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# On the Divide: Examining Residential Segregation in Marin County, California

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## **On the Divide: Examining Residential Segregation in Marin County, California**

A senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and Cultural Studies

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May 1, 2015

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### **[Abstract]**

Today, segregation is a term rarely used or heard in public discourse, as it has been illegal in the U.S for the past 50 years. However, despite its illegalization, scholars and sociologists have noted that patterns of segregation are still a prominent feature of many U.S counties, cities and suburbs. Reflecting upon my experiences as a black woman living in an all-white community, this paper offers a critical analysis of the causes and consequences of residential segregation in Marin County, California: a county of urban and suburban communities just 20 minutes north of San Francisco. Despite its liberal image, Marin County is racially segregated. 80% of Marin County residents are white. Two of its minority populations are geographically concentrated: the majority of African-Americans live in Marin City and the majority of Latinos live in the Canal district in San Rafael. Examination of current statistical research reveals that these racially segregated communities suffer from the most social disparity with regards to education, income and standard of living. Current literature suggests that Marin's affordable housing issue is perpetuating segregation in Marin. The resistance to the creation of low-to-moderate income affordable housing by many Marin residents is fueled by a strong and vocal desire to protect a 'quality of life'. Research suggests that this attitude stems from a fear of the racialized 'other' and the need to preserve white privilege, ultimately contributing to the levels of residential segregation and social inequity experienced by low-income minorities in Marin today.

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## **Introduction**

Today, segregation is a term rarely used or heard in public discourse, as it has been illegal in the U.S for over 50 years. However, scholars and sociologists have noted that, despite being outlawed, residential segregation is still a prominent feature of many U.S counties, cities and suburbs. The objective of this paper is to offer a critical analysis of the causes and consequences of residential segregation in Marin County, California: a county of urban and suburban communities located just 20 minutes north of San Francisco.

But why Marin County? What is so special about this tiny portion of the Bay Area? There are two reasons I have chosen to focus on Marin County, one that appeals to a more academic inquiry and other to a more personal one.

First, in spite of its liberal image and the fact that over 80% of the residents are white Marin County is, despite appearances, racially segregated. Two of its minority populations are geographically concentrated in the most impoverished and less visible areas of the county: The majority of African-Americans live in Marin City and the majority of Latinos live in the Canal district in San Rafael. These racially segregated communities suffer from the most inequity compared to other communities in Marin, providing an interesting case study of the effects of segregation on minorities today.

Marin is also intriguing to me personally, because I have made it my home over the last six years. Coming from a low-income background myself, raised mostly on public housing and public assistance, Marin seemed like paradise to me when I arrived. Its small communities, safe streets and quaint shops were like something I watched on TV as child; something I longed for growing up. But despite its natural beauty, cute towns and neighborhoods, in reality Marin has

not been a comfortable place for me to live. As one of only a handful of black people living in my town, I feel that I have crossed boundaries I should not have crossed.

Living and working in an all-white community in Marin as a black woman has been an uncomfortable, yet interesting experience for me. Daily I am reminded that I am a stranger in a seemingly strange land, a black face in a sea of white faces. Walking down the street, I notice gazes from my white neighbors that can be only described as a form of uncomfortable curiosity. San Anselmo is known as a friendly community, yet I have never felt a part of that community unless I am serving people in the coffee shop that I work at in town. Seeing me in this role is one that Marinites are comfortable with. So much so that they feel safe enough to talk to me about the uniqueness of my hair, that rap music is not even music or how black people had been chased out of town in the 1950s; suddenly I am the spokesperson for everything black. Outside of that role, people avoid me and just stare. The stares bother me the most. I realized some time ago that I do not belong there, and that I am probably not even wanted. I look around my home and I find myself living in a segregated society, with other minorities like myself living in neighborhoods far away and isolated in poverty.

Thus, part of the goal of this research is to make sense of my experiences living in this segregated society, and the other part of it aims to understand how segregation affects other minorities living in Marin, as well as the root-causes of this phenomenon.

Chapter One, “Desegregation and resegregation: a swinging pendulum” provides an overview of segregation in the U.S, using historical literature to examine the illegalization of segregation through various policies and its subsequent revival through housing practices during the post-Civil Rights era. Chapter Two, “Residential segregation in Marin County, California,” investigates patterns of residential segregation in Marin today as it impacts low-income

minorities living in Marin City and the Canal district, demonstrating the persisting link between spatial isolation and social inequality. In Chapter Three, “The perpetuation of segregation: Marin’s fair and affordable housing controversy”, I examine what propagates segregation in Marin, ultimately revealing the county’s involvement at the government and resident level in thwarting access to affordable housing opportunities for low-income minorities . Chapter Four “Behind the Resistance: dysconscious racism, fear of the ‘other’ and preserving white privilege” unpacks Marin’s housing issues further, revealing embedded elements of racism and classicism as root-causes of residential segregation in Marin.

## 1. Desegregation and Resegregation: A Swinging Pendulum

“Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!”

— George Wallace, Governor of Alabama, Inaugural address (1963)

Segregation is a word that embodies an important chapter in the American story, commonly associated with the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s. Stirring up images of separate drinking fountains and lunch counters, civil unrest, bus boycotts and monumental marches, the Civil Rights movement was a movement for racial equality. Racial equality for African Americans and other minorities meant having equal access to better education, employment, housing and other facets of the great American Dream that had been rigorously and historically denied to them.

The following section examines the civil-rights court cases and policies of the 1960s that aided in the “successful” desegregation of American society, as well as their failures in combating levels of resegregation that occurred during the post-Civil Rights era. The patterns of resegregation in housing during the post-Civil Rights era reseeded racial and social inequality in the U.S; almost as quickly as the important social changes that rocked the 1960s.

### *Desegregation and the Era of Great Policy Change*

The movement for racial equality during the 1960s was implemented in the gradual and tense process of desegregation. During this era, coalitions of leaders, communities and organizations propelled policy change that would end legal segregation; ultimately with the goal creating a more equitable America for all citizens. The passage of legislation that desegregated education, employment, housing and other facets of American society during the 1960s not only

strengthened racial equality but also gave hope to African-Americans and other minorities who sought a better quality of life .

The most commonly known court case associated with desegregation of the Civil Rights Era was the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954, in Topeka, Kansas, which prompted the end of segregation in American public school systems. Oliver Brown, a church minister and a concerned father, decided to challenge segregation in schools when his daughter was prohibited from attending an all-white school just five blocks away and was subsequently forced to attend an all-black school 20 blocks away (Sanders, 2012, p.60). With the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a leading African-American civil rights organization, Brown was able to successfully appeal the Supreme Court verdict of *Plessy v. Ferguson* ('separate but equal') on that grounds that it violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Sanders, 2012, p.1) The legal desegregation of the American public school system was not only a major advancement for racial equality but it also convinced the Federal government that enforcing equal access to education for all American citizens was paramount to true social equality and mobility.

Although the success of Brown and the NAACP was a landmark victory in the desegregation movement, it was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that ended legal racial segregation overnight. Signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson, this act outlawed discrimination in the US on the basis of race, class, age, gender and national origin. More specifically, the major impact of Civil Rights Act of 1964 "prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities and made employment discrimination illegal" (Our Documents, n.d, par.1). The passage of this act banned racial segregation in the U.S, providing avenues of opportunity to African-Americans and other minorities.

An additional keystone piece of legislation, that played an important role in the desegregation movement of the Civil Rights Era, is the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Fair Housing act was aimed specifically at prohibiting discrimination in “the sale, rental, advertising and financing of housing” through bureaucratic enforcement (Rucker et al, 2010, p.702). Although previous years of policy change showed promise of desegregation in America, much of the country at the time still resisted the idea of racial integration, and the issue of housing was hardly a consideration in previous policy work. According to Rucker & Alexander (2010):

The segregation existing in many parts of the country, the failure of banks to provide loans to African Americans and the refusal of landlords to rent to individuals and families on the basis of race helped create a hostile housing climate that severely limited most African Americans’ fair access to housing. (p.703)

As a result, legislation was needed to address housing discrimination in order to impede racial segregation and promote housing opportunities for minorities. In *American Apartheid*, Massey and Denton (2001) argued that “Barriers to spatial mobility are barriers to social mobility... segregation constitutes a very powerful impediment to black socio-economic progress” (p.14). Thus, the passage of the Fair Housing Act was a crucial tool, among many, in the desegregation of American society as well as an aid in improving the social mobility of American minorities.

