Post-WW II Decline of the American City: Racial Tensions and Suburbanization

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Post-World War 2 decline of the American city: racial tensions and suburbanization

Propadanje američkog grada poslije Drugog svjetskog rata: rasne tenzije i suburbanizacija

M.A. Thesis

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1 Introduction

After World War 2, the United States of America entered a golden age of progress. Through the 1950s and 1960s the US experienced great economic growth confirmed by the GDP growth which amounted to 200 billion dollars in 1940, 300 billion dollars in 1950, and 500 billion dollars in 1960. This huge growth can be attributed to a number of post-Great Depression laws which aided employment, growth and production or the laissez-faire approach to economy which recovered due to a huge influx of workforce when the war ended, the availability of materials in the post-war industry and technological innovation resulting from the war.

In the post-war period ideologically shaped by the Cold war, the US became a global superpower projecting an image to the world of a country based on freedom, democracy and equal opportunity for all. Through its inception and history, America had the tendency to view itself as an exceptional nation, differing from the rest of the world and having a special mission to preserve the qualities it advocates. The situation in the US pointed to a whole different truth. The African American soldiers who fought for their country were treated as second class citizens upon returning home from Europe and Pacific. In the age of economic growth and prosperity African Americans were deprived of equal ground with the dominant white race under the parole "separate but equal". This simple trope was aimed to legally segregate races in public space but offer the same opportunities and amenities. The "separate" part was upheld but it was never equal for the minorities in the US. The ideals of togetherness, unity and fight against a common enemy, which helped unite the nation during the war quickly faded after it ended. It was replaced by continued racial tensions and a division inside the country that would mark the greater part of 20th century in the US.

This essay will focus on several aspects of urban problematic and black-white dichotomy in the decades following the World War 2. The continued African American migration to the northern parts of the US, most commonly into urban centers, will bring a new round of racial tensions and conflicts. The decline in importance of the city as a central urban figure will be analyzed and the massive movement of middle-class white Americans into new suburban housing. The phenomena of suburbanization and ghettoization of the city will serve as starting points in analyzing social relations in the post-war America.

The term "white flight" and the reasons why suburbanization took flight in this period are documented and well known. These same reasons greatly contributed to the decline of the city and its economic influence. Most of these reasons including the Interstate Highway system, red-lining and segregation, financing laws favoring the whites and a huge migration of people can be placed on a crossroad of a favorable economic climate and large-scale social changes or social "shocks". The Civil rights movement for equal rights was one of the bearers of huge social shift and it caused a turmoil in social discourse which was not accompanied by appropriate institutional changes. Institutional racism proved to be one of the major

roadblocks in trying to end racial discrimination proved by existence of Jim Crow laws until 1965 in some southern states. This essay will try to prove that inefficient and slow institutional changes, faced with rapid social and economic changes in the post-war American society, did not react properly or offer a solution for the issues of equality and problems of decaying urban centers. Not only were they slow or offering weak social programs, they actively contributed to the widening of the gap between whites and blacks. Plagued by institutional racism, even the reforms aimed to help minorities somehow helped only to segregate and differentiate the urban and suburban.

That being said, case studies of these two contrasted communities will be of great help. Portraying the racially homogenous suburban communities and ghettos in the inner cities will help unravel the causes of such state in American society and effects it has on everyday life in post-war America. These case studies will also help understand how beneficial or detrimental institutions were in shaping these communities and the underlying economic processes that exhibited their influence on them.

Changes in the American metropolis after World War II still resonate today. The explosion of suburban housing in the 1940s and 50s is now being engulfed in the continuous sprawl of American metropolises and are starting to show effects of deterioration. The expansion outwards spawns new outer edge suburbs and satellite cities whilst still leaving the inner cities in need of renovation and redevelopment. The American metropolis, being the center of financial and political power in the US, reflects the trends in the globalized modern economy. The wealth inequality problem translated to the topography of the American city shows the poorest inner city featuring the urban underclass in need of redevelopment and reimagining, the outer ring featuring the stagnating middle class, and the most affluent upper class in the most outer parts of the metropolis or within gated communities. Racial issues still remain in the form of racial profiling and police brutality and the discourse about equal opportunity has been trumped by the non-racial unequal wealth distribution discourse. With the election of President Obama in 2008, the myth of a post-racial society emerged indicating that racial issues have been solved. But the legacy of redlined neighborhoods and segregationist practices can still be seen as 27% of African Americans are living in poverty compared to the national average of 14.8%.[1]

These problems remain in the modern American city and as such, call for a historical perspective. Identifying the causes of the American city's state from the post-war period and analyzing the response of the relevant institutions helps in understanding the relevant problems plaguing the modern American metropolis. This historical overview should offer a foundation upon which a better solution can be offered for these problems.

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[1] Semuels, A., "No, Most Black People Don't Live in Poverty-or Inner Cities", *The Atlantic*, Emerson Collective, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/10/trump-african-american-inner-city/503744/ (accessed 16.9.2019)

2 History of suburbanization

In order to fully understand the processes behind the suburbanization after WWII in the US, we must take a look at past instances of suburbanization and what it meant for its time period. It is important to define the role of the city, its suburban environment and their relationship with each other. Even though pop culture references all point to the 1950s USA as *the* representative period concerning suburbanization, it is important to note that city dwellers had the tendency to leave congested urban environments long before this period. People sought refuge in cities' outer rims as early as 18th century. According to Mumford, those who saw themselves as avangarde civilization tended to view villages with disdain. Villages contained peasants, rugged vagrants or aristocrats who lived in the comfort of their own rent, not profit made in trading or manufacturing. But still, even the proponents of utilitarism, if they were given a chance, would run from their industrialized surroundings: to be rich enough to escape them was a sign of success.

> The term *suburb* (or *burgus, suburbium,* or *suburbis*) is of more recent vintage. John Wycliffe used the word *suburbis* in 1380, and Geoffrey Chaucer introduced the term in a dialogue in *The Canterbury Tales* a few years later. By 1500 Fleet Street and the extramural parishes were designated as London suburbs, and by the seventeenth century the adjective *suburban* was being used in England to mean both the place and the resident. (Jackson 12)

The fact is, says Mumford, that the suburbs appear as early as the first city. It possibly even explains how an antic city survived non-hygienic conditions inside its walls. Woolley found proof of a spreading suburbia in the "greater metro area" of Ur. Outside of the densely settled area were scattered buildings all the way to the temple of al'Ubaid, located in today's Dhi Qar province in southern Iraq (Mumford 490)

This proves that suburbs as a residential place are as old as civilization. According to Kenneth T. Jackson, the rapid expansion of suburban residencies can be traced to the year 1815. It first occurred in the United States and Great Britain. The cities of New York, Philadelphia, Boston and London will demonstrate a magnificent growth in their suburban landscape.

To explain this nature of the suburbanization process Kenneth Jackson reviews five spatial characteristics of major cities in 19th century. He calls these preindustrial cities "walking cities ". Why they're called "walking cities "is explained within the first characteristic.

The first characteristic of the "walking city" was congestion. London had 800,000 residents in 1819 and was the largest city on earth. Similar to London, other British cities were also built, as well as cities across Europe with their city limits being defined by medieval fortifications. These residents were situated in a fairly confined space of 2 to 3 miles outwards from the city center. One could walk that distance in a couple of hours, hence the term "walking city". The

important factor is the gross density, exceeding 75,000 per square mile, which is on par with 1980 New York.

The second characteristic was the clear distinction between city and countryside. As stated in the first point the clear divider between city and country was the legacy of medieval city planning. A massive wall around the city is the clear visual separator in the greater city area. Although the North American cities didn't have medieval fortifications found in Europe, there was a clear difference between the tightly built residential area and the rural landscape surrounding it.

The third characteristic is the mixture of functions within the city. There were no special purpose districts dedicated to commercial, governmental or residential functions. Hotels, shops, private homes, warehouses were mixed together. This is all before the industrialization period so there are no large factories and industrial complexes. The production of goods is rather focused on small productions and workshops.

The fourth characteristic is concerned with the distance of residents from their workplace. Since all businesses and shops were concentrated within the city center, it was advantageous to live within walking distance from your workplace as it was the only option of transportation back then if you didn't own a horse. It was common to live in the same building where your workplace is situated.

The fifth and final characteristic of the “walking city” was the tendency of the elite class to be located closer to the city center.

> To live outside the walls, away from palaces and cathedrals, was to live in inferior surroundings. In eighteenth century Paris, the suburbs were populated largely by persons who were prevented, by taxes collected at the gates or by guild restrictions, from settling in the city proper, or by outcasts of one sort or another who sought to avoid the officialdom of the capital. (Jackson 15)

The notion of a “walking city” points us towards a time when cities held greater value than their outer edges. This in itself does not mean that no people resided beyond city limits. In fact, despite the common historic misconception of suburbia as the home of the affluent, outer rings of cities were occupied mainly by the poor. Kenneth Jackson confirms that with his analysis of Philadelphia's very first suburb, Southwark. The 1790. occupational distribution data provided by the US Bureau of the Census shows a small portion of wealthy people living in that suburb. Philadelphia counted twelve times as many physicians, thirteen times as many merchants and dealers, and twelve times as many lawyers as the suburban community.

TABLE 1-1
Occupational Distribution, District of Southwark
Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 1790[a]

White Collar 17%		*Blue Collar* 45%			
Sea Captains	37	Laborers	128	Bees housekeepers	4
Merchants	26	Ship carpenters	56	Cabinet makers	4
Innkeepers	22	Mariners	45	Plaisterers	4
Grocers	20	Shoemakers	39	Painters	4
Shopkeepers	18	House carpenters	32	Porters	4
Schoolteachers	15	Tailors	30	Ship joiners	4
Pilots	14	Blacksmiths	29	Carters	3
Lodgehousekeepers	11	Coopers	26	Caulkers	3
Gentlemen	10	Weavers	17	Mantua makers	3
Gentlewomen	7	Bakers	15	Brewers	3
Clerks	5	Rope makers	15	Wheelwrights	3
Doctors	4	Mates	12	Silversmiths	3
Justices of Peace	4	Joiner and cabinet makers	11	Sailmakers	3
Ministers	4			Sailors	2
Tobacconists	3	Bricklayers	7	Potters	2
Attorneys	2	Ship caulkers	7	Tinmen	2
Constables	2	Butchers	6	Printers	2
Auctioneer	1	Mast makers	5	Barbers	2
Broker	1	Seamstresses	5	Shallop men	2
Beerhouse keeper	1	Boat builders	4	Miscellaneous	25
Customs Officer	1			Total	571
Inspector	1	*Non-Classifiable* 38%			
Nurse	1	Occupation not specified		207	
Sheriff	1	Spinsters and widow		34	
Supervisor	1	Free Blacks		221	
Surgeon barber	1	Slaves		21	
Total	213		Total	483	

Figure 1: United States Bureau of the Census

Source: Jackson 17

Very few suburbs at that time could be described as upper-class residences. Upper class suburbs consisted of dispersed summer homes or weekend villas. Following the pattern observed in England and Italy, the affluent Americans established their own mansions away from the urban centers.

