattle.<sup>77</sup>

### **Comparing Black and Asian Residential Mobility**

Japanese American outmigration from the CD was part of a larger demographic transformation that reshaped the city. Between 1960 and 1970, Seattle’s white population declined by just over 9 percent while its non-white population rose by nearly 44 percent. Even with the decline, the city was still home to 463,870 whites, who made up around 87 percent of the population. The city’s 66,961 non-whites were just under 13 percent of the local demographic. A study conducted by the Seattle Human Rights Department (SHRD) in 1976 summed up the city’s racial transformation. Between 1960 and 1970, the report found, “integration may have occurred for the few” but “segregation continued for the many.” Large, “insulated” white neighborhoods were the norm. The aberrations – the neighborhoods of Garfield-Madrona, Beacon-Rainier Valley and Rainier Beach – contained nearly 75 percent of the city’s non-white population. According to the SHRD report, Seattle was “experiencing the classic example of ‘ghetto expansion.’”<sup>78</sup>

Beneath the label of “non-white,” the report identified important lines of division that had emerged by 1970. Blacks were the largest and the most-segregated non-white group in Seattle. With a population of 37,868, a majority of blacks in Seattle lived in seven of the city’s 121

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<sup>77</sup> “Outsider’s View – Seattle, City With a Chance,” *Seattle Times*, October 27, 1968.

<sup>78</sup> Seattle Human Rights Department, *A Study and Data on Segregated Housing in Seattle, Washington*, February 1976.

census tracts. Most of the seven tracts were a part of the Garfield-Madrona area; all seven of the tracts were contiguous. Japanese residents made up the city's second-largest non-white demographic, with a population of 9,986.<sup>79</sup> For them, the 1960s had ushered in a new era of increasing residential mobility. In general, the decade featured a major Japanese population shift from the International District and the CD into the Rainier Valley and Rainier Beach areas. For example, between 1960 and 1970, the Japanese population in the Garfield-Madrona area declined from 3,575 to 1,670. Together, the International District and the CD saw their Japanese population drop from 4,651 to 2,152 over the decade. Wealthier Japanese Americans migrated into a host of white neighborhoods. By the late-1960s, the reshuffling continued as Japanese residents moved from Beacon Hill and Rainier Valley into non-contiguous neighborhoods throughout the city. A report for the Seattle School District described Seattle's Japanese community as having "leapfrogged from the International District and southeast Seattle," into more outlying parts of the city.<sup>80</sup>

Over the 1960s, the Japanese population in King County living outside of Seattle doubled. The Boeing "bust" of the late 1960s and early 1970s proved fortuitous for Japanese Americans who were able to hold on to their jobs. Many were able to take advantage of the "substantial glut of reasonably priced suburban housing in a dead, buyer's market," according to the school district's report. In particular, Nisei bought homes in Mercer Island, Bellevue and the North End in "considerable numbers." The Japanese shift into whiter, more affluent

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, Seattle School District, October 1977, 20-27.

neighborhoods, particularly in West Seattle and the north end of the city was a sign that the Japanese were “more assimilated than any other Asian ethnic group,” according to the report.<sup>81</sup>

Key socioeconomic differences between Japanese Americans and African Americans meant that the two groups encountered the housing market in distinct ways. Although data at the city level is hard to come by, University of Washington sociologist Calvin Schmid compiled a detailed analysis of non-white groups in Washington State. Between 1940 and 1960, the percentage of Japanese Americans who worked in “white-collar” jobs rose from 29.3 to 45.3 percent. For African Americans, the numbers were 12.3 and 18.6 percent respectively. Even in 1960, 80.0 percent of black workers in the state filled “blue-collar” jobs. In 1960, the median income of Japanese males was 89 percent of that of “Caucasian” males. For blacks, the number stood at 64 percent. The numbers spoke to how discrimination in the workplace undercut the ability of African Americans to negotiate the ebb and flow of the housing market. Blacks faced racial and economic barriers that prevented them from “leap-frogging” beyond the expanding “ghetto.” When housing in the suburbs became more affordable during the recession, they were in a much less favorable position to capitalize on such an opportunity.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

While much of the residential mobility of Japanese Americans is often attributed to economic gains, the ability to move beyond segregated neighborhoods was never simply a question of accumulating enough capital. The presence of Japanese Americans in certain Seattle neighborhoods once stirred whites into defensive action. Segregated housing practices – subtle and direct – guarded Seattle’s white neighborhoods from Japanese and African Americans. Over time, much effort and policy was focused on keeping the city’s black population at bay, opening

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<sup>81</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, Seattle School District, October 1977, 19-27; 161-162.

<sup>82</sup> Calvin F. Schmid et al., *Nonwhite Races State of Washington*, 119; 125.

up spaces for Japanese Americans. For obvious reasons, Japanese American history tends to gravitate toward World War II, incarceration, and redress. A time of incredible loss and trauma, it became the backdrop that eventually gave birth to a new American Dream. From one of the lowest points possible – stripped of rights and property – Japanese Americans rose to achieve incredible social and economic success. From incarceration to “ghettos,” and then on to white suburbs, Japanese Americans became models of “assimilation.” In the words of historian Greg Robinson, “they literally left behind their black friends and neighbors, who continued to face housing and school discrimination.” This literal and figurative distancing registers when speaking with some Japanese Americans in Seattle. Like many, they tend to offer “culture” as the main explanation for what separates them from African Americans. In the absence of historical context, culture has become the default answer.<sup>83</sup>

For African Americans, the narrative of moving out of the “ghetto” has been far more complicated. Part of the challenge must be to explain the forces that have produced ongoing racial segregation in America. While scholars have provided incredibly detailed accounts of black housing patterns into the 1960s, the next step must be to address why, since 1970, the most common Black experience has been “to live in the poorest American neighborhoods over consecutive generations.”<sup>84</sup> To fully understand what has brought about this reality, it is vital to tell stories that transcend black and white, illuminating how racial categorizations are “mutually constitutive of one another.”<sup>85</sup> In the context of Japanese and African American history, it means diverting attention away from the end results, so often used to justify the existing racial

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<sup>83</sup> Greg Robinson, “An Uneasy Alliance: Blacks and Japanese Americans, 1954-1965,” 245.

<sup>84</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (1983; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 40.

<sup>85</sup> Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1999), 106.

hierarchy. It requires a deeper examination of the systems that perpetuate disadvantage across generations, leaving some non-white groups with the “stigma of blight” far more than others. In a nation obsessed with property values, where the bulk of wealth is tied to real estate, the withholding of civil rights from those deemed unworthy has left an indelible legacy.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, “Revisiting the Second Ghetto,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 3 (March 2003), 288.

### **Chapter 3: The Lynchpin of Urban Rebellion: Segregated Housing and the Policing of Racial Boundaries**

“A single society cannot be achieved as long as this cornerstone of segregation stands.” So pithy it was easily overshadowed, the Kerner Commission’s take on racial discrimination in the housing market cut right to the heart of late-1960s unrest. The “discrimination and segregation” so intrinsic to the country’s development “threaten[ed] the future of every American” – a reality hammered home by the drama of urban rebellions. Though chaotic encounters between African Americans and police officers gripped the nation during the latter half of the 1960s, this chapter situates those battles within the context of segregated neighborhoods. It also addresses the stated – though unexplored – conviction of the commission that discrimination and segregation were a threat to all Americans.<sup>1</sup>

African Americans have often used their relationship with the police as something of a litmus test as to their place within the fabric of American society. When they did so in Seattle during the 1960s, the results were abysmal. The city’s black community experienced countless abuses at the hands of local police, dimming the hope once generated by civil rights victories. For many African Americans, police came to “symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression,” in the words of the Kerner Commission.<sup>2</sup> As Thomas Sugrue has argued, by the 1950s and 1960s, most northern cities had police departments filled with white officers recruited from outlying suburbs and small towns. Beyond the workplace, few of the many white officers who policed black neighborhoods lived alongside or interacted with African Americans. As a result, the alienation borne out of segregated neighborhoods manifested itself in the context of

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 1; 475.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 206.



policing. In 1966, Seattle's police force – 900 strong – was home to only five African Americans.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-1960s, civil rights and Black Power activists sought to reshape a society that normalized police violence against African Americans. Most prominently, the Seattle Black Panther Party (BPP) and other Black Power advocates seized the spotlight and turned it on to the police and other arms of the state. Their battles reflected the oppressive nature of the institutions that many took for granted, opening up fundamental questions about race, class and power. How Seattleites responded to these questions played a significant role in shaping neighborhoods throughout the city. The backlash from white homeowners, lenders, and other actors was felt from the CD to the suburbs.

While it is easy to see the link between police brutality and Black Power, the link between racially-segregated housing and the rise of Black Power has become less marked over time. Yet, for many African Americans during the 1960s, the resistance encountered by the open housing movement was pivotal in producing a turn away from non-violent direct action protests and toward Black Power.<sup>4</sup> This chapter argues for the importance of understanding African American protests within the context of racially-segregated housing, showing how the Seattle BPP was borne out Seattle's segregated neighborhoods. It draws out a broader conceptualization of violence, beginning with the violence carried out in making and containing ghettos. At a time when it was common to reference the “cultural deprivation” of African Americans living in segregated neighborhoods, this chapter points to the strong sense of community that was forged beneath the shadow of racial segregation. As the CD lost much of its middle class base to other

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 329-330; Charles T. Michener, “Spotlight on Our Cops,” *Seattle Magazine*, October 1966.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this dynamic see Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 169-214.

parts of the city by 1970, these types of communities – that included a range of races, ethnicities and classes – became less common.

This chapter begins by analyzing the role of police violence in galvanizing Seattle’s Civil Rights movement and subsequent Black Power activism. It shows how African Americans in Seattle were subjected to a culture of violence and corruption within the local police department. On countless occasions, police officers violated the civil rights of African Americans. Almost never did they receive punishment. Their actions were encouraged and applauded by conservative whites, who supported a police department acting with impunity. Amid the chaos of urban rebellion, the Seattle BPP challenged not only the police department but also other branches of the state that oppressed African Americans. Though their struggles early on were centered on police brutality, they also fought to resist the other arms of the carceral state. In doing so, they helped to illuminate the ongoing role of the state in reproducing racial segregation and violence.

A key component of the discussion centers on how Japanese Americans interpreted the violence of the late-1960s. For Japanese Americans in Seattle, the violence generated by black urban rebellions triggered cries for “law and order.” In some cases, Japanese Americans framed the turmoil as part of a “meaningless crime spree,” worth only a stiffer response from the police.<sup>5</sup> Less well known and publicized were the voices of solidarity that arose, including figures like Mike Tagawa, who joined the Seattle Panthers. By incorporating the perspectives of Japanese Americans, there is much to be gained, in terms of understanding the dynamics of racial segregation, urban rebellion, and suburbanization.

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<sup>5</sup> “Chapter to Draft Strong Letter to Mayor for Stronger Police Protection,” *JACL Reporter*, 5, no. 12, December 1968, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1968,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

## **The Killing of Robert Reese**

One of the touchstone moments in the relationship between Seattle's black community and the police, the killing of Robert Reese shook up the city. In June 1965, Reese, an African American, was gunned down by an off-duty police officer named Harold Larsen. After finishing a shift, Larsen and his partner, Officer Franklyn Junell, had spent the rest of the evening drinking. They consumed somewhere between 5 and 7 mixed alcoholic drinks before encountering Reese and several of his friends at a Chinese restaurant in the International District (ID). After a confrontation between the white officers and the black men in the restaurant – the details of which were disputed – the black men left the restaurant. Larsen later fired five shots at a moving vehicle, as Reese and his friends drove away. One of the shots struck Reese in the head, killing him. During a subsequent coroner's inquest, Larsen claimed the black men assaulted the officers without provocation and that he identified himself as a police officer before firing his gun. Reese's friends said the attack came in response to racial slurs and that Larsen and Junell never identified themselves as police officers.<sup>6</sup>

When the coroner's jury read the verdict of "excusable homicide," moans went up from African Americans in the audience. A cousin of Reese, sobbing, had to be helped out of the room. Jim Reese, Robert's father, found the ruling unconscionable; the jury, in his mind, had bent over backward to excuse the officers. The jury ruled that the officers "had been drinking but were in full possession of their faculties" before being assaulted. It also concluded that Junell had used "offensive or derogatory language," in the restaurant. Other than calling for the SPD to implement a policy prohibiting officers from carrying their weapons while drinking alcoholic beverages, the jury found the killing a reasonable police action. In spite of the bizarre ruling, Jim

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence L. Shafer and Charles T. Michener, "The Reese Affair: Was Justice Really Done?" *Seattle Magazine*, October 1965.

Reese cautioned against protests or violence. “But if ever there was a gap between the races in Seattle, it is now,” he said. “This incident is going to be a governing factor in what happens between the races here. I have lived here 41 years and I don’t think I have ever seen people more aroused – not only Negroes but whites as well.” An all-white jury and a white judge later found the four black men guilty of third-degree assault. They were given one-year deferred sentences in exchange for serving 90 days in jail. They would then be placed in a “work-release program” where they were to report to jail during evenings and weekends. Another all-white jury found Junell innocent of provoking the assault. The only punishment levied against the officers was an 8-day suspension by the SPD for excessive drinking and using racial slurs. Later, the suspension was extended to 30 days, after civil rights groups in Seattle were infuriated by the department’s refusal to discipline the officers in any meaningful way.<sup>7</sup>

Jim Reese’s words were prescient. A spate of letter writers to the *Seattle P-I* newspaper epitomized the anger among many white residents. They were irate over the criticism coming down on the police and the inquest process. It had become “all too obvious,” wrote one letter-writer, that the “leaders of the Negro community are more interested in seeking simple revenge than in preserving justice and the due process of the law.” If such unreasonable protests continued, they might “seriously damage the civil rights cause.” Another letter writer carried on this line of reasoning, arguing that in the Reese case, civil rights were “not concerned in any way.” It was “primarily a case of maintenance of law and order,” which applied “to all regardless of creed or color.” Justice, like civil rights, was color-blind. For many, like W.L. Taylor, who

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence L. Shafer and Charles T. Michener, “The Reese Affair: Was Justice Really Done? *Seattle Magazine*, October 1965; “Reading of Inquest Verdict Draws Moans,” *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1965; Stanton H. Patty, “Verdict Distresses Reese Kin,” *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1965, box 13, folder 32: “Reese Incident, 1965,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

wrote to the *Times*, what was truly unconscionable was the gall of those who questioned the “well-disciplined and devoted men” of the SPD.

For Virginia McDonald, of Mercer Island, the real issue was that African Americans needed to develop thicker skin. What had prompted the fight between Reese and the officers was a few “disparaging” remarks. She framed the killing of Reese as a matter of juvenile delinquency bringing self-destruction to the black community: “Too often incorrigible pupils and slovenly workers are not chastised or expelled for the only reason that they are colored.” Somewhere along the way, McDonald implied, Reese’s parents had failed him. In reality, Reese was a 40-year-old commercial painter and apartment manager. He had been accompanied by four friends: Weldon Boyland, a longshoreman; Leroy Head, a warehouseman; and James Williams, who worked for the Washington State Ferries. The trope of juvenile delinquency, though an effective way to ignore black demands for justice, did not align with reality.<sup>8</sup>

In a remarkable sleight of hand, white letter writers managed to shift the conversation away from a police killing and on to the supposed injustice of black, non-violent protests. Peaceful protests on the part of African Americans were seen as more of an affront than the killing of a black man by an intoxicated police officer. Civil rights attorneys in Seattle, on the other hand, were well aware of the SPD’s penchant for meting out violence against African Americans. Leonard Schroeter, a Harvard-trained lawyer and president of the Washington State ACLU, was well-acquainted with the corruption of the SPD. Writing in 1965, a few months before the Reese incident, Schroeter argued that “excessive force” within the SPD “was condoned, tolerated, or even encouraged at the highest levels of the department.” Prior to his

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<sup>8</sup> “Reaction to the Inquest,” *Seattle P-I*, July 7, 1965, box 13, folder 32: “Reese Incident, 1965,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC; Letter to the editor from W.L. Taylor, *Seattle Times*, July 5, 1965, box 13, folder 32: “Reese Incident, 1965,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC; Letter to the editor from Virginia McDonald, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 15, 1965, box 13, folder 32: “Reese Incident, 1965,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

work with the ACLU, Schroeter directed the Northwest branch of the Anti-Defamation League. In that role, begun in 1952, Schroeter had received a large number of complaints from blacks alleging that they had been “beaten up by police officers.” Between 1955 and 1956, Schroeter was deputy prosecuting attorney for King County. In that role, Schroeter encountered a prosecutor’s office unwilling to hold the SPD accountable. The prosecutor’s office, according to Schroeter, was characterized by “a total lack of courage in terms of prosecuting anything controversial.” From alleged instances of police brutality to gambling, prostitution and other crime, the prosecutor’s office refrained from pursuing justice. “I saw numerous instances of police brutality in the jails, and on the faces and bodies of people at preliminary hearings.” Schroeter resigned after two years, unwilling to countenance such behavior. Save for one exception, Schroeter was unaware of any police officer who had been “suspended, reprimanded, or punished in any way for brutality, excessive force, false arrest and similar activities...” While private attorneys managed to win settlements for clients against abusive police officers, these cases were settled through payouts covered by the department’s liability coverage. Any such cases were kept out of the personnel files of the offending officers.<sup>9</sup>

### **Freedom Patrols**

As would become routine, King County Prosecutor Charles O. Carroll defended the inquest ruling, dismissing calls for a civilian review board to monitor the police.<sup>10</sup> One of the immediate responses to the killing of Robert Reese was the introduction of “freedom patrols” within the CD. Meant to be something akin to walking citizen review boards, the patrols were an

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from Leonard W. Schroeter to Donald Robinson, February 23, 1965, box 3, folder: “Seattle Police Department – Police Brutality, Re.: Look Magazine Article on Brutality, 1965-1966,” Leonard Schroeter Papers, Accession no. 5036-002, UWSC; Leonard W. Schroeter obituary, *Seattle Times*, May 4, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence L. Shafer and Charles T. Michener, “The Reese Affair: Was Justice Really Done?” *Seattle Magazine*, October 1965.

idea of the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC). John Adams, chairman of the CACRC, also issued a list of demands in light of the Robert Reese killing. Above all, the CACRC called for the removal of the officers involved in the fight to be removed from the SPD. In addition, the group requested an external review of the SPD and a statement from the mayor, police chief and city council of a “non-discriminatory policy” for the police department. To smooth over the tensions between the SPD and African Americans, Adams called for a police liaison to be employed in the CD.<sup>11</sup>

Training for the Freedom Patrols focused on “nonviolent discipline” and was carried out by the Seattle branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The initial patrol consisted of Charles Johnson, an attorney, Edwin Pratt, the executive director of the Seattle Urban League, and a contingent that included two women and a white minister. According to John Adams, volunteers were reminded that they were part of a larger body, “an organized effort by the civil rights community to come to grips with police brutality.”<sup>12</sup> The idea for the patrols was partly inspired by Adams’ memories of his father, a preacher in Columbia South Carolina, organizing patrols to protect black G.I.’s from military police officers.<sup>13</sup> Seattle’s version of the “freedom patrols” began in July 1965 and lasted for a little more than a year. With volunteers instructed to be “dignified and neatly dressed...and under no circumstances resort to physical violence,” the

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<sup>11</sup> Lane Smith, “‘Freedom Patrols’ to Watch City Policemen,” *Seattle Times*, July 11, 1965.

<sup>12</sup> Lane Smith, “Freedom Patrols Begin; Nonviolence Stressed,” *Seattle Times*, July 25, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Larry S. Richardson, “Action and Rhetoric in Seattle’s Freedom Patrols: A Study of Protest Activity by a Local Social Movement” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association, San Francisco, November 1976); John H. Adams, interview by Trevor Griffey and Janet Jones, Seattle, WA, June 24, 2005, Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/adams.htm> (accessed December 6, 2016).

patrols were about as “provocative” a response to police brutality as Seattle’s civil rights leaders were willing to send.<sup>14</sup>

While the patrols garnered media attention, their ultimate goal was to reform the system, in order to bring about a more sympathetic police presence in black neighborhoods. As Adams explained, the CACRC “never withdrew in such a way that we would not negotiate for advances with the power structure...” Civil rights leaders like Adams urged caution and patience at every turn, even as city officials failed to hold anyone accountable for the killing of Robert Reese. They retained a belief, even when faced with little evidence, that the relationship between the SPD and black Seattleites could be improved. Through protest and politics, justice might eventually prevail.<sup>15</sup>

With peaceful protests carried out by well-dressed and respectable African Americans, the Freedom Patrols were designed to give black leaders in Seattle a voice in how their segregated communities were policed. Exposing the rest of Seattle to the ruthless policing of black communities was a way to gain public support. But, as was clear from reaction to the Reese incident, the link between African Americans and criminality was deeply-ingrained. The particulars of any given case often did not seem to matter. As the city’s open housing debates made clear in the 1960s, many saw housing segregation as a bulwark against black criminality. Crime, they argued, had a way of following blacks around and had little to do with context. Focusing a narrow lens on black criminality was a critical part of the process that distinguished African Americans from the nation’s other “assimilable” minorities. It was also a way to justify black inequality. What the Freedom Patrols overlooked or ignored was that such powerful myths

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<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Taylor, “The 1965 Freedom Patrols and the Origins of Seattle’s Police Accountability Movement,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/freedom\\_patrols.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/freedom_patrols.htm) (accessed January 6, 2017); Richardson, “Action and Rhetoric in Seattle’s Freedom Patrols.”

<sup>15</sup> Richardson, “Action and Rhetoric in Seattle’s Freedom Patrols.”



about black criminality did not pay attention to class. Instead, they reduced working men like Robert Reese into juvenile delinquents.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Model Minority Image and Crime**

As the supposed pathologies of African Americans became a spectacle during the 1960s, Japanese and Chinese Americans were racialized as “definitively not-black.” By 1960, Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans had much higher median incomes than African Americans. They were achieving middle-class status at a significantly higher rate than African Americans, a success attributed largely to education. Racialized notions of crime formed a critical part of a model minority image driven by a focus on Asian American achievement. Unlike other aspects of the model minority image, crime statistics used to draw sharp lines between blacks and Asians were rarely contested. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1964, Berkeley sociologist William Petersen argued that Japanese Americans boasted the lowest rates of “social pathology among all ethnic groups.” According to an FBI “Uniform Crime Report” from 1964, only three Japanese Americans throughout the entire country had been arrested for murder that year.<sup>17</sup>

Because of their distinct histories, Japanese Americans and African Americans interacted with the police in much different ways. Although crime statistics from the 1960s rarely singled out Japanese Americans, those compiled by the SPD in 1971 illuminate these disparate histories. Throughout the city in 1971, only 44 arrests involved “Japanese” suspects, while 32 involved “Chinese” suspects. Compared to the thousands of arrests involving “Negro” suspects, these

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<sup>16</sup> Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 21; 221.

<sup>17</sup> William Petersen, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1966; Wu, *The Color of Success*, 148-149.

were trivial numbers. Like most, Japanese Americans were conditioned to interpret black crime in a particular way, paying little attention to history or the context in which it occurred.<sup>18</sup>

Within the confines of racial liberalism championed by academics, journalists and activists, it made little sense for Asian Americans to publicize issues that plagued their communities. By the early-1960s, the Japanese American success story was “accepted as racial common sense.” What such a narrative revealed was that racial minorities could expect prosperity and social acceptance. All such an outcome required was accepting the state’s handling of race relations. Racial progress would unfold, “with all deliberate speed,” stirred on by increasing civil rights. To juxtapose the criminality of African Americans with the upstanding character of Asian Americans was a project that required the history of both groups to be conflated. The effects of slavery, lynching and other violence were removed from the picture. In their place stood a version of history that minimized the violence experienced by African Americans. Japanese Americans, wrote Petersen, had proven “that they could climb over the highest barriers our racists were able to fashion.”<sup>19</sup>

As the 1960s wore on, black perspectives on policing and justice were transformed, as myriad cases of police brutality went unpunished, with many of them investigated in cursory fashion. Many black migrants from the South came to see Northern cities in a new light, as the forces of racial capitalism hemmed them into segregated neighborhoods. The police were seen as representatives of the white power structure charged with keeping a lid on the “ghetto.”<sup>20</sup> If the city’s “freedom patrols” were a galvanizing force in Seattle’s civil rights movement, the energy they created did not last long or ripple out far beyond the black community. As a writer for

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<sup>18</sup> “Central Area Tour,” August 3, 1972, box 115, folder 5: “Executive-Neighborhoods-Issues/Tours-Central Area, 1973,” Mayor Wes Uhlman, Subject Files, Accession no. 5287-02, SMA.

<sup>19</sup> Wu, *The Color of Success*, 161-165.

<sup>20</sup> Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 52.

*Seattle Magazine* phrased it in 1966, many Seattle residents seemed to be “turning a deaf ear to the movement.” Edwin Pratt, executive director of the Seattle Urban League, also felt the movement had run into a wall in 1966. The wall, in Pratt’s mind, was the city’s image as “cosmopolitan, color-blind, racially progressive” and largely free from “racial bias.” A “false sense of security and accomplishment” regarding racial progress permeated the city.<sup>21</sup>

### **Model Cities: Reforming Problematic Individuals**

As city officials explained it, the window of opportunity was quickly closing on Seattle’s CD. In their 1967 application for a Model Cities grant, policy makers in Seattle framed the area as exceptional, a place not yet there but on its way to becoming a Watts, Oakland, Hough (Cleveland), or Harlem. The area and the city were reeling under the weight of a growing “minority” population. Backed by the rhetoric of citizen participation, Model City funds were used to address the disorder perceived to be at the root of the area’s problems. State power, through federal funding and policing, would bring a halt to the decay and provide a platform for the rebuilding of Seattle’s urban core. Treating the CD as a place of disease and crime allowed the city to emphasize the need for law and order and minimize the voices of those living in the area. A growing concentration of poor blacks, as well as the ongoing loss of more upwardly-mobile black, white, and Asian residents fostered a climate where the city felt encouraged to intervene. Painting its own picture of a community tearing at the seams, the city worked to stem

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<sup>21</sup> “These Empty Seats Portend a New Civil Rights Crisis,” *Seattle Magazine*, November 1966; Lane Smith, “Seattle Not Immune From Race Disturbances,” *Seattle Times*, October 12, 1966, box 13, folder 31: “Racial Riots, 1967-1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

the “growing atmosphere of alienation and hostility.” Without drastic measures, the “in-migration of economically and culturally disadvantaged persons” would cripple the CD.<sup>22</sup>

Residents within the CD fought back against the city’s focus on problematic individuals – the poor, the alcoholic, the single mother, the criminal – and pushed systemic injustices to the forefront. The underlying issue, they argued, was not the supposed concentration of poverty and abnormal behavior found in the CD. Instead, it was neglect on the part of the city, combined with the enormity of a corrupt police department that was destroying the area. Pushing back against a top-down approach, residents pressed the city to implement programs aimed at developing police accountability, as well as bringing an end to the rampant exploitative business practices that plagued the CD. In order for disaffected youth to gain faith in the justice system, residents wanted equal justice for all, not just a system that catered to middle-class property owners and businessmen. On both counts – police accountability and exploitative business practices – residents received little help from the city. These competing narratives – both aimed at “saving” the CD – provide a pathway into the divisions that shaped Seattle from the late 1960s-onward. As a legacy of the War on Poverty, but implemented mostly under the watch of the Nixon administration, the Model Cities program was beset by critics on all sides. A civil rights era program quarantined by conservative politics, it was incapable of meeting the demands of Black Power advocates.<sup>23</sup>

## **Black Rebellions**

As the problem of police brutality toward African Americans festered, young blacks throughout the country began to reject the nonviolence of the civil rights movement. Civil rights gains appeared as a mirage to many young blacks who felt hounded by their local police. Police

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Brown, “Race, Urban Governance, and Crime Control: Creating Model Cities,” *Law and Society Review* 44, no. 3/4 (September/December 2010), 770-781.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, 771.

killings of African Americans followed by verdicts of “excusable homicide” were a part of the “kindling” that inspired a wave of urban rebellions from Watts to Detroit. According to the Kerner Commission, 164 urban rebellions occurred within the first nine months of 1967. These rebellions were a potent reminder of growing economic inequality left untouched by the Civil Rights movement.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1966 and 1970, numerous unsolved bombings rocked Seattle, with many of the explosions occurring in the CD, leaving residents in a state of “fear and dread.” In April, 1970, Morris Hardcastle Real Estate, the Japanese Presbyterian Church, and the home of state legislator David Sprague were the latest targets to be bombed.<sup>25</sup> Toward the end of April, Walter Hubbard, a representative of the CARC held a press conference condemning the perpetrators. “We daily share the anguish of persons who have purchased a house on marginal incomes, some even on welfare, and who now are threatened with destruction of their home,” said Hubbard. Along with their fear, residents also had to deal with the fallout of insurance companies pulling out of the area or “drastically” raising their premiums.

Without naming names, Hubbard singled out the perpetrators as antithetical to the spirit of the civil rights movement, in which demonstrators “used our own bodies as a bulwark against racism in the open light of day, rather than slink through the night and furtively destroy.” Hubbard, by his own count, tallied closer to 90 bombings that had occurred within the last 16 months, all but one of which remained unsolved. He demanded better police protection for the area, suggesting that the Seattle Police Department and the FBI had failed to protect the community. Whether “black, white, yellow, or brown; wealthy or poor,” Hubbard argued,

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<sup>24</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 90-91; Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> “More Bombing in Seattle’s Central Area,” *The Facts*, April 23, 1970.

residents deserved better.<sup>26</sup> For Fitzgerald Beaver, the editor of *The Facts*, a black newspaper, the bombings were another reminder of the area's need for a police precinct of its own. It was a controversial request, coming at a time when Beaver was seeing an uptick in the number of complaints regarding police harassment. "We are now prepared to take your complaints of harassment to officials who can act – and even to explore legal help to end this crime in the name of fighting crime."<sup>27</sup>

Waiting on city government held out little appeal to many young African Americans. Beaver knew this, even though he continued to call for patience. Like Hubbard, he did not see Seattle's urban rebellion as political. He saw it more as evidence that blacks in Seattle were turning on each other. Although he agreed with the basic idea of Black Power, he questioned how it would be accomplished. Building black solidarity in Seattle, Beaver argued, would be "an uphill climb because of the ill feelings of the masses of people toward the groups that try to organize." Any attempt on the part of Black Power advocates to build a movement required them to "work with those that don't look or talk Black Power as well as the church, whether they like them or not."<sup>28</sup> Faced with a range of problems unsolved by the civil rights movement, class divisions within Seattle's black community made it very difficult to organize. Between 1966 and 1968, a string of small organizations seeking to channel the ideology of Black Power emerged within the CD.<sup>29</sup>

While many Black Power activists had struggled to organize their ideologies in a way that drew in disaffected young blacks, the Black Panther Party seized on the urban rebellions, celebrating them as a political awakening. Writing in a June 1967 issue of the *Black Panther*

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<sup>26</sup> "Civil Rights Committee Speaks Out," *The Medium*, April 30, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald Beaver, "Right On," *The Facts*, April 23, 1970.

<sup>28</sup> Fitzgerald Beaver, "Let's Face the Facts About Black Power," *The Facts*, December 28, 1967 to January 4, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 220.

newspaper, Bobby Seale spoke of the common theme driving the urban rebellions. “If one would look closely, and check this three year history, he will find that in every damn rebellion a racist cop was involved...” Seale, who had co-founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966, incorporated the history of black/police relations into a broader anti-imperial struggle. “The racist *military* police force occupies our community just like the foreign American troops in Vietnam.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Seattle BPP**

Formed in April 1968, the Seattle chapter of the BPP was the first established outside of California. The seeds of the local Panther chapter were laid when Stokely Carmichael visited Seattle in April 1967. Speaking at Garfield High School over the objections of the Seattle School Board and many others, Carmichael addressed an estimated crowd of 4,000. He also spoke to a crowd of roughly the same size at the University of Washington. Before a Garfield audience that included a wide range of ages, Carmichael heralded a “new day” for blacks, a time when they were no longer obliged to wait for a freedom doled out by whites. “We are all born free,” Carmichael explained. “We are enslaved by institutional racism.” No longer did African Americans need to seek “integration” for a “small chosen class.” As more Southern blacks arrived in Northern urban centers, Carmichael believed Black Power was at hand: “The inner city in most major urban areas is already predominantly Negro. With the white rush to suburbia, Negroes will in the next three decades control the heart of our cities.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Seale quoted in *Black Against Empire*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Aaron Dixon, *My People Are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 113; Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, “A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest: The Seattle Chapter of the Black Panther Party,” in *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 59; Patrick Douglas, “Black Panthers on the Prowl,” *Seattle Magazine*, October 1968; Lane Smith, “Black Community Power Will End Abuses,” *Seattle Times*, April 20, 1967.

While numerous civil rights leaders in Seattle saw the white exodus to the suburbs as a loss of much-needed capital and resources, Carmichael saw it as an opportunity for blacks to exercise control. The question of what exactly blacks would control was left unanswered. Carmichael's speech shook up Seattle and was a catalyst in the formation of a local Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chapter in 1967. Many members of Seattle's SNCC chapter also joined the University of Washington Black Student Union (BSU), which formed in the spring of 1968. Graduates from Garfield and Franklin high schools, two increasingly-segregated schools, formed the nucleus of both organizations.<sup>32</sup>

### **The BPP's Roots in Segregated Neighborhoods**

Aaron Dixon, only 19 years old, was chosen as the Panther's captain. Elmer Dixon, Aaron's younger brother, 18 years old, was also a founding member. The Dixon family had moved from Champaign, Illinois to Seattle in 1957, in order for their father to begin work as an illustrator at Boeing. Along with their four children, Elmer Dixon, Jr. and his wife, Frances, set out from Illinois in their car toward a city about which they knew little. The couple figured they could drive around and find a house or an apartment to rent without much trouble. Instead, they shuffled from one dilapidated spot to the next, even spending two weeks holed up in a motel on Highway 99, as they found out that the places they wanted to rent were not available to African Americans. In 1960, the Dixons were finally able to buy a home, which was located on 33<sup>rd</sup> and Marion, in the Madrona (CD) area. It took some time, effort and numerous encounters with discriminatory property owners before the Dixons came to call the Madrona area home.<sup>33</sup>

While restrictive covenants, redlining and racial discrimination weighed heavily on the CD, in terms of economics and political power, it also became an area where relationships

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<sup>32</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 63-67; Douglas, "Black Panthers on the Prowl," *Seattle Magazine*.

