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0521548276 - Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960: Presidential and Judicial Politics

Charles M. Lamb

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Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960

Presidential and Judicial Politics

This book examines national fair housing policy from 1960 through 2000 in the context of the American presidency and America's segregated suburban housing market. It argues that a major reason for suburban housing segregation lies in Richard Nixon's 1971 fair housing policy, which directed federal agencies not to pressure suburbs to accept low-income housing. After exploring the role played by Lyndon Johnson in the initiation and passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the book contrasts Nixon's politics of suburban segregation with the politics of suburban integration espoused by his Housing and Urban Development secretary, George Romney. Nixon's fair housing legacy is then traced from the Ford administration through the Clinton presidency and in the decisions of Nixon's federal court appointees.

Charles M. Lamb has been involved in fair housing research for thirty years. He was a fair housing specialist with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Washington, D.C., from 1975 to 1977. Since 1977, he has taught constitutional law and civil liberties at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. Professor Lamb has published in professional journals and has coedited and coauthored four books: *Supreme Court Activism and Restraint*, *Implementation of Civil Rights Policy*, *Judicial Conflict and Consensus: Behavioral Studies of American Appellate Courts*, and *The Burger Court: Political and Judicial Profiles*. He is a member of the American Political Science Association.

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To the memory of my mother

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Preface and Acknowledgments

America's suburbs have traditionally been overwhelmingly white, although this is gradually changing. When moving from the cities, African Americans tend to relocate in older suburbs, rarely penetrating newer areas farther from the urban core. Whites, in turn, frequently flee inner-ring suburbs undergoing significant racial change. White opposition to living in neighborhoods with sizable numbers of blacks is often grounded in racism and fear, especially the fear that property values and schools will decline and that crime rates, local taxes, interracial dating, and interracial marriages will rise.

Even though African Americans are slowly relocating to the suburbs, this has not led to housing integration for most. A small percentage of suburbs experienced sizable declines in racial segregation between 1960 and 2000, but most suburbs underwent little racial change. Continued segregation in the suburbs perpetuates various divisions in American society, including segregated schools and concentrations of wealth and poverty. Suburban segregation also affects politics, policy, and law at all levels of government.

Sociologists explain racially segregated suburbs by emphasizing discrimination. This book adds a political layer of explanation. It argues that segregation in the suburbs is partly rooted in President Richard Nixon's fair housing policy, which prohibits federal agencies from pressuring the suburbs to accept low-income housing. According to Nixon, federal law does not permit the national government to force economic integration on the suburbs, and communities have no legal obligation to provide housing for the poor. Suburbs may refuse to apply for federal housing programs, thereby keeping many African Americans and other racial minorities out.

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Following a review of the national government's historical involvement in housing segregation, this book begins by exploring the influence of President Lyndon Johnson in the initiation and passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The aggressive suburban integration strategy of George Romney, President Nixon's first secretary of Housing and Urban Development, is then contrasted with Nixon's politics of suburban segregation. Nixon's legacy in suburban segregation is next traced from the Ford administration through the Clinton presidency. No president has reversed Nixon's policy, and no administration has significantly decreased suburban segregation. Lastly, it is argued that President Nixon indirectly influenced suburban segregation through the conservative decisions of his Supreme Court and lower federal court appointees.

Richard Nixon was president during a pivotal time in American history for equal housing opportunity and the possibility of racial and economic integration in the suburbs. Compared to the federal government's long record of fostering housing segregation, the potential existed in the early 1970s for reversing that trend. Nixon could have tackled segregation in housing in the same way that Johnson had handled segregation in public schools – by seriously threatening to withhold federal funds from communities that did not desegregate. He chose otherwise. After the 1968 presidential election, the Fair Housing Act was left to a president who consciously advocated the politics of suburban segregation to ensure his own reelection and to bolster the suburban power base of the Republican party for the future. This study therefore chronicles the rise and demise of the promise of the Fair Housing Act in the context of national politics and America's rapid suburban development between the 1960s and the end of the twentieth century.

Dozens of people helped to make this book possible. First, a number of archivists and librarians guided me through the massive collections I used in this research and aided me in countless other ways. Special thanks go to Pat Anderson, Wayne DeCesar, and Steve Greene at the Richard Nixon Materials Project in College Park, Maryland. William Wallach and his colleagues at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, were vital because of their knowledge of George Romney's papers. I am indebted to archivists and librarians at five other collections as well: Allen Fisher and Tina Houston at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas; David Horrocks and William McNitt at the Gerald R. Ford Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Albert Nason and James Yancy at the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, Georgia; Kelly Barton at the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California; and Frank Bauman, Bruce Kirby, and

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Abbreviations

BHL	Bentley Historical Library
CF	Confidential Files
DOJ	Department of Justice
FG	Federal Government
FHA	Fair Housing Act
GRFL	Gerald R. Ford Library
HS	Housing
HU	Human Rights
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
JCL	Jimmy Carter Library
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
LC	Library of Congress
NPMP	Nixon Presidential Materials Project
NPMS	Nixon Presidential Materials Staff
POF	President’s Office Files
RG	Record Group
RNMP	Richard Nixon Materials Project
RRL	Ronald Reagan Library
SMOF	Staff Member and Office Files
WHCF	White House Central Files
WHORM	White House Office of Records Management
WHSF	White House Special Files

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