During the era of the "walking city" the suburbs were undoubtedly inferior to cities. But due to a number of factors, this relationship between the city and the suburb began to change. Gradually, the cities began losing their residents to the outer metropolitan limits. Rapid decentralization of cities, and an ever-growing number of people living in the greater metropolitan area as opposed to central cities began to shape the urban reality of the 20th century America. The change from a "walking city" to a mobile one was one of the greater factors in play, as well as the supporting infrastructure favoring the roadways for the automobile and the highway system which aimed to connect, coast to coast, the biggest American cities and allow efficient and cheap intra-urban mobility. Other major factors enabling suburbanization were the deteriorating social and economic conditions in central cities and a high influx of black southerners migrating to northern cities which caused racial tensions in central cities and prompted the white residents to migrate to suburbia.

American institutions and lawmakers exerted great influence over each of these social changes and were of vital importance in shaping the urban, suburban and racial landscape of the post-WWII America. The way these social changes progressed and the policymakers' response to them will be the focus of attention in the coming chapters.

2.1 Transportation and suburbanization

The transition from the walking city to a more mobile one was ushered in by the introduction of steam ferries, omnibuses, commuter railroads, horsecars, and cable cars. These inventions enabled the affluent to move out to more desirable locations due to shorter traveling times and, eventually, the middle class to move to more affordable housing beyond the city centers.

One of the best examples of transportation aiding suburbanization is the case of New York (Manhattan) and Brooklyn in 1814. At that time Brooklyn was a town of its own with a population of less than five thousand and consisted mostly of farms and agricultural land.

TABLE 2-3
Population of New York City, Brooklyn, and Flatlands, by Decades, 1790–1890

Year	*New York City*	*Brooklyn*	*Flatlands*
1790	33,131	1,603	423
1800	60,489	2,378	493
1810	96,373	4,402	517
1820	123,706	7,175	512
1830	202,589	15,394	596
1840	312,710	36,233	810
1850	515,547	96,838	1,155
1860	813,669	266,661	1,652
1870	942,292	396,099	2,286
1880	1,206,299	566,663	3,127
1890	2,515,301	806,343	4,075

Figure 2: Demonstrating the effect of geography upon community growth

Source: Jackson 27

> In the next four decades, however, the town of Brooklyn was transformed. Regular steam ferry service to New York City (then consisting only of Manhattan) began in 1814, and one year later the *Brooklyn Star* predicted that the town 'must necessarily become a favorite residence for gentlemen of taste and fortune, for merchants, laborers, and persons of every trade in society. (Jackson 27)

The ferry line, coupled with real-estate investors who pounced on the opportunity to subdivide the farms and land into city lots, led to an explosive growth of a new suburb. In the coming years Brooklyn doubled its population in almost every decade until the Civil War,

surpassing the growth of the city (figure 2). Of course, with the growth came the expansion of the ferry lines. “By 1860 the various East River ferries were carrying 32,845.000 passengers per year “ (Jackson 28).

Influential as they were, ferries were limited to cities with access to water passageways such as New York. The real revolution in public transport arrived in the form of the electric streetcar. Near the end of the 19th century inventors experimented with electric powered trolleys in several cities throughout the US. In New Jersey Thomas Edison worked on his version of electric streetcar. In Cleveland, Edward Bentley and Walter Knight were testing their own version of the vehicle and in Montgomery, Alabama Charles J. Van Depoele was developing his own take on this brand-new public transport. Neither of them was commercially successful with their inventions due to mechanical shortcomings and/or lack of financial backing for their projects. Urban transport achieved its breakthrough thanks to Frank Julian Sprague, founder of *Sprague Electric Railway and Motor Company* in 1884.

> Justly regarded as the “father of electric traction”, Sprague overcame the manifold technical requirements for a feasible operation. He used twelve miles of track and forty cars, which got their power and their name from a little four-wheeled carriage connected to the cars by a flexible overhead cable. (Jackson 108)

The electric streetcar enabled faster travel times within the city achieving speeds of 20 mph which was a substantial increase over horsecars or cable cars. Introduction of electric streetcars and their eventual widespread use in American cities substantially improved urban mobility and allowed the urban centers to expand. Both commercial (department stores) and private (housing, apartment buildings) objects were able to move out of the strictly central areas of the city. “By the turn of the century, a “new city”, segregated by class and economic function and encompassing an area triple the territory of the older walking city, had clearly emerged as the center of the American urban society. The electric streetcar was the key to the shift” (Jackson 114).

This phenomenon of expansion by track building is explained by rising value of land where electric trolley tracks were laid. Tracks were deliberately laid from the city center towards the outside of the city limits so as to encompass as much land as possible which was then sold as a desirable location. This is why the fare was fixed at a very low cost (5 cents in the booming days of the trolley). The fare was that low to attract a critical mass of passengers, but the real money was earned on selling the land which the electric trolley connected with the city center.

The streetcars spawned a specific type of suburbs, the “streetcar suburbs “. They were fairly compact and had high population density compared to the later iterations influenced by automobile culture. They were much closer to the city center and had to obviously have a nearby streetcar stop.

Electric streetcar presented one of the first examples (alongside commuter railways, ferries etc.) of technology and public transport pushing the boundaries of cities outwards and changing the way city dwellers travel within the new scope of the city.

This technology also brought about new public spaces where many different racial, class and gender identities collided. Public transport was one of many places in America where these social differences were reinforced. In antebellum America, omnibus companies in New York and Philadelphia forbade African Americans from riding their vehicles, while slaves sometimes rode with their white owners or in separate conveyances in southern cities.[2]

Segregated transit was at the center of Jim Crow-era discrimination in the South. Although the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956, sparked by the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, is rightly remembered as a major moment in the Civil Rights movement, African Americans participated in failed protests in at least twenty-five southern cities against the injustice of Jim Crow laws during the first decade of the 20th century. These laws, following the U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), dictated black riders sit in the back of transit vehicles and give up their seat to white riders if they sat in the middle section.[3]

The US had a period where public transport flourished and influenced the cityscape and its social landscape, but its success was short lived. Soon enough, another technological advancement in the form of the automobile supplanted public transport and left it on the fringes. Public transport remained somewhat relevant and, although in a much smaller capacity, it was still an important service for those who had no other choice. The automobile and its infrastructural requirements proved to be a massive influence on all aspects of life in America, most importantly on the American city.

2.1.1 The Automobile

First automobiles entered the US in the late 1890s. In that respect, America lagged behind Europe in motoring production as these new inventions were only being developed by a handful of American entrepreneurs. In Europe the word "automobile" was already coined and, as early as 1875, used to describe these self-propelled vehicles, horseless carriages, steam omnibuses or whatever else people called the initial iterations of the automobile. In the early 1900s, up to 1910 the automobile was seen as a new gadget for the affluent rather than a viable transportation device.

> In the early 1900s, the automobile, selling at more than five times average annual household earnings, was considered more as a toy for the rich than as a realistic mode of transportation. Even by 1910, only approximately 2% of American families owned a car. Starting in the 1910s, however, the rate of car-ownership began to increase quickly, driven by rapid price declines due to technological progress in production. By

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[2] See Tarr, J., McShane, C., 79

[3] For more on roots of transportation segregation see Kelley, B. M., chapter 1

> the mid- 1930s, more than 44% of American households owned a car, and by 1970, 82% owned at least one car and 23% owned two or more. (Kopecky and Suen 1006)

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS OWNING AT LEAST ONE CAR, 1910–1970

Year	1910	1920	1934–1936	1950	1960	1970
%	2	33	44	59	77	82

Figure 3: Car ownership through the years

Source: Kopecky and Suen 1006

The rate of car-ownership in the early days of the automobile can be attributed to Henry Ford. 1908 saw the introduction of the Model T, one of the most influential automobiles in history. It was important not only because it provided inexpensive transportation on a massive scale, but also because the car signified innovation for the rising middle class and became a powerful symbol of America's age of modernization.

> In 1919, with the opening of his enormous River Rouge complex, the making of automobiles entered the stage of giant enterprise. With greater industrial efficiency and constant attempts to reduce the work process to the simplest possible steps, Ford dropped the price of his Model T from 950$ in 1910 to 290$ in 1924. This occurred during a period of rising wages and prices. Whereas it took the average worker twenty-two months to buy a Model T in 1909, by 1925 the same purchase would have required the labor of less than three months. (Jackson 161)

Soon enough a massive number of automobiles started sharing the roads with the popular electric streetcars. This new competition on the streets of American cities meant trouble for public transport in America because of the government's stance that the streetcar represented private investment and should pay for itself without the need for subsidies. On the other hand, the road was defined as a public good and private transport enjoyed taxpayer subsidies.

The major problem streetcar companies faced was the franchise agreements signed back in 1890s which guaranteed a fixed fare of 5 cents for at least 25 years. This fare couldn't even keep up with the rate of inflation and could barely cover the costs of operation. This meant that the majority of streetcar companies declared bankruptcy as the automobile became more widespread. The only way for these companies to survive was to turn to public subsidies.

> And when the companies took their case to the public, as in Detroit, Seattle, and Los Angeles, voters rejected their appeals for taxpayer financing of rail improvements. Thus, Americans taxed and harassed public transportation, even while subsidizing the automobile like a pampered child. (Jackson 170)

This competition between public and private transport was a short and concise affair. Due to the lack of political and government support, public transport fell out of favor and soon began

to fade out. Its place taken by the automobile; public transport remained active in select few cities where public funding could be secured for those projects. Boston and New York, for example, have a successful public transport project in their subway system and the passenger railroad service, AMTRAK, which was founded in 1971 and operates in a majority of states but is actually relevant predominantly in the north-eastern part of the US.

This private/public transport problematic in the US is important because of its effect on the way the American city will be shaped and the way its inhabitants will be mobile within this city. The standard theory of suburbanization states that a combination of technological progress and rising incomes had a massive influence on suburbanization.

> Transportation innovations such as streetcars, commuter rails, subways, and automobiles affect the spatial distribution of households by lowering the time cost of intraurban travel. In response to lower transportation costs, those who can afford the new technology move to outlying areas where cheaper land translates into more spacious houses and larger yards. As real incomes rise and technological progress drives a decline in the relative price of the new transport mode, more urban households adopt it and relocate to suburban areas. This process drives the expansion of metropolitan areas and the decline in their population density gradients. (Kopecky and Suen 1005)

TABLE 1

MEAN GRADIENTS FOR 41 CITIES THAT WERE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS IN 1900

Year	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970
b	0.82	0.83	0.79	0.66	0.61	0.39	0.31	0.23
% Change		1.2	−4.8	−16.5	−7.6	−36.1	−20.5	−25.8

Figure 4: Technological progress and the correlation with the population density gradient

Source: Kopecky and Suen 1005

In line with this theory, Kopecky and Suen mention a couple other authors expressing similar views. For example, Warner (1962) noted that the electric streetcar in Boston prompted major movement of affluent households in 1850s and 1860s. Introduction of public transport between 1830 and 1860 encouraged city dwellers to live in outer city areas and travel to work, according to Taylor (1966). Beginning of the 20th century saw the introduction of the biggest technological breakthrough yet, the automobile. Glaeser and Kahn (2004) stated in their research that the "technological superiority of the automobile" produces urban sprawl. They used data from the US and other countries and found strong correlation between low population density and automobile use.

Next transport innovation was the highway system, the infrastructure supporting the massive influx of automobiles into the American households. Baum-Snow (2007) analyzed data

ranging from 1950-1990 and his research estimated that the construction of a new highway through a city reduces its city-center's population by 18%.