<sup>33</sup> Zane and Jeffries, "A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest," 58-59; Elmer Dixon, Interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, WA, November 18, 2016.



flourished across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. In an interview, Aaron Dixon described life in the Madrona neighborhood as like growing up in a “cocoon.”<sup>34</sup> For Dixon, the area was a “little paradise of Asian, white, and Black families.” Dixon described Garfield High school as “the best example of racial harmony,” a place with a “rich tradition of openness.”<sup>35</sup>

Over the course of the 1960s, the image of Garfield slowly soured. Most black migrants to the city could only find housing in the CD, while the middle class of all races began to move out of the area. Between 1960 and 1970, Seattle’s black population grew from 26,901 to 37,868. Most found themselves clustered in the Garfield-Madrona neighborhoods. Meanwhile, within Garfield-Madrona, the Japanese American population plummeted from 3,575 to 1,670.<sup>36</sup>

Dixon and many other blacks and Asians who grew up in the CD during the 1950s and 1960s remember the area as largely devoid of racial animosity. At the very least, they were largely sheltered from the racial violence that consumed other parts of the country. There were, however, some reminders that segregated housing patterns were part of what kept physical violence to a minimum. “I remember listening to older teenagers in the neighborhood as they shared their battle stories of venturing out of the Central District, our safe haven, going to neighborhoods like Ballard, Queen Anne, and Shoreline, and being attacked by bat-waving, ‘nigger’-yelling white boys...” Dixon recalled in his memoir.<sup>37</sup>

Gary Owens, one of the original members of the Seattle BPP, enjoyed a similar childhood experience, although he spent several of his years living in various public housing developments throughout the city. Some of his fondest memories as a young boy involved going to visit his

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<sup>34</sup> Aaron Dixon, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, WA, March 8, 2013, <http://centralareacomm.blogspot.com/2013/02/aaron-author-activist-madrona.html> (accessed December 7, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 25; 53.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, Seattle School District, October 1977, 20-27.

<sup>37</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 50.

grandmother at her Chinatown/International District apartment. He sometimes received free food at Chinese restaurants, acts of generosity resulting from the many friendships his grandmother had developed. As with the Dixon brothers, many of his friends growing up were Asian.<sup>38</sup>

Seattle's diverse CD and ID neighborhoods paved the way for black and Asian connections. Aki Kurose, born in Seattle in 1925, was a rare Nisei. One of the few Japanese Americans who marched in support of Seattle's open housing movement in the early-1960s, Kurose also distinguished herself as an ally of the Panthers.<sup>39</sup> She grew up in the CD, in a close-knit neighborhood that included Chinese, Japanese and African American families. Her father, Harutoshi Kato, was a porter at Union Station, as were many Japanese Americans before World War II. After the family was incarcerated at Minidoka (Idaho) during the war, her father returned to work as a porter. During the war, African Americans stepped into the jobs vacated by Japanese Americans. Upon returning from incarceration, Japanese Americans began to be rehired, a trend that worried many of the black porters. Seeing that the two groups were being pitted against each other, Kato helped to form an interracial porter's union. Aki's mother, Akiko Kato, managed an apartment house that the family leased, even running the boiler room and cleaning the furnace. Her father baked jelly roles every Friday, as the family hosted a diverse set of friends from the neighborhood.<sup>40</sup>

Moved by her Quaker faith, Kurose was a well-known pacifist whose six children were raised in and around civil rights and peace activism. In the mid-1960s, the Kurose children were enrolled in a local Freedom School at Madrona Presbyterian church and also joined their mother

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<sup>38</sup> Garry Owens, interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, January 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Tagawa, interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, WA, December 15, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 104; Gail M. Nomura, "'Peace Empowers': The Testimony of Aki Kurose, a Woman of Color in the Pacific Northwest," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 22, no. 3 (Women's West, 2001), 76; Nancy Matsumoto, "Aki Kurose," Densho Encyclopedia, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Aki%20Kurose/> (accessed February 4, 2017).

in civil rights and anti-war marches and demonstrations. Aki and her husband Junelow (Junx), a machinist at Boeing, lived near the Dixon family. She became something of a “den mother” to children in the neighborhood, according to Elmer Dixon, who also remembered learning a few judo moves from Junx on the Kurose’s front lawn.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mike Tagawa’s Path to the BPP**

Like Kurose, Seattle BPP member Mike Tagawa’s upbringing placed him somewhat outside the mainstream of Seattle’s Japanese American community. Born in the Minidoka internment camp in 1944, Tagawa spent his early years living in the Renton and Rainier Vista public housing developments. His father, Takeo, passed away when Tagawa was nine-years-old. Takeo, who worked at Tashiro’s hardware store, had contracted tuberculosis after leaving Minidoka. He spent two years under care at Firland Sanatorium in the city’s North End before passing away. After his father died, Tagawa’s mother moved the family into the CD, where she raised her five children, along with taking care of her mother and father who also lived with them.

After her husband died, Masako enrolled at Edison Technical School, where she obtained a certificate that allowed her to become a nurse’s assistant. She worked at various hospitals, bringing in just enough of an income to survive. From high school valedictorian to a “housewife,” to working in order to provide for a family of six, Tagawa remembers his mother enduring a “tough life.” She insisted that the family attend church, beginning with Faith Bible Church and then the Japanese Baptist Church, though the family did not usually take part in social activities organized by the church. A busy work schedule for Tagawa’s mom made it difficult to become too involved. “As far as being a part of the social fabric of the Japanese

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<sup>41</sup> Elmer Dixon, Interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, WA, November 18, 2016.

community...since mom was a working mom and not having a daddy, our family was not a part of the movers and shakers of the Japanese community like some more well-off families,” explained Tagawa.<sup>42</sup>

As Diane Fujino has argued, activists like Yuri Kochiyama, Richard Aoki, and Mo Nishida came out of particular geographies which placed them at a “social distance” from the mainstream Japanese American community. According to Fujino, “proximity to Black communities in the postwar years was crucial to the development of a mature oppositional consciousness.” Relationships with African Americans and experiences with “structural and residential restrictions” informed their activism. Sheltered in part from the “assimilationist aspirations” of elite Nisei leadership, they managed to avoid some of the anti-black sentiment prevalent in Japanese American communities. Much of these anti-black feelings were fueled by the 1940s struggles to build communities within a segregated world post-incarceration. By the 1960s, the pressure to “dissociate” from African Americans only increased, “given that many Japanese Americans were ascending economically into the middle-class and residentially into white suburbia.” For some Japanese Americans, being associated with divorce marked them as outsiders within the community. For Tagawa, being raised by a single mother placed him at the margins, as did living in public housing.<sup>43</sup>

While at Washington Junior High School, Tagawa befriended a budding young artist named James Hendrix. Later known as Jimi, Hendrix was something of a familiar face in the CD during the 1950s. His parents, Al and Lucille Hendrix, enjoyed an on-again, off-again

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<sup>42</sup> Mike Tagawa, interview by Takashi Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, WA, December 15, 2016; Mike Tagawa, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, WA, December 9, 2014, *The People of the Central Area and Their Stories*, <http://centralareacomm.blogspot.com/2015/01/mike-tagawa-black-panther-party.html> (accessed December 7, 2016); Mike Tagawa, interview by Janet Jones, Seattle, WA, June 6, 2005, *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/tagawa.htm> (accessed December 6, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Diane C. Fujino, “Race, Place, Space, and Political Development: Japanese-American Radicalism in the ‘Pre-Movement’ 1960s,” *Social Justice* 35, no. 2 (2008), 57-72.

relationship, battling drug and alcohol addiction. James, as he was known then, often roamed the streets of the CD. He relied on the kindness of numerous families in the area who provided him with food and shelter when things went awry at home, a testament to the strong sense of community within many CD neighborhoods.<sup>44</sup> Tagawa and Hendrix became “smoking buddies,” sharing a growing desire to spend as little time in the classroom as possible. For several years, while a student at Washington, Tagawa worked at Tokuda’s drug store, stocking shelves and delivering prescriptions. The owner, George Tokuda, did what he could to help out the Tagawa family, providing Mike and his older sister Marion with jobs. The families knew each other from internment camp and George Tokuda did what he could to help Masako and her children. By the time Tagawa moved on to Garfield high school, he had stopped working at Tokuda’s and was hanging out with somewhat of a “rowdy” crowd. “School was very easy for me. I didn’t have any problem with that,” recalled Tagawa. One of his more memorable “larks” was stealing a car with his two buddies – one Japanese American and one Filipino – and joyriding around Seattle. The three were arrested after speeding by the old Lake Union steam plant, earning Tagawa a stay in a juvenile detention center for two weeks.<sup>45</sup>

As Tagawa’s reputation soured among the CD’s close-knit Japanese community, George Tokuda, his former employer, attempted to bring him back into line. “He went from being my employer, old family friend, to being extremely hostile to me,” said Tagawa. “I remember a couple of incidents there where he would start lecturing me about behaving right, and reputation, and Japanese aren’t supposed to act up. He came down hard on my ass.”<sup>46</sup> In delivering such admonitions, Tokuda may have been expressing his acute awareness that the place of Japanese Americans within Seattle remained precarious. The well-known pharmacist knew Seattle

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<sup>44</sup> Charles R. Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: a Biography of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 39-48.

<sup>45</sup> Mike Tagawa, interview by Takashi Matsumaru.

<sup>46</sup> Mike Tagawa, interview by Takashi Matsumaru.

intimately, having opened his first drug store located on 18<sup>th</sup> and Yesler in 1935. Back then, most residents in the CD were Jewish, though by World War II the Japanese and Chinese presence had grown significantly. After being incarcerated at Minidoka, Tokuda returned to a neighborhood that was predominantly black. Forced to sell his two drugstores on short notice – together they were valued at \$25,000-\$30,000 – for a combined \$1,500, Tokuda saw the Japanese community's postwar gains as particularly hard-earned. They were not to be taken for granted by some ignorant teenager. While the CD that Tagawa came to know in the 1950s and 1960s was a place where “all the races mixed without any problem at all,” Tokuda must have seen the area in a much different light. He was able to buy back his businesses after leaving Minidoka because the owners had struggled to maintain the business, in part because of their refusal to serve the area's Japanese residents.<sup>47</sup>

After graduating from Garfield High School in 1962, Tagawa enlisted in the Air Force. From Seattle's segregated yet diverse CD neighborhoods, Tagawa landed in San Antonio for a brief stop before being shipped off for basic training in Greenville, Mississippi. From the thick of the Mississippi Delta, he was then relocated to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1962, before moving on to Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Driving into Montgomery one day, Tagawa came across a sign that became etched into his memory. It was a scene of a man wearing a Klu Klux Klan outfit riding a horse while unleashing the infamous rope. The Klan's advertisement greeted passersby as they entered Montgomery. Before his introduction to the South, Tagawa “wasn't too hip politically,” as he phrased it in an interview. Greenville, however, was his introduction to the

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<sup>47</sup> “Testimony of Kip Tokuda,” September 9-11, 1981, Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Densho ID: denshopd-l67-00287, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx>; Doug Chin, “The Emergence of a Unique Asian American Community,” *International Examiner*, December 19, 1984; Ron Chew, “‘There's Not One Down There Now': George Tokuda's Drugstore Moves Down to the District,” *International Examiner*, November 30, 1979; Ken Mochizuki, “The Community Lost a Good Friend,” *International Examiner*, April 17, 1985.

constricting forces of Jim Crow that denied the black “brothers and sisters” within his unit the same access and service that he enjoyed in town. “It was heavy down there and it bothered me a lot because I came from Garfield, you know, and Garfield was good,” explained Tagawa.

In 1965 and 1966, Tagawa was stationed at the Travis Air Force Base, where he worked as a medic in the psychiatric ward. During this time, he made frequent trips to Berkeley, where he became involved in the antiwar movement. Seeing the connections between war and racism fueled a growing radicalism within Tagawa. He also gained an awareness of his malleable position within a black and white world. When he was stationed in Greenville, officers warned trainees not to head into town in racially-mixed groups. Tagawa would visit town with either black or white groups and remembers being treated well in both cases, as merchants and civilians in Greenville did not quite know how to place him.<sup>48</sup> When he returned to Seattle in 1966, he remained active in the antiwar movement. After the awakening provided by his time in the Air Force, Tagawa encountered Seattle with new eyes:

I was kind of like in a dream world, a little bubble up here in Garfield, living in the CD, because race relations and getting along, brotherhood and humanity...man, it wasn't like that in the rest of the country. And I started really trying to learn about that stuff and then at the same time I was also getting more pissed off about what they did to the Japanese too and what they did to us in World War II...put us in those concentration camps.<sup>49</sup>

The stench of racism and his interactions with some of the “early casualties” of the Vietnam War, who visited the psychiatric ward where Tagawa worked, pushed him toward activism. As he was driving by the arboretum one day with his wife, they came across the local chapter of the Panthers marching in formation. “We saw this incredible sight,” recalled Tagawa. “We saw 50 or 60 Black brothers and sisters in black leather, black pants, powder blue shirts and berets marching.” Tagawa and his wife stopped their car and got out to watch. He recognized one

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<sup>48</sup> Tagawa, interview by Janet Jones; Tagawa, interview by Madeline Crowley.

<sup>49</sup> Tagawa, interview by Janet Jones.

of the Panthers shouting out the cadence as Bobby White, a friend from his days at Coleman Elementary School. Tagawa and White had grown up together in the CD, which made Tagawa all the more ready for White's challenge. When his old friend pushed him to take a stand against injustice, Tagawa found himself drawn in. But not being black, as he put it to his friend, made it difficult for Tagawa to envision himself as a Panther. White kept pressing. "Well, you ain't White either," he replied. Tagawa joined the party later that day in 1968.

Although he was drawn to the ideology of the Panthers, he felt nonviolent movements and "potentially violent" movements went "hand-in-hand." Together, the "yin" of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s message and the "yang" of the Panthers could challenge the "boiling" racism that Tagawa had witnessed. Peace, love, and brotherhood could build some level of unity but Tagawa wanted to align himself with a movement that challenged the worst perpetrators of violence, the ones who were "not going to listen to the intellectual reasoning and rationality of Martin Luther King." Tagawa saw the Panthers as targeting the "knuckleheads" intent on carrying out racial violence, the forces immune to reason and logic.<sup>50</sup>

His boldness in joining the Panthers only extended so far. After serving in the military, Tagawa had enrolled at Seattle Community College in 1966. It was there where he met his wife, a white liberal from Shoreline, a suburb north of Seattle. The two were married from 1968 to 1970. Although his wife was excited and supportive of his decision, he kept his identity as a Panther shielded from the rest of his family. "I thought about it and I was excited about telling them but then I thought this is going to worry them more than anything else." Though a part of him wanted to share the good news with his family, he continually put it off, knowing the fear it would induce. Over time, he would become familiar with his reputation as something of a "hoodlum" within some segments of the Japanese American community. "A lot of them thought

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<sup>50</sup> Tagawa, interview by Janet Jones.



that I must have been crazy,” said Tagawa in an interview conducted in 2005. “I must have been doing too many drugs and that my brain was gone.” From his vantage point, Tagawa believed that Japanese Americans in Seattle were ignorant of the Panthers and largely unsympathetic. Given their history of being incarcerated during World War II and growing up in racially-segregated neighborhoods, Japanese Americans “should have known” more about what fueled the Panthers, according to Tagawa.<sup>51</sup>

In blending nonviolent civil rights protests and Black Power, Tagawa saw the Panthers as part of a movement borne out of the violence of the state. As a Panther, Tagawa brought his military experience to bear, focusing on drilling new recruits in the skills of marching and shooting. Weapons training, a task he shared with Bobby Harding, involved loading up a van of Panthers and driving out to a gravel pit in Issaquah (a city east of Seattle). There, Panthers were drilled on how to use and maintain their weapons. Tagawa also engaged in the grunt work of selling the party newspaper downtown, as well as teaching political education classes. When teaching classes, Tagawa did his best to avoid overly-theoretical material. He recognized that few rank-and-file members wanted to delve into the intricacies of Mao’s Red Book in the way that some party leaders did.<sup>52</sup>

### **Japanese Americans, Violence, and Law and Order**

A generation apart from the young Seattleites who joined the Panthers, George Tokuda, Tagawa’s former employer, found himself in a much different position during the late 1960s. He struggled to keep his pharmacy business going as many of his longtime customers were leaving the area. The year of 1968, in particular, was a time of sleepless nights. After installing grating on the windows to protect his business from firebombs, he still found himself sleeping overnight

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid; Tagawa, interview by Takashi Matsumaru.

<sup>52</sup> Tagawa, interview by Janet Jones; Tagawa, interview by Takashi Matsumaru.

in his store after hearing from police that they were shorthanded and unable to keep watch in the area. Writing to their daughter who was away that summer, his wife Tama, explained their ordeal: “Your father lost his store during the war to the hatred of the white man. Now it is threatened by the fury of the black man. It seems unfair, but I suppose that the elephant cannot watch out for the ants it steps on.” Tokuda’s losses during Seattle’s urban rebellion were significant. Among the damage, his store was firebombed, he was held up three times in the space of one year, and break-ins began occurring about twice per month. On three occasions, he was forced to deal with fires that were set within his store. Kiyoshi Yasui, the owner of Yesler Hardware, and Tom Sakai, the owner of a grocery and gift store on Yesler Way, experienced similar “nights of terror,” as their businesses came under siege. When Tokuda outlined the desperate state of affairs within the CD to city council, he was asked to come back with a list of grievances. In attempting to document some of the problems, he came across 68 people who had been “mugged or robbed” within the last year. Many mom and pop stores run by Japanese families were forced to move out of the CD after being hit by firebombs and burglaries.<sup>53</sup>

Though 1968 was a year of trepidation for George Tokuda, he remained committed to keeping his business in the CD as long it remained possible. Just under two months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Tokuda became one of the founders of Liberty Bank. Billed as the Northwest’s first “interracial” bank, Tokuda was the only Asian founder and epitomized the bank’s desire to build a multiracial clientele, beginning in the CD and gradually extending beyond. At its roots, however, Liberty was a project aimed at increasing black access to loans, a way around the white world of banking.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ken Mochizuki, “The Community Lost a Good Friend,” *International Examiner*, April 17, 1985.

<sup>54</sup> Michelle Purnell-Hepburn, Interview by Takashi Matsumaru, Seattle, WA, August 14, 2015; Herb Robinson, “Multiracial Bank Breaks New Ground,” *Seattle Times*, May 21, 1968; Marcia Schultz, “Bankers Help Others Join ‘Establishment,’” *Seattle Times*, February 21, 1971; Dominic Gates, “Banking Pioneer Worked for Black Financial

A growing number of small businesses in the CD spent 1968 with windows boarded up by plywood or mesh screens. Most of those hit by violence were owned by “Oriental and Jewish” merchants, according to the *Seattle Times* but several were owned by blacks. Fears of rising insurance costs for both businesses and homes in the area were growing. While much of the damage had been covered by insurance policies, some companies were beginning to pull out of the area.<sup>55</sup>

In August 1968, Toru Sakahara and other leaders of the Seattle chapter of the JACL met with Carl Miller, a leader of the Seattle BPP. Writing to George Fugami, the president of the Seattle JACL, Sakahara described the meeting as an effort to “establish some lines of communication.” In his written report, Sakahara, a Japanese American attorney, was largely sympathetic in his assessment of Miller. He gave a nod to the “historical bias” that produced the Panthers but doubted that “Japanese Americans or any other non-white group” would “identify” with the ideology of black militants. One tension running through the two-and-a-half hour meeting was the issue of “law and order,” as Sakahara brought up the complaints of Japanese Americans whose properties and businesses had been damaged by black protestors. He was well aware that “harsh and insensitive justice” drove a wedge between the police and black Seattleites, but wanted to protect the interests of Japanese Americans who lived and worked in the CD. Miller, though apologetic for the damage done to Japanese American property, attributed some of the blame to storeowners in the CD who simply took money from residents without giving back to the area. Miller added to his veiled critique by explaining that blacks in Seattle were aware of the lack of Asian participation in meetings and protests related to civil rights. If

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Equality,” *Seattle Times*, March 28, 2005; Warren Mantz, “Liberty Bank Banks Growth,” *Seattle Times*, March 20, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> Don Hannula, “Unrest Has Impact on Central Area’s Business Structure,” *Seattle Times*, August 6, 1968, box 11, folder: “Seattle’s Mini-Riots and Rumors/Threats of Riot, 1965-1975,” W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

Asians were looking to show solidarity with African Americans, Miller argued, the issue of police brutality would be a great place to start.<sup>56</sup>

### **Mineo Katagiri and the Call for Black/Asian Solidarity**

A few within Seattle's Japanese community were very sympathetic to such ideas, though police brutality remained an issue that often left blacks fighting a lonely battle. An urban minister within the United Church of Christ, Mineo Katagiri saw the city and country moving toward an economy ruled by technology. Justice and human values were being crowded out in an era of rapid technological change. With the U.S. harnessing its latest technological advancements and vast resources to wage war, the misery of those left on the fringes of society would only be compounded. In the process, the U.S. would become – if it wasn't already – the most "hated nation in the world," a country intoxicated by its power.<sup>57</sup>

On the whole, Katagiri saw the cumulative result of urban renewal, the War on Poverty, and the host of employment training programs adopted in cities throughout the nation as inherently flawed in their approach. They would only worsen problems. Expectations might rise over time, only to be frustrated, leading to "cataclysmic" results. So long as white Americans continued to support policies that aimed to gild "ghettos," the future was bleak. Although the nation remained transfixed by black protest and violence, Katagiri recognized that white Americans played an outsized role in shaping life in black communities. Katagiri understood and articulated the clear connections between the CD and the rest of the city. The damage done by

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from Toru Sakahara to George Fugami, August 12, 1968, box 9, folder "Black Panthers, 1968," Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

<sup>57</sup> Lane Smith, "Church Must Shape Metropolis Worthy of Man, Says Minister," *Seattle Times*, May 27, 1967.

racial segregation was concentrated in the CD but its effects rippled out and affected the entire city.<sup>58</sup>

In an article written for the *Seattle P-I* in March 1968, Katagiri detailed the conundrum facing blacks in Seattle: as their civil rights increased – at least on paper – they fell further behind white residents from an economic standpoint. In 1960 the median income gap between white and black families was \$2,602; in 1961 it was \$2,790; in 1962 – \$2,907; in 1963 – \$3,803; in 1964 – \$3,019; in 1965 – \$3,119. “In other words,” Katagiri wrote, “the gap between white and Negro families is growing wider.” The economic status of African Americans in Seattle was “deteriorating in spite of all the Civil Rights activities of the last twenty years.”<sup>59</sup>

When black communities boiled over with frustration, Katagiri argued, much of it had to do with the unemployment or underemployment of black youth. Throughout the country, the spoils of industrial development and new job creation had moved to the suburbs. Two thirds of all new industrial building and more than half of all new commercial building were located in suburbs. For African Americans denied economic opportunity, increasing political power in cities like Gary and Newark brought optimism. In Seattle, however, black voting power was minimal. In such a white city, Katagiri argued, even “coalition politics” would not “win bread and butter for the poor.” This pushed African Americans toward “protest politics”; many of these protests, such as those against welfare cuts, were a symptom of the War on Poverty having to “fight for its life.” The arena of politics would, in all likelihood, yield little.<sup>60</sup>

What Katagiri understood better than most Japanese Americans was the sense of frustration that African Americans were feeling, as avenues toward equality and justice were

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<sup>58</sup> “Clergyman Urges Involvement in Crisis,” *Seattle P-I*, May 4, 1968, box 13, folder 10, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>59</sup> Mineo Katagiri, “It Happened in Watts,” *Seattle P-I*, March 3, 1968, box 13, folder 31: “Racial Riots, 1967-1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

clogged down or slammed shut. He had come to the conclusion that the state was willing to offer so little to African Americans – other than a violent police presence – that politics, at least in the traditional sense, might be thrown out the window. He saw that those most “disillusioned” within the black community “no longer believe that this society will grant the Negro freedom, jobs, power, or anything else.” They had arrived at the conclusion that the only recourse remaining was to “protest violently.” According to Katagiri, they were “unfortunately right,” pointing to Watts, Newark, and Cleveland, as examples where violence had led to some positive changes. Seattle could expect more violence, Katagiri believed, until the city decided to “move with greater speed and imagination in the immediate future” to address the reason for the anger.<sup>61</sup>

A leader in various civil rights organizations throughout the 1960s – including the CACRC – Katagiri was a force pushing Japanese Americans toward issues of justice and equality.<sup>62</sup> In 1969, Katagiri and a group of Asian American activists founded the Asian Coalition for Equality (ACE). Its membership included Japanese Americans Phil Hayasaka and Larry Matsuda, as well as Filipinos A. Barreto Ogilvie and Sonny Tangalin. Chinese Americans were also a part of the organization.<sup>63</sup> As director of ACE, Katagiri worked to develop a consciousness within the Asian American community, in order to make them more aware of the effects of discrimination on them, as well as other “minorities.” In an opening statement to the press, Katagiri outlined the motivation for founding ACE: “Too long we have permitted the American Indians to be exploited, the Mexican migrant to wander the face of this land for minimal return and the black man to carry the struggle for human rights and decency.” The struggle now was about “human rights,” Katagiri argued, and Asians needed to fight for human

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Pieroth, “Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968,” 404.

<sup>63</sup> Gary Iwamoto, “A Picture of the ‘70s,” *International Examiner*, December 31, 1979.

rights alongside other races in the realm of employment, housing, and politics. The specific direction of the struggle would be determined by African Americans, according to Katagiri.<sup>64</sup>

In June 1969, Katagiri joined with Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa, of the American Baptist Convention at a public meeting at the Japanese Baptist Church to drive home the need for Asian American involvement in the human rights struggle. “We want to hit at the idea that American society has provided for the upward mobility of the Japanese American,” said Morikawa. The reality of “institutionalized racism” undercut any such image, explained Katagiri. Racism remained a barrier in the corporate world especially, as executive positions remained closed to Japanese Americans. Rather than making any number of sacrifices in order to assimilate, Katagiri suggested that Japanese Americans embrace their identity and heritage. “The whole idea of the melting pot theory has to be postponed,” he added. Japanese Americans needed instead to exercise their power and be willing to advocate for change. “We do have an enormous power leverage,” said Katagiri. “Black people will tell me, ‘You Japanese Americans are in such a favored position we won’t reach for years.’ But we aren’t using our leverage. In 10 to 15 years in Seattle Orientals are going to rise and gain their identity on the coattails of the blacks.” For Katagiri, the momentum provided by the black freedom struggle was undeniable. Japanese Americans could join in the movement but needed to be “helped to realize who they are.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Interpreting Race and Violence**

Attempts by the Seattle JACL to reach out to African Americans stirred controversy within the Japanese community. Ben Yorita, the head of the social studies department at Franklin High School, was one of several members sympathetic to the idea of Black Power. Sharing his thoughts in the JACL newsletter, Yorita argued that although the Nisei did not have it made, they

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<sup>64</sup> “Seattle Orientals Urged to Join Rights Struggle,” *Seattle Times*, June 3, 1969.

<sup>65</sup> “Japanese-Americans ‘Not Aggressive,’” *Seattle Times*, June 23, 1969.

were slowly entering the mainstream. They were heading toward “integration and ultimately amalgamation.” The “strong heritage of the issei” had enabled Niseis to develop “self pride,” making it possible to transcend their ethnic “ghetto.” They also benefitted from “Japanophiles,” who “helped through their admiration of things Japanese.” African Americans, Yorita believed, were heading in the right direction by turning inward and attempting to build unity based on their own rich heritage. “Black communities with black businesses, black schools with black curriculum, blacks determining their own destinies are the prerequisites to create the new black man,” wrote Yorita.<sup>66</sup>

Other JACL leaders were less willing to express solidarity with Japanese Americans. At a November 1968 meeting, Donald Kazama, chairman of the human relations committee, spoke to the need to cooperate with black organizations in the CD. His views were soon swept aside by those who felt the area’s elderly Japanese residents and business-owners were “bearing the brunt” of a “meaningless crime spree.” There was little need for debate and dialogue. What was needed was for the JACL to push the mayor and SPD to crack down on the perpetrators. Eventually, the board passed a motion to draft a letter to the mayor “asking for his cooperation in restoring law and order.”<sup>67</sup>

Some within the JACL, such as Phil Hayasaka, tried to nudge the organization toward a more nuanced understanding of “law and order.” African Americans in Seattle, he pointed out in the monthly JACL newsletter, faced “increased repression” within a system that treated blacks as “guilty until proven innocent.” Hayasaka situated the incarceration of Japanese Americans

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<sup>66</sup> Ben Yorita, “Parallels of Nisei and Black Heritage,” *JACL Reporter* 4, no. 8, August 1968, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1968,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, 0217: 006, UWSC.

<sup>67</sup> “Chapter to Draft Strong Letter to Mayor for Stronger Police Protection,” *JACL Reporter*, 5, no. 12, December 1968, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1968,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.



during World War II in a similar light to the oppression of African Americans: “History is filled with instances where the majority, in the name of law and order, has mistreated the minority.” Without a “firm foundation of justice and equality for all, regardless of color, religion, or economic status,” Hayasaka argued, law and order would continue to be seen by many as a weapon used to maintain the status quo. Those in pursuit of justice would in turn be forced to sweep aside “tranquility and order,” in their effort to force change.<sup>68</sup>

At the end of the summer of 1968, more than one million dollars in property loss had been caused by arson and fire bombings; more than \$75,00 of property damage was reported, from broken windows to smashed cars and vandalized businesses. Like Hayasaka, many working class or poor African Americans living in the CD saw the violence and crime engulfing their neighborhoods as growing out of systemic injustice. The city had a long history of ignoring the needs of its black residents. The lack of basic city services allowed garbage, rats, and blighted buildings to proliferate. An investigation by a *Seattle Times* reporter illustrated some of the class tensions that shaped how the urban rebellions were being interpreted. With much of the focus on business owners and their struggles, some black residents in the CD questioned the city’s obsession with crimes committed by the lower-classes. “The income level determines police response in the sense that some offenses are not policed because the offenders are landlords, merchants or similar types,” noted one black resident interviewed by the *Times*. “The police simply don’t look upon them as criminals. But in offenses involving poor people, the assumption of criminality is made.” Others were quick to point out that though they despised the way police interacted with black residents, the problem extended well beyond the SPD. The unjust treatment

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<sup>68</sup> Y. Philip Hayasaka, “Law and Order...What Does It Mean?” *JACL Reporter*, 5, no. 12, December 1968, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1968,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

of tenants by landlords, draconian garnishment laws and a corrupt prosecuting attorney – Charles O. Carroll – were part of a long list of evils spelled out by black residents. The police were simply enforcing the will of a hostile white society.

As far as the police were concerned, black residents of the CD emphasized that the problems consisted of more than just the violence carried out by guns and night sticks. The callous indifference of officers was also duly noted, as they were accused of often refusing to help black residents in need of aid. Reflecting the disillusionment felt by many, one resident sought to put the violence of the bombings and vandalism in context. It was, for some, the best way they knew how to secure their rights, in a city so unwilling to meet basic black demands. “If it means flattening this \_\_\_\_ city, then that’s what we have to do. Because we’re going to have some justice.”<sup>69</sup>

If many blacks living in Seattle saw the violence as political, a growing number of whites saw it as the result of a Civil Rights movement run amok. Speaking before the Seattle-King County Bar Association in September 1968, Mayor Dorm Braman argued that the nation was in the midst of a “quiet revolt,” embodied by the presidential campaign of George Wallace. The city of Seattle, Braman explained, was growing tired of racists, both black and white. Braman spoke of handling a phone call from a caller who volunteered 500 armed men should the mayor need any help in quelling the city’s “racial disorders.” He declined the offer, “emphatically,” letting his audience know that he had “never been an enemy of black people.” It was, however,

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<sup>69</sup> Ray Ruppert and Michael J. Parks, “City and the Central Area: An Abrasive Relationship,” *Seattle Times*, June 15, 1969, box 12, folder: “Seattle Police Dept. Re. Minorities and ‘Radicals,’ 1955-1974,” W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC; Ray Ruppert, “Black View of Our Police: Worse Elsewhere, But...” *Seattle Times*, June 15, 1969, box 12, folder: “Seattle Police Dept. Re. Minorities and ‘Radicals,’ 1955-1974,” W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

“time to consider the rights of victims of crimes and their families.” His speech earned an emphatic applause, according to the *Seattle-PI* newspaper.<sup>70</sup>

One of the fallouts from Seattle’s urban rebellion was a growing chorus of demands from blacks living in the CD, many of them middle-class, calling for a police precinct in the area. They also called for an external review system to monitor the police department.<sup>71</sup> By the time the JACL’s letter of protest arrived at Mayor Dorm Braman’s office in January 1969, its main focus was on “civil unrest,” which was characterized as “the greatest public problem facing our government and community.” While Seattle JACL president George Fugami also called for jobs to be given to “those denied by historical bias,” ensuring police protection, arrests, and the prosecution of criminals was the primary goal.<sup>72</sup>

By the end of 1969, Japanese Americans living or working in the CD grew even more exasperated with what they saw as a lack of police protection. A JACL meeting with representatives of the SPD drew a standing-room only crowd. Japanese Americans spoke of muggings and vandalism and fear that had engulfed the area. SPD officials admitted the scope of the problem, saying that they had documented more than 200 reported “purse snatchings” and 4,000 burglaries in the CD between January and September of 1969. The police officers who attended the meeting attributed much of the crime problem to the area’s 325 high school dropouts. There was no shortage of patrol cars that roamed through the CD, according to the

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<sup>70</sup> “Mayor Says Seattle Fed Up With Racists,” *Seattle P-I*, September 27, 1968, box 3, folder 4: “Police, 1966-1969, n.d.,” Lola Day Papers, Accession no. 2746-001, UWSC.

<sup>71</sup> “Group Demands Police Precinct for Central Area,” *Seattle Times*, June 15, 1969, box 12, folder: “Seattle Police Dept. Re. Minorities and ‘Radicals,’ 1955-1974,” W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from George Fugami to Dorm Braman, January 31, 1969, box 3, folder “Outgoing Letters, January-August 1969,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

police, along with the 41 plain-clothes officers who worked the beat. The fears of those attending the meeting were far from allayed.<sup>73</sup>

### **The BPP Turn Toward Community-Building**

Although the BPP had its hand in some of the firebombings that became a regular occurrence in Seattle during the late-1960s, the violence of the era extended well beyond the party. By July of 1968, the Seattle BPP – thanks in large part to the prominence of Huey Newton and the Oakland branch – had received more than 300 applications. In terms of actual members, the branch remained small, consisting of only 25 members by 1970. Some recruits became known as “Rally Panthers,” those eager to don the uniform but unwilling to assume the attendant responsibilities. Early on, many blacks living in the CD were fearful of the Panthers. The party’s national reputation played a part, as did regular confrontations with the SPD.<sup>74</sup>

While the SBPP’s simmering battle with police was controversial, their attention to the plight of the black poor and working class earned the party respect. In September 1968, a group of Panthers stormed into Rainier Beach High School in Southeast Seattle, demanding to see the principle. They had been drawn to the school by calls from black mothers protesting the treatment of their children at the school. While rumors were swirling as to what had actually happened, it turned out that a 16-year-old white student had injured a 14-year-old black student during a fight. The incident was part of ongoing friction related to the school district’s voluntary desegregation program. With an enrollment of 2,050, most of the students at Rainier Beach were white. Only 100 were black; of these, 60 were transfer students. The situation was eventually defused but highlighted lingering concerns among black parents. Some felt that their children

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<sup>73</sup> “Police Department Representatives Answer to Community Charges of Inadequate Protection,” *JACL Reporter*, 6, no. 10, October 1969, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1969-1970,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217-006, UWSC.