With the passage of the Fair Housing Act, the housing element became central to racial desegregation and to the promotion of upward social mobility. During the formation of the Fair Housing act, the issue of segregation in public housing was brought to the forefront and reached a climax during the 1969 court case of *Gautreaux et al. v. the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)*. Between the years of 1954 and 1967, the CHA had built over 10,000 housing units, in

which only 63 were constructed outside of impoverished and racially segregated areas (standford.edu, n.d, par.3). Community organizer Dorothy Gautreaux, and others, sued the CHA in a federal court, ultimately winning a case that “prohibited public authorities from placing housing projects exclusively in black neighborhoods” (Massey and Denton, 2001, p.83). This landmark victory was the first case against segregation in public housing, with its success further challenging the boundaries of social inequity and systematic racial discrimination. This case also assured that public housing placed outside of racially segregated and impoverished areas gave the potential to help socially mobilize low income, American minorities who were spatially isolated as a result of discrimination.

### ***Resegregation during Post-Civil Rights Era***

As a consequence of the ground-breaking civil right court cases and policy changes that occurred during the 1960s, trends during the early 1970s revealed not only increased patterns of racial integration but improved social mobility for African Americans as a result. However, by the 1980s, residential segregation persisted and began increasing; contributing to a growing number of impoverished and racially segregated communities in cities and suburbs. A 1977 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) audit study, carried out by George Galster, not only established a link between patterns of discrimination and segregation, but he revealed that segregation itself has profound impacts on socioeconomic status (Massey & Denton, 2001, p.109). Ultimately, the relationship between discrimination, segregation and socioeconomic status is cyclical. According to Massey and Denton (2001), “Not only does discrimination lead to segregation, but segregation by restricting economic opportunities, produces interracial economic disparities that incite further discrimination and segregation”

(109). The empirical value of history shows us that racial discrimination is the root-cause of segregation, physically and socially isolating African-Americans and other minorities from opportunity and upward mobility.

By the 1970s and 1980s, segregation disappeared from the lexicon of American society. The end of segregation and racism in America seemed nigh; and for a short period of time, the legacy of the Civil Rights era seemed to be on the upswing. Massey and Denton (2001) reveal that, “by the beginning of the decade, blacks had begun to join the exodus of families from central cities to suburbs ...the migration of blacks from South to North decelerated and reversed” (p. 60). As the increase of racial integration during this time appeared promising, so did the improvement of the socio-economic status of black Americans. The early 1970s showed the income levels of African-Americans rising as racial discrimination fell; by 1973 black poverty had decreased to the lowest degree in American history (Massey & Denton, 2001, p.61). Had the movement truly transformed the social landscape of a country haunted by centuries of tense race relations and human degradation? Had the change come?

Yet, as desegregation encouraged and fostered racial and social equality during the early seventies, it was resegregation in housing, fueled by consistent housing discrimination, during the following years that subtly reinstated racial inequality. The housing element again appears as a crucial link in the relationship between segregation, social inequality, and mobility. Patterns of residential segregation during the latter part of 1970s and 1980s revamped racial and social inequality despite decades of social changes. Massey & Denton (2001) argue that:

Despite what whites said on opinion polls and despite provisions of the Fair Housing Act, segregation continued and in contrast to steady improvement of black socioeconomic

status through 1973, the decade ended in record unemployment, inflation, falling wages, increasing income inequality and rising rates of black poverty. (61)

Ultimately, the revival of segregation in housing during this time and its impact on the socioeconomic welling being of African Americans reveal a key relationship between spatial mobility and social mobility. Using computerized Census data, Massey and Denton (2001) concluded that in Northern cities the average level of segregation in 1980 was 77% and 70% in the suburbs” (p.72). With extreme levels of residential segregation occurring and increasing both within metropolitans and suburban areas, paralleling the growing rate of black poverty, the movement of desegregation in American society seemed to have failed.

As a context, I believe that the historical and cyclical relationship between racial discrimination, segregation and social inequity is significant because we can see similar patterns today, as I will further examine, in Marin County. Despite Brown, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing act of 1968, Gautreaux and centuries worth of strife and struggle, segregation and racial discrimination never truly left the American scene. Beyond the Civil Rights era, residential segregation had quickly manifested into a more subtle, yet just as detrimental, mode of disenfranchising African-Americans and other minorities. The next section examines this mode as it manifests itself in Marin County, California; a self-proclaimed liberal county with an alarming pattern of racial segregation and social inequity.

## **2. Residential Segregation in Marin County, California**

“Segregation...not only harms one physically, it also harms one spiritually...its scars the soul...it is a system which stares the segregated in the face, saying ‘you are less than...’ ...’you are not equal to...”

-Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

As the previous section evidences, the persisting link between segregation and social inequity is clearly documented. This section will explore and analyze this relationship and how it impacts minority residents in a specific context, Marin County, California. Despite its liberal roots and aura of affluence, Marin’s less visible issues share national characteristics when it comes to social inequity.

What makes Marin a particularly interesting case study of segregation and inequity are its demographic patterns and how those patterns shape neighborhoods. Marin is home to a population of roughly 252,409 people; 86.2 percent of which are white, 2.8 percent black, 6.0 percent Asian, 15.7 percent Latino and small percentages of American Indian and Hawaiian residents (U.S Census, 2010). In 2009, Marin caught the eye of the U.S Department of Housing and Development (HUD), in which the agency issued an audit to investigate why Marin’s two largest minority populations, African-Americans and Latinos, were so geographically concentrated in just two neighborhoods: Marin City and the Canal District of San Rafael (Dornhelm, n.d., par.1). Both of these neighborhoods happened to be the most impoverished in the county. But perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Marin is that many residents pride themselves on being a part of a socially consciously, Obama-supporting, liberal county, yet its levels of residential segregation and inequity seem to suggest otherwise. In examining Marin City, the Canal District of San Rafael and the residents of these communities, we can understand the relationship between segregation as it perpetuates social inequality more in depth.

### *Tale of Two Neighborhoods: Marin City and the Canal District of San Rafael*

Before we get into an analysis of the relationship between inequity and segregation in Marin County as it impacts minority populations, it is important to know a little more about the histories of Marin City and the Canal district of San Rafael. Although both communities are racially segregated and suffer from the most inequity compared to other neighborhoods in the county, both contain unique histories quite different from each other. These histories provide a little insight into why these segregated communities are shaped the way they are today.

#### **Marin City**

Marin City is a small community located in Southern Marin County, about five miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge. Once a dairy farm inhabited by a few families, the small area was rapidly developed in 1942 “to house 6,000 of the 20,000 workers who migrated from all over the United States” to work at the Sausalito shipyard during WWII.

(marincitygov.org, n.d., par.1). What is unique about Marin City is its history of racial integration and segregation. Fueled by the onset of war, Marin City was America’s first racially integrated housing project, home to about 10% of Southern blacks, 85% of Midwestern whites and a small population (5%) of Chinese immigrants (marincitygov.org,n.d, par 4).

Consequently, after the war there was no need for temporary housing units anymore or Marin City, so many of the white ship-builders moved to other areas in Marin County. However, African Americans ship-builders and their families who had migrated from the south fought for permanent residency in the city, mostly because of the racially discriminatory laws thwarting housing opportunities in other areas of Marin (marincity.org, n.d., par.4). As Reverend Fred Small, a pastor at Peoples Inter-Cities Fellowship puts it “Black people were not welcome

anywhere else in the county at the time” (Dornhelm, n.d, par.4). Since then, Marin City has gone from mostly white to mostly black, with a unique history of black community development, yet a persisting pattern of racial isolation. According to Borenstein (2000), author of “Marin City U.S.A: What Lessons Can Be Learned”:

The end of the war caused an unfortunate repercussion in Marin City: shipbuilding jobs disappeared. African Americans could not easily relocate to find jobs like their white and Asian American counterparts. Real estate agreements at this time often contained discriminatory covenants that prevented African Americans from buying homes in the area. During the 1940’s and 1950’s, the population of Marin City dwindled to 1,300 and its racial composition shifted to 90 percent African American. Increasingly, Marin City became isolated from the rest of the county because of the racial composition and economic predicament of its residents. (p.7)

Although Marin City has an interesting history as the country’s first location of racial integration as well as a rich history of black community development, the isolation of black Marin City residents and the corresponding levels of economic hardship persist to this day.

