

# Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal

---

Volume 10

Article 12

---

2019

## The House Made of Lies: Housing and Racial Inequalities in the 21st Century

Kieren Sutliff  
*Denison University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/prologue>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sutliff, Kieren (2019) "The House Made of Lies: Housing and Racial Inequalities in the 21st Century," *Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal*: Vol. 10, Article 12.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/prologue/vol10/iss1/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Writing Center at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

## The House Made of Lies: Housing and Racial Inequalities in the 21st century

The allure of the American Dream is one that's light is dying out in the modern day. For many Americans, this idea of the ideal life for an American starts with the quality of housing that one is able to obtain. Over time, this has shown how the reality of this situation contrasts greatly with the dream that many impoverished people had, which resulted in many people being dissatisfied with the position that they are in. This has been attributed to political actions that have greatly affected the housing scene, and how those actions had actively inhibited the potential housing options for those of different ethnic groups than the majority. One act that sought to right these wrongs was the Fair Housing Act of 1968, also known as Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act, which aimed to "replace ghettos by truly integrating and balancing living patterns" (Seicshnaydre). This act was brought about when the drive for civil rights was at its loudest, and sought to help bridge the gap in housing quality that many minorities had submitted to. The act also made sure that no act of discrimination pertaining to race or gender would apply to those who would be choosing what house to live in and in what area. The Fair Housing Act and its inability to address the current problems in addressing racial housing discrimination has led us to the disparity in racial groupings in American neighborhoods, with the majority of suburban and higher quality housing owned mainly by white people. Through the analysis of the government's varying impact of its implementation of the Fair Housing Act and how the impact

of those decisions are still being felt in lower income living areas today, the solution will be more clear.

My first source seeks to show the government's varying ability to properly bring forward the acts of the Fair Housing Act. The name of it is *Presidents, Bureaucracy, and Housing Discrimination Policy: The Fair Housing Acts of 1968 and 1988* by Charles Lamb and Eric Wilk. What this scholarly source has to say regarding the Fair Housing Act is a unique stance, as the article focuses more on the political systems that were present when the act was first being implemented and then revised. Through this point of view, the article highlights whether or not the governments of the time period would act in accordance with their political beliefs and push for or against Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act. The article finds a different outcome than initially expected when one thinks of the conservative Reagan Administration, where they were "remembered for championing FHAP. FHAP, addressed later in this article, ensures that state and local governments play an influential role in enforcing Title VIII." (Lamb, Wilk). With the ideas that this articles brings up, why is it that the discrimination of housing delegation is a problem? What I have found, though, is that a great deal of government action that gets put through during one presidential term can then be revoked and changed later on with the election of another president and a new cabinet. A clear example of this is the topic of Obamacare, which is currently being administered, but is also planned to be removed with the election of President Donald Trump. This speaks to the faults in a system of government that routinely lets its agenda shift every time a new president is elected, and does not bode well for the Fair Housing Act that was made to specifically deal with a cultural issue from a certain time period. This directly correlates with how the government's implementation of this act is faltering and thus how the

Fair Housing Act is not a suitable source to combat the housing discrimination. With that in mind, how ineffective is it currently in 2018?

My second source, titled *The Fair Housing Choice Myth* by Stacy Seicshnaydre, answers this question. This article investigates why the Fair Housing Act is currently inadequate in the modern day, and how this problem lies in the Housing and Urban Development's inability to properly facilitate a better transition for those impoverished people in lower income areas. The Housing and Urban Development would simply remove those who were in less adequate housing and lacked the adequate oversight to provide proper housing options that are better than the ones that they were previously in (Seicshnaydre). What I know to be a clear fact for the Fair Housing Act is how larger governments cannot effectively evaluate housing discrimination acts as smaller governments can. A larger government comes with the tribulations of bureaucracy, and while it can be effective in its own right, the scope of my thesis seeks to show that the steps of this system not only bog down the Fair Housing Act, but also remove its effectiveness. The larger government's inability to distinguish this form of inequality is seen in how they ignored the initial segregation in housing that started with the birth of modern suburban life in the early 1950's, where the majority of the higher quality houses were taken by white people. These government interferences back up these sources by bringing out the main issues in the Fair Housing Act for the modern day. This is seen in how the inadequacy of the adaptation of these civil rights to properly combat the housing issue for minority peoples, and also how the larger government interference only muddles the issue in needless political debacle. It is in this political spheres that the socio-economic crisis remains, and how it has impacted the lives of numerous Americans and where they live to this day.