<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, “A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest,” 60.

were being subjected to white racism and hostility in the name of school desegregation.<sup>75</sup> With much of the media focus on the Panther's presence, the underlying issue that prompted their arrival was easily ignored. The confrontation between the students, according to the *Afro American Journal*, a black nationalist newspaper, was a product of housing discrimination. City policies that paved the way for "ghetto expansion" to the south of the CD, rather than north, fueled bitterness among white residents of Southeast Seattle. As a result, black students in Rainier Beach High School found themselves isolated in "one of the more racially hostile 'WHITE AREAS' of the city," according to the *Journal*.<sup>76</sup>

The party's free breakfast program earned accolades but it also garnered suspicion. Between 1969 and 1977, the SBPP free breakfast program served an estimated 300,000 meals, serving children of all races.<sup>77</sup> Led by Garry Owens, the Panthers were able to secure space at the Atlantic Street Center (ASC), run by Tsuguo "Ike" Ikeda. Owens and other Panthers, including Elmer Dixon, had participated in numerous programs run by the neighborhood youth center. The ASC location was the first of what would become five Panther free breakfast program locations. They also ran free breakfast programs within the city's four main public housing developments: High Point, Holly Park, Rainier Vista, and Yesler. When first approached by Panther leadership, Ikeda was uncertain about offering up space at the center for the Panther breakfast program. After taking a week to mull it over it, Ikeda allowed the Panthers to use the space.<sup>78</sup>

Incarcerated at Minidoka during World War II, Ikeda, a Nisei, went on to earn a master's degree in social work from the University of Washington. He was appointed executive director

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<sup>75</sup> Constantine Angelos, "Principal Talks to Students," *Seattle Times*, September 9, 1968; Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, "A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest," 63-64; Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 109-110.

<sup>76</sup> "Crisis! Ends on a Disappointing Note," *Afro American Journal*, September 12, 1968.

<sup>77</sup> Garry Owens, interview by Takashi Matsumaru, Seattle Washington, January 22, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Tsuguo Ike Ikeda, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, Washington, July 1, 2015, <http://centralareacomm.blogspot.com/2015/06/tsuguo-ike-ikeda-former-director.html> (accessed February 7, 2017); Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, "A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest," 68-69.

of the ASC in 1953, a position he held for 33 years. Much of his commitment to social justice emanated from his experience being incarcerated at Minidoka during World War II. As head of the ASC, Ikeda helped to redirect the center away from its settlement house roots and toward meeting the social services needs of young people in the area. During the 1960s, Ikeda began to immerse himself in the topic of juvenile delinquency. With so much attention focused on the individual, Ikeda argued for the importance of understanding the social settings that gave rise to delinquency. Ikeda saw increased policing as only a temporary solution to problems that had more to do with a society shifting toward a post-industrial landscape.<sup>79</sup>

When the Panthers first approached Ikeda, he could not help but be leery given the sensationalized media coverage that tracked their every move. He was aware of rumors that the Panthers had obtained food for the free breakfast program through extortion. While he did not agree with all of their tactics, Ikeda saw the Panthers as a product of an unjust system. What he also realized was that the ASC enjoyed generous financial support from the United Way and the Methodist church. “[The Panthers] didn’t have enough community to back them up and they were trying to feed hungry, needy children,” Ikeda explained, reflecting back on the period in an interview. “Elmer [Dixon] and the BPP were feeding hungry children so I honestly couldn’t condemn their method of fundraising.”<sup>80</sup>

Ikeda was staunch in his support, even as the FBI began urging him to part ways with the BPP. He told an FBI agent who visited him on a monthly basis to inform the SPD that the Panthers were providing much-needed meals five days a week during the school year. They were

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<sup>79</sup> Tsuguo Ike Ikeda, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, Washington, July 1, 2015; Jerry Large, “Seattle Activist ‘Ike’ Ikeda was a Giant in the Community,” *Seattle Times*, December 23, 2015; Bernard Salazar and Tsuguo Ikeda, “Understanding and Preventing Youth Problems and Juvenile Delinquency,” State of Washington Citizen’s Committee on Crime, Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crimes Task Force, November 1968 (from personal collection of Tsuguo Ike Ikeda).

<sup>80</sup> Tsuguo Ike Ikeda, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, Washington, July 1, 2015.

also diligent in cleaning up after themselves.<sup>81</sup> As can be gathered from the FBI monitoring of the free breakfast program, it was seen as a particular threat. While the FBI and local police viewed the Seattle chapter of the BPP as relatively tame, the breakfast program earned particular scrutiny. While the limits of BPP firepower were becoming clear in Seattle and in other cities, the breakfast program was seen as one with revolutionary potential. Speaking before the House Committee on Internal Security in 1970, Seattle police sergeant Archie Porter described the threat it posed: “In their breakfast program they are attempting to indoctrinate the youngsters and if they are able to do this, then they could become a serious threat to our Nation and the security of our Nation.”<sup>82</sup>

In reality, the Panthers were shining a light on just how poorly the state served the needs of the poor and working classes. This, as evidenced by the free breakfast program, included those of all races. Combining healthy meals with lessons in black history, the free breakfast program filled a massive void left by Seattle public schools. As dropout rates climbed among black students during the 1960s, many within the black community were outraged by the cumulative failure of the city’s public education system. A miserable education system, the Panthers argued, was part of what produced the capitalist exploitation that squeezed black communities. Through the teaching of white supremacy from elementary education onward, students of all races were becoming indoctrinated to accept and perpetuate the conditions that produced “ghettos.” As the Seattle public school system ramped up its school desegregation efforts in the late-1960s and through the 1970s, numerous black critics were skeptical of a numbers-based approach to “integration.” Such “integration,” explained a 1968 editorial in the *Afro American Journal* maintained a curriculum that continued to ignore the histories and identities of black students. It

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<sup>81</sup> Tsuguo Ike Ikeda, interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, Washington, July 1, 2015.

<sup>82</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Internal Security, *Black Panther Party, Part 2, Investigation of Seattle Chapter*, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1970, 4308.

was “token” integration that required blacks in Seattle to solve all of the riddles thrown their way by white society. White Seattle had no “intention of accepting the social and economic aspects, fundamental to any integration.”<sup>83</sup>

Since its inception, the Seattle BPP had dealt with a steady stream of calls from residents who felt victimized by the public school system, landlords, the police department, or even abusive spouses. In one incident, a group of Panthers were dispatched to help a single mother whose landlord had ripped off the front door of her house after she had fallen behind on the rent. They visited the landlord’s house, found the door and put it back in its original location. By 1970, the Seattle BPP was running a range of community programs that exposed the limits of the welfare state.<sup>84</sup>

### **A Failure to Understand the Roots of Violence**

Within the whirlwind of violence that engulfed Seattle during the late-1960s, the Washington State Commission on Race and Violence released a report in 1969. The report arrived a year after the Kerner Commission leveled its claim that “White society” had produced the “separate and unequal” conditions that bred urban rebellions. Washington State’s version downplayed “overt” white racism, presenting “institutionalized prejudice” as the main impediment to African Americans. While extremists – both black and white – played a role in poisoning the atmosphere, the crux of the problem was that the “processes of democracy unintentionally” discriminated against blacks. As if completely ignorant of the current political

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<sup>83</sup> “Editorial,” *Afro American Journal*, August 15, 1968.

<sup>84</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 109; Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, “A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest,” 69-82.



climate, the commission held out hope that “the silent middle” of both races would help the nation move beyond the malaise.<sup>85</sup>

What the commission discovered was that the criminal justice system was broken. On a national level, between 1930 and 1959, 3,666 prisoners were executed via capital punishment. Of those, 1,972 were Black, 1,653 were white, and 41 were of “other” races. Although more than half of those executed were black, “far less than half of the capital crimes were committed by blacks.” Within the state of Washington, the disparity was particularly disturbing. As of 1969, 90 percent of those on death row in Washington were black. Blacks made up less than 2 percent of the state’s total population. In the face of such deep-seated problems, the commission issued the following recommendation: “The least that society might do, therefore, is to make those who administer justice more understanding of the cultural implications of race and poverty.” The commission’s focus on “sensitivity training” for judges and other public officials also read as an insignificant response to a monumental problem. If indeed society’s institutions discriminated against African Americans at every turn, a more compassionate judicial system would do little to alter outcomes.<sup>86</sup>

Moving down a level, the report found that most crimes committed by African Americans were carried out against black victims. This went against the grain of public understanding and needed to be reinforced. “The law abiding citizens of Negro communities suffer more from crime than their more affluent white counterparts,” the report read, a statement backed up by statistics. Non-whites, according to the report, had a “78 percent greater change of suffering from a major crime than whites.” Non-white women were 3.7 times more likely to be raped than white women. In terms of robberies, non-whites were 3.5 times more likely to be the victims than

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<sup>85</sup> *Race and Violence in Washington State*, February 1969, Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Civil Disorder, 9-10; 25; 49.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 12; 51.

whites. In short, “the greatest victims of crime” were the “poor and disadvantaged residents of the ghetto.” High crime rates and “abrasive” encounters with police officers left those living in “ghettos” with a “double problem.” On the one hand, they felt abandoned by the police; on the other they felt victimized by a “double standard of justice,” which further eroded their relationship with the police. Although the Washington State report downplayed the issue of police brutality, the investigators did find “at least six authenticated cases,” stemming from the summer of 1968.<sup>87</sup>

A conservative rejoinder to the Kerner Report, the Washington State version emblemized the unwillingness of local and state officials to acknowledge the particular root of the problems faced by African Americans. Slavery was assigned a trivial role in the report’s detailing of Washington’s history, referenced only to explain how the “life of nearly all Negroes [was] one of social chaos.” Where the Urban League in Seattle found evidence of strong family bonds and resource networks within the CD, the Washington commission found chaos, in the form of “illegitimacy, drug usage, and alcoholism.” Slavery, in the commission’s historical interpretation, was a distant relic. African Americans, far from a distinct population, made up the “last major wave of ‘immigrants’” to the U.S, since they had migrated from southern states into northern urban centers. Their lives mirrored that of other immigrants. To African Americans angered by white racism, the report offered a note of caution. Whites in Seattle and the rest of the state were far removed from the evils of slavery, according to the commission, and were not “responsible for the past or present actions of others.” After all, the ancestors of whites in Washington State only arrived in the region after the Civil War; as a result, it was “quite likely” that they had “hardly ever encountered a Negro, let alone mistreated him.” Drawn out of a geographical and figurative distancing from slavery, the commission’s account of state history

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 25; 49.

was Northwest exceptionalism at its finest. It reduced slavery from an issue global in scope to a regional problem. Any area free of a large black population was thereby severed from the racial ideologies supporting slavery – never mind the battle over “free” labor at the heart of westward expansion.<sup>88</sup>

Interestingly, the report assumed that all “ghetto-dwellers” were black and had little to say about other non-whites living in areas like the CD. Japanese Americans were mentioned on only one occasion, in a passing acknowledgement that they were “the greatest victims of discrimination,” followed by blacks and Indians. This assessment was tied to the fact that Japanese American educational success was not reflected in their incomes; for African Americans, a lack of education correlated to lower pay. By cleverly – and misleadingly – tiptoeing around race, the commission created a world in which Japanese Americans and African Americans traveled relatively similar paths. When it came to housing, however, the distance was clear and undeniable, as the report acknowledged that economic disparity was “not the cause” of black segregation. Instead, segregation was largely the product of discrimination in obtaining housing, a finding that mirrored the Kerner Report.<sup>89</sup>

Far from inconsequential, such theorizing was of great significance. The Washington State report was a product of seven months of research and the collective musings of elected officials, university presidents, banking executives, and other powerful leaders. It revealed the damage wrought by the region’s carefully-crafted image of exceptionalism, which allowed government officials to skip around real problems. Too many saw the city of Seattle as existing in rarefied air, outside of a national economy where blacks consistently paid more for less. The effects of racial discrimination left African Americans “both overpoliced and underprotected in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 1-5; 10; 21-23.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 1; 14-17; 21; *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 120.

their lives and property.”<sup>90</sup> This was the case in Seattle as it was in cities with much larger black populations.<sup>91</sup>

It remained an open question just how many policymakers in Seattle and throughout the state read the report. When the Kerner report had come out a year earlier in 1968, Charles Z. Smith was serving as a King County Superior Court judge. The first black judge in Washington State, Smith encouraged his fellow judges on the superior court to read the report. Of the 21 other judges on the court, only three were willing to read the report. One was Asian, the other was Jewish, and the third judge was an older white man who was something of a mentor to Smith. “The others simply would not read it,” Smith would later recall. “As far as they were concerned it was a piece of garbage and wasn’t worth the time it would take to read it.”<sup>92</sup>

Cliff Hooper, writing in the *Afro American Journal*, pounced on the Kramer report, applauding its “dexterity” in maneuvering around the central issue of white racism. As was often the case, Hooper argued, it was easier to focus on the alleged “cultural deprivation” of blacks as an explanation for violence and crime. The nation’s obsession with black “crimes” was akin to a “rapist discussing the corrupted chastity of its victims.” Hooper also singled out the commission’s assertion that a minority of whites deserved blame for their racial hostility. Schools throughout the country were becoming more segregated because of the actions of white society as a whole, not just the actions of a “stupid fraction” of racists. To reason otherwise was to be moved by a “legacy of racist dementia.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Quote from Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (1985; repr., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 118.

<sup>91</sup> *Race and Violence in Washington State*, see introductory pages.

<sup>92</sup> Linn Washington, *Black Judges on Justice* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 186-189.

<sup>93</sup> Cliff Hooper, “Kramer – Social Reform?” *Afro American Journal*, March 6, 1969.

## The Larry Ward Killing and Seattle's Broken Justice System

Meanwhile, the corruption and violence of the SPD rose to the surface in the department's quest to track down those carrying out the bombings, which continued through 1970. In the early hours of May 15, 1970, Larry Eugene Ward, an unarmed black male was gunned down by Seattle police officers. According to police accounts, he was running away from officers who had arrived on scene while he was attempting to light a bomb in front of Hardcastle Realty. It is worth noting that Hardcastle Realty had a reputation for "blockbusting" neighborhoods, exploiting the fears of white sellers and the pocketbooks of black buyers. As mentioned earlier, it had been bombed before.<sup>94</sup> Ward, 22, had been an unremarkable student earning Bs and Cs at Garfield before dropping out in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. He was apathetic about politics and turned down a friend who tried to persuade him to join the Panthers. When Ward was drafted in 1968, he was not upset by the news, according to his mother. "In some ways," his mother explained to *Seattle Magazine*, "the army represented an escape." After dropping out of Garfield, Ward had spent most days hanging around at Milt's Recreation Center, a local pool hall. His two years of service in Vietnam completed in March 1970, he returned to Seattle facing roughly the same predicament – unemployed and living with his mother. Only now, his girlfriend insisted that he start contributing financially to help their baby, who was born shortly after Ward dropped out of high school. Still settling into civilian life, a few job inquiries had yielded nothing. He was scheduled to take a civil service exam on May 16, the day after he was killed.<sup>95</sup>

A meeting at Garfield High School shortly after Ward's death allowed black Seattleites to vent, drawing a crowd of 500. Addressing the audience, David Llorens, a black studies professor

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<sup>94</sup> Dorothy Cordova, Interview by Madeline Crowley, Seattle, WA, September, 2014, <http://centralareacomm.blogspot.com/2014/09/dorothy-cordova-founder-historian.html> (accessed December 7, 2016).

<sup>95</sup> Arvie Idei, "Act II," *Seattle Magazine*, July 1970.

at UW, situated the killing of Ward within the long history of police brutality toward black youth: “Young people know the Seattle Police Department exists to protect the persons and property of the whites in the City of Seattle. And we must find a way to act – collectively, in concert, to end the war.” Although some called for more humane policing methods, others rejected the notion that the police could offer anything positive to the CD.<sup>96</sup>

Raised by a single mother, along with eight siblings, Ward’s life and death stood as an indictment of a city and nation that swallowed up young blacks to fight in Vietnam but gave them little before or after their return. A four-day coroner’s inquest was held at Seattle Center, in order to accommodate public interest in the high-profile case. At times, up to 600 people were in attendance, watching the inquest. Testimony revealed that Ward had been driven to the scene of the alleged bombing-attempt by an FBI informant. The informant, a black male from Pascoe, Washington, was an ex-convict who had been cooperating with the FBI in its efforts to ensnare those carrying out the bombings. According to a story on the inquest by *Seattle Magazine*, it took an inordinate amount of coaxing on the part of the informant in order for Ward to accompany him to the scene of the attempted bombing. The informant had been in the King County jail on a robbery charge before he was released in exchange for providing information on bombers to the FBI and SPD. Though the coroner’s jury ruled that the killing of Larry Ward occurred by “criminal means,” King County Prosecutor Charles O. Carroll declined to bring charges. There was, in his estimation, insufficient evidence.<sup>97</sup>

White protestors responded to the inquest ruling that Larry Ward died by “criminal means” with a rally in downtown Seattle. About 3,000 to 4,000 people showed up at the rally,

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<sup>96</sup> “Focus on Facts,” *The Facts*, May 21 to May 27, 1970.

<sup>97</sup> Arvie Idei, “Act II,” *Seattle Magazine*, July 1970; Don Hannula, “Next Move in Shooting Up to Carroll,” *Seattle Times*, May 28, 1970.

which was sponsored by a group called HELP (Help Eliminate Lawless Protesting). Unwavering in their support for the police, they carried signs that read “support your local PIG,” and “PIG is beautiful.” Following the lead of the SPD, protestors dismissed the inquest ruling as invalid. Their rally offered a telling moment. Greeted by loud cheers, the coroner in charge of inquests, Leo Sowers, spoke briefly to the crowd. In his 13 years on the job, the Ward decision marked the first time a jury had ruled against the police. He had followed his usual approach – refusing to allow cross examination of witnesses – thereby allowing the testimony of police officers to stand unchallenged. Since they were often the only witnesses to killings, their word tended to overshadow conflicting evidence. Coroner’s inquests, as a result, left numerous puzzles unsolved. This was fine when the verdict laid the blame at the feet of African Americans. It was a call to action and reform, however, when it left the finger pointed at the SPD. As a result, Sowers felt compelled to offer an apology to the crowd: “I had to be somewhat impartial, because if I hadn’t, the press as it is situated in this county, today, would have crucified me in another direction.”<sup>98</sup>

Sowers, with his many years of experience, had become a lynchpin within a system that sought to elevate police officers beyond accountability while diminishing black protests. Carroll, who had been King County Prosecutor since 1948, kept him shielded from public protest. Some of Carroll’s closest associates, meanwhile, were Bill Boeing, Jr. (son of the Boeing founder) and Victor Denny, grandson of David Denny, one of Seattle’s “founders.”<sup>99</sup> The actions of Sowers and Carroll ensured that most high-profile SPD killings involving African Americans were veiled in mystery.

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<sup>98</sup> Marty Loken, “More ‘Quiet Middle’ Dissent Expected,” *Seattle Times*, May 30, 1970; Arvie Idei, “Act II,” *Seattle Magazine*, July 1970; David Brewster, “Act III,” *Seattle Magazine*, July 1970.

<sup>99</sup> Christopher T. Bayley, *Seattle Justice: The Rise and Fall of the Police Payoff System in Seattle* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2015), 119; 183; Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present*, 26.

By the late-1970s, much of the pandemonium surrounding the Panthers had died down, yet the violence of the SPD proceeded at its usual clip. In August 1978, John Rodney, a 26-year-old African American, was shot and killed by a Seattle police officer after allegedly fleeing the scene of a burglary. Rodney, attempting to escape police, was shot in the back while climbing over a fence in the Rainier Valley. Although Rodney was unarmed, no charges were filed.

As the story became publicized in the local press, it came to light that the police officer who shot him, Dennis Falk, was a longtime member of the John Birch society. More details about Rodney's life also emerged. Described at the time as "mentally retarded," Rodney had lived a difficult life, the parameters of which emerged when the public defender's office released a 1976 pre-sentence report to the press. The report described Rodney as having the mental capabilities of a fourth-grader. He was first arrested at the age of 9. After a juvenile court labeled him "incorrigible," he was sent to the Rainier School, a state-run facility for the "retarded." In 1971, Rodney left the school and began working as a helper for Goodwill Industries. Unable to perform his job at a satisfactory level, Rodney did not last long at Goodwill. In 1973, he was convicted of second-degree burglary and given a minimum two-year sentence at Monroe state prison. After being granted parole in 1975, Rodney was again back in prison at Monroe in 1976 on a charge of second-degree burglary. At Monroe, Rodney became addicted to heroin. He was also the victim of abuse, as other prisoners taunted him until, in his words, he would "either start to cry or fight."<sup>100</sup>

Blacks in Seattle must have found the circumstances surrounding Rodney's death all too familiar. According to Jerome Page, president of the Seattle Urban League, the death of Rodney once again raised the question of whether police officers were "servants of the law, or

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Henderson, "Debate About Police Shooting Intensified," *Seattle Times*, August 25, 1978.



executioners.”<sup>101</sup> Lacy Steele, president of the Seattle NAACP wondered how the city could tolerate the killing of a man based on his involvement in a suspected burglary. Burglary, Steele argued, was never “a crime punishable by death.” Steele and the NAACP demanded that a civilian review board be established and that an impartial investigation of Rodney’s killing be conducted. Within his list of demands, Steele also called for the SPD to stop using black neighborhoods as “a dumping ground for police officers who in the past have shown sadistic tendencies in other communities.”<sup>102</sup> Part of Steele’s complaint stemmed from Falk’s reputation for being the subject of many allegations of brutality during his time patrolling the University District.<sup>103</sup>

The horror of the John Rodney killing did not create a backlash against the police. Instead, Seattle voters approved a 1978 initiative supported by the Seattle Police Guild to overturn a Seattle City Council policy that restricted the police department’s ability to use deadly force. The racial dimensions of the debate were unmistakable. A 1976 report from the city’s Office of Policy Planning found that 49 percent of the victims of SPD shootings between 1972 and 1975 were black. At the time, blacks made up only 9 percent of the city’s population.<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Carceral State**

In approving the methods of the SPD, the city perpetuated a system that punished African Americans. Beginning in the 1980s, the racialized nature of the criminal justice system in Washington State began to receive more scrutiny from scholars. Studies by criminologists and other researchers revealed the state as having the nation’s highest incarceration rate of blacks. Of

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<sup>101</sup> “President of Urban League Expresses Outrage and Concern Regarding Killing of John Rodney,” *The Facts*, August 23-29, 1978.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Lacy Steele to M.A. Vanden Wyer, Chief of Police, printed in *The Facts*, September 6-12, 1978.

<sup>103</sup> Madison King, “Questions Arise in Killing of a Man By a Seattle Policeman,” *The Facts*, August 23-29, 1978.

<sup>104</sup> Jim Tweedie and Pat Scanlan, “The Use of Deadly Force in Seattle: When is it Justified?” American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, 1977, box 1, “Legal Council Files,” folder 21: “Police Shooting (Analysis, Statistics, Articles, 1978,” Charles T. Royer Legal Subject Files, Accession no. 5274-03, SMA.

the prison population in Washington State, 20.6 percent of inmates were “Black,” 4.1 percent were “Hispanic” and 3.9 percent were “Native American.” In terms of the overall population within the state, only 2.55 percent of residents were black, 2.9 percent Hispanic and 1.47 percent Native American. The state’s incarceration rate of whites, 95 per 100,000 persons, was drastically different than its incarceration rate of blacks, 1,342 per 100,000 persons. While state correctional facilities saw a 6 percent growth in “admissions” between 1977 and 1981, the number of “Hispanic” prisoners surged by 28 percent during that time. Japanese Americans barely registered within Washington State prisons. While 1,092 blacks were imprisoned at the time the above numbers were compiled, only 72 inmates were listed under the “other” races category, which presumably included Japanese Americans.<sup>105</sup>

Those investigating the disproportionate rates of incarceration for non-whites were slow to draw conclusions. In its report, the Washington Council on Crime and Delinquency advised caution for those looking to interpret the numbers. Such figures were most likely a result of “legal, extra-legal, and illegal variables.” The specific role of each of the variables remained open for debate.<sup>106</sup> As media coverage honed in on studies regarding the state’s disproportionate incarceration rates, dueling researchers sought to explain the numbers. Some believed the racial disparity was simply the product of blacks committing more violent crimes. Others, like Scott Christianson, a researcher at the School of Criminal Justice at the State University of New York in Albany, dismissed such studies as being overly simplistic and unable to identify subtle racism. “Nobody in good conscience can look at the facts and say that race does not play a part,” Christianson explained to the *Seattle Times*. “When one out of every 50 black males [within the

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<sup>105</sup> “The Disproportionate Representation of Racial Minorities in the Criminal Justice System of Washington State,” June 1982, Washington Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1; 12.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

State of Washington] is in prison on a single day, you have something like the modern equivalent of slavery.”<sup>107</sup>

As scholars like Dan Berger have shown, many black activists, including members of the BPP, came to draw clear lines between ghettos and prisons. As Berger argues, “they described racism as a prison that confined people to ghettoes, kept them under-and unemployed, subjected them to violence on the street, and caged them in a variety of punitive state institutions.” While the events outlined in this chapter fit into that cycle, it is vital to track back to the issue of segregated housing. With news coverage in Seattle fixated on bombings and black rage, a subtle transformation within the city’s housing market was unfolding. Left to assess the damage of the “rioting,” a white army of insurance professionals increased insurance rates on properties in the CD. Redlining, while not a new issue, was exacerbated by the image of violence that engulfed black neighborhoods. Those seen as living in “bombed-out slums” were hardly viewed as ideal candidates for loans and insurance coverage.<sup>108</sup> As Seattle settled into the 1970s, the demographics of the CD were transformed, as residents navigated the arbitrary reasoning of insurance companies. Middle class residents of all races were quick to move out of the area. As a burgeoning carceral state took shape and black communities dispersed, increasing class and racial divides emerged. This made it extremely difficult to build a movement in opposition to the state-sanctioned violence being brought against black communities.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ross Anderson, “Judges Not Racist in Sentencing, Says Study,” *Seattle Times*, December 18, 1980, box 11, folder: “Washington State Courts, Black Treatment,” W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

<sup>108</sup> Berger, *Captive Nation*, 51; “Redlining, second verse, insurance?” *Seattle Times*, September 3, 1978; Alf Collins, “Lenders Urged to Take New Look at Redlining Foes,” *Seattle Times*, February 25, 1976.

<sup>109</sup> Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

#### **Chapter 4: The Limits of Liberalism: School Desegregation and the Counterweight of Housing**

As people of all races moved out of Seattle's Central District during the 1960s and the 1970s, conditions in the area continued to decline. Blight, abandoned housing, crime, and disinvestment sank the area's prospects during the 1970s. The ability of Japanese Americans to "leapfrog" the CD and settle into non-contiguous white neighborhoods throughout the city was evident. Middle-class African Americans were often able to do the same but the more common experience for blacks involved migrating to the contiguous neighborhoods of Southeast Seattle. As University of Washington geographer Richard Morrill has argued, Seattle's black population was funneled into Southeast Seattle. Some of the increase in the area's black population was due to the construction of public housing as well as new apartment complexes. However, "most was due to homes made available from white flight, a direct result of both busing for school desegregation and enforcement of open housing," according to Morrill. Though enforcement of open housing laws was a factor, it was more likely that white residents of Southeast Seattle assumed that the laws would be enforced and were not in a position to challenge them in court. In wealthier parts of the city, open housing laws were easily evaded.<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkably uncommon to hear changing housing patterns in Seattle described in a way that questions whether movement signified growing freedom and opportunity. The more common description links black migration to decreasing levels of discrimination. Morrill's assessment that blacks were displaced from the CD and moved into neighborhoods that had been abandoned by whites defies the conventional narrative. Much of the belief that housing discrimination declined at a rapid rate during the 1960s and 1970s has been based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Morrill, "The Seattle Central District (CD) Over Eighty Years," *The Geographical Review* 103, no. 3 July 2013), 319; 322; Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, Seattle School District, October 1977, 20-27.

assumption that fair housing laws reflected changing white attitudes toward African Americans. In this account, it seemed natural that movement represented increasing equality within the housing market. School desegregation would only accelerate the process of dismantling segregated neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>

In the minds of its proponents, school desegregation afforded a liberal city the chance to atone for the damage done by segregated housing patterns. Yet, Seattle's efforts to desegregate schools ran headlong into the shifting walls of segregated housing. This chapter documents that collision and shows how school desegregation was undercut by the persistence of segregated housing patterns. Exhibiting a blind faith in the city's evolution away from a racially-segregated housing market, the Seattle School Board's desegregation plans were weighed down by contradictory impulses. On one hand, prominent African American civil rights activists pushed the city to "ensure equity of movement" through busing. They viewed the "movement of entire neighborhoods by bus" as a reasonable approach to fighting segregation in housing, employment and other arenas. This was the extent of racial segregation in Seattle; busing was a small price to pay for the city's longstanding history of restricting black freedom. On the other hand, the city's school desegregation plans needed to be tempered enough to win back white homeowners who were fleeing to the suburbs. Without them, public schooling in the city would crumble.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, Seattleites devoted far more energy to moving segregated neighborhoods, bus by bus, than to dealing with housing discrimination. Seattle's racial liberalism left housing discrimination to fester even as the state championed the cause of school desegregation. This chapter shows how that delicate balancing act emerged out of the school

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 208-209.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Statement of Seattle Black Community Leaders, Seattle School District no. 1 et al v. The State of Washington et al., no. C78-753V, United States District Court, Western District of Washington, box 8, folder 2, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, accession no. 0465-002, UWSC.

board's response to Black Power activism, as residents in the CD fought hard for more than token black integration into white schools. Though elements of black history and culture were brought into the curriculum, school desegregation efforts were ultimately grounded in the need to move black bodies. Instead of addressing the ways in which schools taught and maintained white supremacy, channeling black students toward menial labor, the district continued to place the burden for change on black students. In riding buses across town, black students bore the brunt of violence and anxiety stemming from the city's racially-segregated housing patterns. While the city's increasing commitment to cultural pluralism was championed by residents of all races, at its core it reflected an abiding commitment to white property rights, covered by the veneer of equality.

As school desegregation came to be seen as the answer to segregated neighborhoods, African and Japanese Americans challenged the city to do more than just move bodies. But they were not in a position to dislodge the ideologies that produced segregated neighborhoods and schools. Ultimately, they were forced to work around and accommodate them – an easier task for those of a higher class. For Japanese Americans, the city's school desegregation battles revealed a growing ability to move beyond “ghetto” schools and neighborhoods. The ability to move around the city, to access the resources wrapped up in more affluent neighborhoods, further divided the city along the lines of race, class and gender.<sup>4</sup> One of the most unfortunate legacies of Seattle's school desegregation efforts was the popular belief that they were designed and executed to serve the needs of black students. That was simply not the case. They reflected a compromise that included many who wanted to keep Seattle's schools and neighborhoods as they were, separate and unequal, the natural results of a free market.

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy A. Denton, “The Persistence of Segregation: Links between Residential and School Segregation,” *Minnesota Law Review* 80 (1996), 812.

## The Fight Against Tokenism

According to a January 1969 column in Seattle's *Afro American Journal*, a black nationalist newspaper, president-elect Richard Nixon's support of "Black capitalism" was promising. To fully realize the dream, however, Nixon needed to provide reparations for all African Americans. While many had been led to believe that freedom and equality were attainable without "just payment of a debt," African Americans had labored too long for too little to continue waiting with hands outstretched. It was time to pay up, in the form of 40 acres and \$10,000 for all black "men" in the Pacific Northwest. Washington State offered an auspicious locale, with its bounty of natural resources. No part of the country had a "greater wooded area than the Northwest." Parceling out land for black reparations could lead to the nation toward a "new frontier" in both economics and race relations. This would in turn bring an end to the bureaucratic mess that constituted the War on Poverty. It would also sever the black community's reliance on token black leaders and racist white institutions.

The claim for reparations rested on a simple premise, according to the *Journal*: African Americans had a right to share in the wealth that flowed out of slavery. After shedding blood on behalf of the country in every war, black "men" were ready to collect on the debt owed them. Indeed they had a greater right to the wealth than those who received government subsidies, whether farmers, oil companies, airlines, trucking firms, munitions factories, or a "host of interest groups." After all, the billions of dollars such groups received led to "very little or no social gain." When it came to paying out reparations to African Americans, the yield would be "the creation of a good working relationship among all peoples, in dignity and mutual trust." Nixon and other power brokers needed to choose either "restitution or revolution." African

Americans were no longer willing to accept “integration” into the “plantation system” of city politics that afforded gains for only a few.

Though it never materialized, the *Journal*’s plan was ultimately a critique of the Civil Rights movement, which was “unmistakably dead.” It had been undone, according to the *Journal*, by “institutionalized white racism,” bureaucracy and the “tomism” of black leaders. Only the “shrewd, politically aware middle class Negro” had benefitted from the CRM. Poor and working class blacks had seen their hopes raised only to be dashed. The call for reparations was a rejection of the welfare state that sought to bring about a small measure of integration for African Americans without altering the systems that produced deep divides in schools, workplaces and neighborhoods throughout the city. In restoring the patriarch, reparations would help to rebuild black communities. Only this time, they would be shielded from the ravages of white racism. For E. Loin and Taft Gross, the publishers of the *Journal*, building a black economic and cultural base was the only route to increasing black political power.

In its measured call for justice and reparations, the *Journal* did what few publications in Seattle were willing to do. It tied Seattle’s present to the nation’s slaveholding past, to relationships shaped by a plantation economy. According to the *Journal*, the exploitation of African Americans would continue until the government worked to eradicate “institutionalized white racism.” Until that point, sociological theories about the value of “integration” were meaningless. Before integration could become a relevant word, the nation needed to heed the findings of the Kerner Report and make amends for the damage done by White racism. If not, the black revolution would continue.<sup>5</sup>

For the *Journal*, the city’s school desegregation efforts were a prime target and perhaps the best example of why blacks needed to distance themselves from white institutions. Beginning

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<sup>5</sup> “Restitution or Revolution,” *Afro American Journal*, January 2, 1969.



in 1963, the Seattle School Board introduced a voluntary racial transfer program. Designed to curtail the growing “racial imbalance” in Seattle public schools, the program was welcomed by a range of civil rights organizations. For roughly 10 years, the city struck out toward the goal of school desegregation by relying on the goodwill of its citizens. Most of the burden was carried by the thousands of black students whose parents volunteered them for the program, as whites and Asians participated in a nominal way.<sup>6</sup> In 1965, the Seattle Urban League (SUL) proposed a more ambitious approach. Known as the “Triad Plan,” the SUL’s goal was to end segregation in Seattle’s elementary schools. By creating clusters of schools that would bring together racially-divided neighborhoods, socioeconomic and racial balance could be achieved. The Triad Plan was written by Ivan King, the assistant director of the Urban League. King, a white socialist, admonished the school district to use its “position as an agent of social change.” He took for granted the idea that black and other non-white students were “culturally handicapped,” set apart from mainstream American values. King argued that if schools in Seattle failed to break through the cultural barriers imposed by a racially-segregated housing market, they would simply be passing on society’s problems to the next generation.