2.1.2 The Interstate Highway system

The highway system in America was formed according to several plans, and first of which was the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944. This piece of legislation was an intervention by the federal government into public infrastructure and was signed into law by president Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 20, 1944.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 was focused on the years after the war (World War 2), meaning that the federal budgeting covered the building projects planned to start right after the war. The most important provision of the act was the creation of a 64,000 km National System of Interstate Highways connecting major American cities.

> The legislation also stipulated that highways in this system should be "… so located as to connect by routes as direct as practicable, the principal metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial centers, to serve the national defense, and to connect at suitable border points with routes of continental importance in the Dominion of Canada and the Republic of Mexico." (Baum-Snow 778)

The 1944 highway act does not bring up local commuting at all in any of its provisions. Instead, in the report that shaped the legislation submitted by the National Interregional Highway Committee the most important factors considered were: "nationwide distribution of population, manufacturing activity, agricultural production, the location of post-World War 2 employment, a strategic highway network drawn up by the War Department in 1941, the location of military and naval establishments, and interregional traffic demand (in that order)" (Baum-Snow 778).

An important thing to note is that the Highway Act of 1944 did provision and plan for an expansive highway system but had no financial plan for it. The plan was that each state was to send in their proposal for how the interstate system should look like within their state in response to the recommended national plan from the Interregional Highway Committee. In1947, the last of the proposals came in and were approved by the commissioner. This plan from 1947 was the final step before deciding how the funding would be procured and the construction could start.

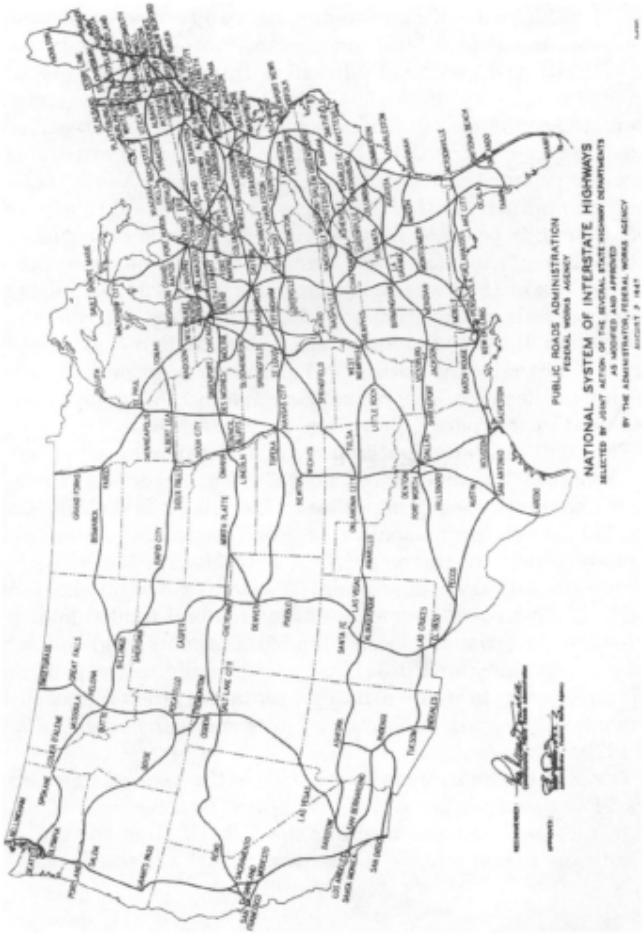

Figure 5: The projected system of Interstate Highways in 1947

Source: Baum-Snow 780

The final piece of legislation arrived in 1956. Dwight Eisenhower, the president of the US, was determined to finalize the decade-old plans, and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was the final piece needed to start this multi-decade road work project.

> The law allocated 26 billion dollars to pay for them. Under the terms of the law, the federal government would pay 90% of the cost of expressway construction. The money came from an increased gasoline tax-now 3 cents a gallon instead of 2- that went into a non-divertible Highway Trust Fund. (*The Interstate Highway System*)

In his paper *Did Highways Cause Suburbanization?* Nathaniel Baum-Snow analyses how each built segment of the highway system influences the population dispersal within the central business district (CBD). First, he defines these segments of highways as "rays".

> For this analysis, a "ray" is defined as a segment of road that connects the central business district (CBD) of the central city with the region outside the central city. If a highway passes through the central city, it counts as two rays whereas if a highway terminates in or near the central city it counts as only one. (Baum-Snow 780)

Then, the author used "PR-511" data which was the result of a mechanism the 1956 legislation put in place. This was a reporting mechanism where each state had to report the completion of federally funded segments of the highway within their state lines. Combining the "PR-511" data and the digital map of the interstate system (physical number of "rays" emanating from each city center in the US) he created a data set containing the miles of each interstate highway in all states for each year between 1950 and 1990.

His work is based on the land use theory developed by Alonso, Mills and Muth. The land use theory postulates that improvements in the transportation infrastructure may cause suburbanization.

> One basic implication of this model is that a higher commuting speed implies lower population density. The introduction of a new highway ray results in an outward shift in the supply of land available for a given commuting time in a section of the city. This causes the equilibrium rental rate of land to fall throughout the metropolitan area, thereby reducing the population density through a price effect. Since the average commuting distance falls, individuals' income net of commuting cost rises. If space is a normal good, a new ray thus further reduces population density, and by extension central city population, through an income effect. (Baum-Snow 785)

This framework explains the basic assumption that with the construction of a highway that passes through a city center, the land following the path of the highway should become available to the central city dwellers. In turn, land becomes cheaper and with shorter commuting times due to the better infrastructure, the population starts to migrate outwards and the central city population density reduces.

With the data he collected, Baum-Snow concluded the following:

> Population in large 1950 definition central cities fell on average by 28 percent between 1950 and 1990. If the average city had not received one exogenously assigned highway (2 rays), estimates thus indicate that its population decline would have been cut by more than half. Empirically, cities received 2.6 rays on average between 1950 and 1990, though not all of these were randomly assigned… Based on these calculations, highways account for about one-third of the decline in aggregate central city population relative to that in entire metropolitan areas between 1950 and 1990. (Baum-Snow 800)

Baum-Snow tried to quantify the influence of a huge infrastructure project on city center populations using raw, empirical data. His work can't answer the question from the title of his paper, but it can in some form or value confirm its influence on the city's spatial form and population density. He admits himself that his paper can't explain the mechanism by which highways cause suburbanization, it can only provide estimates of the treatment effect of highways on central city population. Too many variables influence the phenomenon of suburbanization to simply attribute it to technological and infrastructural changes. The suburban sprout and urban decay might be more dependent on economic, social and political landscape of post-war US.

3 Post-war America

The post-war era in the US started with change to their global political strategy. Formerly a very isolationist country, US foreign policy changed to a proactive one, very much involved in global politics. After World War 2 America's unique geopolitical position enabled it to compete for the spot of a global superpower. This was evident with the forming of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 which would ultimately help America exert its influence all over the globe alongside its allies. The only other country to present itself as a competitor at that time was the Soviet Union. They formed the Warsaw pact akin to NATO in order to consolidate its control over the states of the Eastern Bloc. The difference in the liberal democratic western states led by the US and the communist totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union culminated with the Cold War. Both sides never met in direct armed combat but were arming themselves heavily if such an event would happen. This period was heavily marked with rivalry between the two superpowers via proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam, the arms race where both sides extensively tested nuclear arms which served as deterrents for potential attacks and the Space Race where both sides tried to beat each other showcasing their technological prowess and capabilities.

Despite this looming threat of communism and nuclear war the US enjoyed maybe the biggest economic boost ever. It is referred to as the Golden Age of economic growth.

> According to a frequently made argument, pent-up demand for manufactured goods after years, or decades, of suppressed consumption provided a strong stimulus to output expansion. Rapid growth was also driven by a sustained boom in international commodity trade. In the view of Lamfalussy (1963), growing exports promoted investment at home which, in tun, raised output and productivity, making economies more competitive on international markets and, therefore, leading to further increases in foreign sales. Eichengreen (1996) also argued that rising external demand, secured by universal adherence to trade liberalization, made investment more profitable and was thus instrumental in facilitating the high investment/high productivity/low wage equilibrium characteristic of western economies during the 1950s and early 1960s. (Vonyo 221)

America entered the age of consumerism. With the rise of the newly formed middle-class came an appetite for consumer goods. Middle class Americans wanted cars, housing and relevant household technology, and the production was more than happy to satisfy those demands. Real GDP growth in the 1950s was averaging 4% per year and nearly 5% in the 1960s according to Marglin:

> The war also made the United States the dominant power economically, as the only major belligerent to emerge with its productive power enhanced. For many years after the cessation of hostilities, there was a range of goods which only the United States

> could produce competitively at any reasonable exchange rate, and certain goods which only the United States could produce at all. (Marglin and Schor 6)

The problem with discussing economy and opportunity for American people in postwar America is the fact that predominantly white people enjoyed those privileges. When talking about prosperous postwar America it must be noted that a certain duality existed within the country. In all aspects of progress- automobility, consumer goods and housing, the main benefactors were white Americans.

By the end of World War 2 a dramatic population shift would have been occurred. "In 1910 nearly 90% of African Americans lived in rural areas of the southeastern United States (i.e., the South). One generation after the end of World War 2, nearly 90% of them resided in urban areas throughout the United States, most often outside the South." (Price-Spratlen 437)

Even though this population movement started a while ago, it made the biggest impact between "1950 and 1960, when more than 1.5 million African Americans moved out of the South" (Price-Spratlen 438). This shift came at a time when the country finally recovered from the shocks of the Great Depression and the World Wars and people started converging in urban centers looking to seize the advertised opportunities.

> For about a decade after World War 2, America believed that its resources, its technologies, its policies, its character were not only to be admired around the world but could be exported. There existed a confidence, a belief in purpose and continental experience, a national exuberance born of success in wartime power, that made America a buoyant and special land. (Wood 46)

At this critical juncture in American history the notion of American Exceptionalism again becomes relevant. The ideological construct claiming that America stands taller than other nations, built upon liberty, egalitarianism, democracy, and that its mission and purpose is to lead by example. These ideas, originating from the founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, propagated themselves throughout American history. Michael Marino stresses that the "possession of property is also a core value of America's republican ideals, as reflected in the writings and beliefs of founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison" (Marino 493). Being a core value of America's republican ideals, possession of property was stressed as a fundamental right of all Americans. This idea will be more relevant than ever in post-World War 2 America. With the influx of a huge number of African Americans into American metropolitan areas the housing, welfare and multiple other institutions on both state and federal level will be tested. The following chapters will showcase the legislative and institutional barriers set in front of non-white Americans that were not only late to adapt to the massive social and technological changes but were discriminatory towards non-white Americans. These discriminatory practices were a part of, if not instrumental in shaping the unique landscape of suburban America and the downfall of the American city.