### **The Canal District of San Rafael**

The Canal District of San Rafael is both an industrial and residential neighborhood located in central Marin County. Like Marin City, the Canal began as a neighborhood offering up a slice of the American Dream. Tom Wilson, executive director of the Canal Alliance, the largest non-profit serving the neighborhood, notes that “the area was first developed in the 1950s and 1960s as apartments for young couples and new college graduates...largely studios and small apartments not really intended for families” (Dornhelm, n.d., par.13).

As times changed, so did the demographics of the area, transforming it almost suddenly into an immigrant neighborhood. It was after the Vietnam War that this shift took place. Numerous refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia fled to California, many of whom came to the Canal for low-end job opportunities (Dornhelm, n.d., par. 14). Civil war in Guatemala and El Salvador during the 1980s led to an influx of refugees to the area, changing the demographics once again. “Today, almost half of all Latinos in Marin County live in the Canal area, according to a 2009 U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development investigative report” (According to Dornhelm, (n.d.),par.16). Similar to Marin City, residents of the Canal District often face levels of extreme economic hardship. In *A Portrait of Marin*, a county-wide statistical assessment of standard of living in Marin County, Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012) measure the Human Development Index of Marin County communities, “a composite measure of well-being and opportunity made up of health, education, and income indicators” (12). The authors found that the Canal District measures with an index score of 3.18, the lowest in the county and lower than the score of West Virginia (p.16).

### ***Connections and Disconnects***

Both Marin City and the Canal District have distinctive histories, but there are commonalities. Most importantly, both neighborhoods fought against the grain and established themselves as centers of diversity in an all-white and exclusive county. Residents of the old Marin City developed a sense of community in face of racial discrimination and segregation, one that still persists today. The Canal district blossomed into a culturally and ethnically vibrant community, despite original development plans. As amazing as these histories are, there is a darker side to acknowledge. Massey & Denton (2001) argue that:

Because of the close connection between social and spatial mobility, segregation also perpetuates poverty. One of the primary means by which individuals improve their life chances—and those of their children, is by moving to neighborhoods with higher home values, safer streets, higher quality schools and , and better services” (p 14).

Black and Latino residents living in Marin City and the Canal district continue to be isolated within impoverished neighborhoods and this isolation perpetuates social inequality by inhibiting upper social mobility among these groups.

### ***Indicators of Inequity: Education, Income and Structural Inequality***

Marin City and the Canal District of San Rafael not only serve as Marin’s main centers of ethnic diversity but they also represent the majority of the county’s low-income residents. Part of my argument reiterates the fact that much of the inequity that can be measured in Marin today is the result of residential segregation; that “barriers to spatial mobility are barriers to social mobility” (Massey & Denton, 2001, p. 14). As the majority of African-Americans live in Marin City and the majority of Latinos in the Canal District, we can measure indicators of inequity across geographic and ethnic boundaries.

For the purpose of this paper, I will examine disparities in education, income and residential quality as they affect African-Americans and Latinos living in racially segregated and impoverished communities in Marin. Research suggests that access to better housing opportunities promotes education attainment, better standard of living and general wellbeing among low-income individuals (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, Carr et al, 2010). However, because the majority of African-Americans and Latinos in Marin are residentially segregated in low-income neighborhoods, social mobility for the majority of these groups in Marin remains stagnant (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, p.50).

### *Education Attainment Disparity in Marin*

There is abundant literature on the link between education achievement and social mobility. According to S. Burd-Sharps & K. Lewis (2010), “Considerable empirical evidence demonstrates the importance of access to knowledge for human well-being...It is decisive for breaking the cycle of poverty across generations” (p.34). In Marin, education standards are considerably noteworthy when compared to state and national standards. Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012) reveal that “Marin schools consistently rank the highest in the state in standard measures such as test scores and drop put rates” ( p. 33). However, a careful analysis of educational achievement in Marin reveals that African-Americans and Latinos in the county rank the lowest in educational attainment compared to white and Asian-American residents. Evidence suggests that residential segregation thwarts the access of low income, minority students to good quality education (Carr et al, 2010, p.23).

For African- Americans in Marin, educational achievement in high school and college is actually better than the national average. According to Burd-Sharps and Lewis, (2012) “Adult African-Americans are somewhat more likely to have graduated from high school than African-Americans nationally (83.2 percent versus 80.7 percent) and have comparable or higher rates of degree attainment at all levels of education as well” (p.36). Although this seems promising, post-secondary education attainment rates among African-Americans in Marin is a different picture. In rates of bachelor’s and graduate degrees, the attainment rate of African-Americans in Marin are three times as low when compared to white and Asian-American residents (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, p.36).

Yet, Latinos in Marin experience the most disparity in educational achievement. Less than two-thirds of all Latinos in Marin have completed high school, however that rate is largely

attributed to the rate of low immigrant education (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, 36). The table below illuminates the educational achievement rates by ethnic make-up drawn from *A Portrait of Marin*, showing clearly the disparity in education among African-American and Latinos in Marin and its impact on income.

	Less than High School (%)	At Least High School Diploma (%)	At Least Bachelor's Degree (%)	Graduate or Professional Degree (%)	School Enrollment (%)	Median Earnings (2010 Dollars)
<b>California</b>	19.5	80.5	29.7	10.7	90.0	31,551
<b>Marin</b>	7.8	92.2	53.9	22.4	96.2	44,246
1. Marin Whites	2.7	97.3	60.7	25.5	100.0	51,462
2. Marin Asian Americans	7.6	92.4	61.5	24.2	100.0	43,534
3. Marin African Americans	16.8	83.2	21.8	8.4	100.0	31,608
4. Marin Latinos	37.3	62.7	20.3	8.2	79.00	23,795

This data shows that African-Americans and Latinos rank lowest in educational attainment. But what is the relationship between education and segregation in Marin City and the Canal District of San Rafael? I argue that the segregation of these two groups in impoverished communities may impede education attainment and upward social mobility. More specifically, neighborhood quality and housing conditions may have profound impacts on education outcome. Referring to this relationship in their research, Carr et al reveal:

Their communities usually reflect conditions of distress...housing inadequacy and decay, weak and failing infrastructure and critical lack of mentors and jobs...all of which affect school resource but also connections to networks that can help them out of neighborhood poverty into the world of economic and social success. (Segregation: *The Rising Costs for America*, 2008, p. 129)

In Marin, where you live may determine your educational success; concentrations of race and poverty in neighborhoods shape educational attainment.

Conversely, housing opportunities that allow low-income children and their families to live in middle-class neighborhoods may prove crucial in addressing this disparity in Marin.

According to Carr et al (2008):

A study of Albuquerque, New Mexico...revealed positive outcomes when low-income children...are moved to high income neighborhoods and schools...Despite their family circumstances...children in public housing living in middle class neighborhoods show measurable improvement in academic performance over children... in low income neighborhoods. (p.138)

Ultimately, disparity in educational attainment in Marin may relate to Marin's levels of residential segregation; more housing opportunities outside of impoverished communities may

address this disparity. The interplay between segregation and housing opportunities in Marin will be further explored but first let us examine other indicators of inequity as propelled by residential segregation.

### ***Income Inequality and Standard of Living in Marin***

Although Marin is generally considered an affluent county, its rates of income inequality and variation in living standards are staggering compared to the rest of California. Like education attainment, income disparity in Marin country can be measured along the line of race and ethnicity and can have a profound impact on quality of life; with African-Americans and Latinos making significantly less annually than white and Asian-American residents in Marin. One of the most crucial factors to this disparity is the general cost of housing in Marin and the issue of access to fair and affordable housing, both of which can impede social mobility, asset-building and improved standards of living. Ultimately, minorities earn less money in a county that has high housing costs and their inability to access fair housing in a highly praised, liberal county is dumbfounding. Because the majority of African-Americans and Latinos have low incomes, they are spatially isolated to the most impoverished communities and suffer from the most inequity as a result.