Although the school district was losing white students at an alarming rate, King believed that white opposition to an aggressive integration plan would be “short-lived.” In fact, white opposition was strong enough to derail the plan. Schools superintendent Ernest Campbell and the rest of the school board rejected the Triad Plan. Campbell let the Urban League know that public schools did “not exist for the purpose of imposing broad social reforms upon the people.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Doris H. Pieroth, “With All Deliberate Caution: School Integration in Seattle, 1954-1968,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (April 1982), 53-54.

<sup>7</sup> Singler et al., *Seattle in Black and White*, 147-148; Ivan King, interview by Trevor Griffey, Seattle, WA, May 5, 2006, Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/king.htm> (accessed January 17, 2017); “A Proposal for Re-Organization of the Elementary Division of the Seattle Public Schools,” Seattle Urban

Although the Urban League continued pushing for a school desegregation plan, the organization began to conclude that the school district was more committed to “moving bodies” and less concerned with issues of justice and equity.<sup>8</sup>

In 1966, a cohort of civil rights organizations, led by the Seattle branch of CORE, teamed with local churches to stage a two-day boycott of public schools. In lieu of attending local public schools, an interracial group (most were black) of close to 4,000 students participated in Freedom Schools. Using a curriculum that emphasized black history, those who organized the boycott modeled the type of learning environment they expected for students. Though the school board responded with minor concessions, including the hiring of black administrators, the momentum provided by Freedom Schools was short-lived. Those who wanted their students in interracial classrooms were forced to fall back on the voluntary racial transfer program.<sup>9</sup>

Black parents who signed up their children for the program were often dismayed by the results. Speaking to the *Seattle Times* in 1968, Jeri Ware, a mother of four, explained her son’s educational slide after transferring from Garfield High School to Lincoln High School. The student population at Garfield was 55 percent Black; at Lincoln, a North End school in a middle class area, 98 percent of students were White. “The teachers and students acted as if he were invisible,” said Ware. “Socially he was completely isolated.” Ware described her son as an “intelligent” student but by the end of the year he had lost interest in school. Given the “catastrophe” her son experienced, Ware would not be signing up her other children for the transfer program. “The thing White people don’t understand is it isn’t physical violence that’s killing black men. It’s mental violence – the things you can’t put your hands on, you can’t

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League, Autumn 1964, box 8, folder 9: “Triad Plan,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>8</sup> “Seattle Urban League Position Statement on Desegregation,” Seattle Urban League, March 7, 1977, box 17, folder 19: “Misc., 1966-79, N.D.” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>9</sup> Singler et al., *Seattle in Black and White*, 156-174.

fight.”<sup>10</sup> To Ware and other black parents whose children languished in white schools, school desegregation had become a cruel experiment.

With the rise of Black Power, organizations like the Central Area Committee for Peace and Improvement (CAPI) brought a more militant approach to protesting what they described as “a bankrupt” school system. In August 1967, CAPI threatened a school boycott until the district implemented “minority history” into curriculum and began hiring black principals, teachers, and staff members. Initially, CAPI demanded the ouster of Garfield High School principal Frank Hanawalt. Les McIntosh, chairman of CAPI, called for Hanawalt, who was white, to be replaced with a black principal. They later backtracked on this request, recognizing Hanawalt as committed to the school. One of the fundamental goals of CAPI was to foster a “black consciousness” and a commitment to seeing “black as beautiful.” They viewed the city’s public schools as “white culture centers,” used to prepare black students for menial labor. To counter this, CAPI pushed to eliminate vocational counseling for black students, a request the board denied.<sup>11</sup>

A cross-section of CD residents viewed the district’s desegregation efforts as short-sighted. While school board officials strategized over desegregation plans, community groups worked to improve the educational environment in and around segregated schools. They argued that the day care problems of working mothers, parental participation in community activities, recruitment of “minority” police officers, a lack of housing for new arrivals to the city, and many other issues were inhibiting student performance.<sup>12</sup> In chasing the vague goal of “integrated

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<sup>10</sup> “What Makes Seattle Tick?” *Seattle Times*, October 27, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Hilda Bryant, “Seattle School Board Hears CAPI Demands,” *Seattle P-I*, August 31, 1967; Hilda Bryant, “Group Threatens School Boycott,” *Seattle P-I*, August 16, 1967, box 13, folder 36, “Seattle Public Schools, 1965-1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>12</sup> “Minutes-Garfield Community Council,” October 10, 1967, box 47, folder 5, “S.P.S. Garfield Community Council, 1961-1969,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

education,” the district had equipped itself with few weapons beyond bussing black children throughout the city. Achieving “racial balance” was sometimes portrayed as a panacea. Beyond its initial allure, however, it was a project that said little about the quality of education that non-white students received within the classroom. Formed in January 1968, the Garfield High School Citizen’s Advisory Committee (GHSCAC) worked to broaden the district’s conception of “integrated” education. Its membership included blacks and Asians such as Isaiah Edwards, Cliff Hooper, Jeri Ware, Minoru Masuda, George Fujimoto, and Diane Wong.<sup>13</sup>

At one of the group’s meetings in March 1968, students criticized what they viewed as a dictatorial administration. Others took aim at a curriculum drawn solely from middle-class white perspectives. Some students accused teachers of failing to understand and support Garfield’s Black Student Union and the idea of Black Power more generally; in one classroom a Black Power assembly was referred to as a communist plot. Leonard Dawson, a Garfield student, complained about the stifling attitude of teachers at the high school: “I have heard many people talk about the militants of Garfield and Black Power and so on; but I have heard no one speak of the white brainwashing that goes on in all schools around the country. Is it really a problem when people finally awaken and refuse to be fed the brainwashing any more?” Dawson encouraged teachers at the school to reject their authoritarian ways. He felt students needed help more than they needed discipline and punishment. Many of the students at Garfield came from backgrounds where parents worked all day. Though they wanted a better life for their children, they had trouble giving it to them, according to Dawson. Bringing in qualified teachers who understood

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<sup>13</sup> Pieroth, “Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968,” 411.

these students and their backgrounds would be the first step in “helping to relieve a very great social problem.”<sup>14</sup>

Some teachers at the meeting acknowledged the school’s shortcomings when it came to the treatment of Black students. Others, such as Kirby Morgan, a business teacher, lamented the amount of time spent in some classes on the issue of civil rights. He called for more discipline and more vocational training, arguing that college was being over-emphasized. Ideas of the sort shared by Morgan found an increasingly hostile reception. Cliff Hooper Sr., a leading figure on the GHSCAC, eventually vacated his role. His resignation letter hinted at the simmering anger within the Black community. He had attended too many meetings where black Seattleites were, at least in his mind, used as pawns in the city’s “white racist educational program.” A despondent Hooper felt that black participation in meetings aimed at improving the atmosphere at Garfield only aided “the cruel hoax” of Seattle’s public education system. As black students were having their minds warped by a racist curriculum, white students were absorbing a distorted history one myth at a time. Instead of acknowledging the evils of such a system, Hooper saw far too many willing to come to its defense, even at a time when the “façade of American justice and equality” were on full display.

After a contentious 1967-1968 school year, 40 percent of the faculty at Garfield requested transfers away from the school at the end of the year.<sup>15</sup> Washington Junior High School, ranked lowest in terms of student achievement citywide, was another glaring concern. It also had the

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<sup>14</sup> “Minutes of the Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee Meeting,” March 18, 1968, box 47, folder 6, “S.P.S. Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee, 1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

<sup>15</sup> “Minutes of the Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee Meeting,” March 18, 1968, box 47, folder 6, “S.P.S. Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee, 1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC; “The Chairman’s Report, Faculty Sub-Committee, Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee,” April 20, 1968, box 47, folder 6, “S.P.S. Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee, 1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC; Parker Cook, “Garfield’s Magnet Plan,” *Puget Soundings*, December 1969, box 47, folder 6, “S.P.S. Garfield High School Citizens’ Advisory Committee, 1968,” Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1984, Accession no. 0607-007, UWSC.

city's highest suspension and dropout rates, as well as the highest costs of education per student. Seventy-four percent of the student body was listed as "Black," while 16 percent was listed as "Oriental" and 6 percent were listed as "White." According to a report, the school had been shut down twice toward the end of 1968 due to "student disorders." On the one hand, black students were demanding an education more relevant to their experiences. Meanwhile, more than half of the staff at Washington had requested a transfer. The Seattle School District was in a state of upheaval, according to the report: "The problem, broadly conceived, is that schools, which should reflect the mandates of society, are caught in a period of time when those mandates are not clear and very often are contradictory."<sup>16</sup> As educators in Seattle's public schools struggled to determine their priorities, CD schools continued to see their white and Asian enrollment drop.<sup>17</sup>

Rifts within Seattle's black community widened as the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC) endorsed school closures within the city's Central District (CD). The reverend John Adams, chairman of the CARC, endorsed school closures and cutbacks as a means of integrating black students in outlying white schools. At a meeting on March 6, 1968, Adams shared his position on the matter before three Black Power organizations "swept him right off the platform," according to one observer. The lines of opposition included followers of the Nation of Islam, as well as the University of Washington Black Student Union and the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party. The meeting, held at the East Madison Y.M.C.A., attracted a crowd of 400. It was widely interpreted as a turning point, as black middle class ideas about "integration" were resoundingly shot down by a deeply resentful working class audience. John Adams found

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<sup>16</sup> Seattle School District No. 1, "Seattle Public Schools Dropout Prevention Program," n.d., Seattle Model City Program, Accession no. 5402-04, Task Force Files, Box 2, Folder 20: Education-Seattle Public Schools Dropout Prevention Program, 1969, SMA.

<sup>17</sup> Central Area Planning, "Education Proposal for Central District of Seattle," April 14, 1970, Seattle Model City Program, Accession no. 5402-04, Task Force Files, Box 2, Folder 26: Education Proposals, 1970-1971, SMA.

himself on particularly weak footing. Like many wealthier blacks, Adams had found housing beyond Seattle's segregated CD, in his case in the North End. But, he informed the crowd, he was intending to move back to the CD in order for his children to receive a "multicultural" education.<sup>18</sup>

Adams, for his part, understood that discord in the black community was to be expected. On the other hand, Walt Hundley, the director of Seattle's Model City Program was vexed by pleas for a Black curriculum in CD schools. Hundley, an African American, lambasted the idea in a May 1968 letter to a colleague:

Frankly, the notion of a special school, black curriculum and staff notwithstanding, still strikes me as second-class education. It is an insult to me. It tells me that I am not ready to learn like other Americans. I can't get a decent job with the "black curriculum" outlined in this proposal. I can't successfully compete in the job market with it. What good does it do me in 1968 to know who I am if I can't add.<sup>19</sup>

Hundley's visceral reaction toward a curriculum that emphasized racial pride, the teaching of African languages, and Black studies represented one perspective within a polarizing debate on race and education. It was a framing that minimized the violence black students encountered in their journeys across the city and into hostile white neighborhoods. At the end of their schooling, what mattered most was whether they could compete for a job.

To the writers of the *Afro American Journal*, Hundley embodied the "tomism" that had allowed the CRM to be corralled down a conservative path. They saw his support for school desegregation as self-serving and aloof from the struggles of poor and working class blacks. By October of 1968, the *Afro American Journal* was urging its readers to vote against school levies.

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<sup>18</sup> Pieroth, "Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968," 400-406; Don Hannula, "Central-Area Unity on Schools Not Seen Possible By Adams," *Seattle Times*, March 7, 1968; Don Hannula, "Central-Area School Proposal Meets Strong Opposition," *Seattle Times*, March 7, 1968; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 215.

<sup>19</sup> Walter R. Hundley to Letitia Sommers, May 23, 1968, Seattle Model City Program, Accession no. 5402-04, Task Force Files, Box 2, Folder 2: Education-Correspondence, 1968, SMA.

Funding a school system that continued to “cripple” Black students could no longer be condoned. Writers for the newspaper excoriated the CACRC and other civil rights organizations for attempting to work around the interests of blacks living in the CD who did not want their schools shut down.<sup>20</sup> As a new school year began in 1969, the Black United Front (BUF), a group of Black Power activists, had moved toward a wholesale rejection of Seattle public schools. Cliff Hooper, writing on behalf of the BUF, referred to Seattle’s schools as the progenitors of “white nationalism.” It was “insane,” Hooper argued, for Black parents to continue placing their children at the mercy of a society that continually devalued their humanity.<sup>21</sup>

This was the context in which the BUF and the *Afro American Journal* made their demand for reparations, cited at the beginning of the chapter. It was a call for blacks in Seattle to cut ties with the city’s white institutions, beginning with the public school system and its doctrinaire approach to integration. Geared toward the more than 1,500 black school dropouts within the CD, Hooper and the BUF created a Black Culture Center in 1969. The center’s evolution was a product of Black Power activists who believed that the city’s schools were working perfectly as planned, in churning out black students for menial jobs. Dave Mills and Keve Bray, two prominent Black nationalists, were key organizers in bringing about the center, along with Hooper. The center’s curriculum focused on black history, with an emphasis on figures like Frederick Douglass, Harriett Tubman, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad. The founders of the culture center were adamantly opposed to the gradual incorporation of black history as an appendage to American history. To keep Black history on

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<sup>20</sup> “Ad Hoc Group Blast Central Area Rights Committee,” *Afro American Journal*, October 24, 1968; “Levy,” *Afro American Journal*, October 31, 1968.

<sup>21</sup> Cliff Hooper, Sr., “Position Paper of the Black United Front and the Black Culture Center,” *Afro American Journal* September 18, 1969.



the fringes would do nothing to advance the place of African Americans within the broader society. Placing blacks at the center of American history and instilling pride in black students was only part of the center's agenda. Another core aspect of the curriculum focused on human rights. Hooper and the other founders believed that the nation's strong defense of property rights often stripped the most vulnerable of their human rights. This disparity in power and rights was a crucial aspect in generating the anger that inspired the nation's urban rebellions.<sup>22</sup> Once a vocal proponent in the struggle for an open housing law, Hooper had become disenchanted by the by the widespread worship of property rights.<sup>23</sup>

As faith in Seattle public schools dwindled within the Black community, the Panthers followed the lead set by the BUF, running a summer liberation school from 1970 to 1972. Classes emphasized reading and writing, as well as critical thinking, a project that often involved dissecting the latest issue of the *Black Panther* newspaper. Through their free breakfast program and liberation school, the Panthers presented black communities with an alternative to the often demeaning experience of interacting with the welfare state.<sup>24</sup> Speaking to a reporter from the *Seattle Times* in 1968, Black Panther Garry Owens explained the growing recalcitrance toward school desegregation within the black community: "Integration is not a dead philosophy, but it came much too soon. We want to control our destiny before we start worrying about white people in this community. When I move out to Ballard (in large part a blue-collar, white section of Seattle), my children are going to be ready for the people in Ballard."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Don Hannula, "Marchers for Open Housing Promise Milwaukee-Style Awakening Here," *Seattle Times*, October 1, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, "A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest, 70-71; Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 192-193.

<sup>25</sup> "What Makes Seattle Tick?" *Seattle Times*, October 27, 1968.

Owens, like many black Seattleites, feared that official efforts to “integrate” the city could expose black children to increased racial violence. Moving beyond racial segregation was a worthy goal but the timing and the details mattered. For the time being, the city’s White neighborhoods did not seem ready to handle pioneering black students. Black parents also seemed less inclined to send their children off to such foreboding environments, all in the name of an education. As Owens suggested, there were certain parts of the city that black children were better off avoiding.

An affiliate of the Panthers, the University of Washington Black Student Union voiced similar concerns. One of the group’s first actions was to organize a demonstration at Franklin High School on March 29, 1968. They lobbied for black history courses and for the right to wear Afros. Another sticking point was the suspension of Trollis Flavors, a black student at Franklin who was suspended after fighting with a white student. They demanded his reinstatement, in light of the fact that the white student was not suspended. After Franklin’s principal refused to meet with them, a group of protestors barged into his office. They were arrested but later released.<sup>26</sup>

A few days later, Charles O. Carroll, King County Prosecutor, issued an indictment charging a group of protestors with unlawful assembly. That night, April 4, 1968 Aaron Dixon, Carl Miller and Larry Gossett spent the night in King County Jail before being released the next morning. While in jail the evening of April 4, they heard the news that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. Reflecting back on the experience during an interview, Larry Gossett remembered the anger of black prisoners in jail at the news of King’s death. They wanted to beat up white prisoners as a way of venting their frustration. Gossett and his companions dissuaded

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<sup>26</sup> Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 71-75; Patrick Douglas, “Black Panthers on the Prowl”; Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, “A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest,” 57.

them from doing something “crazy” and decided to hold a “teach-in” where they discussed King’s legacy and it what it meant in the context of prisoner’s rights.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, the Seattle School Board adopted a range of controversial desegregation plans in response to an increasingly uncertain mandate. The board also introduced curriculum designed to reach a growing non-white student population. Out of this arose a perception among some Asian Americans that the school district was catering to black students. In the fall of 1970, several fist-fights between black and Chinese students at Franklin high school brought into the open frustration on the part of some Asian students. A group of about 100 Asian community-leaders, parents, and students met with Forbes Bottomly, superintendent of the Seattle Public Schools. They called for the hiring of Asian administrators, including an Asian vice-principal, as well as the hiring of other Asian staff members. They also asked for bilingual or “bi-cultural” faculty members to be hired and for the school to begin learning more about the problems and needs of Asian students. Writing in the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) newsletter, Betsy Boyle, an English tutor at Franklin explained what she saw as the fault line between Asian and Black students. Some Asian students felt administrators “leaned over backwards to give blacks a chance (or two chances, or five) but expected Asians to sit quietly and not make any trouble.”<sup>28</sup>

Once a crown jewel for white homeowners in the Mount Baker neighborhood, an area that pioneered restrictive covenants in Seattle, Franklin epitomized the city’s history. In painful ways, Seattleites were grappling with the fault lines of race without looking too far into the past.

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<sup>27</sup> Larry Gossett, interview by Trevor Griffey and Brooke Clark, Seattle, Washington, March 16 and June 3, 2005, Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/gossett.htm> (accessed February 3, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Betsy Boyle, “Action on Asian Needs at Franklin High School,” *JACL Reporter*, 8, no. 11, November 1971, box 6, folder “Newsletters-JACL Reporter, 1970-1971,” Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter Records, 1921-1981, Accession no. 0217- 006, UWSC.

## Cultural Pluralism

With more attention given to black demands, it was understandable that Asian students felt ignored. There was, however, little evidence to support the conclusion that black students were feasting on the spoils of protest. In the 1970s, a smattering of Asian representation started to find its way into conversations about school desegregation. Beginning in 1970, Mako Nakagawa, a Japanese American teacher, spearheaded a cultural heritage program in Seattle public schools. Critical to Nakagawa's philosophy of cultural pluralism was the idea that "visible minorities" in Seattle and throughout the nation were being "crippled" by nineteenth century ideas of "the melting pot." According to Nakagawa, teachers and textbooks continued to perpetuate this myth, thereby obfuscating "individual and institutional racism." Nakagawa modeled her program around Japanese American culture. She soon broadened her scope, recognizing the similar struggles faced by other "visible minorities" in Seattle.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the scathing critiques of Black Power advocates, Nakagawa honed in on the issue of culture without saying much about capitalism and exploitation. Working against public perceptions that saw Japanese Americans as a minority without problems, part of Nakagawa's mission was to enlighten teachers and students immersed in stereotypes. Short on funding when she first started the program, Nakagawa relied on college students who volunteered their time to teach the curriculum at elementary schools. Among its many elements, the program introduced elementary students to calligraphy, judo and other aspects of Japanese culture. Through games, stories, field trips, and demonstrations, Japanese culture was etched into the minds of Seattle

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<sup>29</sup> "An Application by Seattle School District #1 for an Ethnic Heritage Studies Program," May 2, 1973, Coalition For Quality Integrated Education, 3130-1, Box 4, Folder 7: Subject Series, Ethnic Cultural Heritage Program, 1973-1976, n.d., SMA.

students.<sup>30</sup> By 1978, Nakagawa's program had evolved, now operated under the title of the Rainbow Ethnic Cultural Heritage Program. Now armed with a \$200,000 budget and a state-level award for its contributions to bettering "human-relations," the program had worked its way into 30 schools, reaching an estimated 4,000 students in 1977.<sup>31</sup>

By 1960, Nikkei in Washington State were graduating from high school and earning college degrees at a higher rate than all other races. It made little sense for them to demand the upheaval of an educational system that – while deeply racist – offered a pathway to the middle class. Although they often encountered a "glass ceiling" once they entered the workplace, it was not a system that many saw as beyond redemption.<sup>32</sup> As Asian immigration reshaped cities during the 1970s, the need to promote cultural pluralism became particularly acute for Asian Americans. The 1974 landmark Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* marked a victory for Asian Americans who protested the lack of bilingual education available to Asian students. According to the court's ruling, San Francisco public schools stood in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 due to the "unequal" education they provided to non-English-speaking students. A lower court ruling had argued that the Chinese American students, on whose behalf the suit was brought, had equal access to an education. If they did not receive a satisfactory education, it was a "result of deficiencies in the children themselves." So long as schools did not actively discriminate, they were not responsible for whatever disadvantages children brought with them into the classroom.<sup>33</sup> Some Asian Americans applauded the Supreme Court ruling as

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<sup>30</sup> "Low Budget Program Teaches Japanese-American Heritage," *Seattle Times*, November 9, 1972; Gary Iwamoto, "The Asian Heritage Program: Bettering Human Relations," *Seattle Times*, June 3, 1973.

<sup>31</sup> "Schools' Rainbow Program: Color It a Success," *Seattle Times*, February 5, 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin F. Schmid, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington*, Washington State Planning and Community Affairs Agency, 1968, 113-118.

<sup>33</sup> Vicki Woo, "On Unequal Treatment of Unequals," *International Examiner*, June 30, 1978; Stephen D. Sugarman and Ellen G. Widess, "Equal Protection for Non-English-Speaking School Children: *Lau v. Nichols*," *California Law Review* 62, no. 1 (January 1974), 157-182.

confirmation of a “century of plights suffered” by Asian Americans within the school system. The ruling was a sign that the country’s “white-supremacy dominated social structure” was ready to be torn down and replaced by “cultural pluralism.”<sup>34</sup>

At the same time as Nakagawa’s program was winning accolades, Seattle’s Japanese American community was slowly filtering out of Seattle public schools. Within the city’s public school system, Japanese enrollment fell from a high of 2,377 in 1966 to 1,360 in 1976. Drawn to the suburbs and moving away from “ghetto” schools, Japanese Americans were escaping the reaches of the district’s desegregation plans. A small number of Japanese American activists – led by Arlene Oki and Gary Higashi – championed school desegregation efforts. Many Japanese remained indifferent or opposed.

Arlene Oki, who lived in Beacon Hill with her husband and three children, became more attuned to politics during Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign. His assassination in June 1968 left her devastated. By 1970, Oki’s resistance to the Vietnam War led her to collect signatures at her church – Blaine Memorial Methodist – in support of the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment. Her support for an amendment aimed at ending the war earned her the reputation of being a “leftist” within Blaine, a predominantly Japanese American church. Oki’s activism in support of school desegregation – along with her stance against the Vietnam War – placed her at odds with her husband. An engineer at Boeing, Oki’s husband was involved with the Minuteman missile program and did not share her views on Vietnam, school desegregation and anything to do with affirmative action. In an interview, Oki recalled arguing with her husband’s co-workers at a Boeing Christmas party. Her views on the Vietnam War and the country’s ever-expanding

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<sup>34</sup> Philip O. Hwang, “Asian-Americans in the U.S. Educational System: Some Research Implications,” Paper Presented at Asian-American Mental Health Research Workshop, January 17, 1976, University of California, San Diego, box 2, folder 54: “Papers Presented at the Asian American Mental Health Research Workshop, 1976, n.d., Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001, UWSC.

military-industrial complex made her an outlier among the Boeing crowd. As her commitments outside of the home swallowed up more time, Oki sensed she was disappointing her husband and his mother by not being very “passive.” She was something less than an ideal “Japanese wife.”<sup>35</sup>

### **The Seattle Plan**

As the influence of Black Power activists subsided, the Seattle branch of the NAACP led a cohort of civil rights organizations that threatened to sue the school district if a mandatory desegregation plan was not implemented. The standoff between the NAACP and the school district peaked in 1977. Later that year the school board voted to adopt a city-wide mandatory school desegregation plan. A range of factors influenced the board’s decision, not the least of which was a desire to maintain control of any desegregation efforts. Failure to come up with a desegregation plan would likely have meant ceding control to a federal court. While Gary Higashi had managed to lead Seattle’s Asian American Education Association toward supporting the desegregation plan, beyond the association support was thin. Japanese Americans, in particular, were far from ardent backers of what came to be known as the Seattle Plan. The following is an excerpt from a 1979 interview with Gary Higashi:

There is a very large number of middle-class Japanese Americans who see themselves as having attained success, and do not feel their education was hurt by being in schools which were predominately Asian. Instead, they look for a situation where there is a preponderance of Asian children because they feel that in that situation their traditional educational values will be expressed.<sup>36</sup>

The support of black and Asian leaders for school desegregation outflanked and outlasted the best efforts of Black Power activists who questioned the health of an education system built on an ideology of white supremacy. From a Black Power perspective, a course or two on the contributions of blacks and Asians and the shifting of black and Asian bodies into whiter

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<sup>35</sup> Arlene Oki, interview by Takashi Matsumaru, Seattle Washington, August 12, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Ann LaGrelus Siqueland, *Without a Court Order: The Desegregation of Seattle’s Schools* (Seattle: Madrona, 1981), 59.

classrooms could not address the problems plaguing the city's schools. From the perspective of civil rights organizations, church leaders and middle class liberals, school desegregation was a chance to confront the city's racist past. As explained by school board president Dan Olson, school desegregation would serve as a remedy for segregated housing patterns. Here is how Olson heralded the arrival of "The Seattle Plan" in 1977:

Now that the School District has acted within its power to rectify a situation that has been created by segregated housing patterns we look now to the city government to do those kinds of things that can help alleviate this situation. We look to the federal government to do those kinds of things that can help alleviate segregated housing patterns and we look thirdly to the real estate industry and to all of us who buy and sell houses as individuals to do those things that will alleviate segregation in housing patterns. We certainly can make the whole situation a lot better if we all take actions in this regard.

Instead, led by whites, the movement away from Seattle public schools proceeded apace. Seattle's school desegregation efforts proved to be an incredible balancing act. Multicultural curricula were incorporated, all while maintaining the sanctity of property rights. Also preserved was the ability of whites to find their way into the city's high-performing schools – whether in city or suburb, public or private. An increasing number of blacks and Asians were also joining the race.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned earlier, a great deal of the impetus for the city's school desegregation plan came from the pressure brought by the Seattle NAACP. In April 1977, the local NAACP filed a letter of administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) against the Seattle School District. The complaint detailed the methods by which the district had contributed to the damage done by a segregated housing market. Among the allegations, the NAACP accused the district of failing to realign school boundaries in order to "minimize racial isolation" for the minority population. In addition, it accused the district of

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<sup>37</sup> Olson quoted in Michael J. Dumas, "A Cultural Political Economy of School Desegregation in Seattle," *Teacher's College Record* 113, no. 4 (April 2011), 713; 727-731.



building new schools in white neighborhoods where schools were becoming overcrowded instead of transferring white students to schools with large minority populations. The complaint also referenced the inferior facilities at schools attended by black and other minority students. Race-based policies for faculty and support staff also contributed to the problem of segregation. Another crucial component, according to the NAACP, was the district's transfer policies allowing white students to "transfer out of schools that are minority impacted."<sup>38</sup>

### **The Specter of Housing**

Scrambling to react, the school board targeted the beginning of the 1979-1980 school year as "the deadline for the elimination of racial imbalance in the District." From the outset, the board fixated its attention on percentages. The concept of "racial imbalance" was defined as "the situation in which the combined minority student enrollment at a school (or program) exceeds the Districtwide combine minority average by 20 percentage points." No single minority group could exceed 50 percent of the student body within any one school. With the threat of a lawsuit – from the NAACP or the ACLU – ratcheting up the intensity, the board hammered out a plan. Research conducted for the school district and the city forecast a messy battle. A report from September 1977 illustrates the point:

In the absence of significant funding levels and uncompromising attention to the enforcement of equal opportunity in housing, a fair share distribution of low income housing, optimum investment of public and private rehabilitation and redevelopment funds, and School District articulation of and strict compliance with its own policies and goals, integrated schools and neighborhoods cannot be a realistic outcome. Without adequate orchestration of all the component parts of a socially, racially and economically integrated city, it is doubtful that a desegregated school system and community can be achieved.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Seattle Branch, NAACP vs. Seattle School District no. 1, Administrative Complaint, April 20, 1977, box 8, folder 2, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, Accession no. 0465-002, UWSC.

<sup>39</sup> *Powers, Responsibilities, and Commitments of the City and School Districts to Effect Integration*, Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study, City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools, September 1977, 27; 45.

In a comprehensive manner, the report struck down any notion that Seattle was on the brink of moving beyond racial segregation. To get there, the city as a whole needed to reckon with its history and begin devoting far more resources to fighting racial discrimination. In particular, the city's housing market stood out as an Achilles heel. Non-white neighborhoods needed serious investments of capital and low-income housing needed to be dispersed throughout the city. Rather than treating racial discrimination in housing as a relic of the past, the city needed to devote "uncompromising attention" and "significant funding" to the problem. Anything less would cripple the city's school desegregation goals.

The Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study staff who authored the above report continued to hone in on the issue of housing. Subsequent reports investigating the practices of the real estate industry were equally grim. Seattle's index of segregation for 1970 showed that its Black population was nearly as segregated from whites as was the case in New Orleans. In Seattle, the white/black segregation was 82.2; in New Orleans the number was 83.9. The southern city, 45 percent black, had at least that much in common with Seattle, which was only 7.1 percent black. Although realtors denied that blockbusting or "panic-peddling" was an issue, Seattle residents, particularly in the southeast, spoke to the intensity of the problem. Canvassing white neighborhoods, realtors had grown fond of referring to the "changing character" and "decreasing property values" in the area. What became clear, though it was left unstated in the reports, was that the real estate industry was working toward a much different goal than the school district. Ultimately, according to the researchers, the city needed more entities and resources to advocate for the housing needs of the poor and minorities.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Alice Woldt, Nancy Burton, and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Real Estate Marketing Practices and Residential Segregation*, City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools, January 1978, 5; 28-32.

As it stood, more than half of Seattle neighborhoods did not “carry any significant share of the low-cost publicly-subsidized housing burden,” according to the researchers. Seventy-nine percent of the city’s elementary attendance areas were “essentially unaffected by any public housing at all.” The neighborhoods of Capitol Hill, Greenlake, Ballard, Broadview, Alki, University, Queen Anne, and Magnolia were chief examples. Many but not all of these overwhelmingly-white neighborhoods were north of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, the well-known marker of class and color in Seattle. It was no accident that the white neighborhoods most staunchly opposed to open housing in the 1960s happened to be free of public and subsidized housing.<sup>41</sup>

### **Japanese American Mobility**

Through analyzing census data and interviewing Japanese Americans, the School District’s research team determined that housing discrimination was no longer an issue for Seattle’s Japanese community. “The prevailing feeling is that no serious problems can be documented as remaining in the realms of housing or credit,” a report concluded. “The last time anyone recalls blatant anti-Japanese discrimination was in the mid-to-late 1950’s.” Much of the newfound acceptance experienced by Japanese in the realm of housing came as a result of changing perceptions among the city’s white population. Once a population that evoked hysteria, now when Seattle’s Japanese moved into a neighborhood they were seen “largely in the context of the newer stereotyped image of the model citizen,” according to the report. The vestiges of discrimination were now found in “subtle steering in the housing market, or slightly less

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<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Silver and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: The Effect of Publicly Subsidized Housing on Seattle Schools and Neighborhoods*, City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools, October 1977, 61.

attractive than normal arrangements on loans.” The extent of such practices was difficult to pin down, the report argued.<sup>42</sup>

In its overview of demographic trends, the school district understated the impact of housing discrimination on Seattle’s Japanese community. As was common, the absence of evidence was interpreted as a sign that discrimination had ended. The subtle impact of steering or less attractive loans were difficult factors to measure. As a result, the report overstated the gains made by Japanese Americans, in terms of residential mobility. After 1957, the report’s authors argued, Japanese Americans in Seattle were largely able to make “free” choices when it came to housing and education. That clearly was not the case. Yet, over the course of the 1960s and the 1970s, white neighborhoods were indeed opening up to Japanese Americans. Part of the reason for expanded residential mobility was a rise in socioeconomic status. Another important reason, referenced only briefly in the report, was described as the “newer stereotyped image of the model citizen.”<sup>43</sup>

Within Seattle Public Schools, Japanese American enrollment peaked at 2,377 in 1966. By 1976, the number dropped to 1,360, as many shifted into suburban schools in West Seattle, the North End and various suburbs. Some Japanese Americans felt pushed out of neighborhoods with “ghetto schools” and drawn to the suburbs. As Robert Self has argued, the suburbs embodied “full assimilation into American life and its celebration of modernity and consumption.” A new home, a big yard, and a garage were a strong selling point for many who had once been confined to the “ghetto”; people of all colors were buying into this vision. Ultimately, the district was forced to recognize that the residential mobility of Japanese

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<sup>42</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, 163.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

Americans was an overlooked aspect of the city's school desegregation plans. Enough Japanese families were in a position to foil plans that casually lumped "minorities" together.<sup>44</sup>

The report also found that interviews with Japanese American leaders revealed widespread anti-black sentiment within the Japanese community. "The issue of Japanese American racist sentiments regarding Blacks arose in virtually all interviews," the report read. "Albeit with embarrassment, a range of comments were made regarding racially mixed (i.e., Blacks) schools and neighborhoods." The allure of Bellevue "or other majority White suburbs" played a role in the dispersal of Seattle's Japanese population, with some framing the escape from the city as a way to keep their children from "mixing with 'low achievers'." With discussions of school desegregation ramping up in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, many Japanese Americans in Seattle became frustrated with the narrowness of the debate, according to the report. The following is an excerpt that spelled out their discontent: "The primary concern of the Japanese American community is that the dominant theme of all desegregation discussions is a Black-White one, to the exclusion of substantive involvement of Japanese and other minorities." Japanese American leaders involved with the school district feared that past gains for Asians in Seattle would be supplanted by "grander" desegregation plans geared toward black students.<sup>45</sup>

It is easy to look back on talk of assimilation and model minorities in a dismissive way, but recent work by the sociologists Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou points to the need for a greater understanding of the impact of these ideas. While the damage perpetuated by the model minority image has been well-documented, the other side of the equation has been largely ignored.

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<sup>44</sup> Siqueland, *Without a Court Order*, 117-119; Constantine Angelos, "School Board Expected to OK Milestone Seattle Plan," *Seattle Times*, December 11, 1977; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*, 16; Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, 19; 164-165.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, 164-165.