3.1 The institutions of inequality

Institutional racism is the foundation of all inequality present in the postwar America. Institutional racism is, according to Walter Stafford and Joyce Ladner:

> …the operating policies, properties and functions of an ongoing system of normative patterns which serve to subjugate, oppress and force dependence of individuals or groups by (1) establishing and sanctioning unequal goals, objectives and priorities for blacks and whites, and (2) sanctioning inequality in status as well as in access to goods and services. (qtd. in Jones 219)

Institutional racism is present throughout American history in the form of a control mechanism put in place to control and regulate a given race of people. In the time when slavery was still legal and socially accepted, the repressed African Americans were controlled with the so-called Black Codes. Black codes regulated the slave's legal status or the lack of it. They could not partake in any legal activities of the court, such as being a part of a lawsuit. The slave's testimony in court was not binding and as such slaves could not sign contracts. They generally could not own any property and could not hit or attack a white person, even in self-defense (Jones 219)

After the abolishment of slavery Jim Crow laws were established to regulate the African Americans. The Jim Crow laws were a system of state and local laws which enforced racial segregation in the Southern US.

> This social order, created by local and statewide laws, statutes, and policies, received constitutional sanction in 1896 with the US Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and it was finally dismantled at least judicially and legally, in the 1950 and 1960s, specifically with the 1954 ruling by this court in *Brown v. Board of Education* overturning *Plessy*. (Jarrett 388)

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) institutionalized the trope "separate but equal" regarding facilities and opportunities available to whites and blacks. The "separate" part of the phrase was indeed upheld but the "equal" was nowhere to be seen.

> Blacks had separate schools, water fountains, hospital and bus waiting rooms, and bathrooms. They were not allowed to swim in the public swimming pools, attend the local theater, or use the public library. Restaurants and motels were for whites only. Segregation was total in the South, but not confined there. Las Vegas, Nevada, for example refused to allow blacks to stay in its hotels and casinos. The difference between southern and northern segregation was legality; if a black tried to use a southern public facility he had broken a law, not just a custom. In the North, segregation was preserved through segregated housing and social pressure. (Burson 36)

The passing of segregation laws and the horrific treatment of African Americans in the South was one of the primary reasons for the Great Migration of African Americans towards the more liberal Northern states. Labor shortages in Northern factories and an incentive of a better economic and social opportunity was the other influential factor in this huge migration.

From the inception of the Jim Crow laws an organization was formed to combat the racial segregation laws. The NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was formed in 1909. Founded by a group of activists, among them W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary White Ovington and Moorfield Storey. Its mission was and still is "to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons" (Naacp.org). The NAACP was active from its beginnings in its mission to attack the Jim Crow laws directly in court. Some early successes include the challenging of the Louisville, Kentucky ordinance that required residential segregation in *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 US 60 (1917) and nullifying the *grandfather clause* which exempted most illiterate white voters from a law that disenfranchised African Americans in *Guinn v. United States* (1915). Although it yielded some results in its early years of operating, the NAACP's biggest victory came in May of 1954 when the Supreme Court reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision with the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). This decision was aimed at school segregation and was the first ruling against the "separate but equal" doctrine. The court's statement read that "in the field of education, doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place" and "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" Burson, 36). "The state of Mississippi was a prime example. Although blacks comprised over 50 percent of the school-age population, in the 1960-61 school year the state spent $46 million on white education versus $26 million for black education" (Burson 36).

The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) ruling opened the floodgates and under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. African Americans saw a chance to overturn the majority of Jim Crow laws aimed at the right to vote and equal access to public facilities. The 1960s proved that with the 1963 march on Washington. A quarter of a million people marched on Washington demanding equal rights. After that, the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed which forbade discrimination in public accommodations and was followed with the 1965 Voting Rights Act which finally secured voting rights for all racial minorities across the country. These wins for the Civil Rights Movement were historic ones as they abolished legal discrimination and made it illegal to segregate or impede someone's right to vote but the legacy of racialized federal, state and local policies remain.

Even though it started happening before and continued after the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the ghettoization of the American cities serves as an example of another mechanism of control and separation of racial minorities from the majority white population. The millions of African Americans migrating to northern cities in search of a better life found themselves in the midst of a great urban shift in American life.

3.2 The housing inequality

Before the Great Depression getting loans for purchasing homes was difficult for many Americans. Lending rules and bank loans were structured in a way that a significant down payment was necessary and followed with a relatively short period of time for repayment (ten years usually)[5] With the emergence of the New Deal programs and reforms the situation got better for a potential homeowner.

> New Deal programs such as the Home owners Loan Corporation (1933) and the National Housing Act (1934) dramatically altered the rules of home buying. These measures lowered the required down payment needed to purchase a home (to 3%) and lengthened a mortgage's repayment period- extending it to a maximum of 30 years. The National Housing Act also created a government agency, the Federal Housing Authority, which guaranteed and underwrote mortgages issued by banks; this encouraged lending and lowered interest rates. As a result, homeownership became a realistic possibility for millions of Americans who could not have purchased a home otherwise. (Marino 493)

Instituting a government agency to oversee mortgages for home buyers was one of the better and more influential programs of the New Deal. The Federal Housing Authority revolutionized the home finance industry and it was made possible by the following:

The mortgages before the instituting of the FHA were limited to a half or two-thirds of the property's value. Average mortgage in America before the FHA's changes averaged 58% of the property's estimated value. In this case, a 30% down payment was mandatory to successfully buy a house. The FHA changed that so the lender's collateral which he was able to lend for an FHA loan was about 93%. That meant that down payments wouldn't be in excess of 10%. FHA also instituted an extension of the repayment period to 25 or 30 years and all loans had to be fully amortized. FHA also introduced minimum standards for home construction that would become the industry standard. These standards asserted the quality of the house against the debt placed on it. For the first time these standards were in written form, objective and uniform and were enforced by on-site inspection. These changes meant that millions of Americans could afford homes now and the numbers support the success of this program. By the end of 1972, the FHA helped 11 million families to own houses and another 22 million families to improve their properties (Jackson, 204). The FHA's changes meant that it was often cheaper to buy than to rent. Kenneth Jackson offers an example:

> In 1939, 400 six-room houses were built just north of Wilmington, Delaware, in an FHA-backed development called Edgemoor Terrace. Using the tract techniques that would later be popularized by the Levitt organization after World War 2-standardized models and lot sizes, routinized construction methods, and furnished models-the

> Wilmington Construction Company was able to offer the home for 5,150 dollars. The FHA mortgage guarantee meant that purchasers needed only 550 dollars for a down payment and an incredible 29.61 dollars monthly charge for 25 years to the bank. (Jackson 205)

The problem was that just like most of the New Deal programs, it benefited mostly the white Americans. Coinciding with these changes, the great migration of African Americans from the southern states was in motion. The northern and midwestern cities of America were facing a huge influx of population and with them, a huge demand for housing and basic living infrastructure. This crucial point in American history will be recognized as one of the more influential in shaping the racial and ethnic issues in the long term. The fact that the Federal Housing Authority would only underwrite mortgages for homes in white neighborhoods in the face of such a big change in the city's population structure will prove to be disastrous. Racial discrimination codified into the policies of a government agency (FHA) will show to have long lasting effects on segregation in America. To show some examples how the Federal Housing Authority operated at the time, George Lipsitz wrote:

> By channeling loans away from older inner-city neighborhoods and toward white home buyers moving into segregated suburbs, the FHA and private lenders after World War 2 aided and abetted the growth and development of increased segregation in US residential neighborhoods. For example, FHA appraisers denied federally supported loans to prospective home buyers in the racially mixed Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles because it was a 'melting pot area literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive racial elements.' Similarly, mostly white St. Louis County secured five times as many FHA mortgages as the more racially mixed city of St. Louis between 1943 and 1960. Home buyers in the county received six times as much loan money and enjoyed per capita mortgage spending 6.3 times greater than those in the city. (Lipsitz 373)

Even the manual of the FHA warned home buyers: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial groups." "The manual recommended use of restrictive covenants to keep out 'inharmonious racial groups' (qtd. in Jones 220)[4] FHA also compiled and constructed maps charting the present and future likely residences of black families. Mortgages were not offered in racially mixed areas, or areas that were likely to become racially mixed. In 1948, Assistant FHA Commissioner W.J. Lockwood wrote that FHA "has never insured a housing project of mixed occupancy" because of the expectation that "such projects would probably in a short period of time become all-Negro or all-white." (Jackson 209) This practice, called red lining, ensured a huge gap between the inner city and the suburban area.

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[4] *How the Federal Government Builds Ghettos*, National Commission Against Discrimination in Housing, December 1968, p 18

> Homebuyers hoping to purchase a home in a redlined neighborhood were universally denied mortgages, regardless of their financial qualifications. This severely restricted opportunities for building or even maintaining quality housing in the inner city, which in many ways set the stage for the urban blight that many Americans associate with black neighborhoods. (Wilson 557)

Not only mortgages, the federal and state taxes money went into infrastructural needs of racially exclusive suburban communities. Lipsitz also notes that by the 1960s these suburban communities incorporated themselves as independent municipalities to gain access to more federal funds allocated for urban aid. This meant that even though the inner city needed the home-improvement loans far more than the suburban parts of the city, only 44 million dollars went to the city, while about 112 million dollars went into the outer rings of the city through the 1960s. (Jackson 210)

These practices contributed to the decline of inner-city areas across America. The red-lining practices of the FHA influenced the urban and suburban landscape for many decades to come, but these changes were also fueled by changes in technology and the spatial and industrial changes in the economy after World War 2.

> This growing social and spatial concentration of poverty creates a formidable and unprecedented set of obstacles for ghetto blacks. As we shall see, the social structure of today's inner city has been radically altered by the mass exodus of jobs and working families and by the rapid deterioration of housing, schools, businesses, recreational facilities and other community organizations, further exacerbated by government policies of industrial and urban laissez-faire that have channeled a disproportionate share of federal, state, and municipal resources to the more affluent. (Wilson and Wacquant 10)

The building of interstate highways, relocation of businesses, industry and retailers outside of city centers, middle class migrating to the suburbs and thus the cities losing their crucial tax base-these factors all contributed to the decay that many cities and its citizens faced after World War 2.

3.3 The fall of the American city

In concert with the FHA practices the American city was undergoing changes of its own. With the end of World War 2 city centers experienced mutually reinforcing spatial and industrial changes in the country's urban political economy.

> Among these structural shifts are the decentralization of industrial plants, which commenced at the time of World War 1 but accelerated sharply after 1950, and the flight of manufacturing jobs abroad, to the Sunbelt states, or to the suburbs and exurbs at a time when blacks were continuing to migrate en masse to Rustbelt central cities; the general deconcentration of metropolitan economies and the turn toward service industries and occupations, promoted by the growing separation of banks and industry;

> and the emergence of post-Taylorist, so-called flexible forms of organizations and generalized corporate attacks on unions- expressed by, among other things, wage cutbacks and the spread of two-tier wage systems and labor contracting-which has intensified job competition and triggered an explosion of low-pay, part time work. (Wilson and Wacquant 11)

Wilson and Wacquant point to the problem of deindustrialization because typically African Americans who migrated to cities relied on blue collar employment. That means that with the industry leaving the cities either a new type of employment opportunity should appear to compensate, or people should migrate in search of a better opportunity. Due to the red-lining practices of issuing mortgages, African Americans had no way to relocate either to a better location within the city or the suburbs and with the blue-collar jobs leaving cities, the ghettoization of inner cities started to take hold.