To gain a sense of the gravity of the wage disparity issue in the county, it is useful to compare the median income rates of minorities to that of Marin's white residents. The pattern of income disparity mimics that of California in general, with whites making the most, followed by Asian Americans, African Americans and Latinos (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, p.44).

However, a closer examination of these gaps reveals a relationship between ethnicity and income that is unique to Marin. According to Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012), "The earnings gap in Marin between top-earning whites and the second highest earners, Asian Americans, is \$8,000.

This is five times the gap between these two groups in California” (p.44). African Americans have a median income of about \$32,000, compared to a median income of \$51,000 of white residents (Burd-sharps & Lewis, 2012, p.19). But perhaps the most startling disparity is between white and Latino earners, in which the gap is measured to be \$27,667 (Burd-Sharp & Lewis, 2012, p. 44). Ultimately, minorities in Marin County make significantly less compared to white residents, and that rate is significantly higher compared to the same groups measured in other parts of California.

But what does this have to do with segregation and its impact on African-Americans and Latinos in Marin? Although we have established that education attainment is crucial to social mobility, yet limited by residential segregation, income inequality in Marin dictates a lower standard of living among the majority of African-Americans and Latinos in the county. A lower standard of living means residing in the least desirable and most impoverished neighborhoods, with very little chance of upward social mobility and asset-building. Furthermore, income inequality impedes spatial mobility among these groups in Marin, and spatial mobility is determined in large part by Marin’s high housing costs. A high cost of housing is considered “a critical impediment to human development progress” (Burd-Sharps, 2012, p.50).

Related to this issue of housing is access to fair or affordable housing for low-income residents, which is particularly difficult to attain in Marin County. According to Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012):

Marin was recently found in preliminary noncompliance in its efforts to further fair housing according to a 2010 Civil Rights Compliance Review...The hard truth is that long-standing residential segregation by race and income that persists today is in large part due to a shortage of creative solutions and public and political will to change (p.50).

Marin as a political body is deliberately impeding the expansion of fair and affordable housing throughout the county, and by extension perpetuating racial segregation and social disparity. But before we get into this issue of housing in Marin, let us examine an additional indicator of inequity as a result of residential segregation.

### ***Structural Inequality in Marin: Disparities in Residential Quality***

As we have examined, disparities in education and income exist in Marin County, predominantly among African-Americans and Latinos. A large majority of these two groups are geographically concentrated in the two most impoverished neighborhoods: Marin City and the Canal District of San Rafael. The residential quality of these neighborhoods, their “schools, home values, job networks, infrastructure, food stores and transportation options,” socially and economically isolates low-income residents (Troutt, 2014, par. 19). This refers to structural inequality:

Structural Inequality occurs when the fabric of organizations, institutions, governments or social networks contain an embedded bias which provides advantages for some members and marginalizes or produces disadvantages for other members. This can involve property rights, status, or unequal access to health care, housing, education and other physical or financial resources or opportunities. (Belshaw (2011) par. 2)

In Marin County, as exhibited by Marin City and the Canal neighborhoods, structural inequality not only reinforces residential segregation by isolating individuals to low-income status but it also strengthens social inequality in the county by creating barriers to opportunity through lack of community resources.

Structural inequality in Marin can be measured largely in the Canal district of San Rafael, a culturally vibrant community of Latino immigrants and their families. As mentioned before,

Marin's Latino population is heavily concentrated in the Canal district but what is interesting to note is that these residents have the highest labor participation rates in the county (Capps,R. Fix , M., McCabe, K.(2013). Despite this fact, the residential conditions of the Canal District are cause for concern, as residents and their families struggle with poverty in face of poor neighborhood conditions, which thwarts health, education and access to opportunity. According to Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012):

Compared to affluent communities likes Ross and Larkspur, low-income majority-minority neighborhoods tend to have fewer green spaces, street lights, bike paths, sidewalks, playgrounds and full-service grocery stores...Higher rates of crime and violence causes chronic stress and even injury and death, and discourage outdoor exercise. Services, from education to transportation, tend to be of poorer quality. (p.30)

Low-income majority-minority neighborhoods like the Canal district can have profound impacts on mental and physical health; this coupled with disparities in education and income inhibits social mobility.

Like the Canal District, Marin City also suffers from extreme levels of structural inequality compared to Marin's other neighborhoods. Suffering from high rates of crime, drug-trafficking and poverty, Marin City stands out in the mostly white, affluent county. According to Marin City Health and Wellness Center (n.d):

Marin City is home to county's largest Public Housing Project with over 800 residents, many of them impoverished...Residents suffer higher morbidity and mortality rates and experience a higher incidence of hypertension, diabetes and other chronic diseases than any of the surrounding communities. (par.1)

In Marin City, where the county's largest numbers of public housing units are concentrated, the poor health of African-American residents can be largely attributed to the structure of the community; where access to full-service grocery stores is limited. According to Laith Agha, reporter from *Marin Independent Journal* (2013), "The only store with food within walking distance, other than fast-food restaurants, is a CVS drug store. There's a Mollie Stone's Market about a mile away in Sausalito, but it's higher price point makes it a challenge for lower-income shoppers" (par.22).

Neighborhood conditions that impede health, safety and general wellbeing naturally tie into the larger disparities, such as education and income, present in the Marin City and the Canal District. The spatial isolation of African-Americans and Latinos in these two neighborhoods places a social and economic burden on these groups that limits upward social mobility. Therefore, residential segregation is integral to the levels of social disparity measured in Marin County among these groups.

The 2009 HUD Audit of Marin County, an investigation that revealed Marin's noncompliance with fair housing and civil rights laws, suggest that residential segregation in Marin County is a huge problem; it's a problem of social inequality (Dornhelm, 2011, Par.4). Clearly, people of color isolated within the Canal and Marin City neighborhoods suffer the most inequity in Marin County with regards to education, income and general wellbeing. The conditions of these neighborhoods perpetuate these disparities, isolating low-income individuals in a perpetual cycle of poverty. Structural inequality is the foundation for much of the disparities that can be measured in the majority-minority neighborhoods of Marin County today.

Outside of these neighborhoods, Marin County seems to be flourishing, leading the nation in standards of income, education and health. How interesting that such a liberal county

that is both revered for its quality and social consciousness reflects such a detrimental level of segregation and social inequality. As we examine the housing controversy and its relationship to segregation , we will also delve more deeply into the dichotomy of Marin levels of social inequity and its apparent liberal values.

The issue of lack of fair and affordable housing outside of impoverished communities is central to the disparities experienced by low-income minorities in Marin. Furthermore, Marin's noncompliance with expanding more fair and affordable housing opportunities for low-income residents throughout the county seems to be perpetuating residential segregation and social inequity. In the next section we examine this issue further and investigate more in depth Marin's fair and affordable housing dilemma.

### **3. The Perpetuation of Segregation:**

#### **Marin's Fair and Affordable Housing Controversy**

“Denial of access to housing is arguably the single most powerful tool to undermine and marginalize the upward mobility of a people”

- James H. Carr and Nadine K. Kutty (*Segregation: The Rising Costs for Inequality*)

Fair and affordable housing programs are crucial to addressing growing populations in America, particularly in a state as expensive as California. But what is fair and affordable housing? According the U.S Department of Urban Development, “a home is affordable if a household pays no more than 30 percent of its gross income on a mortgage, rent and utilities” (Green, n.d., par.12). Fair housing refers to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, advertising and financing of housing (Rucker et al, 2010, 702). Fair and affordable housing programs work collectively to assure housing opportunities for all individuals in the country, particularly for individuals from a low economic background, for women, families, minorities and the elderly.

The lack of adequate fair and affordable housing options in Marin is sustaining segregation while attempts to provide more options at a state and county level are meeting resistance by factions of Marin's wealthier, white, conservative and oddly enough, liberal residents. This leads to the question: Why are those residents adamantly against fair and affordable housing and are their concerns warranted? Research by Peattie & Tankersley (2011) and the League of Women Voters of Marin County (2013) reveal Marin's blatant housing discrimination practices and the impact on minorities. Additionally, the findings document that the resistance to affordable housing developments is grounded in fear-mongering myths. These myths continue to impede housing opportunities for many residents of color in the county.