Though the racialization of Asian Americans has wielded negative consequences, it has also brought about “positive” stereotypes, according to Lee and Zhou. These “positive” stereotypes, seen most clearly in the way teachers interact with Asian students in the classroom, “become a form of symbolic capital that Asian Americans can leverage to facilitate academic achievement and social mobility.” Teachers have come to expect more of Asian students, regardless of their ethnicity or socioeconomic background. In turn, many Asian American students have imbibed the notion that their achievements can be credited to Asian American culture.<sup>46</sup>

While this type of research is still now only in its infancy, researchers for the school district and Japanese Americans leaders were fully aware of the racialized image of Japanese American students, even in the 1970s. They recognized that “more or less average” Japanese American students got by “in part on the ‘model citizen’ stereotype.”<sup>47</sup> On the ground in Seattle, Japanese Americans were able to leverage a “symbolic capital” not only in schools but also in a racially-segregated housing market. Seattle’s open housing debates of the 1960s revealed the power of stereotyped images of Japanese Americans and other Asian American groups. The racialized perceptions of Japanese Americans created an image of a community that stood in contrast to African Americans. When it came to access to housing and schools, socioeconomic status was incredibly important but it was not the only factor that distinguished the two groups.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond the school district, other researchers noticed a similar trend, as the image of Japanese Americans was transformed following World War II. A study of interracial marriage among Japanese Americans in Seattle between 1930 and 1975 brings home the point. Going back to the pre-World War II period, UW anthropologists Donna Leonetti and Laura Newell-

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<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Lee, and Min Zhou, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox* (New York: Russell Sage, 2015), 49; 64-65; 71; 117; 184-185.

<sup>47</sup> Nancy Burton and Dick Birnbaum, *Schools and Neighborhoods Research Study: Minority Population Shifts in the Seattle Area*, 164.

<sup>48</sup> Lee and Zhou, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, 49; 64-65; 71; 117; 184-185.

Morris found King County's Japanese American population was "characterized by both low occupational prestige and intense occupational specialization." Simply put, Japanese Americans in King County were part of a tight-knit, interdependent community that relied on businesses tied to farming. As a result, they experienced high levels of "social-isolation."<sup>49</sup>

After incarceration during WWII led to catastrophic losses within the community, the Nisei began to move into professional positions, "eventually achieving occupational integration into the larger American economy." Their social mobility "was also accompanied by spatial dispersion of the population." Occupational advances and rising income levels coincided with "residential integration." The era between 1950 and 1970 marked a watershed for Seattle's Japanese community, which "spread into prosperous, predominantly White, middle-class neighborhoods within the city and the suburbs of King County."<sup>50</sup> According to Leonetti and Newell-Morris, the cultural socioeconomic status of Seattle's Japanese residents became "sufficiently aligned such that exogamous marriages were perceived as possible."<sup>51</sup>

As economic and cultural circumstances changed for Seattle's Japanese residents in the 1950s and 1960s, the possibility of exogamous marriages greatly increased. In particular, marriages between Japanese Americans and "Caucasians" became increasingly common. Between 1965 and 1970, the percent of marriages between Japanese and "Caucasians" in Seattle climbed past 30 percent; by 1975 the number was over 50 percent. Marriages between Japanese Americans and African Americans were "very rare," according to the study. Marriages to other Asians were somewhat more common, though the percentage of such marriages never reached

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<sup>49</sup> Donna Lockwood Leonetti and Laura Newell-Morris, "Exogamy and Change in the Biosocial Structure of a Modern Urban Population," *American Anthropologist* 84, no. 1 (March 1982) 19; 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

above 10 percent. Although such numbers indicated an “apparent preference for outmarriage to Caucasians,” no firm claims could be made, given that most Seattleites were white.<sup>52</sup>

Leonetti and Newell-Morris emphasized the extent to which marriages were “critical social linkages” and a key indicator of social and economic ties. What they did not mention was that even with the expansion of Japanese residential patterns during the 1960s and 1970s, there were still numerous neighborhoods where black and Japanese residents lived together, along with a range of other non-whites. For example, in 1960 the Garfield-Madrona area was still home to 74.6 percent of the city’s black population, 38.2 percent of the city’s Japanese, 36.1 percent of the city’s Filipinos, 24.1 percent of the city’s Chinese, and 16.7 percent of the city’s “Native American” population. By 1970, the Beacon-Rainier Valley and the Rainier Beach areas developed smaller but still highly-concentrated enclaves of blacks, Japanese Americans, and other non-whites. Given Seattle’s racial hierarchy, however, Japanese Americans risked a diminished reputation, or even being disowned by their family, if they decided to marry African Americans. When Rose Kobata married Clayton Harrell, Sr. in 1953, her family disowned her for a period of about 20 years. A Nisei, born and raised in Seattle, Kobata met Harrell, an African American originally from Louisiana, at Garfield High School. While Kobata was welcomed into Harrell’s family, they were ostracized by hers, a fact that circulated widely within Seattle’s black and Japanese communities.<sup>53</sup> The stigma of marrying or entering into a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 24, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 32; Assunta Ng, “What the newspaper taught me about interracial marriage,” *Northwest Asian Weekly*, March 17, 2012; Assunta Ng, phone interview by Michael Matsumaru, July 7, 2016; Sumi Hayashi, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, July 18, 2016; Mark C. Hayes, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, July 19, 2016; John Yasutake, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, July 19, 2016; Dee Goto, interview by Michael Matsumaru, Seattle, Washington, May 25, 2016.



relationship with an African American transcended the Japanese community and had real consequences in the housing market as well as schools.<sup>54</sup>

### **Forcing School Desegregation into Place**

Far from a settled landscape, the city's school desegregation efforts were built on shifting sand. When the school board brought "The Seattle Plan" to life on December 14, 1977, it did so with the support and assistance of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Municipal League.<sup>55</sup> The malleability of Seattle's "pragmatic" liberalism shone bright in the fact that business interests rallied around the issue of school desegregation. In part, this signified the impact of the Civil Rights movement, particularly in the realm of rhetoric. It also demonstrated the usefulness of a public commitment to racial justice, even one that ignored the issue of economic justice. Seattle's white power brokers saw incredible value in picking out elements of the 1960s civil rights struggles that were the most palatable. Wrapped up in the language of racial liberalism, school desegregation was the perfect vehicle for reformulating Seattle's image as a tolerant city.

Even opponents of the plan managed to reiterate their support for equality and diversity. Citizens Against Mandatory Busing, an overwhelmingly white group, adopted a platform appropriating the language of civil rights. The group affirmed its support for a "totally integrated school system that is comprised of many races, classes, and ethnic groups and is completely void of segregation..." The sticking point, however, was housing. In Seattle, they argued, an open housing law already existed. No resident was "restricted to or directed to live in any area."

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<sup>54</sup> Bruce Harrell, phone interview by Michael Matsumaru, August 3, 2016; City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1978*, 1802-G9, Office of the City Clerk, Annual Reports, Human Rights Department, 1963-1982, Box 1, Folder 4, SMA; City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1979*, Ibid; City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1979*, 1802-G9, Office of the City Clerk, Annual Reports, Human Rights Department, 1963-1982, Box 1, Folder 4, SMA.

<sup>55</sup> Siqueland, *Without a Court Order*, 104-105.

Simply put, “all schools” were “open to any resident.” According to one historian of Seattle school desegregation, white middle-class residents, particularly those living north of the ship canal, “refused to accept any responsibility for the injustices in the city’s racial hierarchy.”<sup>56</sup>

Brought into effect in the fall of 1978, the Seattle Plan met a swift backlash. The plan paired or triaded elementary schools in white and minority neighborhoods. Children who attended desegregated schools together at the elementary level would remain clustered together at the junior and senior high levels. Several magnet programs were also introduced. The newly-formed Citizens for Voluntary Integration Committee produced a state-wide ballot measure, Initiative 350. The measure prohibited such mixing, demanding instead that students be assigned to schools nearest to their home. Voted on in November 1978, Initiative 350 passed, illuminating the widespread divisions throughout the city and state. In Seattle, 60 percent of votes were in favor of the measure; statewide, 66 percent were in support. Only two legislative districts in Seattle voted against the initiative. The 37<sup>th</sup> (home to the CD) and the 43<sup>rd</sup> (including Capitol Hill and the University District) stood alone in their opposition. The school district battled Initiative 350 all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1982, the court found the initiative unconstitutional.<sup>57</sup>

A great deal of opposition to busing was couched in the language of property rights. Untangling education from a capitalist housing market that delivered uneven opportunities was an impossible task. On the ground, school desegregation did help a younger generation of Seattleites reimagine the city, even if only temporarily. Scholar Catherine Veninga interviewed an interracial cohort of 50 students who were bused as part of the Seattle Plan. Her research

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<sup>56</sup> Kirsten Louise Martens Pochop, “Learning Liberalism: Seattle Schools and the Changing Face of American Racial Politics, 1960-1980 (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2014), 4-6; 135-136.

<sup>57</sup> Laura Kohn, *Priority Shift: The Fate of Mandatory Busing for School Desegregation in Seattle and the Nation*, Institute for Public Policy and Management, University of Washington, March 1996, 31-32.

attested to the “spatial embeddedness of racial identities.” Fear permeated the minds of many of those interviewed as they looked back on what it meant to traverse a segregated city. Most felt a strong sense of displacement and anxiety, dreading the thought of being a racial outsider. In some cases, these fears subsided over time – particularly for white students. As the most racially-isolated group in the city, white students tended to harbor the most anxiety about traveling beyond their neighborhood. Encountering black male bodies, imagined as violent, was a daunting experience for many white interviewees. Race was mapped on to bodies and spaces. For black students who were bused to North End schools, many “expressed a fear that North End whites desired to preserve the racial order as it stood prior to school desegregation.” According to Veninga, Asian students reported the least amount of topophobia. This, she attributed to the fact that they were the least racially-segregated group in the city by 1980. Their index of isolation, at 17 percent, was miniscule compared with whites (84 percent) and blacks (35 percent). While her analysis rings true, the imputed blackness or whiteness of neighborhoods also underscored the invisibility of Asian Americans. Over time, virtually all of the students interviewed saw their fears dissipate. But, for the most part students felt their lives post-graduation characterized by “socially homogeneous spaces.”<sup>58</sup>

Seattle’s experiment with school desegregation forced many African American students to bear the brunt of a city’s racialized fears triggered by dislocation. The low status of African Americans within the city’s racial hierarchy traveled across school boundaries. So too did markers of class, and gender. Interviews conducted by the scholar Michael Dumas serve as helpful guides. An African American who himself was bused across town to a white school, Dumas uncovered the tension that sometimes developed between black parents and white

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<sup>58</sup> Catherine E. Veninga, “Road Scholars: School Busing and the Politics of Integration in Seattle,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2005), 102-110; 158-188; 279.

teachers. For black women in particular, and especially those who were single mothers, advocating for their children often involved one traumatic battle after another. Gendered and racialized stereotypes of black single mothers were mobile and powerful.<sup>59</sup>

One of the most damaging aspects of Seattle's school desegregation efforts resulted from the implementation of magnet programs in black schools. Fully cognizant of the economic damage caused by the loss of white students, the district saw magnet schools as an incentive to help stem the loss of white capital. As Dumas has argued, these magnet programs essentially offered a private-school setting for white students at public expense. These magnet programs sent a number of destructive messages that reverberated through the black community. Firstly, they implied that black students did not "deserve" or were not "culturally or genetically fit" for elite programs. Most of these programs were filled by white and later Asian students. In addition, the message was that white students needed to be "compensated" for going to a black school. According to Dumas, an additional insult came with the logic that "racially integrated education need not mean that white students actually interact with black students as *intellectual peers*." Quite simply, the ability of middle-class white parents to navigate the city's racialized boundaries in the housing market held the school district captive. The only way school desegregation could work was if it reinforced white supremacy. This could be accomplished even as interracial clusters of students rode school buses across a racially-divided city. Even, as they shared the same schools and cafeterias.<sup>60</sup>

The first African American woman elected to the school board, Dorothy Hollingsworth was an architect of the city's busing program. She had also been active in the open housing

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<sup>59</sup> Michael J. Dumas, "'Losing an Arm': Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering," *Race and Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 1 (2014), 11; 14-15.

<sup>60</sup> Dumas, "A Cultural Political Economy of School Desegregation in Seattle," 715; Phyllis Beaumonte, Interview by Takashi Matsumaru, August 14, 2015, Seattle, Washington.

movement. When she was first elected in 1975, Hollingsworth was immediately – and unsurprisingly – asked to chair the desegregation committee. Far too many still saw desegregation as strictly a black issue. Hollingsworth, in a 2005 interview, described how she politely declined the request: “No one asked me could you segregate; now don’t ask me to desegregate you.” It would become her go to answer, a way of forcing whites in Seattle to own the segregation they perpetuated. Looking back on desegregation, Hollingsworth admitted that the city had succeeded in “moving bodies” but not in shifting attitudes toward black students.<sup>61</sup>

For African American students and their parents, being bused into White neighborhoods was often a traumatic experience. After querying her black friends in the mid-1980s, Zakiyah Stewart had this to say about what she learned: “The academic performance piece was missing and it seemed as if you put them on the bus that meant they were going to be suspended at one point or another during that school year.” Part of what had blunted earlier efforts to challenge racial segregation had been the desire of African Americans to protect their children from the worst of white racism. The Seattle Plan, curtailed in 1989 and ended seven years later, left many isolated and subjected to emotional and physical violence. For many African Americans, a return to neighborhood schools was a welcome respite, even if it meant more segregation.<sup>62</sup>

As Robin D.G. Kelley has argued, “the point of liberal multiculturalism was not to address the historical legacies of racism, dispossession, and injustice but to bring some people into the fold of ‘a society no longer seen as racially unjust.’”<sup>63</sup> This was the dynamic enshrouding school desegregation, making it difficult to see how the structures that produced

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Hollingsworth, Interview by Trevor Griffey, Seattle, Washington, March 2005, Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/hollingsworth.htm> (accessed February 20, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Zakiyah Stewart quoted in Dumas, “‘Losing an Arm’: Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering,” 14; Linda Shaw, “The Resegregation of Seattle’s Schools,” *Seattle Times*, June 1, 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle,” *Boston Review*, March 7, 2016, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle> (accessed February 28, 2017).

segregated schools remained in place. For the school district's purposes, Japanese Americans fit into the paradigm of liberal multiculturalism. Meanwhile, for African Americans, ongoing and systemic violence was coupled with a heavy dose of inclusive rhetoric.<sup>64</sup> The stigma of blighted neighborhoods followed them into the classroom. Ellen Roe, who had been the sole dissenting vote when the school board enacted the "The Seattle Plan," reinforced this reality. At the time, she had argued that forcing desegregation on the city would provoke white flight. She was right. In 1970, white enrollment was at 80 percent within the district. By 1980, that number had shrunk to 56 percent. The descent continued even after Seattle did away with mandatory busing. By 2005, the number stood at 41 percent, while more than half of the city's white, school-aged children attended private schools.

As critiques of the city's attempts at school desegregation poured in throughout the 1980s, it still remained a shock that the most vociferous comments came from a 10-year member of the Seattle School Board. In 1985, Ellen Roe, the former school board president, outlined the principal at play behind her opposition to busing in a conversation with a local newspaper reporter. "What happens when you put a child whose mother is a prostitute in Holly Park...who doesn't know anything except the inside of his own scruffy house...together with a boy like mine whose parents and grandparents have taken him everywhere?" asked Roe. She went on to add that women were unfit to lead due to their emotional temperament. Although Roe's comments were roundly condemned, she retained her seat on the board even as numerous detractors called for her removal. Alluding to the perceptions that school desegregation was

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<sup>64</sup> Natsu Taylor Saito, "Beyond Reparations: Accommodating Wrongs or Honoring Resistance," *Hastings Race and Poverty Law Journal* 1, 27 (Fall 2003).

socialistic, Roe framed the city's desegregation efforts as the ultimate example of high-minded "ultra-liberal" attempts at social engineering.<sup>65</sup>

Roe's comments spoke to the racialized boundaries of the city that plagued school desegregation efforts. She represented an all-too-common perspective, one that framed geography as destiny. Speaking in 2004, Roe remained adamant in her opposition to busing. "I don't think it changed many housing patterns, which is the main issue, (and), what causes a lot of the segregation," she explained to a *Seattle Times* reporter. For many African Americans in Seattle, freedom meant a healthy distance from the neighborhoods and schools that produced such a toxic ideology.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Though Seattle's school desegregation efforts represented a compromise that left many black, Asian and white residents feeling alienated from their public school system, the way forward left even less room for protecting the civil rights of African American students. Those working to turn the city into a post-racial urban oasis achieved a significant legal victory in 2007. After a prolonged legal battle that began as soon as the local school board committed to a mandatory desegregation plan, the nation's highest court eventually weighed in. In a 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court's conservative majority declared the desegregation plans of the Seattle and Louisville school districts unconstitutional. The districts could no longer assign students to schools based on their race. With the court applying the "strict scrutiny" standard of judicial review, the racial tiebreaker formula stood little chance of surviving. Under strict scrutiny, the Seattle School District (SSD) needed to prove that its use of racial classifications was "narrowly

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<sup>65</sup> "Quit School Board, Roe Urged," *Seattle P-I*, August 2, 1985, box 8, folder 1: "Subject Series-Ellen Roe, 1985," National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, Accession no. 0465-002, UWSC.

<sup>66</sup> Sanjay Bhatt, "The School Board Member: 'I don't think it (busing) changed many housing patterns,'" *Seattle Times*, July 8, 2004; Dumas, "'Losing an Arm': Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering," 18.

tailored” to serve a “compelling” government interest. In the end, the SSD failed to do so according to the plurality, made up of Chief Justice John Roberts as well as justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito.

In the plurality opinion, Roberts reduced the case to a few simple words: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” Racial balancing, according to Roberts, had “no logical stopping point” and therefore could not be endorsed by the Court. Roberts’ pithy dismissal of race summed up the growing desire to move beyond the quagmire of race without confronting the nation’s history. His perspective was affirmed by Justice Thomas. “Individual schools,” Thomas argued, “will fall in and out of balance in the natural course, and the appropriate balance itself will shift with a school district’s changing demographics.” In a powerful way, the court gave credence to the popular idea that neighborhoods in Seattle and other cities became racially-segregated through a “natural course” of events.<sup>67</sup> This could not have been further from the truth.

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<sup>67</sup> Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District no. 1 et al., 551 U.S. 701 (2007).



## Chapter 5: The View from Below: Seattle's Housing Crisis in the 1970s and 1980s

In the spring of 1978, Cory Schaetzel embarked on a search for affordable housing in Seattle. Busy, noisy neighborhoods, particularly those near main roadways held out the promise of low-income housing. So too did locations near the bustle and smell of heavy industry. Shabby buildings, little-to-no landscaping, and worn-down cars were additional indicators that affordable housing might be on the horizon. In a city boasting the highest “quality of life” in the nation, according to one popular study, Schaetzel discovered few promising options. Investigating on behalf of the Seattle Emergency Housing Service, her report was grim. The cheapest rental units tended to be clustered in neighborhoods that were pictures of neglect. Low-income families, if they could even find a landlord that would accept children, “were channeled into and confined to these areas.” Priced out of the homeowners market, and competing on the fringes of a brutal rental market, most poor families were forced to accept substandard housing. With more than 1,000 families on the waiting list, public housing offered no immediate respite. Languishing on the waiting list for six months to a year was not uncommon.<sup>1</sup>

Once hemmed in to the Central District by restrictive covenants, Seattle's non-white population was slowly moving southward. Schaetzel found property owners and managers in Southeast Seattle resented the area's image as “the melting pot of the poor.” Some held out for as long as possible to avoid renting to a welfare recipient. In North and West Seattle, few affordable rentals were available. When they were, Schaetzel encountered landlords who were quick to offer “tales of destruction, lack of payments, overly large families, etc.” to justify their refusal to rent to those on welfare. Most landlords in the North End believed families on public assistance “should remain in the Southeast end of the city.” The suburbs of Renton, Kent, and

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 177; Cory Schaetzel, *Survey of Affordable Rental Housing for Low Income Families*, March 1978, Seattle Emergency Housing Service, Accession no. 5274-01, Charles T. Royer Departmental Correspondence, SMA.

Burien also yielded little beyond luxury apartments. The federal Section 8 program, aimed at disbursing low income families throughout cities, had “failed” in Seattle, according to Schaetzel. Those with Section 8 vouchers were eligible to find housing at “fair market rent” but unfortunately that ceiling fell well beneath the actual market price of rentals. To further exacerbate the problem, most property owners refused to cooperate with the program.<sup>2</sup>

Schaetzel’s account provides an important backdrop for understanding Seattle’s housing crisis in the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter will focus on some of the factors that allowed Southeast Seattle to become “the melting pot of the poor,” while other parts of the city remained shielded, for the most part, from people of color and poverty. The fact that both Schaetzel and property owners spoke to the circumscribed nature of housing opportunities for non-whites is worth emphasizing. Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, much of the complexity of Southeast Seattle’s development is easily swept away. In its place stand celebrations of Southeast Seattle as a “leader in diversity.”<sup>3</sup> Yet as Seattle’s housing crisis continued into the 1980s, the racial dimensions of the city’s poverty sharpened into focus. More than 11,500 people were served by the city’s homeless shelters in 1985. That same year, minorities made up 50 percent of the city’s homeless population. To put it in context, Seattle was still nearly 80 percent white, according to the 1980 census.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter brings into view the architecture of racial segregation. Its main argument is that disinvestment followed black migration patterns, shifting from the Central District to Southeast Seattle. Government policies – at all levels – combined with private decisions, helped

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<sup>2</sup> Schaetzel, *Survey of Affordable Rental Housing for Low Income Families*.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, “Southeast Seattle, 98118: Yes, My Diverse Zip Code is Cool,” *Crosscut.com*, June 25, 2010, <http://crosscut.com/2010/06/southeast-seattle-98118-yes-my-diverse-zip-code-is/> (accessed January 25, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> David Takami, “It’ll Take Door to Door Education,” *International Examiner*, February 19, 1986.; Jackie Jamero, “City Staves Off Eviction of Residents from the Mt. Baker Apartments,” *International Examiner*, December 2, 1987; Sharon Lee, “Housing Trust Fund Will Help Our Community,” *International Examiner*, May 6, 1987; “Demographic Profile, Seattle-King Country,” August 1982, Seattle Chamber of Commerce.

to reinforce a racial segregation that set African Americans apart within Seattle's housing market. African Americans lived in neighborhoods riddled by disinvestment. For Japanese Americans, the same could not be said, for by the 1970s and 1980s they were a population scattered throughout white neighborhoods. Urban renewal within the downtown core pushed Seattle's black population southward and by the 1980s, Southeast Seattle was home to a disproportionate number of low-income African American single mothers with their children. As this chapter shows, they, and other low-income black renters consistently ran into opposition from landlords when they tried to find rental housing in white neighborhoods. Fears of miscegenation that once constricted Asian American mobility were now concentrated on African Americans.

The interlocking features of Seattle's racial geography drive this chapter. Piece by piece, the chapter focuses on urban renewal, redlining and disinvestment, subsidized housing, and the fight for equality in the rental housing market. A key feature of this chapter is a detailed analysis of case files dealing with racial discrimination brought before the Seattle Human Rights Department. These case files bring to light the civil rights struggles waged by low-income African Americans. They led a fight against the litany of discriminatory policies used by landlords to keep out black renters. At a time when the federal government had eviscerated funding for low-income housing and the enforcement of civil rights, their cases fill in a broader story about a Civil Rights movement run aground. Little broad-based support was mustered for an issue that had once been at the core of the movement.

### **Urban Renewal**

For those with the financial means to enter the homeowner's market or the high-end rental market, living in Seattle afforded a variety of housing opportunities. Both Boeing and

Seattle's condominium market were booming in the early 1980s. By the beginning of the decade, more than 17,000 condominiums had been platted in the Seattle area. Though the allure of condo-living drew some from the suburbs back in to the city, it also resulted in the displacement of low-income renters. In the words of the city's Department of Community Development, those who could not afford to buy units that had been converted from rental housing into condominiums became "urban refugees." In the midst of Seattle's redevelopment, over half of the downtown housing stock was lost between 1960 and 1979. A total of 16,000 units were eliminated, most of which housed tenants who were elderly, low-income, single, and white. Their displacement from the downtown core wreaked havoc on an already-tight rental market.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1970s, the rate of moves from Seattle's suburbs back in to the city doubled. More than two thirds of the movers in this category were under the age of 30. The so-called "urban elite" was young and largely made up of two-income professional households. Two very different regions of the city – the Central District and the North End (defined as the area north of the ship canal) – experienced the greatest increase in housing costs. A key difference between the two neighborhoods was that in the CD, low-income and elderly renters were most affected, whereas in the North End, homeowners dealt with the increased costs. A report by the city revealed that "increased demand for housing in the CD is most heavily impacting minority households living in the area." Low-income households throughout the city experienced the highest rates of rent increases. For white residents of the CD, the options were open and varied as to where they might live once they left what was becoming an increasingly popular

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<sup>5</sup> *Draft: Seattle's Downtown Housing Crisis: A Plan of Action, 1979*, Department of Community Development , 2-3; 62-63.

neighborhood. Many tended to move to the North End. For blacks, those who moved out of the Central District usually moved to the South End, defined as the area south of the I-90 interstate.<sup>6</sup>

Average purchase prices for single-family homes in the CD increased by 143 percent between 1976 and 1980. Rents in the area shot up by 61 percent over the same period. Housing conditions within the CD – which was 55 percent black and 10 percent Asian – were some of the “poorest in the city.” Demolishing “blighted” homes under the policy of urban renewal had resulted in the CD losing 22 percent of its housing stock since 1960. Since 1970, many Japanese and Chinese families had moved out of the CD and were being replaced by a sizeable Southeast Asian population. But overall, the Asian population within the CD declined by 25 percent between 1970 and 1980. As the neighborhood was rapidly changing, a study conducted by the city posed the following question: What would happen to the long-time residents, most of whom were low-income, who had weathered urban renewal, the “urban rioting” of the late-1960s, “white flight,” and redlining? Those squeezed in by racist policies and practices at one point, were now being pushed out as the area continued its resurgence.<sup>7</sup>

### **Race, Redlining and Disinvestment**

The role banks and other financial institutions played in reshaping Seattle’s neighborhoods came under close scrutiny in the summer of 1975. That year, the Central Seattle Community Council Federation (CCCCF) published a report that thrust the issue of redlining into the spotlight. Titled, “Redlining and Disinvestment in Central Seattle: How the Banks are Destroying Our Neighborhoods,” the report documented the extent to which “high-risk” areas were being starved of capital. The CD and the Rainier Valley (Southeast Seattle) were at the center of the drought. After perusing public records, the federation discovered that no

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<sup>6</sup> *Seattle Displacement Study*, Seattle Office of Policy Planning, 1979, ii-iii; vi; 2-3; 121-122; 134-135.

<sup>7</sup> *Background Report on Housing Population and Land Use in Seattle’s Central Area*, Department of Community Development, April 1981.

“conventional or FHA loans were granted in the last five years” in large parts of the CD. “Nearly all banks” had combined to shut out the area from housing-related investments. The only flicker of investment to be found was money lent to “speculators or investors.” Residents of the CD and the Rainier Valley were forced to rely on higher-cost FHA insured loans obtained through mortgage companies. As a result, the major mortgage companies operating in the redlined areas were foreclosing on homes at an alarming rate, eight times higher than that of conventional banks. In turn, money invested in banks by CD residents was “flowing out...to be invested in the suburbs.” The report found that banks in the CD loaned out “as little as 19 cents” for every dollar invested, whereas suburban branch banks invested up to \$2.40 for every dollar deposited. A “total redlining of major portions” of the CD and “a near complete redlining of the Rainier Valley” was the end result of such policies.<sup>8</sup>

Mayor Wes Uhlman charged a “reinvestment task force” with investigating the report. Race, though still a major factor in Seattle’s housing patterns, was a topic that received only a sliver of attention in the ensuing debate over redlining. The precise impact of redlining on the city’s black population failed to register much attention, even though the majority of residents within the CD were black. Banks, pressured by CD residents and city officials, were forced to respond to the report. Discord ensued as the task force was split between community representatives who wanted full disclosure in lending practices and bankers who chafed at the burden and cost of such regulations. One of the main points of contention was the issue of retroactive disclosure. More than 30 financial institutions joined in an argument against disclosure. They argued that identifying investments, past and present, by neighborhood, would be a waste of time and resources. “We believed such data is useless to the community in an

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<sup>8</sup> Central Seattle Community Council Federation, *Redlining and Disinvestment in Central Seattle: How the Banks Are Destroying Our Neighborhoods*, July 1975.

historic sense, especially because the Task Force already has concluded that disinvestment, in fact, has occurred,” they argued. To go back in time and spell out particular discrimination could lead to exorbitant costs. What community activists realized, however, was that it would be virtually impossible to hold banks accountable without a comprehensive understanding of past loan practices throughout all Seattle neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup>

An interracial coalition of community activists from various parts of Seattle struggled to bring the legacy of housing discrimination to the forefront of the debate. They were hardly in a position of power. Lender members of the Task Force cited a litany of fair housing laws as evidence of progress in eliminating discrimination. Community members countered with the response that “legislative changes do not always result in behavioral changes.” But even as the representatives of lending institutions praised new housing laws, several of the financial institutions involved in the Task Force were sullied by revelations of ongoing discrimination. The Washington State Human Rights Commission found that a “subsidiary” of one bank “practiced racial discrimination” in the rental of apartments. In another case, the U.S. Department of the Treasury “cited Seattle banks for subsidizing the membership of their employees in private clubs which bar women and minorities from membership.” In light of such revelations, the community members on the Task Force asked all local lenders for information on the “race, sex, and place of residence of boards of directors, real estate loan officers, and staff appraisers.” Their request was denied. Financial institutions strove to keep the systemic nature of the problem from being exposed.<sup>10</sup>

Community members on the Task Force also pushed to abolish practices that deemed “minority” neighborhoods a higher risk for loans. Financial institutions throughout the city

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<sup>9</sup> *Draft Report of the Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force*, Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force, April 23, 1976.

<sup>10</sup> *Final Report of Community Members of Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force*, Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force, June 3, 1976.

recoiled at their demands. Any emphasis on the disproportionate impact of discrimination on the CD was steered from the conversation. Redlining in West Seattle drew as much attention as redlining in the CD. Timothy Nakayama, chair of the Church Council of Greater Seattle's task force on redlining, criticized the way the conversation on redlining was evolving. Speaking to the *Times*, the Reverend of St. Peter's Episcopal Church described how the CD was "taking a back seat to this as a middle class-issue" that transcended any one neighborhood. Nakayama was one of the few Japanese American voices in the redlining debate.<sup>11</sup>

At a public hearing on redlining in 1976, the Reverend Samuel McKinney, of Mount Zion Baptist Church, spoke to the credit challenges facing the black community. In 1970, the iconic CD church was denied a loan to build a new sanctuary by five banks. Eventually the congregation obtained a loan for \$650,000 and moved in to its new building, which was completed in 1975. The loan came from a Baptist corporation located in Pennsylvania, as the church was forced to look beyond the city for help. At the time, McKinney thought the denials were just another device in a "white system to try to keep black and other poor folks from trying to achieve their dreams." According to McKinney, blacks in Seattle "didn't know it was called redlining, all we did know was when we went to the bank to get a loan we couldn't get it." From a citywide perspective, redlining was a revelation. From a black perspective, it was a longstanding and familiar practice.<sup>12</sup>

What frustrated McKinney most was that he could see – hidden in plain sight – that the CD was being "decimated by design." He knew whites were slowly flocking back to the area after "running out of town to the nicer parts of the community to play ring-around-the-city in the

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<sup>11</sup> Ray Ruppert, "Central Area is 'Taking a Back Seat,'" *Seattle Times*, October 13, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Mayor's Reinvestment Task Force, Public Hearing, January 22, 1976, Office of Management and Budget Housing and Community Development Subject Files (5015-01), Box 4, Seattle Municipal Archives; "Redlining in Seattle," Seattle Municipal Archives, <http://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/online-exhibits/redlining-in-seattle> (accessed July 13, 2016).



suburbs.” When blacks first began to settle in the area, they had moved into “worn out” homes and were forced to pay a “colored tax,” – reflecting the overpricing of homes available to blacks.<sup>13</sup> To the extent it was possible, McKinney now urged his congregants to hold on to their properties in the CD. Part of his reasoning came from the knowledge that black communities in Texas had been bamboozled into selling property that contained valuable oil deposits. Though not oil-rich, at least to his knowledge, CD real estate was on the upswing. For McKinney, Seattle’s broad push toward racial integration, whether in the school system, or the housing market, was an elaborate ruse. “All integration means is absorption, assimilation, and annihilation,” McKinney explained to a newspaper reporter in 1977. “Only concentrated Blacks can build a power base.”<sup>14</sup>

McKinney possessed a wealth of knowledge regarding the city’s racially-segregated housing market. It is worth noting that he was only given a token, unpaid position on the city’s Human Rights Commission during the open housing debates in the early 1960s. More than a decade later, the city still failed to put his knowledge to use in helping to create a more just and equitable society. Seattle’s debate on redlining failed to advance beyond vague references to “racially and economically mixed” neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup> Seattle arrived late to the debate over redlining, partly because it was such a white city. Even as the issue of redlining piqued the interests of many Seattleites, the city continued with segregated Multiple Listing Service (MLS) systems. Of the city’s 18 “minority” real estate firms, only five belonged to an MLS. That particular MLS only listed properties in the CD, Southeast Seattle, and the southeastern suburbs.

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<sup>13</sup> Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force, Public Hearing, January 22, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> Erik Lacitis, “There Goes the Neighborhood,” *Seattle Times*, June 22, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> *Final Report of Community Members of Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force*, Mayor’s Reinvestment Task Force, June 3, 1976.

The city's white real estate firms used different MLS programs.<sup>16</sup> Tension surrounding redlining continued for about a year before most Seattleites moved on with their lives. As a result, Seattle lost an opportunity to remove one of the cornerstones of a racially-segregated housing market. What ensued was no mere coincidence. The outmigration of blacks from the CD and the influx of whites back into the city was a process inextricably linked to redlining. By not fully addressing the racial aspect of redlining, city leaders paved the way for whites to secure loans as neighborhoods in the CD slowly recovered from decades of disinvestment.<sup>17</sup>

At the national level, the issue of redlining received a much more thorough analysis. In 1976, HUD officials, led by James Blair, assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, convened a meeting in Philadelphia to address the rampant problem of redlining. Darel Grothaus, of the Mayor's Task Force in Seattle, offered testimony addressing the city's challenge in eliminating redlining. According to Grothaus, local lenders deferred responsibility when questioned about their underwriting standards. They claimed that they were simply beholden to the secondary mortgage market. Washington State, as a "mortgage-poor" region, needed to sell its mortgages within the secondary market "in order to recoup enough money to meet the local demand." In short, local financial institutions would change their practices only when national appraisal and underwriting standards changed.<sup>18</sup>

Other testimony from the meeting in Philadelphia addressed the damage caused by redlining in various U.S. cities. The toll of redlining on African Americans was particularly severe. While whites could flee redlined areas, blacks were stuck, as redlining policies followed

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<sup>16</sup> Alice Woldt, *Seattle's Real Estate Marketing Practices and Residential Segregation*, Seattle School District, City of Seattle, Joint Advisory Commission on Segregation, 1978, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Henry W. McGee, Jr. "Seattle's Central District, 1990-2006: Integration or Displacement?" *The Urban Lawyer*, 39, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 219.

