

Color of Law Book Study Questions
Session 5 – May 6

Speakers – Rev. Andrew Connors, Moderator, Baltimore Presbytery/Pastor, Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church and Mr. Alex Aaron, CEO, Blank Slate

Facilitator – Lisa Beacham

Topic – Legacy of Redlining and Current Housing Policy (Chapters 8 and 9)

1. In Chapter 8, “Local Tactics” describes racial segregation defended and enforced often in language of protecting financial interests. How do such descriptions limit a community in moving toward the inclusive, beloved community, described in the Gospels? What other types of coded language are used today in order to avoid calling a thing what it is?
2. “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Over the past 5 weeks we have read and heard how governments at all levels historically worked to create segregation through delays, costly lawsuits, redlining, building highways through African American neighborhoods, etc., and the ramifications of this segregation in terms of wealth and health gaps. In what ways are we as a society still delaying justice today?
3. Baltimore City, like many communities across the country, created, enforced and defended racial segregation through many different avenues. What stories do you know about your own neighborhood or places where you grew up about how segregation was created and defended? What are some signs today of the ongoing legacy of those decisions, policies, or actions?

Relevant Background Information

For Question 1:

The Baltimore Sun famously tagged the desire of some African-American families to move into all-white areas as “the negro invasion.” Later, “urban renewal” programs routinely pursued the displacement of African-Americans in order to “improve” the community.

For Question 2:

Municipalities have delayed approval for zoning or building permits, and/or drastically increased fees for access to public utilities and roads for housing benefitting African-Americans. These tactics as well as filing lawsuits were costly to developers proposing black or integrated housing to the point that such developments became infeasible. Furthermore, local, state and federal agencies chose to build highways in areas that disproportionately destroyed Black neighborhoods and provided no assistance for finding new housing for those forced to move. Relocation assistance was finally required in 1965 but by then most of the Interstate highways had been built or land cleared for construction.

For All Questions:

Governmental actions

- Defining the intent of segregation to preserve home values, denying racialized intent.
- Using zoning laws to prevent Black institutions from moving into predominantly white areas
- Altering physical structures, closing off streets, building parks to close off white neighborhoods from adjoining Black neighborhoods.
- Intentionally concentrating lower-income Black public housing residents in redline or yellow-lined neighborhoods;
- "Ghettoizing" Black areas, refusing to allow Black residential areas to grow to meet natural demand, then blaming the inevitable health problems created on the very people who are forced to live in cramped, overcrowded, unhealthy conditions.
- Displacing Black families for slum clearance, urban renewal, code enforcement, public school construction, public housing construction, or demolition, and for University expansion.
- Destroying neighborhoods by running railroad lines and highways directly through Black neighborhoods in the name of eliminating "infested blocks"; (*Note connection to former President Trump's comments about Baltimore as "a disgusting, rat and rodent-infested mess."*)

Private actions or practices

- Creating "improvement" or "protection" associations to keep neighborhoods all white
- Utilizing restrictive, racial covenants to preserve racial segregation at the buyer-to-buyer level, enforced by neighborhood agreements
- Using "racial steering" in real estate to direct Black people to Black neighborhoods and White people to White ones.
- Churches appealing to public officials to prevent Black people from moving into all-white neighborhoods to preserve their ministry;

State-sanctioned Violence

- Police refusing to protect Black homeowners attacked by white vigilantes when Black homeowners move into all-white areas
- Police refusing to arrest, prosecutors refusing to charge, and judges refusing to convict white people who brutally attacked black homeowners, vandalized their homes, burned crosses, and committed other violent crimes.