A general look into Marin's fair and affordable housing practices reveals a county-wide problem that is a reflection of a deeper issue. Marin, like numerous other jurisdictions, receives funding from the U.S department of Housing and Development to aid non-profit and local government agencies in providing a wide range of services, including housing, to low income residents. In order to receive this funding, Marin is required to collaborate with low-income and minority communities to gather input on how those funds would be best used to serve these protected groups. However, a 2009 HUD audit revealed that "the county did not do enough to ensure that a representative swath of the population was included in the planning process. HUD also found that Marin failed to provide enough racial, ethnic, gender and disability data on those who would benefit" (Green, n.d, par.3). This reveals that Marin County deliberately impeded access to fair and affordable housing programs to low, income minority communities by failing to include these communities in the planning processes. Marin County broke federal fair housing laws, and deliberately marginalized low- income, minority communities.

More importantly, the HUD audit shed light on patterns of residential segregation and housing discrimination occurring in Marin. In response to the audit, Caroline Peattie & Jessica Tankersley of Fair Housing of Marin, an organization that works to establish better fair and affordable housing programs in the Bay Area, authored a report in 2011 titled, "Marin County Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice" (AI). The goal of their research was to identify what was restricting housing choice in Marin County for individuals protected under state and federal fair housing laws. Peattie & Tankersley found that:

There exist substantial impediments to housing choice across the rental, sale and lending markets throughout Marin County. Hispanic, Asian and particularly black households are

not moving into Marin County in appreciable numbers; and those who live here may face differential treatment in the housing market.( p.i)

In addition to the housing discrimination faced by minorities in the county, the report found that low-income housing opportunities already in Marin are concentrated in particular communities, perpetuating segregation:

Disproportionately high numbers of Black residents receive Section 8 housing voucher subsidies or reside in Marin City Public Housing...there is no other public housing in the county. Public housing effectively perpetuates segregation based on race and familial status. Many landlords are reticent to participate in Section 8 program...due to negative stereotypes about recipients of public assistance, which exacerbates the concentration of protected classes in certain neighborhoods and communities. (ii)

Similar to the Chicago Housing Authority in the 1960s, which sparked the infamous 1969 court case of *Gautreaux et al. v. the Chicago Housing Authority*, public housing units in Marin are concentrated in impoverished and racially segregated communities. Ultimately, the report reveals that low-income minorities are purposefully isolated to particular communities through public housing and they are also the most discriminated against in housing markets throughout the county.

Minorities also face discrimination in housing finance in the Marin that perpetuates segregation. Despite the passage of fair housing and fair lending laws in the 1960s, and a decrease in discriminatory practices in sales and rental markets since 1989, extreme levels of discrimination against minority groups remains the same (Carr et al, 2008, p. 11). In Marin, Black and Latino borrowers face higher denial rates and receive a disproportionately smaller share of prime loans (Peattie & Tankersley, 2011, p.iv.) Peattie & Tankersley also discovered

that, “Borrowers residing in predominantly minority tracts in Marin County are more likely to get a high-cost loan than borrowers residing in predominantly white tracts” (p.iv). For low-income and minority residents in Marin, housing discrimination is impeding access to fair and affordable housing. Public housing in Marin has maintained levels of segregation, and predatory and discriminatory lending has inhibited access to better housing outside of racially segregated communities.

Carr et al (2008) argue that, “Years of abusive policies and practices of denial of opportunity have led to severe wealth disparities, including levels of poverty and concentrated poverty, in both Black and Latino communities across the nation” (p.14). Housing policies and practices have perpetuated the segregation of minorities in Marin; and since spatial mobility is connected to social mobility, the segregation of these individuals has led to a perpetual cycle of social inequality in the county. Considering that housing is the centerpiece of opportunity and social mobility, ensuring more affordable and fair housing developments in Marin means addressing the county’s social inequity problem.

The HUD audit and the AI report both encouraged leaders of Marin County to address the county’s fair and affordable housing issues. In particular, the report outlined the specific issues that have impeded the development of affordable, multifamily housing options and what officials should consider in terms of policy change to address these impediments. According to Peattie & Tankersley (2011), “Current zoning ordinances impose onerous restrictions on the development of high-density, multifamily housing, which limits the stock of available rental housing” (p.i).

Ultimately, there are existing policies that limit the construction of more affordable, high-density housing developments in Marin. In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown passed a controversial

bill known as AB 1537, changing Marin’s default density of their housing element from 30 units per acre to 20 units per acre (*marinscope.com*, 2014). The bill was initially introduced by Assemblyman Marc Levine, D-San Rafael, early in 2014, emerging from discussions with local government officials, community leaders and, strangely enough, affordable housing advocates (Hansen, 2014, par.3). According to Supervisor Judy Arnold (2014):

Thanks to the help of Supervisor Adams, AB1537 gained the support of Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, Bridge Housing, Eden Housing, EAH Housing, and Center for Sustainable Neighborhoods. Supervisor Rice was instrumental in getting ABAG to endorse the bill. The broad support from housing advocates played a large role in the ultimate success of the bill.

With the goal of preserving Marin’s low-density appearance, Bill AB 1537 ultimately characterizes Marin County as suburban rather than metropolitan. However, lowering the density effectively inhibits development, and less developments means less affordable housing opportunities in Marin (*housing adovcates.org*, 2014). County leaders are reticent to change zoning laws and this is the result of strong opposition to more housing developments by many of Marin’s residents. The issue has become extremely polarized and highly politicized, with Marin County and its leaders center stage in an extremely contentious affordable housing debate.

### ***Viva La Résistance: Opposition to Affordable Housing***

As illustrated, access to affordable housing is a huge issue in Marin, with very little options existing in the county. This situation impacts low-income individuals and families but also working and middle class families. According to “Dispelling the Myths Surrounding Affordable Housing” (2013), a report issued by the League of Women Voter of Marin County:

An income of at least \$4600 a month or \$55000 a year is needed for rent and utilities on a one-bedroom apartment. These rents would exclude many of Marin's residents with service-sector jobs: EMTs and paramedics (\$45,470), preschool teachers (\$37,250) and bank tellers (\$29,200). Two-thirds of all Marin employees earn less than the \$55,176 annual income needed to rent a median one-bedroom apartment. (p.2)

Even more problematic is the astounding amount of resistance to the creation of more affordable housing developments. Despite the overwhelming need for more affordable housing options, a large faction of Marin residents continue to vigorously fight this perceived threat against their communities. According to Chris McManus (2014), a reporter at Project Censored, "In efforts to oppose affordable housing...a peculiar coalition of open space environmentalists, property-rights neo-libertarians, some progressive democrats and tea-party reactionaries has formed. This coalition in Marin County has been referred to as ... 'The Green Tea Party'" (par.5). This anti-affordable housing coalition cuts across political and ideological lines, uniting those who are fearful of the development of affordable housing projects.

But what are they afraid of? Opponents of affordable housing developments have continued to spout the same fears and concerns, quite angrily, at county supervisor meetings. One individual angrily shouted at Supervisor Susan Adams about developments in Lucas Valley and Marinwood, "It looks like you volunteered us for the ghetto, basically" (Hansen, 2013, par.11). Such views consider affordable housing to be a detriment to the tradition and vitality of Marin communities; fears centered on high-density complexes and overcrowded neighborhoods, the lowering of property values, the rise of crime, impact on schools, and the general increase of traffic (*marinlwv.org*, 2013).

Citizen Marin, a prominent anti-affordable housing advocate group, exists to support “individual leaders and groups as they wake up to the threats of overdevelopment, congestion, and a weakened infrastructure...[They]address community challenges regarding land use, zoning, transportation, and state mandates for housing” (*citizenmarin.org*, par.1). Groups like Citizen Marin have rallied many residents against increasing affordable housing developments and their voices have put unyielding pressure on county officials. Are their concerns warranted? An analysis of the major concerns of anti-affordable housing advocates, such as: high-density, lowered property values, increase in crime rates, to name a few, may provide insight to the issue.