<sup>18</sup> *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential Mortgage Loans*, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, 1977, 34.

them even into the suburbs. A statement from William Morris, Director of Housing Programs for the NAACP, summed up the frustrating cycle: “Whenever Blacks break the chains of past discrimination and exclusivity in housing they are, by forces beyond their control, forced back into ghetto living,” explained Morris. “Communities open to Black families are redlined for disinvestment, and the delivery of services to these so-called traditional areas are cut back.”<sup>19</sup> Research reports presented at the meeting gave added weight to Morris’ testimony. Studies pointed to the reality that “the most significant variable in explaining the variance in lending among census tracts was the size of the Black population.”<sup>20</sup>

The process of racializing spaces and properties was a cornerstone of the lending industry and helped to reinforce the value of segregated neighborhoods. Officials at the HUD redlining meeting were referred to the 1967 version of the McMichael’s Appraising Manual, known as the “bible” of appraising manuals. It spelled out the dynamics of race and property within the industry:

The causes of racial and religious conflicts are not the appraiser’s responsibility. However, he must recognize the fact that values change when people who are different from those presently occupying an area advance into and infiltrate a neighborhood. Economic status and degree of assimilation of the new groups are kindred problems in the infiltration of a neighborhood.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the negative consequences of such an ethos. Other earlier models of appraising manuals even ranked ethnoracial groups, from the most desirable to the least desirable. This perspective demanded the sorting of the “assimilated” from the unassimilated. It also called for an assessment of urban unrest that singled out African Americans as at the center of conflict. Carried out in Seattle, it required a clear line to be drawn between African Americans and Japanese Americans. As the city’s most “assimilated” group,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 32.

Japanese Americans enjoyed a reputation that placed them at a distance from African Americans. Japanese Americans were still racialized, but no longer carried the “stigma of blight.”<sup>22</sup> Blacks in Seattle represented the “infiltrators,” those whose presence altered neighborhoods.

Grounded in ideas formulated by the Chicago School of Sociology, this model of urban development was ingrained in the housing market. Its foundation was social Darwinism and it relied on the language of ecology to separate the “infiltrated” from the “invaders.” When whites fled neighborhoods, it was because they were suited to a different environment. They were drawn to neighborhoods rich in capital and left behind aging infrastructure for the “unassimilated.” Ultimately, the “competition” for neighborhoods and territory was seen as natural and inevitable. After each neighborhood battle, different groups settled in their proper places. In the 1960s and beyond, the evaluation of neighborhoods and property values grew more sophisticated. But within the mix of conversations about property values, schools, and crime, ideas about assimilation lingered. They retained their formative power, even as the dialogue shifted.<sup>23</sup> As the work of Becky Nicolaides and James Zarsadiaz has shown, the transformation of American suburbs through a bifurcated stream of Asian immigration only served to complicate the narrative. Globalization and the arrival of wealthy Asian immigrants reproduced racial and class privilege across suburban landscapes.<sup>24</sup>

From listings to loans, racial discrimination against African Americans was lodged deep in the heart of the real estate industry. Seattle was no exception. Discrimination against African

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<sup>22</sup> Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 8; Schmid, *Nonwhite Races State of Washington*, 131-132; Edward and Rosetta Kreuger to Seattle City Council, October 21, 1963, Legislative Department, City Council Committee of the Whole, Clerk Files, microfilm, 249431, SMA.

<sup>23</sup> *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential Mortgage Loans*, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, 1977, Section III, 36-37; Self, *American Babylon*, 16; Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolaides and Zarsadiaz, “Design Assimilation in Suburbia: Asian Americans, Built Landscapes, and Suburban Advantage in Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley Since 1970,” *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2, 2017, 336-338.

Americans within the housing market, as the Supreme Court ruled in 1968, was ultimately a “relic of slavery.” It carried the potential to reduce the Thirteenth Amendment to a “mere paper guarantee,” unless Congress proved able to “assure that a dollar in the hands of a Negro [would] purchase the same thing as a dollar in the hands of a white man.” That was not the reality in St. Louis, where the *Jones v. Mayer* housing discrimination case cited above originated, nor was it the reality in Seattle.<sup>25</sup>

In Seattle, the unwillingness of financial institutions to dig into their past lending practices had enduring consequences. For one, it served to bury important details that might have provided a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between race and real estate. Such information might have addressed how financial institutions interacted with Japanese Americans, as compared to African Americans. Refusing to compile even a rough sketch of the history of racialized lending practices also made it virtually impossible to assess the scope of the problem. Looking at census data, however, shows that the diffusion of the city’s Japanese Americans helped to limit their presence in neighborhoods that were hit hardest by redlining.

While analysis of the 1970 census is hindered by the fact that Japanese Americans were lumped in the “other races” category, the data from 1980 is helpful. In 1980, King County was home to 16,391 Japanese Americans. Many lived in the suburbs and were spread evenly throughout white neighborhoods around the city. Only 4,019 of them lived in SE Seattle and only a small contingent still lived in the Central or International Districts. The vast majority of those who lived in Southeast Seattle lived in Beacon Hill, a middle-class community of single-family homes. Beacon Hill, the former bridge out of the Central and International Districts for Asian Americans in Seattle, boasted the highest rate of homeownership within the city. Most

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<sup>25</sup> Supreme Court ruling in *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, 1968, quoted in Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 277.

blacks in King County still lived in Seattle, divided between the CD and SE Seattle.<sup>26</sup> As Japanese Americans were able to migrate into white neighborhoods, African Americans left behind one aging area for another. They remained a reservoir for those looking to offload the least desirable property.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Racialized and Gendered Poverty of Southeast Seattle**

By 1980, SE Seattle neighborhoods featured a concentration of poor families, far above the citywide average. The area contained a disproportionate number of poor, female-headed families with children, many of whom were drawn by the low-income housing available in the area. Recognizing the lack of low-income housing available for families north of the ship canal, in 1982 the city designated the region as a “high-priority” zone, in need of subsidized housing. SE Seattle and the CD were targeted as “special objective areas,” where the construction of new subsidized housing was prohibited.<sup>28</sup>

Commercial development in Southeast Seattle during the 1970s and 1980s was minimal. When it did occur, it was haphazard, at best. Business districts throughout Southeast Seattle were in varying stages of distress after 1970, plagued by a lack of investment. The image of crime and spotty development kept investors away through the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>29</sup> A study from 1991 identified 29 vacant sites (12.1 acres) along Rainier Avenue and 50 vacant sites (13 acres) along Martin Luther King Way. The two main arteries running through Southeast Seattle continued to remain bare, still struggling to attract investment. According to the researchers, it was “difficult

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Asian and Pacific Islander: Japanese, Census 1980, Prepared by Social Explorer (accessed July 6, 2016); U.S. Census Bureau, Total Population: Black, Census 1980, Prepared by Social Explorer (accessed July 6, 2016); *Seattle's Communities: Profiles of Change, 1976-77, 1974-77*, Seattle Office of Policy Planning, 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Sale, *Seattle, Past to Present*, 232; South East Effective Development, *Southeast Seattle Community Development Plan, 1976*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> *City of Seattle, 1983 Housing Assistance Plan*, Office of Management and Budget, December 1982, 36; *Seattle's 1989 Housing Assistance Plan*, City of Seattle, Department of Community Development, Housing Division, Exhibit N; Pacific Development Concepts, *Seattle's Special Objective Areas: A Policy Analysis Based on Experience in Southeast Seattle and the Central Area*, City of Seattle's Department of Housing and Human Services, June 1995.

<sup>29</sup> *Southeast Seattle Action Plan*, Southeast Planning Initiative Steering Committee, 1991, 17.

for retailers to target a market in Southeast [Seattle] because of the economic, racial, and cultural diversity of the population.” The end result was that those living in the region shopped elsewhere, with an estimated \$25 million “leaking” out of the area each year.<sup>30</sup> What was true of the CD in the 1960s and 1970s became true for SE Seattle during the 1970s and 1980s. As the city’s black population migrated southward, disinvestment followed. Small businesses in Southeast Seattle routinely saw their loan applications rejected. Even healthy businesses were denied credit.<sup>31</sup>

That retailers were perplexed by the area’s diversity harkens back to the point, discussed earlier, about how the real estate industry paid close attention to markers of assimilation. As consumers, African Americans and the many Asian immigrants in SE Seattle did not register in a retail world that catered to whites. But to focus solely on disinvestment as a phenomenon crippling “minority” neighborhoods is to miss the crux of the problem. The presence of African Americans exacerbated disinvestment. To speak of black and Asian experiences within a racially-segregated housing market as simply a shared history of living in “minority” neighborhoods is to obliterate important differences. These differences mattered in the lives of African Americans, Japanese Americans, and other blacks and Asians within the city.

Statistics do not speak for themselves but they do help to shed light on the intertwined histories of blacks and Asians in Seattle. Blacks and Asians occupied very different positions within Seattle’s housing market, even in the 1960s and especially in the years beyond. Into the 1970s and 1980s, African American and Japanese American housing patterns diverged in substantial ways. By 1990, index of dissimilarity rates for King County showed that Japanese Americans were slightly more segregated from blacks than they were from whites. A rating of O

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 34; Walter Hatch, “Seattle’s Neighborhoods – A City Split on Racial Lines – Segregation in Housing Patterns Separates Whites, Minorities,” *Seattle Times*, October 30, 1989.

signified complete integration and 1 meant complete segregation. The Japanese dissimilarity with whites measured .37 and rose to .44 in relation to blacks. Black dissimilarity with whites was rated at .56, higher than all Asian groups including the Vietnamese, whose rating was .50. Asian groups also lived in the suburbs at a much higher rate than blacks. Only 30.4 percent of blacks lived in the suburbs, whereas 48 percent of Japanese lived in the suburbs. When it came to homeownership rates, blacks lagged far behind. Only 36.6 percent of blacks owned their own homes, whereas 65.7 percent of Chinese and 60.5 percent of Japanese owned their homes.<sup>32</sup>

These numbers mirrored national trends. In their study of the residential segregation experienced by blacks, Asians, and Hispanics between 1970 and 1980, the sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton argued that blacks remained “by far the most spatially isolated of the three minority groups.” By 1980, average black isolation was 2.5 times that of Hispanics and 10 times that of Asians. While the rates of black isolation in some cities had declined, in other highly-segregated places such as Chicago they changed little between 1970 and 1980. For all the economic and political gains blacks had achieved, Massey and Denton argued, they had not yet “achieved the freedom to live wherever they want.” Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians occupied “very different positions in urban society.”<sup>33</sup>

Japanese Americans and African Americans often came together as landlord and tenant – adding a particular class element to their interactions within the housing market. While the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a commitment to the hotel industry within the Japanese American community, the latter half of the century saw a growing investment in apartment buildings. By the 1970s,

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Wierzbicki, “The Assimilation of Asians in Seattle,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Washington, DC, March 27-29, 1997); Walter Hatch, “Seattle’s Neighborhoods – A City Split on Racial Lines – Segregation in Housing Patterns Separates Whites, Minorities,” *Seattle Times*, October 30, 1989; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, “Suburbanization and Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, no. 3 (November 1988), 604.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, “Trends in the Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians: 1970-1980,” *American Sociological Review*, 52, no. 6 (December 1987), 812; 823.



Japanese Americans owned or managed a little fewer than 100 apartment buildings in the central city.<sup>34</sup> The increasing residential mobility of Japanese Americans may have affected how they interacted with black tenants, though there is little evidence of this dynamic within the archives.

A new study (2016) examining wealth inequality across racial and ethnic groups in Los Angeles shows just how wide the wealth gap has become between Japanese and African Americans. U.S.-born blacks in greater Los Angeles have less than one percent of the wealth of Japanese Americans. In terms of median net household worth, blacks measure in at \$4,000, Japanese Americans at \$592,000. Though more recent Japanese immigrants and other variables complicate these statistics, it is clear that Japanese and African Americans stand apart. The ability to navigate a segregated housing market must have played a significant part in bringing about this divide. With so much American wealth tied to real estate, the experiences of Japanese and African with the housing market warrant much more additional research. Compared with other Asian groups, Japanese Americans have the highest percentage of U.S.-born individuals. This has helped in terms of passing on wealth from one generation to the next. While the above study focused on Los Angeles, a similar wealth gap between Japanese and African Americans could be expected in Seattle.<sup>35</sup>

### **Public and Low Income Housing**

By the time federal and local housing authorities began to develop programs in the mid-1970s aimed at dispersing public housing, much damage was already done. According to one study, by that time “most of Seattle’s low income units had already been built, creating a classic case of securing the barn door subsequent to the escape of the horses.” Too much time had been

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<sup>34</sup> Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter, *Greater Seattle and Vicinity Japanese Telephone Directory*, 1973.

<sup>35</sup> Melany De La Cruz-Viesca et. al., “The Color of Wealth in Los Angeles,” Duke University et. al., 2016, [http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/besol/Color\\_of\\_Wealth\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/besol/Color_of_Wealth_Report.pdf) (accessed November 27, 2017).

spent in the 1950s and 1960s focusing on “housing production and neighborhood revitalization,” without paying attention to how growth bolstered racial segregation. One program that might have helped to alter the lines of race and poverty – the Section 8 housing program – fell flat. Private developers were willing to work with the federal government to provide subsidized housing for the elderly but when it came to housing for poor families they balked. Developers feared the additional wear and tear on the buildings and additional management issues related to housing families.<sup>36</sup>

The Section 235 program was even more of a catastrophe. By 1971, Seattle had built up the third-largest number of 235 housing units in the nation, at approximately 4,000. Only Atlanta and Columbia, South Carolina boasted more units. A major component of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, the Section 235 program helped low-income families purchase homes. The program facilitated home-ownership by authorizing HUD payments to commercial mortgage lenders. These payments in turn decreased borrower’s interest payments to as low as one percent. Nationwide, by 1974, more than 400,000 families used the section 235 program to become homeowners. It was one of the federal government’s most ambitious attempts to bring subsidized housing to the suburbs. Yet, by 1971 lawsuits were piling in from those who had been ripped off by the program. Most of the lawsuits singled out HUD mismanagement of Section 235, which placed many low-income homebuyers at the mercy of profiteers. In Seattle, claimants argued that the Seattle Insuring Office of the FHA consistently approved mortgage insurance and Section 235 subsidies for substandard housing.

A group of plaintiffs in one particular Seattle case had managed to purchase homes for the first time. All four were single mothers on welfare. According to their lawyer, they had a

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<sup>36</sup> *The Effect of Publicly Subsidized Housing on Seattle Schools and Neighborhoods*, City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools, October 1977.

“limited educational background” and one could not read or write. Their excitement and inexperience led them to take the word of real estate agents, who assured them that any defects would be fixed by the seller. The realtors informed them that the FHA would require the sellers to make necessary repairs before insuring the properties, a promise that never came to fruition. Unable to make the necessary repairs, they were stuck living in homes that had become safety hazards. While the FHA allowed them to deed back their substandard homes to the mortgagee and find another property eligible for Section 235 funding, they could not afford new down payments and moving costs. By January 1973, the Section 235 program was suspended at the federal level. Beset by corruption and scandal, it was shut down at a time when the low-income housing shortage was already acute.<sup>37</sup>

Local government began the project of constructing scattered-site low-income housing north of the ship canal in 1978. Much of the program’s momentum was blunted by a sharp decline in federal funding for housing during the early 1980s. Between 1981 and 1985, the Reagan administration reduced federal funding for housing programs by 68 percent, from \$27 billion to 9.9 billion. In addition to the decline of federal funding, many areas on the city’s “high-priority” list for subsidized housing fought vociferously against even small projects. It took very little subsidized housing for some North End businessmen and residents to argue that their neighborhoods were being inundated. Officials with the Seattle Housing Authority became all too familiar with the refrain, “It’s a good program, but not in my neighborhood.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> House Committee on Banking and Currency, *HUD Investigation of Low and Moderate-Income Housing Programs*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., March 31, 1971, 120-132; John McClaughry, “The Troubled Dream: The Life and Times of Section 235 of the National Housing Act,” *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1975), 3-4; Chris Bonastia, “Why Did Affirmative Action in Housing Fail During the Nixon Era? Exploring the ‘Institutional Homes’ of Social Policies,” *Social Problems* 47, no. 4 (November 2000), 529-538.

<sup>38</sup> *Executive Proposed Affordable Housing Policy Plan, King County, Washington*, Housing and Community Development Division, Planning and Community Development Department, December 1985, 36; Lee Moriwaki, “Royer Increases Effort for Low-Income Housing,” *Seattle Times*, October 1, 1979; Sally Macdonald, “Please, Not

But the production of government-funded housing did not entirely stagnate during the period. Whites took advantage of the Seattle Housing Authority's growing array of high-rise developments for seniors. Scattered throughout the downtown core, to the West, and in the North End, these developments were built in white neighborhoods, for the most part. SHA records from 1970 show that of the 1,767 residents living in "special housing," the authority's label for housing designated for the elderly and the handicapped, 90.7 percent were white. Production of subsidized high-rise elderly/handicapped housing boomed between 1970 and 1980; the city's stock rose from 1,182 units to 3,007 over the course of the decade. By 1980, the population living in subsidized high-rise elderly/handicapped housing was 85.8 percent white. These numbers meant that whites enjoyed far greater access to subsidized housing that was scattered and away from the four main public housing developments. These big four were becoming increasingly diverse. Seattle's two-tiered system of public housing only added to the city's segregated housing patterns.<sup>39</sup>

From 1980-1985, 3,228 units of subsidized housing for the elderly were produced for the SHA. During the same period, 1,108 units for small families (2-4 members), and 431 units for large families (5-plus members) were produced. Such an emphasis on senior housing was driven by private developers, drawn by federal incentives. The end result was a serious shortage of public housing for families. By 1985, 1,635 families were on the SHA's waiting list, the demographic most in need of housing within Seattle. The bulk of families (42 percent) living in public housing were black. Growing numbers of Asian families – particularly from Cambodia,

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Here," *Seattle Times*, December 10, 1980; "Housing Plan Opposed in Hawthorne Hills," *Seattle Times*, August 19, 1987.

<sup>39</sup> *Annual Tenant Census, September 30, 1965; Annual Population Report, December 31, 1971; Annual Population Report, December 31, 1981*, Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, Annual Population Reports, 1945, 1960-1986, Box 1713, accession no. 1999-06, Puget Sound Regional Branch, Washington State Archives, Bellevue, Washington; *Proposed City of Seattle 1986 Housing Assistance Plan*, Office of Management and Budget, September 1985, Appendix B.

Laos, and Vietnam – were also beginning to make use of SHA housing.<sup>40</sup> Between 1970 and 1990, Seattle’s four main public housing developments gradually saw their white populations shrink. In their place, the black and Asian populations at Yesler Terrace, Rainier Vista, Holly Park, and High Point became the majority.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of government and private policies that reinforced segregation based on race, class, gender, and family status, SE Seattle came to house a disproportionate number of poor, female-headed families with children. They were drawn by the low-income housing available in the area. The consequences of such policies – reinforced time and time again – played out along the streets and neighborhoods of SE Seattle. From a lack of health care facilities and providers to the unaffordability of daycare for single mothers with children, the problems stemming from discrimination and disinvestment were wide-ranging.<sup>42</sup>

### **Finding a Home for Refugees**

Awakened by the plight of the Asian elderly – unseen and uncared for by the state – Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino activists in Seattle created a web of ethnic organizations to fill the void. The needs of its most vulnerable populations mobilized Seattle’s Asian American community in multiple ways throughout the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Many organizations were founded to serve the needs of the Asian elderly, as activists and community leaders worked to refute the stereotype that Asian Americans took “care of their own.”

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<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Kreisman, “Going Public – Architectural Solutions Break from Stereotypes of Public Housing,” *Seattle Times*, March 12, 1989; *Seattle Housing Authority Annual Report, 1984*, Seattle Housing Authority, Admin, Annual/Periodic Reports, 1946-1993, Box 1, Puget Sound Regional Branch, Washington State Archives, Bellevue, Washington; *Proposed City of Seattle 1986 Housing Assistance Plan*, Office of Management and Budget, September 1985, 19; 24-30.

<sup>41</sup> *Annual Population Report, December 31, 1970; Annual Population Report, December 31, 1981; Annual Population Report, December 31, 1990*; all contained in Seattle Housing Authority, Admin, Annual/Periodic Reports, 1946-1993, Box 1, Puget Sound Regional Branch, Washington State Archives, Bellevue, Washington.

<sup>42</sup> *City of Seattle, 1983 Housing Assistance Plan*, Office of Management and Budget, December 1982, 36; *Seattle’s 1989 Housing Assistance Plan*, City of Seattle, Department of Community Development, Housing Division, Exhibit N; Pacific Development Concepts, *Seattle’s Special Objective Areas: A Policy Analysis Based on Experience in Southeast Seattle and the Central Area*, City of Seattle’s Department of Housing and Human Services, June 1995.

By 1972, an estimated 5,000 Asians aged 60 and upward lived in greater Seattle. The majority of them were foreign-born and many were limited in the amount of English they spoke. Between 1950 and 1970, Asian immigration to Seattle and other American cities surged. In 1950, Seattle was home to 10,785 Asians; that number rose to 17,182 in 1960 and 22,552 in 1970. The biggest increases came among the Chinese and Filipino populations. Within Seattle's three largest Asian populations, the elderly faced particular hurdles stemming from complicated histories. Restrictive immigration laws left many elderly men in the Filipino community single, living in run-down International District hotels. Among the Issei, many did not speak English and were forced to restart their lives and work careers post-incarceration. This left many Nisei taking care of parents who were economically dependent. Many Nisei themselves saw their families and careers hindered or derailed by incarceration.

One half of the city's Asian elderly had annual incomes less than \$2,400. Housing, healthcare, homemaking, nutrition programs, and mental health services were all major needs. A large contingent of Asians in their 70s and 80s were forced to keep working because of financial need but had become physically impaired. Often elderly Asians were reluctant to ask for help, further exacerbating their problems. When they did seek out help they were often treated by those who had no real understanding of their cultures.<sup>43</sup> The end result of Chinese Exclusion, Alien Land Laws, and incarceration was an elderly Asian population far removed from social welfare programs. This was a population long exploited for its labor and barred from citizenship. They embodied what Kornel Chang has labeled the "central contradiction that defined the Pacific Northwest borderlands." This was the tension between the "pursuit of greater economic integration and intercourse with Asia" that ran alongside "a deep and abiding disdain for Asian

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<sup>43</sup> "Asian Elderly Model Project," 1975, box 1, folder 36, "D.P.A.A. Progress Report, February-April 1975," Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001, UWSC.

bodies.”<sup>44</sup> That a great percentage of elderly Asians were ill-equipped for retirement was to be expected. Asian Americans in Seattle realized this and were able to pool together resources in order to minimize the fallout from mercurial U.S. policies.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, Asian Americans rallied around efforts to prevent the International District from losing its Asian character. Building and rehabilitating low-income housing was a crucial element of the fight. Over half of the ID’s 45 hotels had been shut down by the early 1970s, leaving many elderly Asians scrambling to find housing.<sup>46</sup> The imperious nature of Seattle city government was a key factor in the coalescing of an Asian American movement. This dynamic was typified in the early 1970s, through the showdown over a new domed stadium, slated to be built next to the ID. Back in 1968, King County voters approved a \$334 million Forward Thrust bond program, with \$40 million allocated for a domed stadium. The Chong Wa Benevolent Association, the JACL, the Japanese Hotel Association, and the Filipino Community of Seattle, Inc., were part of a list of established ethnic organizations that refrained from taking an official position on the stadium. With little Japanese American presence left in the ID by this time, Japanese organizations had a “limited” interest in the area, according to a local historian.<sup>47</sup> The Chinatown Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Community Service Organization felt the stadium would be a boon for businesses in the area. A number of Asian American activists feared the stadium would turn the ID in a giant parking lot. Peter Bacho, a Filipino law student at the UW filed a law suit against King County on behalf of the area’s elderly population. He was

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<sup>44</sup> Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Tom Owan, “Asian Americans: A Case of Benighted Neglect,” (paper presented at the National Conference of Social Welfare, San Francisco, California, May 13, 1975).

<sup>46</sup> “Asian Issues, 1977,” box 26, folder 1: Asian Issues, Redress Japan, 1984,” Charles T. Royer Records, Subject Correspondence, 1978-1989, Accession no. 5274-02, SMA; Maria Lina Ambalada, “The Asian American Community: Crime and Delinquency,” 1978, box 47, folder 16: “Asian Issues, 1978,” Charles T. Royer Records, Subject Correspondence, 1978-1989, Accession no. 5274-02, SMA; Letter from Charles Royer to Maria Lina Ambalada, May 15, 1978, box 47, folder 16: “Asian Issues, 1978,” Charles T. Royer Records, Subject Correspondence, 1978-1989, Accession no. 5274-02, SMA.

<sup>47</sup> Chin, *Seattle’s International District*, 81.

hoping to push the county to build the stadium elsewhere, though the suit was unsuccessful. The city's announcement that five hotels in the ID were going to be closed – due to code violations – was taken as an ominous sign.

Asian American activists were quick to highlight the class dimension of the struggle to preserve the ID. In a column co-written in the *Asian Family Affair* newspaper by Sabino Cabildo, Roy Flores, and Vic Pineda, they described the need to protect the area's elderly residents from the “wealthy and still-seeking-wealth money mongers of the world of private enterprise...” This was a cast of property owners that included Asian Americans. To those in the ID waiting on the profits to be reaped from business related to the domed stadium, they offered a sardonic warning. It was unlikely that a “‘Chinatown’ Hilton” would be erected atop of the rubble of an eviscerated neighborhood.<sup>48</sup>

The Forward Thrust bond, brought to life by attorney James Ellis, signified a commitment to revitalizing the city's urban core. Voters, by rejecting the low-income housing component of the bond measure, worth a mere \$3 million, made it so that renewal and displacement would go hand-in-hand. The city's commitment to rebuilding its downtown for a postindustrial urban elite was unmistakable. An interracial group of community activists, led by Asian Americans, fought unsuccessfully to keep the stadium from being built next to the ID. They did, however, succeed in their efforts to bring more subsidized housing to the ID – a slow and painful process that continued through the 1970s and 1980s. By 1980, the International District Improvement Association had reached 60 percent of its goal. Six hundred out of a planned 1,000 subsidized housing units had been built or redeveloped. Asian American activists

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<sup>48</sup> Sabino Cabildo, Roy Flores, and Vic Pineda, “Is Chinatown Doomed?” *Asian Family Affair*, April 1972.



facilitated collaboration, bringing together business owners and civic-minded professionals to prevent the ID from being reduced to a parking lot.<sup>49</sup>

As the diversity of Seattle's Asian community increased after the Immigration Act of 1965, the Demonstration Project for Asian Americans (DPAA) helped to study and respond to Seattle's shifting demographics. Between 1970 and 1975, 1,725 Chinese, 3,323 Filipino, and more than 1,000 Korean immigrants had settled in King County. Another 1,448 Vietnamese refugees had also arrived. Most of these Asian immigrants and refugees lived in Seattle.<sup>50</sup>

Founded by Dorothy and Fred Cordova, Donna Yee and Sil Dong Kim, the DPAA centered its research on Seattle's "forgotten" Asian Americans. Among those groups targeted for study were war brides, unemployed or underemployed health care professionals and refugees. For those working on behalf of the DPAA, which began in 1971, the project represented an Asian coalition that arose out of the frustrations of the 1960s. A 1975 report on the accomplishments of the DPAA explained that "if the poverty programs of the sixties accomplished anything, they brought to light the inability and inexperience of Asian American communities to come to grips with irrelevant service systems" and government bureaucracies that left them on the margins. The "ignorance and insensitivity to Asian American community needs and concerns by other minority and majority community members and agencies" had

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<sup>49</sup> Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, *Task Force on Rental Housing*, 1008; 170; Michael Brown and Richard Morrill, eds., *Seattle Geographies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 170; Chin, *Seattle's International District*, 80-81.

<sup>50</sup> Tsuguo Ikeda, "Brief Historical Review," box 1, folder 1, "Brief History Review, Tsuguo Ikeda, n.d." Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001, UWSC; Letter from Greg Tsang and Sil Kim to Gary Massel, January 22, 1975, box 1, folder 61: "DPAA Appeal to Gary Massel (Against Funding Termination), 1974-1975," Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001; "Number of Immigrants Admitted, 1970-1975," Compiled by Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, June 1976, box 5, folder 50: "D.P.A.A./AC Pacific Northwest Region, Workshop: The Asians Are Coming, 1976," Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001, UWSC; "Demonstration Project for Asian Americans," *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2010), eds. Huping Ling and Allan Austin, 43-44.

become a growing obstacle. Americans of all races were accustomed to ignoring the needs of Asian Americans.<sup>51</sup>

As Asian American organizations struggled to deal with the fallout of anti-Asian immigration policies, the legacy of U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia reshaped the city. As Judy Tzu-Chun Wu has argued, refugees from Southeast Asia “constituted a racial other, now on American soil, making demands again on American resources.”<sup>52</sup> By 1980, 400 to 500 Southeast Asian refugees were arriving in Seattle each month. Most refugees arriving in the city at this point were from the hill tribes of Laos. One of the first steps in getting them settled – finding housing – put additional strain on government agencies and low-income housing groups. Most did not speak English and needed to be guided through the process of finding housing. Helping refugees through leases and rental agreements also required time and resources. In 1980, a Congressional hearing on the nation’s rental housing shortage convened in Seattle. Gregg Hope, a housing caseworker for the International Rescue Committee, brought the issue of refugee housing to the forefront:

Refugees are paying 50 to 60 percent of their incomes for shelters. But the expense of the so-called low-income housing, although it is a serious problem for refugees, is not their most serious problem. Their major problem, and a problem for all of Seattle, is growing competition between refugees and other minority groups over Seattle’s dwindling supply of places to live. This competition is aggravated because landlords tend to favor the Southeast Asians to the exclusion of others as refugees who have a reputation for being quiet, paying rent promptly, and causing minimum destruction of property. All of this could lead to racial conflict.

Representing the non-profit low-income housing group Common Ground, Steve Clagett seconded Hope’s comments. Aided by sponsors and the housing personnel associated with refugee programs, Southeast Asian refugees were in some cases treated as a priority. But,

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<sup>51</sup> “An Assessment of Progress,” April 1, 1975, box 1, folder 2, “History and Mission of D.P.A.A., 1974-1974, n.d.” Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, Accession no. 3878-001, UWSC.

<sup>52</sup> Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism During the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 269.

according to Claggett, their success in finding housing often came “at the expense of other low-income households and minority groups who do not enjoy similar support.” These comments hinted at how Southeast Asian refugees were imagined as model minorities. They also touched on the government’s unwillingness to help African Americans secure low-income housing. The renewed power of the model minority image was in part a consequence of government failures in the realm of low-income housing.<sup>53</sup> As Eric Tang has argued, stereotypical views of Asian culture even followed Southeast Asian refugees into the “hyperghettos” of New York City during the 1980s. They were seen as exceptional figures – “in but never of” the “ghetto.” Southeast Asian refugees were cast as ill-suited to such areas and in dire need of rescue. Black and brown people, on the other hand, were portrayed as much more suited to such environments.<sup>54</sup>

For Asian American activists in Seattle, the developing image of Southeast Asian refugees harkened back to the violence that accompanied Chinese Exclusion. As anti-refugee groups began popping up, Southeast Asian refugees had become the latest scapegoats. This in turn made it easier to deflect attention away from the government’s role in creating a housing crisis that exacerbated racial and class tensions. In 1980, without debate Congress authorized just under \$30 billion in housing subsidies through IRS tax deductions. These deductions continued to prop up middle class families. At the same time, federal funding for housing subsidies that

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<sup>53</sup> Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, *Task Force on Rental Housing*, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., May 30-31, Seattle, Washington, 1012-1013; 1016.

<sup>54</sup> Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 64-65.

benefitted the poor was slashed. As was the case before World War II, the federal government retained a heavy hand in building and maintaining ghettos.<sup>55</sup>

During the mid-1980s, the International District Housing Alliance (IDHA) drew attention to the Mount Baker Apartments in the Rainier Valley. Mount Baker, a neighborhood once known as Seattle's most exclusive, had developed the city's latest ghetto. The nine-building, 180-unit apartment complex was in miserable shape. The IDHA was an organization comprised of Asian Americans who had fought to preserve low-income housing in the International District, beginning in the 1970s. Most of the residents in the Mount Baker Apartments were refugees from Southeast Asia. Cambodians, who made up 48 percent of the renters, were the main tenant group. Like many non-whites, the tenants of Mount Baker found themselves southeast of the downtown core. Unable to find a spot in public housing due to long waiting lists, the residents were left to deal with private owners. A revolving door of owners and a lengthy list of building code violations had left the complex in disarray. At one point, 1,300 tenants were crowded into a complex designed to house only 400. Residents had grown accustomed to living with filthy carpets, rodents, roaches, clogged sinks, and backed-up toilets. Meetings with residents revealed that, in spite of the conditions, most did not want to leave. Many had developed friendships within the community and would miss the cultural ties they had forged. In addition, they dreaded the idea of having to uproot their children from school. They also did not know where else they could move and if the conditions would be better upon moving. Residents also wanted to remain close to Asian grocery stores and health clinics with a multilingual staff.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Anzai, "History Repeats Itself: Indochinese Backlash," *Asian Family Affair*, May 1980; Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, *Task Force on Rental Housing*, 667; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Jackie Jamero, "'We're in a Holding Pattern at the Moment': Mt. Baker Apartments: 'Making Sure the Needs of the Refugees come first,'" *International Examiner*, October 21, 1987.