In the case of Chicago in 1954, around 10,000 manufacturing plants operated within the city. These factories employed around 616,000 people. Following a gradual decline in the next quarter century, by 1982, the number of factories was cut in half, providing 277,000 jobs for 162,000 blue-collar employees. That's a loss of 63 percent which is in contrast with the overall growth in manufacturing employment which created more than 1 million jobs in that same time period. Trade employment also took a hit, 120,000 jobs lost in retail and wholesale from 1963 to 1982. These trends began a steep and quick road to labor market exclusion. (Wilson and Wacquant 13) Even though the unemployment rate hasn't changed significantly in the case of Chicago, African American neighborhoods suffered much higher unemployment rates as evident in the table below.

TABLE 2
THE HISTORIC RISE OF LABOR MARKET EXCLUSION IN CHICAGO'S GHETTO NEIGHBORHOODS, 1950-80

	Adults Not Employed (percentage)		
	1950	1970	1980
City of Chicago	43.4	41.5	44.8
West Side			
Near West Side	49.8	51.2	64.8
East Garfield Park	38.7	51.9	67.2
North Lawndale	43.7	56.0	62.2
South Side			
Oakland	49.1	64.3	76.0
Grand Boulevard	47.5	58.2	74.4
Washington Park	45.3	52.0	67.1

Figure 6: Unemployment rate: city of Chicago

Source: Wilson and Wacquant 14

In the 1950s African American neighborhoods had very similar unemployment rates to the rest of the city but as economic and industrial landscape changed, the gap widened. With no upward mobility available to them because of institutional racism and no relevant employment opportunities available, the people living in ghetto neighborhoods had to resort to welfare or illegal activities. An ethnographic account detailed by Arne Duncan[5] describes the social and physical decay of the ghetto. The account is of one of the poorest parts of Chicago's South Side, North Kenwood:

> Today the street might be better characterized as soulless. Some stores, currency exchanges, bars and liquor stores continue to exist on 47th. Yet, as one walks down the street, one is struck more by the death of the street than by its life. Quite literally, the destruction of human life occurs frequently on 47th. In terms of physical structures, many stores are boarded up and abandoned. A few buildings have bars across the front and are closed to the public, but they are not empty. They are used, not so secretly, by people involved in illegal activities. Other stretches of the street are simply barren, empty lots. Whatever buildings once stood on the lots are long gone. Nothing gets built on 47th… Over the years one apartment building after another has been condemned by the city and torn down. Today many blocks have the bombed-out look of Berlin after World War II. There are huge, barren areas of Kenwood, covered by weeds, bricks, and broken bottles. (qtd. in Wilson and Wacquant 14)

Before the economic shift African American neighborhoods were vibrant, soulful and a self-contained society. When the stores, theaters and nightclubs were open, the neighborhood was alive. All of this changed with the rising unemployment and economic hardship that struck inner city neighborhoods. Disappearance of local businesses and vacant housing invited drugs and all sorts of criminal activities into the neighborhoods. This is what Wilson and Wacquant call "hyper ghettoization". Ghettos had a presence of social structure, an inner society of some sorts which enabled, within it, basic resources and some form of social mobility.

> Its activities are no longer structured around an internal and relatively autonomous social space that duplicates the institutional structure of the larger society and provides basic minimal resources for social mobility, if only within a truncated black class structure. And the social ills that have long been associated with segregated poverty – violent crime, drugs, housing deterioration, family disruption, commercial blight, and educational failure – have reached qualitatively different proportions and have become articulated into a new configuration that endows each with a more deadly impact than before. (Wilson and Wacquant 15)

From the city's perspective the solution for these neighborhoods was tearing down housing and crumbling infrastructure and gentrificating the neighborhoods if they were beyond repair. Clearing out slums was important for bringing business back into city centers. Paired with

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[5] See Arne Duncan, *The Values, Aspirations, and Opportunities of the Urban Underclass* (B.A. honors thesis, Harvard University, 1987), p 1

gentrification which was supposed to make the inner city more attractive to middle-class folk, the revival plan aimed at dissoluting the city center of low class minorities by clearing slums and relocating people to public housing or just naturally bypassing the problematic areas via strategically built highway tracts through the city.

3.4 Racist infrastructure

This is the point where two major factors will intersect to exemplify the urban crisis in American cities. They are both products of the government's intervention into the post-war social and economic issues: The Federal Housing Authority's redlining practices and the Federal Aid Highway Act. Wilson summarizes it well saying:

> Beginning in the 1950s, the suburbanization of the middle class, already under way with government-subsidized loans to veterans was aided further by federal transportation and highway policies that included the building of freeway networks through the heart of many cities. Although these policies were seemingly nonracial, the line here between ostensibly non-racial and explicitly racial is blurred. For example, it could be asked whether such freeways would have also been constructed through wealthier white neighborhoods. In any case, they had a devastating impact on the neighborhoods of black Americans. These developments not only spurred relocation from the cities to the suburbs among better-off residents, the freeways themselves also created barriers between the sections of the cities, walling off poor and minority neighborhoods from central business districts. (Wilson 557)

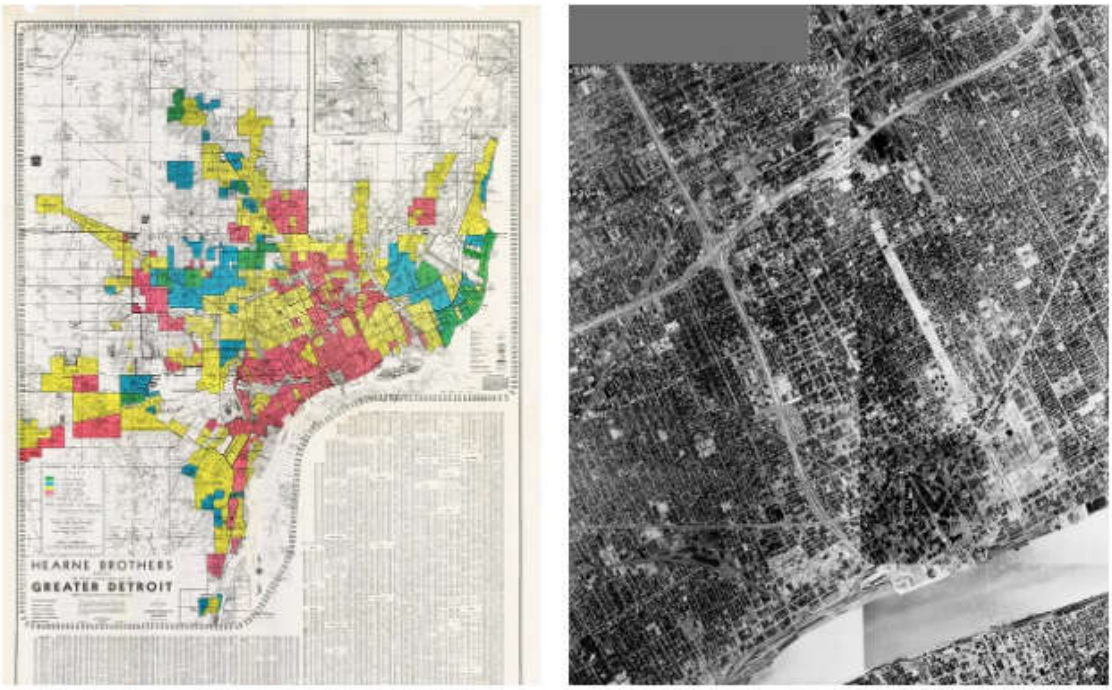

Figure 7: (left): an FHA housing map of Detroit (right): aerial photo showing completed highway tracts

Source: Miller, J., *Roads to nowhere: how infrastructure built on American inequality*, The Guardian, Guardian Media Group, 21 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/21/roads-nowhere-infrastructure-american-inequality (accessed 7.8.2019)

> If your neighborhood had the misfortune to be "redlined", it was often doomed to a future of stillborn investment and decay. Specifically, it would be impossible to secure federally backed mortgages, a sort of scarlet letter branded across huge swaths of the city. Developers avoided these areas and concentrated investment into white areas, and services stagnated. The seeds of future ghettos of America had been sown. (Miller, J.)

During the 1950s and 1960s the connection of "redlined" neighborhoods and Interstate Highway building became apparent. These stagnating neighborhoods, full of low-income housing and no political clout whatsoever to fight such interventions, were prime targets for building huge overpasses and merging highways going towards city centers. The highways served dual purpose here: The first is connecting the city centers with the Interstate highway network which was being built all over the country and the second was that the city could also tear down problematic parts of the city using federal funds for rebuilding and renovation. It was such a common idea in city planning at that time, that it got its own colloquial phrase: "white roads through black bedrooms." Highways were used as tools for destruction of many historical neighborhoods in inner cities in order to make way for highways connecting urban centers and new suburban neighborhoods sprouting around the cities. The neighborhoods upended and mutilated by highway construction didn't even benefit from the road itself. Most

often it just divided the neighborhoods and communities that it ran through with no entrance or exit points thereby destroying local businesses and local economies of these neighborhoods. Hundreds of cities were affected by this practice but people living in these communities which were deemed slums had no legal recourse to oppose such plans. A few famous examples from Miller's article, *Roads to nowhere: how infrastructure built on American inequality*, showcase how prominent these practices were in urban planning.

Baltimore's urban geography contains one of the most egregious examples of divisive highway building. West Baltimore is divided in half by State Route 40, which was a part of the planned east-west freeway that was meant to connect the city longitudinally.

Figure 8: Road to nowhere – Baltimore

Source: Miller, J., *Roads to nowhere: how infrastructure built on American inequality*, The Guardian, Guardian Media Group, 21 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/21/roads-nowhere-infrastructure-american-inequality (accessed 7.8.2019)

The locals call it the "road to nowhere" because its role was never fulfilled as a connection between interstates I-70 and I-95 as it ends suddenly at a park & ride lot just outside Leakin Park. Yet, in its wake, thousands of homes were cleared out. Everything from the south side of Franklin Street to the north side of Mulberry Street was cleared, from Pulaski Street to Paca Street, disconnecting the neighborhood of Harlem Park from Poppleton and Franklin Square and Midtown Edmondson neighborhood from Penrose.

Figure 9: Another example of the divide

Source: *The ultimate insult: The Highway to Nowhere*, Community Architect Daily, 2016, https://communityarchitectdaily.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-ultimate-insult-highway-to-nowhere.html (Accessed 16.9.2019)

Figure 9 shows Fremont Avenue (north - south) being cut off by the Route 40 with a beaten path in the median which exemplifies that no thought was spared for local communities and their means of connection. The most damning thing was that not all of these neighborhoods were actually ghettos. As John bullock, the city councilman for Baltimore's ninth district says in Miller's article: "This was not a neighborhood that was struggling. We're talking about middle-class neighborhoods, which were seen through the eyes of others as slums or ghettos because of the color of the people who lived there."

The same goes for another historical neighborhood known as "Black Bottom" located in Detroit. In his article Miller describes that it was a vibrant, dense area in prime location just north-east of downtown, with a nationally renowned music scene and home to many famous residents, including boxer Joe Louis and the first African American mayor of Detroit, Coleman Young. The area was mixed, rich and poor, with migrants from Syria, Poland and Germany co-existing in a bustling urban area that ran from the Detroit river all the way up to Grand Avenue.