### ***Myths of Affordable Housing: High Density, Property Values and Crime***

On the surface, resistance to fair and affordable housing in Marin seems rational in a county that has remained largely undeveloped, despite population growth. However, research suggests that conceptions surrounding affordable housing are grounded in myth rather than reality (LWV, 2013, & *hcd.ca.gov*, n.d.) This section focuses on three of the myths that perpetuate fears: 1) the concerns over high-density, 2) lowered property values and 3) the increase in crime. Although there are many fears surrounding affordable housing, these are the most prominent.

#### **High Density**

High-density is a term often thrown about by anti-affordable housing advocates, conjuring up images of densely populated, inner-city slums. However, the reality is that high density in Marin would be quite different than high-density in city communities. In their report, Marin LWV (2013) concluded that:

Marin's "high density" would be low density elsewhere in the region's more urban areas... To protect the 83% of the county's protected open space and agriculture, pioneer planning in Marin in 1973 focused development along the 101 corridor where densities would be higher to accommodate economic vitality, environmental protection and equitable access to housing. The key elements to successful and pleasing high-density developments of 20 to 30 units per acre are proper planning and design that complement and blend into a neighborhood and remain well maintained .This is the model Marin continues to follow today... (p.5)

Fears centered on high-density developments by many anti-affordable housing advocates seem to conjure up images of urban ghettos. But in reality, Marin is far from the densities we see in urban cities and much of the development in Marin today is geared toward preserving Marin's open, natural spaces and quaint townships, not enveloping them.

### **Property Values**

Similarly, there are major concerns around the lowering of property values as a result of affordable housing developments introduced into Marin communities. However, numerous studies over the last few decades suggest that affordable housing has no negative impact on property values (League of Women Voters of Marin, 2013, p). In fact, according to the LWV (2013):

Most research... finds that such housing results in slight increases of property values of homes in surrounding neighborhoods. One such study states that no study in California or elsewhere has ever shown that affordable-housing developments reduce property values...Key reasons for affordable housing's beneficial impact on property values are

that contemporary developments combine attractive design with professional tenant and property management and maintenance. (p.5)

Similarly, according to a report issued by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (n.d.), titled “Myths and facts about affordable and high-density housing”, there have been numerous studies on the impact of affordable housing developments on property values, and no single study has ever established such a relationship between the two (p.5).

According to the report:

The truth is the single most significant factor affecting property values is the preexisting value of the land in a given community or area. This in turn is based on supply and demand, proximity to major urban centers, nearby attractions (beachfront property, panoramic views), any negative factors such as environmental contaminants, and availability of adequate infrastructure and services...Properly maintained affordable housing developments, designed and built with sensitivity to the architectural and aesthetic standards desired by the community, may even increase property values. (p.5)

Ultimately, research suggests that property values are not really impacted by affordable housing developments, and considering the affluence and beauty of Marin, affordable housing developments would probably add value to properties if executed to the standards of communities.

### **Crime**

Another myth of affordable housing, one grounded in prejudice and bias, is that of increased crime by the presence of affordable housing developments and the type of people that they will attract (Dovey, 2014, par.29). In fact, there is no study or evidence to show an increase of crime or number of criminal offenders “when non-profit owned and managed housing

developments are introduced into the community” (League of Women Voters of Marin, (2013), p.9). In addition such developments have guide lines and restrictions to maintain community safety. The League of Women Voters of Marin found that:

Nonprofit-owner affordable housing being built today is very well managed, usually with active on-site resident managers and security measures with no tolerance for antisocial or criminal behavior. In addition to criminal background checks, they require tenants to have good credit and good references from prior landlords. (p.8)

In addition, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (n.d.) found that:

Density does not cause crime. For many years social scientists have asked whether high density housing causes crime. Not one study has shown any relationship between population or housing density and violent crime rates...In neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment, particularly those areas lacking jobs and community services, crime can be higher. (p.6)

Ultimately, the myth of increased of crime as a result of high-density affordable housing is not substantiated by research.

In a place like Marin, one of the most affluent counties in California, affordable housing would not transform the county into an inner-city slum, nor would it lower property values or increase crime in already well-guarded and highly desirable communities. Although there is a need for more affordable housing, not just for low income minorities, but for middle class and working class individuals who work in Marin, many residents are aggressively campaigning against such developments. Fears based on high-density, decreased property values and increased crime, among other concerns, are not grounded in fact, yet and are often used to

perpetuate more resistance among Marin residents. This resistance to providing more housing opportunities throughout Marin is contributing to the segregation of low-income minorities. In the next section, we dig deeper into this resistance to affordable housing and come to the root-cause of segregation in Marin.

## 4. Behind the Resistance:

### Dysconscious Racism, Fear of the ‘Other’ and Preserving White Privilege

“Residential Segregation has proved to be the most resistant change of all realms—perhaps because it is so critical to racial change in general.” — Thomas Pettigrew (1966)

As previously detailed, Marin County has detrimental fair and affordable housing practices and policies that perpetuate the segregation and social inequity of low-income minorities. Despite this, many Marin residents postulate that they are in fact socially conscious citizens, often aligning themselves with progressive or liberal politics. In the online magazine *American Thinker*, Norman Rogers (2012) sums up the political reality of Marin County residents:

The population of Marin is overwhelmingly white, Democrat, and financially well-off. In 2008, nearly 80% of the vote went to Obama...In Marin there are shared values, and it is expected that the residents will toe the line. One of those shared values is a kind of make-believe tolerance. The reality is that the inhabitants of Marin are just as conformist and narrow-minded as are the inhabitants of flyover small towns ridiculed by Hollywood or Ivy-League sociology professors. (par.3, 6 and 10)

Despite being nominally progressive or liberal, anti-affordable housing activists often portray reactionary politics when it comes to local issues such as affordable housing. According to Rogers (2012) “It seems that the typical resident of Marin wants everything to remain exactly the same as it was on the day he moved to Marin...Promoting low-income housing in Marin County is guaranteed to meet massive opposition ” (par.10 & 15). Marin County is a very desirable county to live, escaping the congestion and crime of nearby Bay Area cities while offering up a

safe haven of quaint townships, exemplary public schools and pristine natural beauty to upper income residents. As a result, numerous anti-affordable housing advocates in Marin often express a desire to preserve Marin or a perceived quality of life against the threats of affordable housing developments.

Rejecting any racist motivation behind their virulent campaigns, anti-affordable housing advocates claim, as we will examine further, that they are not opposed to providing more housing opportunities for low-income residents but instead are concerned about how these developments will impact their own quality of life. Therefore, resistance to affordable housing appears to be more about resistance to change and the cultivation of a life-style that has attracted many residents to the area; an all-white and traditionally exclusive area. Marin residents living outside of racially impoverished areas recognize the value of their spaces, the safe neighborhoods, excellent schools, high property values and low levels of congestion—all traditionally characteristic of middle to upper middle class white communities. Therefore, anti-affordable housing advocates are preserving the privileges of their spaces, and in their movement for preservation, they associate the development of affordable housing, and those who come along with affordable housing, as threats to those privileges.

In the following section, I will examine the root-causes of the resistance to affordable housing in Marin County as it relates to issues of class and race. A critical analysis of public commentary regarding affordable housing reveals that elements of dysconscious racism and the fear of the racialized ‘other’, found among many anti-affordable housing advocates, contribute to the conscious and unconscious aim to preserve white spaces and ultimately white privilege from low-income minorities. (King, J., (1991), King & Wheelock, (1997), Hubbard, P., (2005)).

## Dysconscious Racism

Despite Marin's liberal façade, many anti-affordable housing advocates perceive the concept of affordable housing as an encroachment on their communities and quality of life, rather than viewing affordable housing as a means to promote the quality of life for others. In fact, the preservation of Marin, or preserving "our quality of life", is often the tag line used by many anti-affordable housing advocates. In "Marin Voice: Building more housing in Marin is no guarantee of affordability", columnist Niccolo Caldararo (2014) wrote on pro-housing advocates:

Speaking for the people of Marin, they think they know better. But the effect of efforts by CALM — Coalition for a Livable Marin — and groups like it, are not to build the housing choices they espouse, but rather to weaken environmental protections for wildlife and our quality of life.(Par.2)

The concept of preserving Marin also suggests preserving the legacy of segregation and social inequity among minorities that has haunted the county since WWII. As a result, those who are resistant to affordable housing seem to be uncritical of the reality facing many low-income minorities in the county. The apathy surrounding the status of low-income minorities and their preservationist attitudes suggest that even liberal Marin residents have a complex relationship with race and social inequality.