Many of the Southeast Asian refugees who lived in the building were close to using up or had used up their 18 months of federal aid. A good number of them simply needed more time to transition into life in the U.S., as most remained unemployed after their eligibility for federal aid expired. Across the city, 17,000 refugees, primarily Southeast Asians, lived on less than \$6,000 a year per household.<sup>57</sup> Together, Southeast Asian refugees and low-income African Americans were brought together in Seattle's "melting pots of the poor." These were spaces shaped by globalization as well as what Eric Tang has labeled "liberal warfare." Under the assault of constant housing displacement, police violence, mass incarceration and drug wars, they found themselves walled off from residential and economic mobility.<sup>58</sup>

### **Fighting for Equality in Rental Housing**

As the historian Michael Katz has argued, the "selective incorporation" of African Americans from the late-1960s through the 1970s "constructed limited ladders of social mobility." Urban rebellions in the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement, and affirmative action combined to open up avenues for selective incorporation. Most African American men, when able to enter professions, were confined to human service fields. Law, medicine, or corporate jobs were still largely closed off. African American women professionals often worked as technicians, steered away from higher status and higher wage careers. The dependence of African Americans on public sector jobs also added to the instability of their post-1960s economic gains. Nevertheless, the prospect of economic and occupational gains, however fragile, limited the potential for collective protest. As cities embraced "mimetic reform," without "devolving real power or redistributing significant resources," the grounds for collective protest

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<sup>57</sup> David Takami, "It'll Take Door to Door Education," *International Examiner*, February 19, 1986.; Jackie Jamero, "City Staves Off Eviction of Residents from the Mt. Baker Apartments," *International Examiner*, December 2, 1987; Sharon Lee, "Housing Trust Fund Will Help Our Community," *International Examiner*, May 6, 1987; *Demographic Profile, Seattle-King County*, August 1982, Seattle Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>58</sup> Tang, *Unsettled*, 131.

eroded even further. These dynamics encapsulated Seattle's approach to managing the marginality of its black population within the housing market.<sup>59</sup>

Instead of implementing an aggressive and comprehensive approach to fighting racial segregation in housing, backed by funding for low-income housing, the city devoted scant resources to the project. For those relegated to the bottom end of the rental market, the decent options vanished and slum housing emerged. The idea that a renter could flee substandard housing on short notice remained more fantasy than reality. Real power and mobility belonged to developers, real estate agents, and investors. For the most part, renters were armed with little more than toothless fair housing laws and a stubborn commitment to holding rental owners and their managers accountable.<sup>60</sup> This disparity in power was reinforced in the 1980 battle over a rent control initiative. Defeated by a 2-1 margin, the initiative was opposed by the Seattle Apartment Operators Association (SAOA). The association was backed by a powerful coalition that mounted what it labeled a "defense of private property rights." The SAOA had also led the fight against an open housing ordinance in the 1960s. Deceptively-named, the Washington Coalition for Affordable Housing spent \$525,000 of its \$873,779 war chest on its anti-rent control campaign. It was the largest fundraising effort to date in Washington State politics and dwarfed the \$50,000 spent by Renters and Owners Organized for Fairness (ROOF), which championed the initiative. With roughly 35,000 Seattleites in need of housing assistance, those who sought to check the power of the real estate industry and its allies were crushed.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Michael B. Katz, *Why Don't American Cities Burn?* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012), 87.

<sup>60</sup> Douglas Massey, Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson and David N. Kinsey, *Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Paul O'Connor, "Seattle Rent Control Beaten 2-1," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 5, 1980; Peter Constantini, "Keeping a Roof Over Our Heads," *Scanner*, February, 1980; Judith Kuskin, "Seattle Rent Control," *Shelterforce*, 6, no. 1, 1981; "The Seattle Open Housing Campaign, 1959-1968," Seattle Municipal Archives, <http://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/digital-document-libraries/the-seattle-open-housing-campaign> (accessed December 17, 2015); "Controls on Rent for Residential Structures – Prohibited – Exceptions,

Nevertheless, the struggle against racial discrimination in housing within the rental market continued. It was not until 1980 that a “just cause” eviction law was finally passed. Once again, the SAOA had lobbied against the law, joined in opposition by the Seattle Master Builders Association. Prior to the law’s passage, state regulations had permitted landlords to evict tenants in twenty days without providing a reason.<sup>62</sup> Rent strikes were a relatively common response to this uneven power dynamic, particularly in the CD, as low-income tenants organized against slumlords throughout the 1970s and 1980s. One of the more high-profile rent strikes was carried out by tenants of the Buckingham Apartments in 1977. Residents of the Buckingham, located in the CD, had organized a union and had carried out their rent strike for several months. After fighting it out in court, the judge sided with the landlords, pressuring the tenants into a compromise. In exchange for moving out, the tenants would not have to pay back rent and damages. The Buckingham Tenants Union considered it a partial victory, issuing a press release detailing the power that was brought against their cause:

In the society that we live, the position that the landlord assumes over the tenant is quite clear. Landlords have enormous power and tenants have very little. Laws and codes have been passed by different levels of government. These laws and codes are nothing but masterpieces of deceit, designed only to confuse the real problems that exist. The problems being: TENANTS ARE VICTIMS OF SLUMLORDS.<sup>63</sup>

Renters sometimes responded to the frustrations associated with racial discrimination, absentee landlords and decrepit housing conditions in innovative ways. In February 1974, two African American women, staged a sit-in during a Sonics basketball game. Louise Daw and Geri Staten were hoping to draw attention to the discrimination they encountered after renting a home in West Seattle’s Magnolia neighborhood. They used their brief moment in the spotlight to

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RCW 35.21.840, Washington State Legislature, <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=35.21.830> (accessed December 17, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> “Seattle’s Tenants Win ‘Just Cause’ Eviction Law,” *The Facts*, July 23 to July 29, 1980.

<sup>63</sup> “Buckingham Tenants Union Forced Into Compromise on Rent Strike,” *The Facts*, June 1, 1977.

publicize the negative treatment they received from landlords and neighbors in the area. In particular, they claimed that their rent money was withheld after a fire forced them out of the home. At the time of their protest, they were living temporarily in a motel. “Our continuing problems are an illustration of the discrimination worked on Blacks who move into suburban areas,” Louise Daw explained to the *Facts* newspaper. Their brief sit-in, according to the black newspaper, was a “unique protest against a common problem.”<sup>64</sup>

In another protest, 35 tenants from the Gale Place Apartments in the Mount Baker neighborhood hitched a ride on public buses to confront their landlord at his Mercer Island home. After sending letters complaining of rats, roaches, broken heaters, faulty plumbing and other problems, they had received nothing in response. Their patience exhausted, they trekked out to the landlord’s home. When no one answered the doorbell, the group spread out and canvased the neighborhood. According to the *Facts*, “they split up in pairs and walked from door to door explaining their plight and asking the neighbors to speak with [the landlord] on their behalf.” In addition, the tenants also pressured the health department. They demanded that inspectors force the landlord to deal with the pests and rodents.<sup>65</sup>

### **Taking on Landlords and the Seattle Human Rights Department**

That low-income renters, particularly African Americans, felt the need to share their grievances in such unconventional ways testified to their lack of faith in local government. Those who did bring their housing complaints through more formal channels encountered the quagmire known as the Seattle Human Rights Department. Their stories, drawn from the Seattle Human

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<sup>64</sup> Judith Williams, “Unique Protest against a Common Problem,” *The Facts*, January 31-February 6, 1974; Jerry Carson, “Game Sit-In Was Desperate Plea,” *Seattle Times*, January 11, 1974.

<sup>65</sup> “Gale Place Tenants Surprise Landlord at Home,” *The Facts*, July 13 to 19, 1977; Janet Thorne, “Rats, Roaches Found in Mt. Baker Apartments,” *Seattle Times*, June 30, 1977.



Rights Department (SHRD) discrimination case files, add an important layer to discussions of civil rights and housing.

When the SHRD came into being, its initial 1969 budget of \$63,844 spoke volumes about the city's lukewarm approach to fighting racial discrimination. While the budget grew to \$150,000 in 1970, even the *Seattle Times* acknowledged that it was a "pittance and a token" for a department whose main task was to enforce civil rights laws. For a city with an annual budget of \$88 million, the SHRD's allocation was pitiful, enough for only a barebones staff. The department was an offshoot of the Seattle Human Rights Commission, which had originated in the tumult of the city's open housing movement. Civil rights leaders in Seattle had viewed the advent of the human rights commission as a stalling tactic. It was a conservative response to the open housing movement from a city council leery of defying the real estate industry. In its first few years, the SHRD saw a number of investigators resign. Already, they had come to see the department as nothing more than a superficial attempt to stave off the urban rebellions of the 1960s. In spite of its miniscule budget, the SHRD had already drawn the ire of many. Opponents increasingly aligned against its investigations of discrimination in the fire department, as well as police brutality.<sup>66</sup>

By the 1970s, the objectives and the issues confronting the SHRD began to change, along with Seattle's demographics. According to the *Times*, a surge in Asian immigration and increased attention on school desegregation shifted the conversation. In 1978, the *Bakke* decision turned the issue of affirmative action on its head, asserting the right of whites to be free from

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<sup>66</sup> David Suffia, "Exhaustive Study of City Light Looms; Cost Pondered," *Seattle Times*, October 7, 1969; David Suffia, "Uhlman Aide Scolds Council for Fund Cuts," *Seattle Times*, November 13, 1970; "Rights Department Upheaval Overdue," *Seattle Times*, January 6, 1971.

discrimination based on race.<sup>67</sup> Other local media outlets noticed a similar shift within the SHRD from the 1970s to the 1980s. The 1970s version of the SHRD was staffed by “grassroots civil rights leaders,” whereas the 1980s version was “more educated, more white, and more concerned about job security,” according to one local newspaper. One recurring theme among critics of the SHRD was that the organization was subservient to the mayor’s office. SHRD directors who were too aggressive in fighting against discrimination risked being forced out of their jobs.<sup>68</sup>

Almost all of the housing discrimination charges the SHRD received were brought by blacks, who were either renters or prospective tenants. The charges typically fell into two categories. The first type involved alleged discrimination aimed at excluding them from white neighborhoods. The second involved renters who complained about alleged harassment from building owners and property managers. Cases dealing with alleged harassment were often brought by renters in the CD and Southeast Seattle. Asians and other non-whites rarely filed housing discrimination charges with the SHRD. Much of this absence was likely tied to the distance between Asian Americans and the welfare state. As Scott Kurashige has argued, the incarceration of Japanese Americans “created a deep sense of cynicism toward the government on the part of Japanese Americans.” A key difference between African and Japanese American communities was their “clashing notions about the proper role of the state in remedying social ills” – a dynamic that played out during Seattle’s open housing movement. Southeast Asians, though deeply involved in the welfare state, were also familiar with the limited help (at best) provided them by U.S. government agencies – both abroad and in the U.S.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Herb Robinson, “Human Rights – An Issue Adrift Far too Long,” *Seattle Times*, June 29, 1986; Patricia Fisher, “Advocacy vs. Enforcement – City Neglect Leaves Vital Department Rudderless,” *Seattle Times*, April 27, 1986.

<sup>68</sup> Louise Kolker, “Why Are All Those Radicals Yelling at the Mayor?” August 22-28, 1984, publication unknown, Office of Civil Rights, Director’s Records, Box 1, Folder 18, Human Rights Rules, Proposed-Responses, 1984-1985, Accession no. 3800-01, SMA.

<sup>69</sup> Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, 174.

Blacks typically brought charges against white property owners and their landlords, though some accusations were leveled against Asians. Often those bringing charges were women, many of them poor and single, and most of them black. Their vulnerability and the city's impotence in the fight against racial discrimination in the housing market stand out in the record. The absence of strong civil rights protections against housing discrimination triggered wide-ranging consequences. The denial of such a basic right threatened to empty other civil rights of their significance, particularly those tied to education and school desegregation.<sup>70</sup>

Stepping into the bureaucratic mess that was the SHRD, low-income African American renters challenged the systems that channeled them southward and away from white neighborhoods. Their stories run counter to the city's carefully-crafted image of inclusion. While much attention has been placed on policies that drove racial segregation in the homeowner's market, the rental market has garnered much less scrutiny, though it is an arena where the issue of class is often foregrounded. Honing in on the rental market also helps to complicate the idea that suburbanization in Seattle during the 1970s and 1980s signified a broader freedom of movement. Affluent or middle-class African Americans may have seen their housing options increase, but the same could not be said for lower-income black renters.<sup>71</sup>

Race, class, gender and familial status were crucial factors in determining the range of housing available to prospective renters. These factors also coalesced in terms of how renters were treated by landlords, who in a tight market felt the power to evict on a whim. Within the SHRD's case files, a clear picture emerges of how the everyday discourses and practices of race unfolded on the ground.

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<sup>70</sup> McEntire, *Residence and Race*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Massey and Denton, "Trends in the Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, 1970-1980," 811; 816; 823.

Digging in to the case files provides a glimpse of how the SHRD dealt with housing discrimination and helps to explain why trust in the department gradually eroded. Between 1969, when he inherited an apartment building in Seattle's First Hill neighborhood, and May 1, 1974, not one of owner William Torka's tenants was African American. Forced to respond to two separate allegations of unlawful discrimination brought before the SHRD, Torka mustered a tepid defense. In his written response, the best he could do to counter the charge was to explain that "a black does rent garage space in the building." Like most respondents, Torka was white, and those bringing the charges were black. Torka denied that race was a factor in tenant selection. Blacks could apply just like anyone else, he wrote to the SHRD, and to his knowledge no black applicant had been prevented from filling out an application. All that being said, Torka did not keep application records. In fact, Torka did not even take applications and did not advertise vacancies. He relied on word of mouth recruitment, with tenants alerting their friends about vacancies. SHRD cases revealed numerous property owners who had similar policies, which left a bare trail for investigators.<sup>72</sup>

When SHRD's investigation began in June 1974, tenants in his apartment building on Ninth Avenue had lived there for an average of twelve years. While the SHRD eventually found "reasonable cause" to believe that Torka discriminated on the basis of race in renting out his apartments, resolving the case took 4 years. Torka was required to pay \$500 to one of the victims and "make every good faith effort to recruit Black applicants and give such Black applicants preference in filling vacancies..." The SHRD also ruled that Torka would need to keep detailed records, beginning with the application process. The department also mandated that 15 percent of Torka's apartments needed to be rented out to minorities, "at least 8 percent of whom are Black

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<sup>72</sup> "Jeff and Kathy Moses and Human Rights Commission v. William Torka (124-h)," Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 69, Folder 89, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

persons.” Upon achieving that goal, Torka could petition the department to review and then terminate the monitoring process.<sup>73</sup>

The agreement between SHRD and Torka provided little compensation for the two African Americans who brought the charges. The settlement, as per SHRD policy, did not “constitute an admission” by Torka that he had violated any laws. Instead, the settlement reflected the respondent’s “desire to take the affirmative action agreed upon...to ensure that housing opportunities are made available to minority group individuals, particularly Blacks.” That the case took four years was more the norm than an aberration. Unfortunately, the only really proactive element of the ruling – the requirement to increase the percentage of Black and minority tenants – ceased to be a part of SHRD rulings by the 1980s.<sup>74</sup>

While the SHRD often ran into resistance and denial from apartment owners, sometimes managers would cave in to pressure from the department’s investigators. When the SHRD charged Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Hasson, the white owners of the Sir Lancelot Apartments in Capitol Hill, they responded with a brief letter of denial. They denied SHRD allegations, brought in 1973, that they had refused to allow a black man to apply for an apartment. They also informed the SHRD that on the day of the alleged incident, “there were two black ladies living in the building.” Their defense quickly unraveled, however, when two of their former apartment managers provided statements to the SHRD. According to the former managers, the Hassons advised their managers not to rent to blacks. If a black person insisted on applying for an apartment, the Hassons instructed their managers to require a credit check, something not demanded of prospective white tenants. From there, the managers were told to ask prospective black tenants about their specific rental needs “and then to give the prospects information that

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

was not in accord with their needs.” They were also instructed to quote higher rental prices to blacks. Rarely, however, did the SHRD receive such cooperation and detail from apartment managers. Instead, investigators often dealt with a shortage of evidence and recalcitrant apartment managers and owners.<sup>75</sup>

Though most landlords dragged in front of the SHRD were white, on occasion Asian landlords came under investigation. By the summer of 1982, SHRD investigators had secured statements from about a dozen people who had either lived in or managed the Royal Vista Apartments, located in the CD. On the surface, it appeared that the owner, Tae Yon Kington operated a 47-unit apartment complex that attracted a racially diverse group of tenants, most of them low-income. As the investigation unfolded, the narrative grew increasingly complex.

During her first night in the Royal Vista, Denise Jones saw “mice running everywhere.” When Jones informed Kington about the uninvited guests, and asked that the apartment be fumigated, she received a terse reply: get a cat. The next month, in June of 1982, Jones withheld her rent, on account of the mice. In July, Jones caved in and paid her rent for that month. When dropping off the payment, Jones once again refused to pay her rent for the month of June. In a written statement to the SHRD, Jones explained that the owner then told her to move to a cheaper unit in the back of the building. When Jones refused to move to the back of the building, the owner gave her a notice to pay her rent or vacate.<sup>76</sup>

When Jones refused to do either, the owner then sent someone to her apartment late one night to collect the June rent. According to Jones, Bill Heide, a white male representing the realty firm that managed the Royal Vista, berated her in the process of trying to collect the rent.

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<sup>75</sup> “SHRD v. Hasson,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 69, Folder 93, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

<sup>76</sup> “Hemphill v. Kington,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 23, Folder 19, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

She said that Heide told her “the building was made for people like me” and that they did not want “welfare mothers” to live there.” Jones, an African American woman on welfare, was nine months pregnant at the time. Seymone Gray, an African American man who lived in the Royal Vista, told investigators that he threw Heide out of his apartment later that night in response to his despicable treatment of Jones. It seems Heide had also confronted Gray in order to collect back rent. Gray was refusing to pay rent until Kington dealt with the mice, roaches, faulty appliances and insufficient heating in his room. As she did with other tenants, Kington dealt with Gray’s complaints by asking him to move to a smaller, cheaper apartment.<sup>77</sup>

According to Jones, the apartment owner Kington, a Korean woman, perpetuated a hostile living environment for her black tenants as a result of some negative experiences with African American men. In her statement, Jones wrote that Kington told her “that she had a Black man and he was no good for her” and that “you people don’t belong here.” Kington, who had owned the building for two years when the investigation began, treated the department as a joke. In a telephone conversation with Mildred Gunn, an SHRD investigator, Kington asked why the department bothered “wasting time with this shit?” Kington, recognizing the relative powerlessness of her tenants and the SHRD, saw little at stake in the battle.<sup>78</sup>

The SHRD’s investigation unearthed few personal details about Kington. Her obituary, published in the Anchorage Daily News, provides a brief history. Born in Seoul in 1943, Kington earned a bachelor’s degree in literature from Ewha Womans University before immigrating to Alaska in 1971. In Alaska, Kington worked in real estate and property management. At the time of her death, in 2000, she was a member of the First Korean Presbyterian Church in Alaska.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Obituary of Toney Taeyon Kington, *Anchorage Daily News*, July 13, 2000, GenealogyBank.com, <http://www.genealogybank.com/doc/obituaries/obit> (accessed August 30, 2017).

The circumstances surrounding Kington's move to the U.S. and her apparent antipathy toward African Americans are unclear. They do, nevertheless, point toward the exportation of U.S. racial ideologies abroad, in countries like South Korea. As Nancy Abelman and John Lie point out, "South Koreans note the (informally) segregated restaurants, bars, and brothels, and the black-white geography of the U.S. military in South Korea." The U.S. media and its negative portrayals of African Americans influence racial imaginings well beyond the nation's borders. Though their analysis focuses on the relationships between blacks and Koreans within the context of the 1992 Los Angeles riots – this is a dynamic that undoubtedly influences how Asian immigrants encounter the U.S. housing market.<sup>80</sup>

From her tenant's perspective, Kington was an absentee landlord who flew in from Alaska to collect rent. Those who complained were singled out for eviction. Initially, Kington refused to cooperate with the investigation but eventually she provided the SHRD with a statement. She denied instructing her managers not to rent to blacks. Her incompetent managers were to blame for any misunderstandings. She pointed out that twelve black families were living in the building at the time of her statement and had been living there for a number of years. Kington emphasized that blacks, whites, and "Orientals" all lived in the Royal Vista.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the evidence against Kington was slowly trickling in. Multiple witnesses, including tenants and managers, both black and white, spoke to Kington's propensity for making disparaging remarks about African Americans. Earl Love, an African American who had managed Royal Vista for a little more than a month before he was fired by Kington, stated that she instructed him to "rent to white persons, gay persons and white females because they looked more professional and did not try to live off of others like Black people." Love said Kington

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<sup>80</sup> Nancy Abelman and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 148-151.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



once told him that “she wanted Blacks in the back of the building...and more professional whites in the front of the building because the apartments are larger.” According to Love, the Royal Vista’s 11 basement level studio units, where Kington tried to send her black tenants, were in rough shape. The two shared bathrooms in the basement – one for males and one for females – rarely functioned. Rats and roaches made their way in and out of the sizeable holes in the walls and water regularly leaked into the units from the floor above.<sup>82</sup>

In her own elaborate and peculiar way, Kington perpetuated a hierarchy that elevated white tenants and those who were married, while punishing black women. Although she was forced to rely on black managers and tenants, they were treated like pawns and easily discarded. Some of those living in the most squalid conditions were Southeast Asians. That they did not testify before the SHRD, or join with the black tenants in filing charges is worth noting. They may have felt inhibited by language and uncertainty regarding their rights. As the investigation plodded along, tenants who complained increasingly saw themselves as at the mercy of Kington. In her case notes, Mildred Gunn, the lead investigator, documented some of the concerns voiced in a meeting at the Seattle Tenants Union. Dreading Kington’s upcoming visit, the tenants discussed “alternative legal action...to prevent the landlord from living on the premises the week or so that she flies down to collect her rent.” Nothing seemed to materialize out of the discussion and the tenants remained on edge.

Well after the initial charges were filed, Kington’s units in the Royal Vista continued to attract African American women. Tenants were still being funneled into the lowest quality housing, operated by a callous owner who profited at their expense. It took the SHRD 17 months to complete the investigation process, which ended in June 1983. Along the way, Gunn found her work delayed by a number of obstacles, many of them common in cases brought by low-income

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

tenants. Haphazard or non-existent record keeping and the constant turnover of managers and tenants hindered progress. In the end Gunn and the SHRD found “reasonable cause” to believe the charges. Kington had repeatedly tried to move black tenants away from the front of the building and into inferior basement units. It was a victory for the tenants, who showed courage in testifying, even at the risk of being evicted. Remarkably, they were not seeking a monetary award for their troubles. In spite of the ruling, it does not appear that Kington was forced to change her policies. Her belief in the profitability of a policy that prized white tenants while demeaning African American ones was difficult to shake.<sup>83</sup>

Those who demanded more from the SHRD were often left disappointed. Almost a year-and-a-half after he initially filed housing discrimination charges after trying to rent an apartment in the Queen Anne neighborhood (West Seattle), David Battles found himself being questioned on the stand. Battles was one of the few who rejected the SHRD’s settlement offers. The hearing involved Battles, an African American, and Genevieve Mason, the white owner of the Olympic Arms apartment building. In the middle of March, 1978, Battle’s search for an apartment had brought him to Queen Anne. He was rebuffed by Mason, who said nothing was available. Shortly after his conversation with Mason, Battles asked his wife, who was white, to inquire about an apartment at the Olympic Arms. Mason offered her an apartment. Subsequent tests by SHRD investigators revealed that Mason’s policies discriminated against prospective tenants who were black.<sup>84</sup>

When Battles took the stand, Ms. Mason’s attorney, Edwards E. Merges, began by looking for holes in Battles’ story. Then, he cut right to the question of Battles’ credibility, asking if he had ever been convicted of a crime. Battles admitted that in either 1961 or 1962 he

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> “Battles v. Olympic Arms,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 24, Folder 18, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

had been convicted of armed robbery. He had robbed a bank in Los Angeles and spent five years in prison at Terminal Island. Later in the hearing, Merges asked Battles why he filed the complaint, and Battles responded with the following:

I took it as a personal affront, you know, that you can come to somebody's place that obviously has space in a place, and they are open to the public to rent, and be turned down without even...I felt a personal affront, and I thought, if we are going to make these laws, they ought to enact them.<sup>85</sup>

Battles probably meant to say that they ought to enforce the laws, but his point was clear in that he felt the sting of being denied. Merges continued to press. "Are you interested in getting money out of this case?" he asked Battles. The question further irritated Battles, who tried to keep calm:

I'm always interested in getting money, but that wasn't the purpose. The purpose I filed for was because I was very hostile about that kind of treatment. I didn't like that kind of treatment. Now, subsequent, if there is some damage done because I've spent a lot of money out of my pocket, running around, and I find it personally humiliating to even have to go through this whole thing when I went to look for a place to stay.<sup>86</sup>

Merges pushed further. After Battles described how he had asked his wife to check out the apartment after he was denied, Merges intervened. Battles had already made it clear that he and his wife were separated but Merges feigned ignorance, asking, "Is that one of the ladies that you are living with now, sharing a house with, I mean?" Although Battle's attorney, Ron Chatburn, corrected Merges, Battles was clearly bothered by the question. "That's pretty tacky," Battles told Merges. "That is the one I was married to. Yvonne is the lady I was married to."<sup>87</sup>

Merges did his best to tarnish the image of Battles, insinuating that he was a philandering ex-convict. He also denied Chatburn, Battle's attorney, full access to Mason's rental records. While Merges dragged Battles' biography into public view, Genevieve Mason's testimony

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

lacked substance and drama. Mason and her husband had owned the Olympic Arms since 1946. When he died in October 1976, she became the sole owner. She could recall only one black tenant who had lived in the building, a roommate of a white tenant. The black roommate had since moved out. When pressed regarding black tenants who might have lived in the building during the 1950s and 1960s, Mason could not recall. “I’m an old lady, I can’t remember.” When asked about Battles, Mason said she did not recognize him. Her time on the stand yielded little.<sup>88</sup>

It is obvious reading through the transcript that Merges sought to whittle away at Battles’ testimony, portraying him as a typical member of the “underclass.” With the media fixated on a “menacing underclass,” it was all too easy to suggest that Battles’ past indiscretions made his exclusion from a white neighborhood understandable and even necessary. Who indeed would want a black man who had robbed a bank in their neighborhood? His simple demand for justice was even turned on its head, caricatured as another attempted heist.<sup>89</sup>

Eventually, the investigation produced more evidence, as the SHRD obtained several statements from white tenants. One, an elderly woman, told an investigator that she had not seen any black tenants during the roughly 25 years that she had lived in the building. Another tenant, who had lived in the Olympic Arms for 20 years, also could not recall any black tenants. At long last, the SHRD concluded its investigation in January 1981, nearly two-and-a-half years after the charges were filed and nearly three years since the alleged incident. Mason, the SHRD ruled, “willfully and knowingly denied rental of available apartment units at the Olympic Arms to black persons.” She did not advertise vacancies and denied access to the manager’s apartment when prospective black tenants entered the building. Relying on “word-of-mouth recruiting and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Michael B. Katz, ed., *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4-5.

walk-ins” from the white neighborhood (Queen Anne) made it so that few African Americans even entered the picture.<sup>90</sup>

After dragging along for three years, as investigators slowly dug up evidence, the case came to an uneventful end. No resolution emerged and Mason escaped without punishment. Battles, most likely, had lost his patience with the process. He was living in Bellingham, Washington, when the case was closed.<sup>91</sup> Whatever the reason for his abandoning the case, Battles went to extraordinary lengths in his pursuit of justice. Few individuals were willing to stick around and muddle through the mess of dealing with the SHRD for as long as he did. Meanwhile Merges, Mason’s attorney, had a long history of fighting fair housing laws. He had fewer qualms about engaging in the tedium of an SHRD investigation. In fact, he had represented Mason in front of the SHRD at least once before, in 1976. She lost the previous case, which took two years, but received only a \$100 fine.<sup>92</sup> Back in 1961, Merges had served as general counsel for the Seattle Apartment Operators Association in its bid to thwart the municipal open housing ordinance. One of his objections to the ordinance was rather ironic, as he argued that it would be impossible to enforce. He felt anti-discrimination legislation and enforcement needed to be handled at the federal and state level.<sup>93</sup>

African American women who wished to get away from the CD faced a range of obstacles, particularly if they had children. On May 25, 1982, Idabelle Parker, an African American woman, finally won her suit, six years after filing charges with the SHRD. In the case

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “Judy Olson v. R.H. Mason and the Grayson Apartments,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 5, Folder 13, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

<sup>93</sup> “Edwards E. Merges Statement,” December 11, 1961. Comptroller Files, Accession no. 1802-01, SMA.

notes section, an investigator celebrated the victory by writing “Hallelujah!!”<sup>94</sup> Parker, a single mother, brought the charge in January 1976, shortly after checking out a unit for rent in a house in the Greenwood area of Seattle (North End). According to Parker’s statement, her friends, Kevin and Katherine Leonard, a white married couple, were planning to move out of the building. They had informed Leonard that they needed to end their lease and Parker had been eager to take it over. But when Parker met with Paul Tutmarc, one of the property owners, her offer to take over the lease was rejected. According to Parker, the main issue was childcare for her daughter. She said Tutmarc, who was white, would not rent to her because he preferred to rent to couples. “He asked me several questions about who would live with me; who would take care of my 13 year old daughter,” Parker explained to the SHRD. “These questions had no bearings (sic) upon whether I would be a suitable tenant or not.” Tutmarc told the SHRD that he never agreed to let Leonard break his lease.<sup>95</sup>

The SHRD investigation revealed that Tutmarc, who owned two other rental properties, did not have any black renters in his buildings during the last three years. The only “minority” renters that lived in one of his units were the Otanis, a Japanese American family. While they had a young daughter, Tutmarc explained that the mother was always at home watching the daughter. Tutmarc remained adamant that he did not want a situation where a child would be left unattended while their parent was at work. According to the SHRD, Tutmarc prolonged the case by not giving “full cooperation” to the investigation. Case notes show that when Tutmarc did respond to SHRD letters, he moved in a slothful way. On one occasion, it took him six months to send a return letter. When a settlement was finally reached, Tutmarc escaped without a fine. His

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<sup>94</sup> “Parker v. Tutmarc Realty,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 5, Folder 14, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

main requirement was to conduct future rentals without violating the city's open housing ordinance.<sup>96</sup>

The differential racialization of a Japanese nuclear family and a single black mother was more than just a minor detail in the case. Instead, it probably reflected a growing theme within the housing market – played out in various white neighborhoods. Japanese Americans, though they had been cast as a community of unassimilable bachelors in the early twentieth century, could now be construed as familiar, at least in terms of family structure. As sociologist William Petersen argued in laying out the model minority image in 1966, Japanese Americans had “developed a family life both strong and flexible enough to help their children cross a wide cultural gap.”<sup>97</sup> Japanese and Chinese American communities, once imagined as haunts for sexual deviancy, entered the mainstream partly through the development of nuclear families. But, as Nayan Shah has argued, these were terms of assimilation that offered only “limited inclusion” that “enable[d] the resilience of exclusionary strategies in U.S. liberal democracy.” In this case, the conditional acceptance of a Japanese American family in a white neighborhood was inseparable from the exclusion of a single, black mother.<sup>98</sup>

Other cases from the SHRD files help to shed additional light on the differential racialization of African and Asian Americans. In March 1981, C.J. Christian, a white female, filed a charge with the SHRD against Peter Wong, an Asian male. In her statement, Christian told investigators that she and her two “mulatto” children had been combing the newspapers in search of an apartment to rent. Their search brought them to a West Seattle apartment owned by

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> William Peterson, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1966.

<sup>98</sup> Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 253.

Wong.<sup>99</sup> During their informal interview with Wong regarding the apartment, Christian noticed that Wong seemed uncertain about her two children, Carey, 11, and Toby, 9, who were both half black and half white. According to Christian, Wong “kept staring at the children” throughout their 45-minute meeting. “He asked where I worked,” said Christian. “He asked if they were my children three times?” The third time of asking, Wong took the questioning a step further. “Were they my natural children? Yes. Where did they go to school? Private school.” Christian tried to move beyond the inquisition and offered Wong a deposit for the apartment. He refused, saying he needed to first speak with his partner. Though Wong also asked Christian if she was married, his scrutiny regarding the two children was her most pressing concern in her statement to investigators.<sup>100</sup>

According to Christian’s statement, she called Wong the next morning to see if he had spoken with his partner regarding the apartment. He said he had and that his partner did not want to rent to those who had kids. When Christian informed him of the illegality of his decision, Wong quickly responded by saying that the apartment had been rented. According to Christian, the conversation took a strange twist, as Wong shifted the topic away from the apartment. The exchange ended with Wong asking Christian if she wanted to get a drink sometime and Christian refusing his offer. She then hung up the phone in disgust.<sup>101</sup>

Uncertain as to how to break the news to her children, Christian tried to soften the blow. She told her boys that they were denied the apartment because Wong did not want children in the building. Her eldest son, Carey, dismissed her story. “He said that’s not the reason, he won’t rent to us because we’re tan. He has never said anything like this before,” Christian told the SHRD.

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<sup>99</sup> “Christian v. Wong,” Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 17, Folder 2, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



Just six blocks from Hope Lutheran School, where the children would be enrolled, the rental was in a prime location. This made the rejection all the more bitter.<sup>102</sup>

Investigators had trouble obtaining information from Wong. Wong's English skills were "very minimal," according to investigators. He was taking part-time ESL classes at the time of the investigation. Wong did not believe that he discriminated against Christian. In the words of the investigator, "he just didn't want his property destroyed by tenants – adults or youth." A little over a month after filing the charges, Christian dropped her complaint. After returning from visiting with family, Christian called Wong and ended up changing her mind about the case. She informed investigators that Wong told her that, although he had sole ownership of the property, his "Caucasian" wife also had some input on the rental. The wife, Christian believed, was the one pulling the strings. She was the one who did not want children living in the building. "He's not very assertive – although a man – he's easily dominated," Christian told investigators. Wong also informed her that he was mired in a financial mess. "He's totally obliterated with his problems," explained Christian. Investigators ended the case by requiring Wong to report all vacancies, rental applications and rental agreements in detail. He needed to report the "name, race, color, and parental status" of all rental applications.<sup>103</sup>

On one level, the case was typical, as far as Wong's aversion to renting to a single mother with children, especially if they were black. Within the mix, however, was Christian's perplexing decision not to carry on with her complaint against Wong. She appeared to be taking pity on Wong, largely because she saw him as an emasculated Asian man. Dominated by a white wife, he could hardly even think for himself. While being racialized in such a way may have afforded Wong a way out of a difficult situation, it was in the end a burden. For at the same time that

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

Asian Americans were envisioned as unthreatening neighbors, they were also treated as wholly unfit for positions of leadership in the workplace.<sup>104</sup>

Beginning in the late 1970s, the SHRD noticed a rise in the number of housing discrimination cases being brought by whites. Between 1978 and 1979, the percentage of housing discrimination complaints brought by white charging parties rose from 10 percent of all cases to 35 percent. The number of complaints brought by black charging parties declined from 65 to 53 percent. In 1980, the numbers remained roughly the same, as white charging parties brought 30 percent of complaints and blacks 60 percent. At first glance, the changes seemed to point to declining levels of prejudice aimed at black renters. Unfortunately, the changes did not signify any such progress. According to the SHRD's 1980 annual report, "In each instance where whites filed, they alleged unlawful discrimination based upon their association with non-white guests in their housing accommodations." A closer look at the case files reveals that the complaints related more specifically to whites associating with blacks.<sup>105</sup>

As Peggy Pascoe has argued, fears of miscegenation and interracial sex were foundational in maintaining white supremacy, particularly when it came to the transmission of property. Through anti-miscegenation law, U.S. courts "elevated the notion that interracial marriage was unnatural to commonsense status." Though the legal argument had been removed in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), an opposition to interracial marriage and sex that seemed commonsense remained. In Seattle's contested housing market, landlords raised the threat of

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<sup>104</sup> Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America*, 35-39.