Figure 10: Hastings Street (left), aerial shot of the area today (right)

Source: Miller, J., *Roads to nowhere: how infrastructure built on American inequality*, The Guardian, Guardian Media Group, 21 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/21/roads-nowhere-infrastructure-american-inequality (accessed 7.8.2019)

Today, the section of Detroit that was once Black Bottom is now paved over by the Chrysler Freeway (Interstate 375) and Lafayette Park, a collection of superblock high-rise and low-rise apartments.

A couple of other examples include the city of Chicago and its fourteen-lane Dan Ryan Expressway, which created a barrier between black and white neighborhoods. In Birmingham, Alabama construction of the interstate highway system predominantly took routes through black neighborhoods following along the boundaries established in the city's racial zoning law from 1926. In Atlanta, Georgia the I-20 West served as a boundary between white and black communities and the I-95 in Florida, "which displaced many black residents in Miami's historically black Overtown neighborhood" (Wilson 558).

Another piece of legislation was instrumental in shaping urban realities in America. The American Housing Act of 1949 was another federally approved project that was supposed to alleviate the cities' slum problems, the housing crisis and revitalize urban areas. This legislation funded large scale clearances of blighted urban areas which were then rebuilt according to then-modern standards of building: the high-rise towers set in superblocks. Even though it did help in eliminating the worst of slums, the legislation also helped in destroying many minority or racially mixed neighborhoods. In many cases this meant abusing the provisions of this act by removing African Americans from valuable land close to the central business district and moving them to segregated areas under the guise of public housing.

Upgrading the central business districts was supposed to succeed by building high-rent apartments for the middle-class and automobile friendly shopping areas. Middle-class Americans still picked the suburbs in high numbers which meant, according to Fishman: "urban renewal combined with the impact of urban highways and competition from suburban malls left many downtowns a pedestrian unfriendly patchwork of highway ramps, empty lots, parking structures and isolated buildings" (Fishman 204)

3.5 Public housing

The federal public housing program dates back to 1930s. After several decades of concern regarding the condition of low-income families' homes, the Great Depression brought about a much larger government involvement into social issues. The Housing Act of 1937 was a comprehensive legislation with the goal to:

> To provide financial assistance… for the elimination of unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions, for the eradication of slums, for the provision of decent, safe and sanitary dwellings for families of low income, and for the reduction of unemployment and the stimulation of business activity… (Shester 982)

Passing of this legislation marked the first time the federal government accepted responsibility for constructing accessible low-cost homes. The subsequent piece of legislation, The Housing Act of 1949 reinforced the acts of its predecessor and made a commitment to build 810,000 housing units over six years. It also allocated federal funds to slum clearing and weakened the equivalent elimination requirement from the original 1937 Act meaning that for every unit of public housing built, an unsafe unit must be demolished or repaired. The new act of 1949 required equivalent elimination only for urban projects not built on slum sites.

The success or failure of the public housing program after World War 2 can be looked at from two perspectives. The positive outlook focuses on the fact that by the end of 1962, more than 2 million people lived in the half-million units built under various public housing programs. In any case, the projects were a step up over the structures they replaced. On the other hand, public housing did not meet the expectations of the public. Even though 810,000 units were authorized to be built over the next six years, only 322,000 were actually funded over the next eleven years. So, in 1980 the public housing market comprised only 1% of the whole housing market in the United States. (Jackson 224)

Another major variable in the success of public housing construction was the location of the housing units. The public housing projects were almost exclusively built in city centers for two reasons. First reason was because of the United States Housing Authority, which was a government body made to operate through local initiative. This means that any city or community that wanted to build public housing had to provide tax exemptions for the project and had to create a municipal housing agency. Every community had to decide for itself, to see if there were a need for public housing. Public housing wouldn't get federal funds if it weren't approved by each community locally. For suburbs and white neighborhoods that meant that they wouldn't apply for the federal grant or create a local housing agency, which meant that public housing couldn't be built in their community. The cities, where the real need for public housing existed thus could not build public housing anywhere but in the localities that needed them.

Naturally, most white dominated city councils and suburban communities moved to block the construction of public housing in their neighborhoods. That resulted in public housing being built on cleared land in or near ghetto neighborhoods (Massey and Bickford 1012).

The second reason was that the concerns of the housing authorities were primarily based around clearing slums rather than the housing deficit for the lower classes. Clearing slums was paramount for the estate and public housing authorities as it would clear blight, raise the tax revenue and stop the drop of land value. John Bauman nicely illustrates the positions taken by the Chamber of Commerce and Real Estate Boards in his study of public housing in Philadelphia:

> In 1935, numerous Philadelphia organizations, settlements, the Chamber of Commerce and Real Estate Boards all demanded a full-scale assault on urban blight. Municipal leaders recognized that slums exacted enormous costs in health, crime, and welfare charges from the city. Slum tax income was disproportionately low, while tax delinquency remained astoundingly high; and finally, and most important, European and American experience indicated that slum clearance followed by the building of large, protected low-cost housing projects would rescue endangered land values. (Bauman 121)

The main point was that the city authorities were more preoccupied with financial well-being of the city and the business or tax revenue it could attract, than solving the social crisis they had on their hands. The main benefit being slum clearing, the public housing was a side benefit provided by federal funding, and as such the high-rise projects were, in a lot of cases, underdeveloped, undermaintained and unsuitable for long term occupancy. Jane Jacobs says something in a similar tone:

> Our present urban renewal laws are an attempt to break this particular linkage in the vicious circles by forthrightly wiping away slums and their populations, and replacing them with projects intended to produce higher tax yields, or to lure back easier populations with less expensive public requirements. The method fails. At best, it merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction. (Jacobs 353)

In its function, the public housing projects replaced the slums (sometimes literally, it being on the same location) but only with a visual difference – the high-rise buildings. All the same problems connected to slums and poverty persisted leaving a number of projects unable to fill vacancies and riddled with crime and vandalism. One such example is the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis. It was a poster child of what was wrong with public housing in the US. It garnered a lot of attention by its failure and subsequent demolition starting in 1972. Following the failure of Pruitt-Igoe the public discourse filled with narratives of dysfunctionality of black communities due to their cultural characteristics. Some of the criticisms include the Washington Post article arguing that there was "incompatibility between the high-rise structure and the large poor families who came to inhabit it, only a generation removed from the farm" (Bristol 167).

"The failures of Pruitt-Igoe were increasingly understood as a mismatch between modern design and black cultural inferiority" (Ferguson 141).

But, as Kenneth Jackson wrote, the fault was not with the public housing or with the tenants, but with the expectation that any one solution could so vastly reduce poverty and social pathology. He goes on to say that even though they were heavily criticized and failed in a number of cities, the concept of public housing still has some social value. The success of public housing in New York suggests that the fault may be in individual city authorities and funding levels rather than the idea of public housing itself. "Waiting lists for public housing in New York included more than 175,000 names, and the annual turnover rate was less than 4 percent" (Jackson 229). Although not a resounding success by a longshot, public housing had some positive stories come out of it. The housing crisis in America was definitely abated with federal intervention. Easier crediting and long-term, low-interest mortgages stemming from the 1934 legislation significantly upped the rate of house ownership in America, but it was aimed at mostly white, middle class citizens.

> Between April 1950 and April 1970 some 96% of the nation's total housing production was built for ownership by the private sector. Substantial improvement in housing conditions was recorded during this period even though only a small proportion of total production was oriented toward "housing-poor" families. (Kristof 309)

Gunnar Myrdal agrees with federal interventions into the housing problem saying that just as in the labor field, the increase of public interference will by necessity mean a decrease of discrimination. "As always, the African Americans will profit from the lifting of private practices up to the level where public principles have to be applied" (Myrdal 204)

He is arguing that with governmental interference house or property owners in America don't have to individually worry about housing minorities. With an introduction of a legislative act, an overall plan, the responsibility falls into the public, or social sphere. But the federal housing solution for minorities was so far from what could be called a national success and pales in comparison to housing opportunities available to the white middle-class that it brings into question Myrdal's assessment that any government interference decreases discrimination. It could be argued that in the case of the American housing policy, the federal government managed to generate even bigger differences between the city and the suburbs and establish this division as the norm for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the next couple of chapters will illustrate the products of these two policies, one in the central city and one on the periphery.

3.6 Pruitt-Igoe public housing project

Like most American cities after World War 2, St. Louis also experienced population loss. Between 1950 and 1970 more than 400,000 people consisting mostly of middle and upper-class families left the city. Immigration of African Americans, mostly lower class, offset the population loss somewhat but the city experienced constant decline of population in that time period. The labor market also took a hit as the city lost 11,000 manufacturing jobs between 1953 and 1958 due to a shift from labor-intensive industries to more technologically advanced skilled labor industry. Urban renewal in the Central Business District brought the construction

of new high-rise apartments, major office buildings, a new stadium, two major industrial areas, etc. This renewal was accompanied by a further shift towards white collar jobs in the city but failed to replace the loss of employment opportunities the city endured in this time period. (Comerio 26)

Hit with much of the same problems as other American cities, St. Louis made use of the provisions from the 1949 Housing act to transform their inner-city slums. In order to stop the spread of slums towards the Central Business District and to accommodate all the people left behind in the slum clearances, public housing projects were built on cleared land in the inner-city area. One of these projects was Pruitt-Igoe which was finished in 1954. It was supposed to house 13,000 people in 33 buildings. "Approximately 2700 units of one to five bedrooms replaced 400 dwellings on a 58-acre tract just north of downtown St. Louis" (Comerio 26).

As early as 1958, the conditions started to deteriorate. From the 1957 peak occupancy rate of 91% it started steadily declining amidst deteriorating conditions, lack of service and maintenance, all the way to 1972 when the project was abandoned and demolished within four years.

In order to demonstrate the living conditions of a public housing project as huge as Pruitt-Igoe, the work of Frances A. Koestler, who took the work of Eugene Porter and Lee Rainwater and joined them in a case study of Pruitt-Igoe (*Pruitt-Igoe: Survival in a Concrete Ghetto*), will be the basis of this chapter.

3.6.1 The conditions of Pruitt-Igoe

1965 data collected by the St. Louis Housing and Land Clearance Authority showed that 2,018 families (9,952 individuals) resided in the Pruitt-Igoe projects. Furthermore, the data shows that 62.4% of these families in Pruitt-Igoe was without a male head of the household and counted on some sort of public assistance program. Many more residents occupy Pruitt-Igoe yet they are unaccounted for in the official occupancy list. A more realistic approximation of the population residing in Pruitt-Igoe is closer to 12,000 because of derelicts living in unoccupied apartments or laundry rooms.

Many of the services normally found in neighborhoods are non-existent in Pruit-Igoe:

> For example, no public mailbox exists within the projects; telegrams are seldom delivered. Some large St. Louis department stores refuse to deliver furniture to residents. Taxicabs hesitate to service the area. Automobile insurance, if written at all, involves astronomically high premiums. (Koestler 4)

The state of the infrastructure inside Pruitt-Igoe is appalling as well:

"There are broken windows in every building. Streetlights are inoperative. Glass, rubble, in cans, paper, and other debris litter the mud-caked walks. Discarded tires and abandoned automobiles line the pavements and the parking lots" (Koestler 5).

The report goes on as visitors come near a building entrance.