In her paper "Dysconscious Racism: ideology, identity and the miseducation of teachers", Joyce E. King (1991) coins the term *dysconscious racism*, which is "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p.135). Anti-affordable housing advocates seem unworried about the socio-economic isolation of Marin's minorities. Furthermore, Marin residents seem to feel comfortable with low-income, people of color working in Marin to provide

services including child care, landscaping and food service. According to Burd-Sharps and Lewis, 60% of Marin's workforce commutes in daily and half of those individuals make less than 40,000 a year, thwarting their access to housing in Marin (p.51). The reality is Marin residents accept a hierarchy that allows low-income minorities to serve Marin through various service jobs. Yet, many residents scoff at the idea of providing these crucial groups better housing opportunities in the county. Both of these factors suggest elements of dysconscious racism in the resistance to affordable housing, in which low-income minority workers are utilized for their services by wealthier residents, but are often disregarded and barred from better housing opportunities. Consciously or not, anti-affordable housing advocates accept this existing order, effectively accepting social inequity.

In "Marin Struggles to Meet Fair Housing Laws" reporter Rachel Dornhelm (2011) interviewed Dick Sportswood, a columnist from the *Marin IJ*, in which he illuminates this attitude:

We are going to follow state and federal laws but we are not going to collapse because some bureaucrats don't like the racial composition of the county...I can't afford to live in Belvedere, I can afford to live in another part of Marin County...And well maybe that is luck or how you have been raised; background, luck but that's life, that is America.

(par.22 &24).

Not only does Dickwood accept the racial composition of the county, the norm being minorities segregated to the most impoverished areas, but he also seems to justify the inequity of individuals in Marin by chocking it up to background and luck. King (1991) asserts that:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness...but an impaired consciousness or

distorted way of thinking about race...Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others. (p.135).

Comments like Dickwood's are dysconsciously racist, because they accept the levels of social inequality occurring in Marin County as a naturally occurring phenomenon, justifying the marginalization of low-income minorities. The danger of dysconscious racism is that it justifies racial disparities by accepting the 'existing order of things.' Anti-affordable housing advocates do not want Marin to change, even if that means denying housing opportunities to those most in need.

Anti-affordable housing advocates are predominantly concerned about preserving their own quality of life because they feel entitled to it; they have the money, they have the right. Yet, when it comes to the thought of enhancing the quality of life among Marin's marginalized through affordable housing, anti-housing advocates began to feel threatened but such a prospect. But, what exactly are they threatened by? Another element to their resistance is not just about affordable housing projects and their effect on the quality of Marin but rather those individuals who might come along with affordable housing.

### **Fear of the Racialized 'Other'**

As noted before, Marin County is predominantly white, with the majority of minorities segregated in specific communities. Therefore, if a racial minority found themselves in an all-white town or community in Marin, they instantaneously become the 'other'. An 'other' is an ideological construction that defines a person who deviates from the norm (*yorku.ca*, n.d.) The

racialized ‘other’ is someone who deviates from the norm of whiteness, which can refer to skin color as well as cultural assumptions about skin color.

The depiction of the racialized ‘other’ in the anti-affordable housing rhetoric of Marin paints low-income minorities as individuals who may potentially destabilize local ways of life. A critical analysis of public opinions and comments drawn from town hall and supervisor meetings suggests that local opposition also stems from a fear of the racialized ‘other’ and ultimately racial integration.

In one Planning Commission meeting, during the summer of 2013, regarding the approved plans for housing zoning that would accommodate low-income individuals and families along Highway 101, angry anti-affordable housing residents packed the room, protesting possible sites in Tam Valley, Strawberry St. Vincent- Silveria Tract (Johnson, (2013), par. 2). According to Johnson (2013), a reporter at *Marin Independent Journal*, “Angry residents of neighborhoods including Lucas Valley, Los Ranchitos, Marinwood, Strawberry and Tam Valley...told the Planning Commission that packing their backyards with new neighbors will hurt the quality of life, if not impose health and safety dangers” (par. 7). Anti-affordable housing advocates always talk about protecting their ‘quality of life’ and this, deliberately or not, implies that there is a group of people they are trying to protect themselves from.

In “Group threat and social control: race, perceptions of minorities and the desire to punish,” Ryan D. King & Darren Wheelock (2007) examine perceptions of minorities in relation to punitive attitudes in the U.S. The authors reveal that :

Dominant groups fear that subordinate groups will upset existing social arrangements, thus spurring feelings of prejudice and out-group hostility. In other words, ‘The greater the sense of threat to the dominant group's prerogatives,

the more likely are members of the dominant group to express prejudice against threatening outsiders.’ (p. 1257)

Drawing from public commentary regarding the ‘other’, we find that many anti-affordable housing advocates in Marin feel threatened by the presence of low-income minority residents, and some are becoming more vocal about their prejudices of these individuals.

When Novato was revising its housing element for the 2010-2011 year, a public policy document on housing needs, public commentary exploded, characterizing low-income residents as “criminals, gang members, sex offenders and ‘high maintenance individuals’ who would decimate police resources and shuffle under-performing students into public schools... ‘ghettoizing a town that used to be a nice place to live’” (Dovey, (2013), par. 29). These assumptions imply that low-income minorities, individuals who would largely benefit from affordable housing, are automatically considered dangers to Marin communities.

In “The white space”, Elijah Anderson (2015) argues that, “whites and others often stigmatize anonymous black persons by associating them with the putative danger, crime, and poverty of the iconic ghetto, typically leaving blacks with much to prove before being able to establish trusting relations with them” (p.13). Ultimately in Marin, like many places in America, racial minorities are often stigmatized because of the color of their skin and by the cultural assumptions surrounding their skin color. Low-income minorities are often characterized as dangerous, lewd, and uneducated among other negative attributes, and such attitudes are used as talking-points in Marin town hall meetings to perpetuate the fear of the racialized ‘other’ and the resistance to affordable housing.

Interestingly enough, there is hardly any representation of low-income residents and minorities at town hall meetings addressing affordable housing, simply because such

environments are actually hostile to these individuals. Rachel Dovey, reporter at the *Bohemian*, notes (2013) that African-American John Young, leader of Marin Grassroots Leadership Network “recalled talking to a colleague during a public meeting—before someone called the sheriff and asked that he be kicked out (par. 14). In a similar meeting, an Asian American man who spoke up for affordable-housing was heckled by the words “you don’t belong here” (Dovey, (2013), par.16). Another instance of this can be seen with San Rafael resident Isela Diaz, who attended a town-hall meeting in San Rafael in 2013 organized by *Citizen Marin*. Having never heard *Citizen Marin*, Diaz had hoped the meeting would be a positive discussion, commenting, “I thought people would come and gather with ideas...” (*San Rafael Patch*, 2013). Instead, Diaz sat quietly listening to the negative aspects of affordable housing, in a room void of many of those in need the housing. Ultimately, the fear of the racialized ‘other’ has ignited attitudes of prejudice against minorities in the affordable housing debate, where minorities are ultimately seen as problematic outsiders who have no seat at the discussion table in Marin.