<sup>105</sup> City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1978*, 1802-G9, Office of the City Clerk, Annual Reports, Human Rights Department, 1963-1982, Box 1, Folder 4, SMA; City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1979*, 1802-G9, Office of the City Clerk, Annual Reports, Human Rights Department, 1963-1982, Box 1, Folder 4, SMA; City of Seattle, Department of Human Rights, *Annual Report, 1980*, 1802-G9, Office of the City Clerk, Annual Reports, Human Rights Department, 1963-1982, Box 1, Folder 4, SMA.

interracial marriage and sex as a way to restrict black renters. Single women were easy targets for discrimination, particularly African Americans and those in relationships with black men.<sup>106</sup>

Joan Bozzer, a white woman filed a complaint with the SHRD after being denied an apartment in the Fremont neighborhood (North End). Facing a looming eviction deadline handed down by her current apartment owner, Joan Bozzer set out to find a place to live in the fall of 1978. To her relief, she found a rental unit in Fremont for \$150 per month, barely within her budget. Bozzer, 20 years old at the time, was a student at the Seattle Opportunities Industrial Center, a vocational training center tied to the War on Poverty. She worked as a housekeeper on weekends. Ed Gajowniczek and his wife, Solveig, were in the midst of remodeling a basement unit in one of their rental homes. By mid-September of 1978, Bozzer and the Gajowniczek's had met in person several times and reached an agreement. When the remodeling was finished, the Gajowniczek's would rent out the unit to Bozzer. Only a few finishing touches were needed. The couple accepted Bozzer's \$70 deposit and even told her that she could move some of her belongings into the unit before beginning her tenancy.<sup>107</sup>

A few days later, Bozzer stopped by the Gajowniczek's house to obtain a key to the unit. She was eager to begin moving in some of her belongings. Bozzer entered the home of the Gajowniczek's alone and after conversing with Ed found out that the couple only had one key for the unit. They agreed that Ed would ride along to the unit with Bozzer and her friend, who was waiting in the car. When they stepped out to the curb, Bozzer offered Ed Gajowniczek the front passenger seat and proceeded to enter the back seat of the car. Gajowniczek lowered himself to get in the car and made eye contact with the driver, Ed Hoskin. Startled to see that Bozzer's friend was black, Gajowniczek changed his mind and said he would rather sit in the back seat.

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<sup>106</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 3; 23; 104.

<sup>107</sup> "Bozzer v. Gajowniczek," Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 18, Folder 33, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

Hoskin hurried around and attempted to clear some papers from the back seat. Gajowniczek again made a move to get in the car, this time in the back seat. But then he quickly turned away for a second time. He informed Bozzer and Hoskin that he needed to go back and get something from his house. A confused Bozzer followed him into the house. She would later tell SHRD investigators that she overheard him tell his wife that he had seen Bozzer “sitting in a car with a nigger.” When Bozzer knocked on the door to see what had happened, Gajowniczek returned her deposit and told her that the apartment was no longer available.<sup>108</sup>

Bozzer soon filed a charge with the SHRD. The above account was drawn from the “findings of fact,” as compiled by SHRD investigators. In her statement, she expressed how shocking it was to witness Gajowniczek’s reaction. “I was confused and ashamed,” said Bozzer, “that a white person would even discriminate against another white person just because she has a friend who is black.” Hoskin was less confounded by the incident. He wrote: “I picked up that [Gajowniczek] didn’t want Black people around there because his actions from walking to the car and leaving were drastic changes.” Hoskin reacted to the slight calmly, recognizing that his friend was running out of time to find an apartment. “I told Joan to go into the house,” he wrote, “and explain to [Gajowniczek] that I only drove her there and we were not planning to live together or anything.” By that time, however, Bozzer had been sent home with her deposit.<sup>109</sup>

Hoskin’s measured response was telling. Clearly, he was not surprised by the treatment he received. He was even willing to distance himself publicly from his white friend in order to appease the anxieties of Gajowniczek. After the incident with Gajowniczek, Bozzer told the SHRD that she felt “scared, confused, embarrassed, and humiliated.” Bozzer lived alone and had no family in the area. It had been “so hard” to find the apartment with the Gajowniczek’s. After

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

their rejection, Bozzer was “very depressed” and struggled with her schooling. The rental market was “so scarce [in Seattle] that it was almost a month later that I finally found and moved into an apartment that I could afford,” Bozzer told the SHRD.<sup>110</sup>

After concluding its investigation, the SHRD found “reasonable cause” to believe Bozzer’s claims. In her own estimation, Bozzer spent 67 hours dealing with her SHRD complaint. She counted seven visits to the SHRD, each lasting about an hour-and-a-half. She made one visit to the Seattle Tenants Union that lasted for an hour-and-a-half and another to Evergreen Legal Services of the same duration. She spent nearly eight hours on phone calls related to the case, two hours preparing statements and one hour locating a witness. One additional hour was devoted to speaking with her school counselor. The search for a new apartment, after the rejection, took about 42 hours. For her troubles, the SHRD awarded her \$1,168.97 in damages. Through their lawyer, the Gajowniczek’s challenged the ruling. The case was then sent to the Seattle Human Rights Commission Hearing Panel. Bozzer received a check for the damages roughly three years after filing her complaint. Bozzer’s dogged pursuit of justice was exceptional. It most certainly helped that as a white woman, dealing with the affront of racial discrimination was rare. It stung her. African Americans like her friend Hoskin, familiar with Seattle’s racial boundaries and the ways in which they were enforced, had learned to navigate around the hostility. Few low-income renters were able and willing to muster the time and energy that Bozzer devoted to the case.<sup>111</sup>

Cases brought before the SHRD easily fell apart, as it could be difficult to prove that landlords were indeed policing the bounds of race, class, gender and familial status. Teresa Conyers, a white female who was studying at the University of Washington, filed a charge

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

against her Japanese landlord in April 1976. She accused her landlord of discriminating against Conyers' boyfriend and his mother, who were both black. According to an interview report filed by an SHRD investigator, Conyers moved into a CD apartment in January 1976. She was told by the Japanese owner that "he preferred that she would avoid entertaining Black persons or associates on the premises because they are noisy and cause nothing but trouble." Conyers, desperate to rent the apartment, declined to tell the owner of her many relationships with African Americans. Her boyfriend, her boyfriend's mother, and some of her friends were black. Conyers' alleged that the owner, upon meeting her boyfriend for the first time, was deeply suspicious. He interrogated her boyfriend, even asking where he worked. From there on out, the owner "made it a habit" to enter Conyers' apartment whenever her boyfriend was there. Often, the owner would ask her boyfriend "embarrassing and personal questions before leaving." In response to the owner's unwelcome intrusions into her apartment, Conyers installed an extra lock. To her dismay, she later found that the lock had been tampered with and her two pet cats were no longer in the apartment. On multiple occasions, Conyers arrived home to find things amiss within her apartment. She told investigators that the owner had asked her to "leave her drapes open when she leaves for school so that he would know that she was out." Perhaps the last straw was when Conyers arrived home one day to find a gold-colored woman's sweater in her dresser. According to the investigator's notes, Conyers felt "that the owner had placed it there to make it appear as if her boyfriend had brought another girl to the apartment and would cause an argument between the two."<sup>112</sup>

The case log reveals that the SHRD initially had trouble obtaining a response from the Japanese couple who owned the Central District apartment. On May 24, 1976, Martha Steinborn,

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<sup>112</sup> "Conyers v. Miyaki," Office for Civil Rights, Discrimination Case Files, Box 5, Folder 45, Accession no. 3805-01, SMA.

the investigator, filed a note explaining that the couple did not want to meet with the SHRD. In her note, Steinborn wrote that she tried to outline how the SHRD conducted investigations to the owner's wife, who seemed uninterested. Steinborn then offered a mild warning: "I indicated to her that if I were to base my conclusions on what she had told me thus far, it would probably go against them just because the information was not detailed enough." Many of the documents from the case seem to be missing from the file but it appears that the owner and his wife offered a brief statement to the SHRD. But beyond that, they were unwilling to provide more information. Going back to the case log, it seems that the investigation carried on for more than two-and-a-half years. The apartment owners eventually hired an attorney and multiple witnesses gave statements, though none of the statements remain in the archive. In November, 1982, the SHRD closed the case, no longer able to locate Conyers. More than six years after the charges had been filed, the case petered out.<sup>113</sup>

It is easy to dismiss this particular case as a bizarre and unimportant misunderstanding. But seemingly trivial interactions between landlords and tenants mattered. As Wendy Cheng has argued "discourse is not merely representative or explanatory but productive of material conditions and essential to the operation of power." These were debates about freedom and belonging that influenced how neighborhoods in Seattle were to be developed. Who would have access to the resources so heavily concentrated in white neighborhoods and could the city's racial geography be undone?<sup>114</sup> For those who experienced the city's bureaucratic and ineffectual approach to enforcing civil rights, there was little reason for optimism. For Japanese Americans, the city's racial geography appeared drastically different. No longer the prospective tenants barred by their race, they were more likely to be among the gatekeepers.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes*, 19; 71.

By the early 1980s, the SHRD was in shambles. In an exit letter from 1983, Carmen Jones, a disgruntled employee, let loose. She laid the blame at the feet of her boss, SHRD director Marlaina Kiner. But she also blamed the city. She described the SHRD as a “department programmed for failure.” In her letter, Jones wrote that “minority businesses, charging parties, friends and the community considered the department a joke, a sham.” She added that “there will be no ill feelings if the department is closed and many are willing to help close it.”<sup>115</sup> Jones was at one point optimistic that Kiner would bring the department back from irrelevance, but “as the months passed, discrimination towards employees and the community profoundly exhibited a new high.” According to Jones, white personnel within the SHRD projected “an image of superiority.” They viewed blacks as having the “intelligence of a brown paper bag.” Black employees were subjected to discrimination when it came to job assignments, promotions and the application of departmental policies and procedures. Along with black employees, other employees “who may be associated with aggressive blacks” were also subjected to discrimination. On a more general level, Jones believed employees were given instructions that were “inconsistent with the law.”<sup>116</sup>

In her letter, Jones also took aim at the Mayor’s office. Mayor Royer, she claimed, “was subversive in flaunting the law at the expense of blacks, the department and the community.” The investigation of cases, according to Jones, became an ultra-efficient routine. Investigators were encouraged to do the following: “Take a charge, grab a form letter, check the ‘no cause’ box and close the case.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Carmen Jones to Marlaina Kiner, August 18, 1983, Box 10, Folder HRD Directorship, Management and Mismanagement, W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.



Toward the end of 1985, Kiner resigned. Staff turnover within the SHRD left the department in constant flux. The investigations division had four different managers in an 18-month period under Kiner. Two supervisors in the division had resigned within the last six months. Six out of 10 investigators had resigned in the past year. Twenty-three staff members had “resigned, quit under pressure, or been fired” since Kiner had become director, according to a report by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* newspaper. Eighteen of them were minorities. Though Kiner was African American, her three top aides were white and three out of four supervisors were white. The newspaper also reported that Mayor Royer received a letter from Mildred Gunn, a former investigator, describing the toxic work environment within the SHRD. In her letter to Royer, submitted before she quit, Gunn warned of “an intolerable work environment permeated with racism.” Gunn, it should be noted, was the investigator who spent several years immersed in the turmoil surrounding the Royal Vista Apartments and Tae Yon Kington.<sup>118</sup>

Critiques of the SHRD only intensified through 1986. An editorial in the *Post-Intelligencer* diagnosed the department’s condition as “terminal.” Ever since the department was first organized, a PI editorial explained, it had been a “neglected stepchild.” Periodically, “elected politicians trotted it out...to take a bow as a symbol of the city’s enlightened and tolerant image.” Beyond that, politicians ignored the department. SHRD leaders, the PI argued, were chosen for their “political value as symbols.” City leaders “liked the idea of having a Human Rights Department around, but they never really expected it to do much.”<sup>119</sup> As morale

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<sup>118</sup> Duff Wilson, “City’s Embattled Chief of Human Rights Resigns,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 9, 1985, Box 10, Folder HRD Directorship, Management and Mismanagement, W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

<sup>119</sup> “Rights Agency Needs an Overhaul,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 19, 1986, Box 10, Folder HRD Directorship, Management and Mismanagement, W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

and productivity plunged over the years, the department was left with a glut of backlogged or inactive cases.<sup>120</sup>

### **A Civil Rights Struggle Run Amok**

Federal fair housing law and enforcement procedures were just as flimsy as those at the municipal level in Seattle. Despite the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, housing discrimination remained rampant throughout the country into the 1980s. In 1983, the United States Commission on Civil Rights organized a conference titled, “A Sheltered Crisis: The State of Fair Housing in the Eighties,” held in Washington, D.C. Leading academics and policy makers offered a somber assessment of the current state of fair housing. Fallout from the global recession dating back to the late 1970s and the consequent tightening of the housing market led to rising rates of racial discrimination. A report by Henry Schechter of the AFL-CIO, summed up the stakes: “if decent housing is not vacant and available in local markets at prices and rents that families of limited income can afford, then, for them, the right to buy or rent without discrimination becomes a cruel hoax.”<sup>121</sup> The number of discrimination complaints brought to (HUD) and other fair housing agencies soared. In 1979, 2,800 complaints were documented. In 1980, 3,100 cases were filed. In 1981, 4,200; 1982 saw 5,100 cases filed. In 1983, the number was at 2,100, six months into the year. How these cases were handled, was an entirely different matter, according to Schechter:

Under the current fair housing law, HUD has a procedure that enables a victim of housing discrimination to report a violation. But the Department can do little to stop that violation. No official has the authority to issue ‘cease and desist’ orders to those found guilty of discriminating. HUD can only investigate and try to bring the two parties together to conciliate their differences. But without any power to back up its conciliation

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<sup>120</sup> Duff Wilson, “City’s Embattled Chief of Human Rights Resigns,” November 9, 1985, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Box 10, Folder HRD Directorship, Management and Mismanagement, W. Ivan King Northwest Black Heritage Collection, Accession no. 5506-1, UWSC.

<sup>121</sup> *A Sheltered Crisis: The State of Fair Housing in the Eighties*, Conference organized by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington D.C., September 26-27, 1983, 54.

efforts, HUD has been unable to get landlords and sellers of housing to take the process seriously.<sup>122</sup>

Robert Weaver, who had served as the first secretary of HUD and was now president of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, spoke of an environment where racial discrimination in housing remained “widely prevalent.” Beginning in the Nixon years and reaching a low under the Reagan administration, the federal government’s “virtual abandonment of subsidized housing,” left low income residents with few options. Coupled with the “wholesale retreat” from enforcing civil rights laws under Reagan’s watch, especially in housing and education, the results were devastating.<sup>123</sup>

There were, however, some signs of progress. Fair housing legislation had “accelerated” the suburbanization of blacks, “loosening the white noose around the central city.” The number of African Americans living in the suburbs rose from 2.5 million in 1960 to 3.6 million in 1970 and nearly 6.2 million in 1980. But Weaver advised caution for those getting caught up in the numbers: “There are more black suburbanites primarily because, in a number of cities, ghettos have expanded beyond the city line and into the inner suburbs.” The evolution of U.S. cities and suburbs was lost on many white Americans, according to Weaver. In an era of increasing black suburbanization, white Americans were brimming with optimism. African Americans were now free to move throughout the city, wherever their income permitted. Weaver cited a Harris survey from 1978 to substantiate his point. Only 23 percent of white respondents felt blacks were discriminated against in the housing market. With a view shaped by decades of experience trying to create more equitable housing policies, Weaver offered a more realistic analysis. While the history and process that gave rise to racial discrimination and segregation in housing had unfolded over centuries, the effort to end housing discrimination was of a more “recent vintage –

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 5.

barely 20 years.” Discriminatory practices in the housing market, Weaver believed, had become “more complex and subtle.” Redlining was “done behind closed doors and off the record.” Racial steering was becoming “increasingly prevalent” and now “effected with a new finesse.” Blatantly racist behavior was fading and a new artful discriminator emerged.<sup>124</sup>

Before signing the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, President Reagan remarked that discrimination was “particularly tragic” when it resulted in families being “refused housing near good schools, a good job, or simply in a better neighborhood to raise children.” The bill provided several vital tools aimed at eradicating housing discrimination. It extended protected class status to families with children, pregnant women, and the disabled. The Act also opened the door for HUD attorneys to bring charges before administrative law judges on behalf of victims. In addition, the Justice Department’s ability to bring suits in Federal District Court on behalf of victims was enhanced. Perhaps most importantly, stiffer penalties were introduced. Gone was the policy, dating back to 1968, that limited punitive damages in private suits to \$1,000. In cases handled by an administrative judge, the following penalties could be levied: \$10,000 for the first offense, \$25,000 for the second offense, and \$50,000 for the third offense. For those prosecuted by the Justice Department, the fines could run from \$50,000 for the first offense to \$100,000 for the second offense.<sup>125</sup>

In Seattle, Bill Hilliard, the director of the SHRD, welcomed the Act with relief. Hilliard acknowledged that the \$1,000 cap on awards for housing discrimination in Seattle had been too

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 4-6

<sup>125</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988,” Public Papers of Ronald Reagan, September 1988, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/091388a.htm> (accessed January 14, 2016); “The Fair Housing Act,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD.gov, [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/progdesc/title8](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/progdesc/title8) (accessed January 14, 2016); Timothy J. Moran, “Punitive Damages in Fair Housing Litigation: Ending Unwise Restrictions on a Necessary Remedy,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 36, 279 (Summer 2001), 281.

small to serve as a deterrent. Such a low number, in Hilliard's opinion, had been the main problem in fighting housing discrimination. Two decades after the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the nation finally implemented laws against housing discrimination that might be strong enough to deter. The consequences of the 20-year delay in providing enforcement provisions against housing discrimination were enormous. Between 1960 and the end of the century, the black middle class in the U.S. tripled in size. Yet, as the historian Hugh Davis Graham has pointed out, "Blacks largely failed to benefit from the great postwar surge in equity values from real estate." Though the value of residential real estate prices rose, in spite of recessions in the 1970s and 1980s, most African Americans did not experience those gains. African Americans paid a high price for the delay "in the form of racial isolation in neighborhoods and schools and a generation of lost opportunity to accumulate home equity." In King County between 1970 and 2015, the rate of homeownership for African Americans plummeted from 49 percent to 28 percent. A city that once stood above the national average in this category had sunk well below it. The denial of housing opportunities to low-income renters was a massive part of the problem, hindering the process of upward mobility for African Americans.<sup>126</sup>

It is a popular notion, even among scholars, that blatant examples of housing discrimination, especially those rooted in racial prejudice, have declined. After the 1970s, the story goes, overt racism and discrimination went out of style. Institutional and more subtle forms of discrimination emerged. Audit studies conducted by HUD and other agencies reveal the new guise of discrimination. Among the findings, audits show those with "black"-sounding names and accents victimized by discrimination, as well as lending practices that targeted black

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<sup>126</sup> Addy Hatch, "The Kid's Law- Landlords Would Have to Accept Renter's Children," *Seattle Times*, September 4, 1988; Hugh Davis Graham, "The Surprising Career of Federal Fair Housing Law," *Journal of Policy History* 12, no. 2 (2000), 225-226; Gene Balk, "The Rise and Dramatic Fall of King County's Black Homeowners," *Seattle Times*, June 12, 2017.

borrowers for subprime loans. As the sociologist Douglas Massey argues, “In a world where overt discrimination has largely vanished from public view, subtle forms of discrimination are hard to detect, and density zoning now functions as a principle cause of segregation.” Such a narrative is compelling, though it is mostly-based on the absence of evidence of blatant discrimination. It is also based on the fact that black-white segregation has “steadily declined over the past decades,” according to Massey.<sup>127</sup>

There are, however, other factors worth considering. In 2001, Timothy J. Moran, an attorney with the Housing and Civil Enforcement Division of the Department of Justice, published an important article based on his experiences within the court system. Writing in the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, Moran argued that “recent litigation has made it clear that blatant housing discrimination...remains common,” particularly for blacks and Hispanics. One of the key obstacles in the fight against housing discrimination, Moran argued, was that lower courts consistently shied away from awarding punitive damages to victims. Punitive damages, he believed, were “essential to effective enforcement of fair housing laws.” Unfortunately, courts reserved punitive damages for only the most egregious conduct. Punitive damages – those awarded in excess of the amount needed to compensate the plaintiff for their injuries – were particularly important when there was “a significant likelihood that the wrongdoer will escape detection.” The sale or rental of a housing unit, with myriad complications and contingencies, offered numerous opportunities for discrimination to go undetected. Absent strong penalties against housing discrimination, perpetrators had little incentive to change. Victims also had little incentive to sue.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>127</sup> Massey et al., *Climbing Mount Laurel*, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Timothy J. Moran, “Punitive Damages in Fair Housing Litigation: Ending Unwise Restrictions on a Necessary Remedy,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 36, 279 (Summer 2001), 280-290.

It is easy to assume that the Southward migration of people of color and poverty in Seattle was somehow natural and inevitable. However, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Seattle's neighborhood patterns are shaped by ongoing racial discrimination in housing. It is not a relic of the pre-1970s era. In 2011, the City of Seattle contracted with a non-profit fair housing group to test 48 properties. One phase of the investigation, which spanned several months, involved black and white testers. Investigators found that "nearly 70 percent of the race-based tests showed a pattern of discrimination that favored white renters." Examples included quoting higher rent prices to blacks, not telling them about move-in specials, and doing credit and criminal checks that weren't done on whites. In 2015, the Seattle Office of Civil Rights conducted similar tests and filed housing discrimination charges related to 13 properties containing more than 2,800 rental units. Testers found disparate treatment in 64 percent of 42 tests related to race. The treatment of black prospective tenants mirrored that found in the 2011 report. According to the *Times*, the properties that were charged included "large, sleek new developments in Ballard and South Lake Union." The Office of Civil Rights' charge against the Corydon, an apartment complex near University Village, alleged that an agent told an African American tester that a one-bedroom apartment would be \$2,300 a month and would be available in one week. Ninety minutes later, the agent told a white tester that the unit would be \$2,000 a month and was immediately available. The city eventually reached a settlement with the company in charge of the Corydon.<sup>129</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, Seattle's housing crisis dizzied a city dealing with demographic change. What appears clearly is that Seattle's Civil Rights movement fell apart

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<sup>129</sup> Vanessa Ho, "Property Owners Victimized Black Renters, City Charges," *Seattle PI*, October 21, 2011, <http://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/Property-owners-victimized-black-and-disabled-2229188.php> (accessed January 14, 2016); Daniel Beekman, "Discrimination Alleged at 13 Seattle Rental Properties," *Seattle Times*, June 14, 2015, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/13-rental-properties-in-seattle-accused-of-discrimination> (accessed June 14, 2016).

within the realm of housing. As middle class African Americans and other non-whites moved away from the CD, the perception was that Seattle's housing market was opening up. Racial discrimination had reached the roadblock of fair housing legislation; outward migration only confirmed this. What this chapter shows was that class and gender were important but often overlooked variables in determining the re-structuring of neighborhoods. By the 1970s and 1980s, those with the least economic and social capital, often African American women, were at the center of a civil rights struggle that garnered little publicity.



## Epilogue

By the 1980s, the Central District was attracting a range of young white couples, eager to move into diverse neighborhoods close to downtown. Marc Slonim and Kay Sirlin were one such couple, moving into the CD in 1983, purchasing a home conveniently located near the East Madison YMCA and the Pendleton Miller Playground. They were struck by the changes that occurred in 1986 and 1987, as what seemed like a stable neighborhood was transformed by drug trafficking. Across the street from their house, the 47-unit Madison View Apartments that once housed low-income residents, including many single mothers with children, became a haven for drug dealers. The landscape now featured discarded syringes and other drug paraphernalia strewn about, along with liquor bottles and other trash. In a letter to Mayor Charles Royer, the couple questioned the city's commitment to the area, describing the living environment as a "cruel joke." With a child on the way, they anticipated having to move to a safer neighborhood. In particular, they were dismayed that the city was allowing critically-needed low-income housing to be overrun by drug dealers. "Other houses, now devoted to the drug trade, have potential to serve as low income housing, but that potential cannot be realized until the illegal activities are brought under control," they wrote. "If Seattle is to remain a city of viable, diverse residential neighborhoods, elected officials must take a leadership role in preventing the destruction of our communities."<sup>1</sup>

As the demographics of the CD changed, the product of years of disinvestment could be shocking. It seemed as if Seattle's elected officials were idle and indifferent, allowing and contributing to the destruction of a diverse residential neighborhood. As had been the case in the 1950s and 1960s, much of the city's efforts to spearhead growth and progress in ghettoized

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Marc Slonim and Kay Sirlin to Charles Royer, November 25, 1987, box 68, "OMB-Police, 1987," folder 39 "Police: Drugs, 1987," Office of the Mayor, Charles T. Royer, Departmental Correspondence, 5274-01, Seattle Municipal Archives.

neighborhoods remained focused on targeting problematic individuals. The systemic failures that produced racially-diverse neighborhoods mixed with a thriving drug trade were sidestepped. The link between disinvestment and black neighborhoods – a troubled history – was cast aside for an easier narrative.

Community groups in Southeast Seattle also worked to rid their neighborhoods of drug trafficking, echoing the sentiments of many in the CD who accused the city of doing little to stop drug dealers. Between 1983 and 1986, the SPD saw drug-related arrests and investigations more than double. In 1985, the department made 808 drug-related arrests and in 1986 that number jumped to 1,527. The number of drug-related investigations rose from 606 in 1985 to 1,659 in 1986. One of the main reasons behind the phenomenal increase in investigations and arrests was the proliferation of cocaine “rock houses,” according to the SPD. In 1987, Seattle was one of six cities to receive a federal grant meant to help the department bring in new technology and additional manpower in order to gather “a greater amount of raw narcotics-related intelligence data.” The focus of the program, entitled Project NOVA, was to gather information on “lower” level dealers and buyers in an “urban environment.” Through the first eight months of 1987, the SPD had already made more than 2,000 arrests. For Mayor Charles Royer, the arrests were only a first step; the second step was to “inculcate a societal value that vehemently condemns drug usage by all people.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Ellen E. McBride to Charles Royer, October 7, 1987, box 68, “OMB-Police, 1987,” folder 39 “Police: Drugs, 1987,” Office of the Mayor, Charles T. Royer, Departmental Correspondence, 5274-01, Seattle Municipal Archives; “Concept Paper, Project Nova,” April 1987, box 68, “OMB-Police, 1987,” folder 40 “Police: Drugs, 1987,” Office of the Mayor, Charles T. Royer, Departmental Correspondence, 5274-01, Seattle Municipal Archives; Val Varney, “Computerizing the War on Drugs: Grant Will Help Seattle Police Upgrade System,” *Seattle Times*, August 5, 1987; Letter from Charles Royer to Constance Herring, September 10, 1987, box 68, “OMB-Police, 1987,” folder 40 “Police: Drugs, 1987,” Office of the Mayor, Charles T. Royer, Departmental Correspondence, 5274-01, Seattle Municipal Archives.

In its alleged zeal to wipe out the drug trade, the city played an integral role in adding to the disproportionate rates of incarceration within the state. By the early 1990s, blacks made up 22 percent of prisoners within a state where they were only 3.1 percent of the total population. Blacks also made up 30 percent of those in prison for drug-related offences. Part of the reason for these disproportionate numbers stemmed from the ways in which state laws were wielded against black neighborhoods. A 1989 state law assigned two extra years of prison time to anyone caught selling drugs within 1,000 feet of a school. According to the *Times*, the law was “being vigorously enforced only in part of King County, especially Seattle’s Central Area.” A Seattle law from 1990 allowed police to arrest suspected drug dealers for loitering. About 60 percent of those arrested were black.<sup>3</sup>

From time to time, Seattle’s local media outlets remind a “white” city of its racially-segregated past. It is a past that existed before class supposedly took hold as the primary force producing inequality. Along with these moments of fleeting regret, however, Seattle has continued to celebrate its new frontiers of racial diversity. The twenty-first century has seen the 98118 zip code, comprising a six square mile swath of Southeast Seattle, mythologized as “the most diverse zip code in the country.” In 2012, 56 percent of students attending public schools within 98118 came from a home where a language other than English was spoken. The area’s racial diversity, including large Asian and African immigrant and refugee populations, is well known. Economic diversity within the 98118 zone, represented by lakefront mansions and dilapidated apartments, also adds to the image.

According to an article in HistoryLink, an online encyclopedia devoted to Washington State history, the pathway to the fusion of races and cultures within 98118 originated in the 1960s. A postwar housing boom in the Rainier Valley and a loss of affordable housing in the

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<sup>3</sup> Duff Wilson, “State Drug Laws Tilt Against Blacks,” *Seattle Times*, January 17, 1993.

Central District were two key factors, along with the passage of the city's open housing ordinance in 1968. These changes opened the door for blacks and Asians to migrate southward. Such rendering of the history frames the southward migration of Seattle's black and Asian populations as one of opportunity. Blacks and Asians, once hemmed into Seattle's Central Area by restrictive covenants and discrimination, were finally able to migrate outward, drawn by affordable housing.<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation, through charting the histories of African and Japanese Americans has aimed to complicate that narrative, demonstrating how race, class, and gender have continued to shape Seattle's housing market. Instead of working to uproot the exploitation at the heart of its ghettos, Seattle has continually polished their edges. At best, local, state and national policies have displaced those on the lowest rungs, in terms of race, class, and gender. The creation and maintenance of segregated housing was and is viewed as an unfortunate after-thought – one that follows a wholehearted commitment to growth and progress.

By analyzing the housing patterns of Japanese and African Americans in Seattle over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this dissertation contributes to an understanding of the history behind the city's segregated neighborhoods. It is a story that begins by looking at the segregation encountered by Japanese and African Americans – a foundational aspect of Seattle's housing market. It looks at how this segregation was created – through racial and class-based exclusions – and how both groups accommodated and resisted malleable but persistent boundaries. By following the overlapping and divergent experiences of Japanese and African Americans, there is much to gain in terms of understanding how race, class, culture and gender have worked in Seattle's neighborhoods. Though the two groups both contributed to and gained from the city's civil rights

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<sup>4</sup> Cassandra Tate, "Southeast Seattle Zip Code 98118: Neighborhood of Nations," August 13, 2012, *HistoryLink.org*, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=10164](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=10164) (accessed December 17, 2015).

struggles in particular ways – their combined histories help to illustrate how racial segregation has changed over time in a particular city. As this dissertation has argued, the racialization of non-white bodies has been formative in the discourse of housing and property rights. Discussions of housing, education, crime and policing reflect this. The most prominent way of attacking the “problem” of ghettos has been through the use of police force and the use of bussing to achieve school desegregation.

As recent scholarship has shown, there is still much to be learned about the way ghettos have been made and reinforced. Richard Rothstein has argued against what he calls the “myth of *de facto* segregation.” Racial divisions in U.S. neighborhoods are the product of *de jure* segregation. Private prejudice aided and abetted a project built on government policy and funding. In order to reverse the current course that leads to the perpetuation of ghettos, there must be a realization that constructing and maintaining them has been a national commitment. Support for ghettos has been widespread, whether couched in the logic of biological inferiority or the language of property rights.<sup>5</sup> Work by Nathan Connolly reinforces just how widespread this support has been. People of all races defended property rights as an avenue to racial reform. Those of all races, including some African American civil rights leaders, could be slumlords. “In Jim Crow America,” as Connolly argues, “the right to speak for others, or simply to speak for oneself, remained bound to property.” Along with lynching and “residential white terrorism,” Progressive and New Deal-era housing reform was bound up in white supremacy. Building on this racial logic, development and displacement tied to economic growth has led to the “continued disassociation of majority-black communities with ‘good schools, ‘safe’ neighborhoods, and ‘moral families’.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 198-199.

<sup>6</sup> Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 278-281.

There remains much more work to be done, as far as understanding how black and Asian homeowners in cities like Seattle defended their property rights and worked to distance themselves from the “underclass.” As the last chapter of this dissertation has shown, turning attention toward the rental housing market can be helpful, in terms of understanding how the lines of race, class, and gender were shaped on the ground. Though some of the story involves the persistence of white supremacy, an expanding group of non-white landlords deserve their own attention. There is still also much that remains unwritten about poor and working-class Japanese American residents in cities like Seattle, particularly after the 1970s. As Seattle and other West Coast cities continue to navigate housing crises, increasing attention has been focused on the issue of class, with less focused on the remapping of race and gender.

Though African and Asian Americans have broken important political ground, a system that perpetuates white supremacy has been shaken but still stands. With non-white political gains, a more elaborate struggle for power has transformed cities – though certain elements are familiar. Much attention has been directed to the possibility of interracial coalitions and activism. The long and intersecting histories of African and Japanese American communities in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles continue to yield fruit for historians. The ties forged between residents of these cities through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are integral parts of their racial formations. Civil rights organizations, most prominently the NAACP and the JACL aligned to bring landmark civil rights victories.<sup>7</sup> There has also been a concerted effort to draw out the trans-Pacific ties that distinguished Japanese Americans from their African American counterparts in these cities. Connections between Black Power and Asian American activists

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*.

were particularly strong in these cities – coalescing in Third World organizing. Anti-war activism also united a broad, interracial front.<sup>8</sup>

In cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, the possibilities have seemed far more promising, especially as it concerned coalitions between African and Japanese Americans. Writing about Los Angeles, Scott Kurashige has encouraged urban historians to embrace “the possibilities” of a “new urban majority” – people of color. Taken together, the struggles of Japanese and African Americans have reshaped Los Angeles.<sup>9</sup> But much depends on where you look and in the context of Seattle’s housing market, the lines have been drawn and continually redrawn in less hopeful ways. Cities like Seattle offer a different avenue to understanding the process of racial formation, as places where political power has been more elusive, where building black businesses has been even more of a painful process. The issue of segregated housing warrants particular scrutiny, as one of the most intractable and divisive issues of the Civil Rights era. Exploring the history of segregated neighborhoods in cities like Seattle helps to contextualize the racial geography of the 1970s and 1980s. The reworking of racial boundaries inspired both multiracial solidarity and non-white homeowner conservatism. Ghettos were reshaped and re-imagined, as seen by the work of Eric Tang in documenting the histories of Southeast Asian refugee communities in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

In researching this dissertation, I encountered numerous examples of interracial solidarity and organizing between African and Japanese Americans. When it came to housing, however, there were far fewer coalitions – perhaps a testament to how natural and individualized the issue of housing and segregation had become. Once at the core of Seattle’s Civil Rights movement – the struggle against racial discrimination in housing quickly became a forgotten issue. At the

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<sup>8</sup> Maeda, *Chains of Babylon*.

<sup>9</sup> Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*, 288.

<sup>10</sup> Tang, *Unsettled*.

local and national level, the easiest response to racial segregation and poverty was to redirect money away from public housing and toward the building of market-rate housing and prisons. As was the case throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the strategy of containing ghettos proved the least controversial – endorsed by a broad swath of society.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).



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