> Abandoned rooms under the buildings, originally used for storage, have long been stripped of their light bulbs and their rusty locks are easily opened. The rooms are receptacles for all manner of waste – mice, roaches, and other vermin thrive there. Inside the buildings the floors are scarred and filthy. Pruitt-Igoe's elevators are of the sip-stop variety. The elevators stop only at the fourth, seventh and tenth floors, which means the tenants living on any of other eight floors must walk up or down stairs from one of the elevator landings. These landings or "gallery floors" are reminiscent of caricatures of nineteen-century insane asylums. Institutional gray walls line one side of the institutional gray concrete floors. On the other side, rusty screens cover windows whose glass panes have long since disappeared. In many of the buildings, the radiators that once heated the gallery corridors have been stripped away. (Koestler 5)

These are some of many examples of decrepit conditions in public housing. Segregated, without proper access to city's services, Pruitt-Igoe's tenants were once again living in a slum, but this time a federally sponsored one.

3.6.2 The survey

In 1966 the St. Louis Human Development Corporation made a grant of 31,000 dollars to the Urban League for its Pruitt-Igore Station. The money was put aside to improve services of the residents. In order to correctly identify the services that needed to be prioritized a survey was undertaken. The research team consisted of a captain and two workers for each of 38 buildings. Two forms were designed for completion by respondents during the first visits. The shorter forms record basic demographic data about the family and also provided a checklist on which each respondent could note the items of his greatest concern. Five categories were present on the form: housing and maintenance, security, health and welfare, recreation, and relations with management.

The most frequently checked one among the residents was "housing and maintenance". Living conditions were substandard – to say the least and maintenance was sorely lacking. The reason for such dire conditions is the maintenance staff, or the lack of one. Only one elevator man is employed to service the 43 elevator cars. The same goes for the regular maintenance staff. Between 2 pm and midnight and also on weekends, there is only one maintenance man on hand to serve the entire complex. Furthermore, the problems with heating throughout the whole complex were often cited, old equipment isn't properly maintained or replaced if broken like broken boiler tanks, stoves, refrigerators and other basic household necessities

The complex has its own privately contracted security service. The whole Pruitt-Igoe complex has only two men assigned during each 24-hour period. Common complaints centered around ineffectiveness of the security guards. The same goes for the city police. Calls go unanswered or a couple hours too late. Instead of suffering through police brutality as is generally common among minorities, Pruitt-Igoe had the problem of police indifference. (Koestler 9)

The dissatisfaction in the health and welfare category was aimed at the Missouri Division of Welfare office inside the complex. Major complaints include the fact that residents aren't

informed about many programs that could aid the. Elderly persons, many of the infirm, often live in filthy apartments without adequate food or clean clothing.

The "recreation" part of the survey is connected with appropriate spaces for younger residents of the complex to play and spend their time. Approximately 5,000 youngsters have two asphalt play areas at their disposal. The equipment is dated and rusted. The children have nowhere to be so they loiter inside the buildings in the halls which are dangerous because of the lack of maintenance. The same goes for adults as they have no place to socialize except the community center unsuitable for such activities.

The bureaucratic setup of the agencies that serve Pruitt-Igoe is believed by the tenants to be a primary cause of frustration and unrest. Apparently no one has the authority to make decisions about problems that warrant immediate attention. "As a consequence, no one can be held accountable for failures and delays or the isolation in which the individual finds himself" (Koestler 11).

Many of these issues boil down to the unavailability of services and maintenance because of lack of funding. Because of lack of funding coming from the city, the complex should more or less be self-sufficient by way of the residents' rent paying for services and maintenance. With degraded living conditions more tenants vacate their apartments leaving the complex more underfunded each day and stuck in a vicious cycle.

The report concludes that it has not presupposed that all residents of Pruitt-Igoe are conscientious citizens, good tenants, or responsible, mature adults acclimated to urban living. It does, however, rest on the conviction that the majority of Pruitt-Igoe's people are law-abiding citizens who are being short-changed by the very society that purports to serve them. Society has all but destroyed the dream of Pruitt-Igoe's people that they, too, may live, work, and contribute to their community. "They have been excluded, ignored, and admonished not to complain too frequently or too loudly" (Koestler 12).

One other important factor left out of this report is employment as it was mainly concerned with housing issues in the community. It wasn't needed to illustrate the conditions which Pruitt-Igoe's residents lived in but is necessary to explain the phenomenon why it failed, just like many other public housing projects. Collapsing economy, big population shifts in American cities, just like in St. Louis, and institutional racism are some of the major reasons why 1972 saw the destruction of this ambitious project and left the 57-acre land desolate.

3.7 Levittown

On the other side of the spectrum, beyond the city limits, a new community was sprouting after World War 2. One of the most famous suburban housing projects in postwar America, Levittown, is a product of William Levitt. He was the founder of the *Levitt & Sons* company and most famous for innovating in the field of home building.

> It was Bill Levitt who first brought Ford's techniques of mass production to housing, up to then the most neglected of American industries. Until he arrived on the scene, builders were small-time operators, employing multiple subcontractors. The typical prewar builder put up fewer than five houses a year. Levitt revolutionized the process of home building with remarkable planning and brilliant control procedures. These techniques made it possible to provide inexpensive, attractive single-unit housing for ordinary citizens, people who had never thought of themselves as middle class before. As much as anyone, William Levitt made the American dream possible. (*How William Levitt Helped to Fulfill the American Dream*).

Levitt's most famous project, Levittown, is spread over four townships in Bucks County: Falls, Middletown, Bristol and Tullytown. (Yeager 65). The site occupied by Levittown consisted of 6,000 acres of open farmland in 1950. The first residents moved in 1952, and 15,500 families, around 60,000 people, were living in this suburb in 1957 (Bressler 127). Levittown sported a familiar look, one easily connected to suburbs. Winding rows of houses, all very familiar one to another filling out the landscape uniformly, will become one of the trademark looks not only of William Levitt's building endeavors but of suburbia as a whole. Critics called the building pattern of suburbs boring, repetitive, and homogenized. But to offer a home at a low price to a huge volume of people in such a short time, the architectural freedom in design had to be traded for low cost efficiency (Yeager 65).

Levittown was not an affluent suburb; it was built with lower middle-class whites in mind. It was low-medium priced housing just like many other developments appearing in suburbs of large cities after World War 2. Most of the settlers were in their 20s and 30s looking for a home away from the city to start a family (Miller, A. 109). Just like in other similar housing developments, Levittown's homeowners looked for security, a place to start a family, and a suitable environment for their children. Alexander Miller succinctly illustrates the average homeowner in Levittown.

> Drive through the wide, winding, pleasant streets of Levittown on a soft summer evening and you see the man of the house, frequently assisted by his lady, working in his garden, making repairs or even building additions to his home. Almost all of the homes reflect the loving care which has been lavished upon them – symbolic of the fact that these Levittowners have sunk deep roots. They are no longer the nomad apartment dwellers whose resentment of undesirables (by their own standards) moving into their urban street was mitigated by the knowledge that as soon as their leases expired they could move to a new, more culturally homogenous neighborhood. The home represents for the Levittowner emotional and economic security in an age when all the pressures are for insecurity. At the same time, it is a chain which keeps him linked to a fixed spot. (Miller, A. 109)

Figure 11: Levittown, Pennsylvania; 1954

Source: Yeager 64

The dynamics of community in Levittown will best be explained by Marvin Bressler in his paper *The Myers' Case: An Instance of Successful Racial Invasion* describing a situation that arose in the summer of 1957. In August of 1957 an African American family, the Myers, moved in a three-bedroom house in a section of Levittown called Dogwood Hollow. Levittown was an all-white community at that time and the reactions to a black family moving in were volatile to say the least. As soon as it was apparent that their new neighbors might be black, Levittowners organized to protest such an event. The segregationist crowd formed the Levittown Betterment Committee whose purpose was to protect the homogenous community and restore order to Levittown. Their manifesto read:

> We the citizens and homeowners from Levittown, Pa., protest the mixing of Negroes in our previously all-white community. As moral, religious, and law- abiding citizens, we feel that we are unprejudiced and undiscriminating in our desire to keep our community a closed community. Inasmuch as having equal rights, the Negroes have an equal opportunity to build their own community of equal value and beauty without

> intermingling in our community . . . we therefore feel that we must keep our community closed in order to protect our interests (qtd. in Bressler 135)

The segregationists employed different tactics in order to drive the Myers family out of Levittown. Among them, they appealed to authorities, protested and marched, used violent tactics and threats of violence against them, and several other tactics terrorizing the family and any sympathizers standing by them. The court injunction which followed these events lists them in detail:

> From September 22, 1957, up to and including September 26, 1957, defend- ants incited, instigated, organized, and attended gatherings at 30 Darkleaf Lane, which is directly behind the home of the said Myers family and which has a common boundary with the Myers property. At these gatherings, records were played loudly day and night and bright lights were turned on late at night . . .
>
> On or about August 13, 1957, the defendants/together with others/caused caravans of automobiles bearing Confederate flags to drive past the homes of said Myers and other residents of Levittown both day and night causing fear of violence, creating noise and disturbance and preventing the residents of the vicinity from resting at night...
>
> On or about August 13, 1957, and continuing intermittently to the present time, the defendants/have together with others egated in conduct including calling dogs 'nigger' and summoning them in a loud tone of voice in the vicinity of the home of the said Myers; . . . (qtd. in Bressler 136)

The Levittown community was not unified in its mission to eject the Myers family. An opposition to the segregationists formed in the shape of the Citizens Committee for Levittown. They advocated integration and also came under attack by the aggressive segregationist crowd. They appealed to the State police, the Governor and Attorney General to end the hostilities against the Myers family. Failing to reach out on the community level with appeals to morality, they relied on the appeal of law. In the end that was the most successful course of action as it ended the conflict in October 1957 by an injunction proceeding personally prosecuted in the Court of Common Pleas of Bucks County by the Attorney General. The injunction decreed that "taking any acts of any kind whatever which seek by force, violence or intimidation to compel the removal or withdrawal of the said Myers from Levittown or by force, violence or intimidation to prevent the sale of any property in Levittown to any Negro." The injunction was successful in quelling any further terrorizing of the Myers family and that led to another four black families and one racially mixed family to move to Levittown in the next three years.[32] With the combination of local level activism and invoking higher judicial bodies and agencies, the integrationists successfully defeated the segregationists.

This case from the summer of 1957 in Levittown goes on to show the importance of local governing bodies in these new types of communities. Levittown, a young community in 1957, was divided into four different townships each of whose separate jurisdictions include other localities. This meant that no government body spoke for all the people of Levittown. The

comments from *Trends in Housing* surmise it well: "A new community, still developing, it had no real leaders or established institutions. Neither local government, newspaper, church, or other civic organizations offered immediate or constructive leadership…" (qtd. in Bressler 129). This was an issue plaguing not only Levittown, but any new community built in a new locality. Without proper or matured local institutions, organizations or governing bodies it was going to be a problem introducing propositions that equal opportunity in housing was both inevitable and desirable.

To expand this issue to the whole of the United States, the problem might lie in the individuality of states and their implementation of laws on the local and state level. Just as Jim Crow laws varied from state to state, now after the 1954 *Brown vs Board of Education* ruling abolishing the "separate but equal" doctrine, each local community and state had to institute a specific ruling regarding their segregation laws. In new communities such as Levittown this was harder to achieve but thanks to a push in the right direction by the Governor and Attorney General the 1957 decree was issued which became a permanent mainstay.