Continuing with the notion of large scale government action towards the housing crisis, an example of the government acting against the notion of civil rights in the housing market is seen in *Knocking on the door: the federal government's attempt to desegregate the suburbs* by Christopher Bonastia. In this source, a prominent example is when “Nixon gained the necessary political cover to declare a housing freeze, which saved large sums of money and prevented court-driven integration plans from taking hold.” (Bonastia 123). Compared to my other source, which showed an example of a positive change for the Fair Housing Act, this one showcases the exact opposite and goes to show how government interference can muddle the pursuit of various acts and stances. Not only that, it showcases how differentiated the government’s actions can be with a different agenda in mind, which actively inhibited the progress that the Fair Housing Act was aiming towards and contributes to a critical part of my thesis. This example of the government actively inhibiting the progress of civil rights leads into the idea that the current discrimination in housing for minorities is a result of actions from the past. This further emphasizes the need to observe the events of the past in order to better understand the current crisis that exists today. With this in mind, it is also important to consider the impact this legislation had on the lives of many Americans, who will continue to suffer.

When looking at large scale government policy and actions, it can be very easy to forget that a lot of these decisions impact countless Americans who live and work just as anyone else does. The implicit social effects that this has on those living may be irrevocable, but it is important to understand how this issue came to be in order to frame it in a better perspective. One source that shows this happening in a real-time scenario would be *Neighborhood Selection and the Social Reproduction of Concentrated Racial Inequality* by Robert J. Sampson and

Patrick Sharkey. The main source of information that the article pulls from is the neighborhood incomes and compositions of Chicago families, and how they change over a period of seven years. What is shown is that not only is the distributions of racial groups mostly homogenous and how a greater white majority will motivate nonwhite movers, but also how “Preferences and structural constraints thus simultaneously and dynamically work together to yield a self-reinforcing cycle of inequality” (Sampson and Sharkey 27). This idea of a cycle of established inequality over this period of time shows how the conflict is one that has been rooted into the system itself, and how it has influenced the decision making of many potential homeowners in the area. With this type of inequality present in the process itself, it sets itself up to be exceptionally difficult for many to escape the economic situation that they had no influence over, and also speaks to why this is such a glaring fault in the current home owning landscape. One can get a really good grasp as to how social hierarchies impact the distribution of common amenities in how the quality of housing drastically decreases as you go to less advantaged social hierarchies, mainly ones such as nonwhite minorities. The reverberations of this and how seemingly endless this cycle will be point to how the impact of the previous actions of governmental organizations such as HUD further drives the need for the proper historical knowledge of this problem, which is exactly what I had been leading towards as the main point of my paper and thesis. As this source supports, the widespread issue is impacting a great many amount of American’s choice in households, and is more evidently seen in the next source.

My next source, titled *Measuring Housing Discrimination in a National Study : Report of a Workshop* by Angela Williams Foster, discusses the issue of how the modern day application of housing discrimination has greatly changed from the past and how it continues to be an issue

today. This source finds that, through a survey conducted by the Housing and Urban Development in the cases for racial discrimination, not only do homeowners suffer from discrimination before they decide on a house, but “minority home seekers are also vulnerable to discrimination in the form of different terms and conditions after their application has been submitted for review.” (Foster 14). What this means is that after someone initially believes that their rights were violated under Title VIII, they are still having their rights potentially violated and will continue to suffer because of it. The problem that HUD will be facing from this point onward is how to properly address the housing discrimination issue, since it has moved into a different area over time. As stated throughout this paper, the idea of using a rigid system and not changing it as ways to circumvent these rules are made more prevalent over time. This is exactly how this crisis came to be and why it keeps needing to be discussed. With the acknowledgement that the current system harbors a discriminatory flaw, the outcry against this system has been apparent for a long period of time.

What’s more than that, racial biasing for housing units is increasing, albeit in much more implicit ways. A source that shows this is *Housing Discrimination Research: Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Same-sex Couples*, which was written by Maxwell Blake. This source uses evidence from their conclusion data, which covered 28 metropolitan areas that compared the differences in how various ethnic groups were treated when they tried to find data on available housing. The result is that “the most blatant forms of ‘door slamming’ discrimination observed in the earliest paired-testing study are much less frequent today, but that other, less easily detectable forms of discrimination persist, limiting the information and options offered to minority homeseekers” (Blake 77). This institutionalized racism takes advantage of an already faulty

system of real estate discrimination and makes it even less explicit. This corroborates with what I have discussed in previous sources; how the changes in discrimination appears to have shifted over time and how the housing market now targets people in equally malicious ways. This combined with the acknowledgement of the actions of governments in the past has coalesced into the large scale problem that many people are confronting. With this in mind, it paves the way for how the issue will be continued to be seen in the future.

The research that I have discussed helps to shed light on the topic of housing discrimination. The ability to purchase affordable housing and to get what is properly desired for someone is a luxury that every American citizen should be able to afford. Thus, it should be of the utmost importance that people take notice and actively care about the resolution of this crisis in the housing market. With the relatively old Fair Housing Act still being implemented in the modern day, it should come as no surprise after reading this paper regarding the faults of this act. Through my integrated analysis of the situation, I've now come to understand how deeply flawed this system is and the reasons for why it needs to be changed. With the current field of discourse surrounding larger topics of racism and white privilege, focusing on a much smaller and more discrete topic can help to better frame and understand the bigger issues. For the case of housing discrimination, this rings true and the activism to change it needs to be there for anything to get done.