Some anti-affordable housing advocates have become bolder and more vocal about their fears and angers at the possibility of having low-income, minority neighbors; ultimately expressing the most racist sentiments. In a 2014 letter to supervisor Judy Arnold, M.D. Robert L. Freinkel of San Rafael writes:

We do not want ill-behaved ignorant irresponsible welfare landfill dumped in our communities to trash our neighborhoods and schools... Diversity is supposed to be good for you like Brussel sprouts and castor oil. If someone wants, they are welcome to it is such wonderful communities such a Vallejo (unpaved streets, nonfunctioning traffic lights) Richmond, Oakland. They can find all the diversity and murders and crimes they

want. We do not need eight year olds murdered at sleepovers and two year old toddlers killed in front of the parents' food truck. (*fishbob.org*, 2014)

After reading this letter aloud at a supervisor meeting, Supervisor Arnold asked her colleagues to call out any racist and classist comments within the affordable housing discussion (*fishbob.org*, (2014)). As they enter the political domain, comments from Marin residents like Freinkel's can be a real liability in Marin's struggle to meet fair-housing and civil rights laws. As the affordable housing debate heats up, with anti-affordable housing advocates feeling increasingly threatened by the prospect of having low-income neighbors of color, racial prejudice appears to be increasing.

Another example of this extreme racism can be seen with anti-affordable housing and anti-illegal immigration activist Jerome Ghigliotti, in which he told city council members of Novato that "he wished one of their family members would be raped or murdered by an illegal immigrant so that the council would recognize the seriousness of his concerns (Rogers, (2011), par. 8). Although the attitudes of Freinkel and Ghigliotti are very extreme and are in no way representative of all anti-affordable housing advocates, the often discriminatory perception of potential affordable housing residents as threats to the safety and quality of Marin neighborhoods suggest an irrational fear of the racialized 'other'.

### **The Preservation of White-Spaces and White Privilege**

As noted before, Marin is a county to be desired; home to expansive areas of natural beauty, safe neighborhoods, quaint townships, great education among various other wonderful features. Anti-affordable housing advocates know well the benefits of Marin County and that is exactly what they are trying to preserve in their struggle against affordable housing. As we have

found, the struggle is really against the threat of the racialized ‘other’ encroaching upon that way of life.

This struggle for preservation against the racialized ‘other’, whether consciously or not, is actually the struggle for white privilege, or a quality of life historically designated for white people. In “Accommodating Otherness: anti-asylum centre protest and the maintenance of white privilege” Phil Hubbard (2005) examines community opposition to proposed housing for asylum seekers in Nottinghamshire, U.K., conceptualizing NIMBIYSM (“Not in my backyard”), as white privilege. Drawing from multiple schools of thought, Hubbard (2005) reveals:

NIMBYism maintains white ethnic privilege by effectively constructing whiteness as the unnamed norm against which Otherness is gauged. Even when it is not characterized by hostile racism, NIMBYism may therefore be a key means by which white populations protect the benefits of their whiteness (such as the enhanced value of their homes and properties in relation to those in ‘non-white’ areas). (p.54)

When anti-affordable housing advocates claim that they want to preserve Marin, they actually want to protect the benefits and image of their position in society. This is why they are so adamantly against affordable housing and its projected occupants, because they consider low-income, minority status to be a character flaw which would devalue Marin communities and their quality of life as a result. Hubbard asserts (2005) that “people seek to defend their body, home and neighborhood in response to the incursion of abject Others who appear to threaten the boundaries of individual and collective identity” (p.53). The reality is low-income minorities do not fit in the perfect, white spaces of Marin County. Their mere presence, equated with the structural degradation commonly associated with the ‘ghetto’, is a threat to white spaces.

Resistance to affordable housing is largely about the preservation of white spaces. Anderson (2015) argues that, “ For black people in particular, white spaces vary in kind, but their most visible and distinctive feature is their overwhelming presence of white people and their absence of black people” (13). But the concept of white spaces is not just about racial composition but the benefits of whiteness or white privilege within those spaces. When anti-housing advocates talk about preserving their quality of life while expressing prejudice attitudes against potential low-income minority neighbors, they actually feel threatened by a loss of status by the presence of these groups.

Anderson (2015) asserts that “black skin is equated with lower class status and white skin is with privilege” (19). As we have seen within town hall meetings, many Marin residents fear the “ghettoization” of Marin County, associating low-income minorities with community degradation. Inviting low-income minorities into Marin’s white spaces would fundamentally change the hegemonic structure of white privilege in Marin, a structure that has been consistently maintained for many decades.

The affordable housing debate in Marin is less about changing landscapes and more about a change in social structure and scene; a change that many residents are fearful of. Anti-affordable housing advocates often express a desire to preserve Marin or a quality of life in face of affordable housing developments. However, the preservation of Marin as it is today also means the uncritical acceptance of the segregation and social inequity of the county’s minority populations. How can a county that prides itself on being the most liberal in nation turn a blind eye to the rampant levels of social inequality happening in its own backyard?

Since the end of WWII, minorities in Marin, especially low-income individuals, have been restricted from accessing these white spaces, effectively segregated to the most undesirable

and impoverished areas. Today, local opposition to affordable housing, whether consciously or dysconsciously, continues to perpetuate the segregation of low-income minorities in order to protect these spaces from racialized 'other' and cultivate white privilege.

## **Conclusion**

Minorities in Marin have historically endured segregation, and the impact of that experience has limited such groups in numerous ways. Segregated to the least desirable and impoverished areas of Marin, African-Americans and Latinos living in Marin City and the Canal District struggle to access a decent education, a better income and in general a better quality of life. I find this upsetting, considering that outside of these communities, Marin residents appear to be thriving in every way. If only low-income minorities had access to affordable housing outside of impoverished communities, they stand a chance of thriving too. I live outside of these impoverished communities, and as someone who comes from a similar background, I can attest to the improvement of my quality of life; I'll be the first one to graduate from college in my family.

But many Marin residents do not want to provide more affordable housing; the HUD investigation established clearly what Marin thinks about access to fair and affordable housing. Anti-affordable housing advocates are aggressively campaigning against the development of more affordable housing, despite the overwhelming need of not just low-income minorities but working class families and individuals as well. And although anti-affordable housing advocates claim that they are not racist or classist, their efforts seem to be in direct response to the potential of having low-income neighbors. If you examine the rhetoric of anti-affordable advocates in Marin housing closely, you get a sense of what Marin residents really think about low-income minorities, comments of racial prejudice characterizing these individuals as dangerous, lewd and unfit for Marin communities.

But ultimately, I find that anti-affordable housing advocates, however prejudiced they appear, are actually concerned with preserving their white spaces and ultimately white privilege.

Sharing space with low-income minorities is characterized by the more extreme voices as “ghettoization,” drawing on less articulated associations of those who are, perhaps, more politically correct but who, unconsciously or not, share such fears. To avoid this characterization, the discourse becomes less about the racialized ‘other’ and more about preserving whiteness. Marin is a desirable community that has remained largely white throughout its history. Therefore, providing more housing opportunities to low-income minorities throughout the area fundamentally changes the social structure of Marin County. And this is what many residents fear.

So, anti-affordable housing advocates will continue to fight housing opportunities cropping up in their neighborhoods to protect their own quality of life, even if it means denying a better quality of life for others.

Embarking on this research project, I realized that my discomfort living in Marin as a black woman is directly related to the social environment of the county. Marin County is a segregated community and I find myself living right on the divide between white, wealthy residents and low-income minorities. In that space, I have become more aware of the prevalence and severity of social inequity and racial segregation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even in a liberal county like Marin.

I am only one black person among this sea of white faces so I really do not pose any threat, and since I am often serving my neighbors at the local coffee shop I am even less threatening. But here and there, I am reminded of the boundaries that I have crossed. The relentless stares of apprehension and a general standoffish feeling I get from people who pride themselves on a sense of community and friendliness, is enough to let me know that I am not welcomed. It is hard to explain, but when you are the ‘other’, you know.

I wish I could offer solutions to the issue of residential segregation in American society, such as more aggressive policy changes similar to, but more effective than, what we witnessed during the Civil Rights era; I am not sure if that is enough anymore. I want to say open dialogue, especially in liberal Marin, may begin to facilitate a discussion about social inequality in the area, but people do not seem moved by facts here in this county. They are only concerned about *their* quality of life. Ultimately, all I can conclude is that I do not belong here. And that is okay, because I do not want to be a part of a narrow-minded and selfish community that is okay with the marginalization of minorities, of my people. By living in these white spaces, I too accept what is happening to minorities in this county, guilty by association. This, I cannot do anymore. The privileges of these white spaces are simply not worth sacrificing my own identity or sense of ethics. Marin is not that special.

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