3.8 Contemporary American city

New reality for the American city in the 21th century points to the notion that the greater metropolitan area is the new American city. This new American city holds 86% of all jobs and is responsible for 90% of America's GDP while housing the majority of the American population (Birch 134). What constitutes the new American city is explained by Bruce Katz, vice president and program director of Brookings' Metropolitan Policy Program. "These disparate places, once fully separate, are now co-joined and co-mingled as people live in one municipality, work in another, go to sports game or medical specialist or shopping in yet another…and share the same air, water and natural resources" (qtd. in Birch 135). The new American city encompasses all the components of the metropolitan area: the central downtown area, secondary downtown areas, surrounding cities and the suburbs and exurbs. Being the centers of economy and employment, the cities sprawled outwards engulfing their outer limits containing suburbs, satellite cities and by doing that even spawned a new form of area called an exurb situated even farther than the suburbia which was historically known as the place beyond the city limits. The modern city's limits are blurred, and its constituent parts become less clear. The city became fluid and the concept of place lost the importance it once held in the clear distinction of the historical city and the surrounding suburban area.

In the age of globalism and internet technology, mobility became one of the most important factors in the modern society. Following the works of Zygmunt Bauman who defined contemporary society through the lens of liquid modernity, Peter Abrahamson writes:

> What distinguishes liquid modernity from early modernity is the lack of stable institutions. There is no condition; everything is process. With liquid or fluid modernity the relationship between time and space has been altered. Modernity started with the separation of time and space from living practice, and each from the other, as

> opposed to premodern time when they were inseparable. In early modernity, space was the dominant category. (Abrahamson 171)

What Abrahamson's interpretation of Bauman tells us is that a citizen is no longer defined by space but by his/her mobility. In the age of globalism and the information revolution mobility becomes power and Bauman talks about the "revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite" (Abrahamson 172). In this modern scape of individuality and mobility the cities across America adapted differently to new challenges and technologies.

Some cities experienced more drastic changes than others, for example the Sunbelt cities and the prime example of the postmodern city: Los Angeles.

> In Sunbelt cities, many of which came of age at the cusp of the metropolitan era, these suburban orientations became most pronounced. Americans quickly noticed the connection between suburbanization and the Sunbelt. Cities like Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Houston were described variously as oozing "off in every direction like lava," a "huge unplanned urban complex" and "a spin the wheel happening that hops, skips and jumps outwards."[6] (Nicolaides 22)

These kinds of cities, often called "suburban metropolises", are stereotypical postmodern cities very different from typical modern cities like, for example, New York. These cities are famous for their atypical sprawled look and multiple downtown centers displaced throughout the city. These cities look as though they consist of multiple suburban lots stitched together to form a sort of coherent unit.

Despite their importance in the modern global economy and their central position in the American life, American cities are still plagued with similar problems they had throughout the 20th century like housing and racial tensions. The cities are still drawing huge amounts of people and are still in need of a large amount of housing for lower middle class and poor citizens. The HOPE VI program for public housing led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was created in 1993 and at its peak had 1.41 million housing units in its inventory. Since then, the inventory was reduced by 210,000 and is still decreasing. As of 2009, the public housing composed 0.9% of all housing units and 2.9% of all rental units and represents a small part of the US housing market. (Hanlon 375)

For example, the HOPE VI program helped Atlanta and Chicago in their process of relocating thousands of households out of problematic older developments, like the Robert Taylor homes in Chicago and Techwood Homes in Atlanta, into newer mixed-income neighborhoods in order to lower the crime rate and improve living conditions for their residents (Popkin, Rich et. al 138). Controversy rose from a 2008 *Atlantic Monthly* article claiming that "HOPE VI, specifically relying on vouchers to relocate residents in private rental housing, was to

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[6] Original quote from Abott, C., "The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities", *Chapel Hill, N.C.*, University of North Carolina Press 1987, 62-63

blame for rising crime in Memphis" (Popkin, Rich, et. al 138). These relocations are reminiscent of The Housing Act of 1949 and the slum clearing and relocating provisions it entailed. Even the controversial statements and misconceptions connecting the public housing residents with increase in crime sounds like a throwback to a not so distant segregationist past. Even though they evoke the past of problematic relocations and developments, the transformation of Chicago and Atlanta can be deemed a successful venture as both cities reported lower crime rates in that period (Popkin, Rich, et. al 152).

Even though the racial and political climate has changed substantially since the 1950s and 1960s the issue of race and equal opportunity remains. The inclusive and affirmative action programs through the years made great strides towards equal opportunity and safer cities[7], but since the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 claims started showing up that America was now a post racial society. "Using Obama's election as hard evidence that we have transcended race in the United States, many political proponents of post racial thinking are agitating for the end to all race and ethnicity centered social policy mechanisms aimed at reducing social inequities" (Teasley and Ikard 413). This is a dangerous proposition as it favors the established power relations and disregards the slew of existing structural changes that need to be done to even start talking about equality.

> These changes should include social policy enactments and monetary investments that reduce educational and health care disparities and outcomes, greater investment and revitalization in the nation's declining urban infrastructure where nearly 70% of African Americans reside, and grants for college and business entrepreneurship within Black communities. (Teasley and Ikard 423)

The African American community still holds only 3% of wealth even though it makes up 12% of the population in the US and until these scales start tipping in their favor it is going to be unwise to talk about a post racial society.

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[7] Example of a reformed neighborhood https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-0815-compton-image-20150815-story.html

4 Conclusion

The American city underwent great changes after World War 2. These changes were a result of economic, demographic and political shifts in America following the end of the great conflict.

Majority of these shifts started taking place even before World War 2, for example the Federal Housing Administration was a product of a New Deal program, or the racial segregation, which is a product of institutional racism, and has troubled the US since the days of slavery. The important factor in these changes and how they aided the decay of American cities is timing. The US cities found themselves in the crossfire of these changes after World War 2. The African American Second Great Migration, which lasted from the 1940s to 1970s, has urbanized millions of African Americans in northern US cities. They arrived at a time when the cities themselves were undergoing changes in the form of deindustrialization which left a good portion of the African American population unemployed due to their major reliance on blue collar jobs. Due to segregation and redlining practices, this meant that major parts of cities became slums and ghettos which needed revitalizing and renewal.

Outside the city centers new tracts of housing were sprouting all around the country incentivized by the Federal Housing Administration and its mortgages and the fast travel enabled by the new interstate highways. These new suburban neighborhoods were drawing the white middle class away from the cities' slums and blight and into the quiet, peaceful and racially homogenous communities where families can raise their children in safety. This movement away from the cities further accelerated urban decay drawing away businesses and taxpayers from city centers.

The role of government institutions in postwar United States is significant. That much is obvious by looking at the list of influences[8] Robert Fishman compiled in 2000. For example, three of the top four influences listed are direct interventions by the government: the 1956 Interstate Highway act, Federal Housing Administration which was a product of the 1934 National Housing Act and the Housing Act of 1949 which aimed to eradicate slums and bring about urban renewal, amongst other. None of these pieces of legislation were racially charged, or incited segregation. But, when applied on a local, or state level, they morphed into something dangerous for racial equality. For example, the 1934 National Housing Act's mission was to facilitate home buying across the US. But the legislation spawned the Federal Housing Administration as an institution which overlooked mortgage applications and it was

[8] The list can be found in Fishman, R., "The American Metropolis at Century's End: Past and Future Influences", *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2000, p 200

entirely at their discretion how the legislation will be implemented. This led to redlining and refusal of credit for African Americans which ultimately led to segregation and racially homogenous communities. This leads to a conclusion that no matter how good the legislation is it will always depend on the institution enforcing it. And the institution itself will reflect the cultural context it is embedded in. Postwar United States resided in a context which still preferred racial segregation.

Despite the racial segregation issue, the US would still face the same urban issues it suffered. Due to technological progress, automobile and the new highway system, urban sprawl was inevitable. From the earliest forms of cities, any improvements to mobility meant that people lived further and further away from city centers. What makes the American situation unique lies on the juncture of a great migration, bigger government involvement following the Great Depression and the cultural context which was influenced greatly by institutional racism.

Today, the American city resides in a radically different context but is troubled by a lot of similar problems from the past along with some new ones. American cities still feel the remnants of the redlined neighborhoods: public housing projects in need of renovation and more housing units needed for the underprivileged. Public transport, even though gaining more traction in recent times, is still a sorely lacking feature in most American metropolises. The automobile still reins king. Alongside housing, the urban infrastructure needs renewal: from bike paths and roadways to bridges and highway tracts in the city centers. With that comes the challenge of reinventing urban environments. The problem of today's cities is the uncontrolled sprawl of modern cities spreading outwards and erasing traditional boundaries of the city center and the surrounding suburban area. Now modern metropolises contain multiple downtowns and centers and all its constituent elements formed into one big urban mass with barely recognizable features. Sprawling metropolises raise questions about the environment, the loss of public space and congestion in city centers. In order to tackle these new issues of today, it is important to understand how American cities developed into what they are today and how they were shaped by social policies, technology and context of their time. Today, more people live in suburban areas than in urban and rural areas combined[9]. This reality of today was shaped by economic, demographic and political shifts of the post-war era of the US. And understanding these past issues and their causes is the foundation of solving the issues of today's American city.

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6 Abstract

This thesis examines the period after World War II in the United States with a specific reference to the American city and the suburbia, and their relationship in the context of urban problems in 1950s and 1960s America. The problems concerning the housing crisis, racial segregation, structural and technological changes to the visage of the traditional city all converge in a question of what caused such a major shift in the urban fabric of America and how does it relate to today's metropolis. Major demographic shifts at the end of World War II indicated great changes to American cities as a wave of African Americans moved into the cities and middle-class white Americans settled at the outskirts of cities in suburbia. Backed by federal legislation which sponsored highway building and cheap housing outside urban centers, cities rapidly lost their middle class and with it, their tax revenue. At the center of it all is the decline of the American city. The main argument is that the relevant government institutions, with their discriminatory and racist practices and legislative acts, amidst tumultuous times, managed to completely change the urban landscape in America. These changes are still influencing the modern American city and will be for the foreseeable future. This historical overview analyses legislative acts concerning housing, highway building and racial segregation from the1950s and 1960s and correlates them to the decay of the American city as well as the rapid evolution in technology and mobility via automobiles which also aided in the process of city depopulation. The analysis of these findings shows that the proliferation of the automobile, building of the interstate highway and cheap housing depopulate cities which was offset only by African Americans settling inner cities. Segregation and white flight accounted for a portion of that depopulation. The implications of these processes are: racial issues remain unanswered to this day; the American city still feels the consequences and faces similar issues from 70 years ago; new issues emerge in the new Information Age global economy. The American city needs an urbanistic guideline, a new modern way of reworking inner cities and its outer rim in the bid to stop the uncontrolled urban sprawl and to improve the mobility within it whilst being environmentally positive. How the American city will adapt to these new challenges while taking care of a backlog of issues from the past will define its role and importance in the American everyday life.

Key words: suburbanization, inner city, segregation, institutional racism, U.S. federal government