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Book Review: Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City

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population and the increasingly urbanized world population, an alternative framing of this aspiration might be, How can these opportunities and their association with attachment to place be sustained in nonfarm places?

Antero Pietila

Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2010. 320 pp. \$28.95 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-56663-843-2

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According to the 2000 Census, African Americans constitute 64 percent of the population in Baltimore. However, in one-half of the city's census tracts, the African American population exceeds 80 percent; and in nearly one-third of census tracts, the proportion is greater than 95 percent. How did Baltimore become so segregated? In *Not in My Neighborhood*, Antero Pietila argues that a history of discriminatory real estate practices is to blame. Pietila, a longtime journalist for the *Baltimore Sun*, traces both individual and government actions that institutionalized residential segregation in Baltimore from the early 1900s to the present. Based on archival research and interviews with real estate agents, developers, and residents, the author provides a detailed account of redlining, restrictive covenants, and related tools used to exclude African Americans from white neighborhoods. *Not in My Neighborhood* provides a useful introduction for planning students and general readers interested in the forces opposing residential integration in Baltimore and other U.S. cities.

Baltimore offers an apt setting for the tortuous story of race-based exclusion in America. The city proudly displays a statue of Roger B. Taney, who called Baltimore home before joining the Supreme Court and authoring the infamous decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), which held that any person descended from slaves was not protected by the Constitution. Baltimore is also the birthplace of Thurgood Marshall, who despite being denied admission to the University of Maryland Law School because of his race would successfully argue the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and would become the first African American to serve on the nation's highest court.

Not in My Neighborhood documents Baltimore's notorious link to housing discrimination: in 1910, the city passed the first law in U.S. history that prohibited African Americans from moving to white neighborhood blocks, that is, residential blocks where whites comprised more than half of residents. According to Pietila, neighborhood separation by race existed in northern cities when the Baltimore residential segregation law was approved. He argues that the explicit use of government power to enforce racial exclusion made Baltimore unique. The 1910 Baltimore residential segregation

law also barred whites from relocating to city blocks where African Americans formed the majority of residents; the goal was not simply discrimination but preventing intermixing and preserving neighborhood stability. The bold action by Baltimore triggered a flood of similar laws from Richmond to Atlanta to Dallas.

The author divides the city's history of housing segregation into three periods: The first opens with the purchase of a row-house in a white neighborhood by an African American lawyer, which triggered the 1910 Baltimore residential segregation law, and ends with the rising demand for housing during World War II. The second period picks up in 1944, describes uneven attempts at integration, and continues through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The final period covers white suburban flight around the 1970s before the story closes just as subprime home mortgages were becoming increasingly popular at the end of the century.

Pietila argues that racial enmity, inspired by support from the eugenics movement, fueled housing discrimination. Furthermore, he contends that Baltimore's history of racial exclusion is emblematic of the nation's experience with residential segregation. The book details how individual home owners, neighborhood groups, real estate agents, and elected officials developed a variety of tools to achieve the geographic separation of the races.

The residential segregation practices outlined in the book can be categorized as either government or individual actions. At the government level, legislative tools like the 1910 Baltimore residential segregation law blatantly used legal force to ensure that African Americans would not occupy white communities in Baltimore. The book recounts other uses of local government power like expulsive zoning, a popular 1950s practice of rezoning predominantly African American residential areas for industrial use. Federal housing programs also served to advance and reinforce residential segregation, but under the guise of providing assistance to citizens. The author chronicles how government wartime housing for African Americans was placed in geographically isolated or environmentally hazardous areas. These actions all remained within the public eye, while government redlining maps were kept secret for many years. The book relates how the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, which guided lending activity during the Great Depression, created maps of investment risk that incorporated neighborhood racial composition into the calculations. The highest risk areas were marked in red; they often included high concentrations of African Americans. While discriminatory laws and public housing programs targeted individuals, redlining targeted capital, which led to massive disinvestment in minority neighborhoods. The author notes that redlined areas developed enduring negative reputations that fostered economic decline.

Local and federal government resourcefulness in preserving segregation was matched only by the ingenuity of Baltimore's residents. Pietila describes how neighbors wrote restrictive covenants, which prohibited the sale or rental of nearby homes

to members of other races or ethnic groups, until the Supreme Court declared such covenants unconstitutional in 1948. More entrepreneurial citizens engaged in blockbusting. The author recounts how real estate agents introduced African American buyers into white communities to instill fear in residents that the neighborhood was undergoing a racial transformation. As a result, white residents fled, selling their homes for a pittance to agents, who turned around and sold those same homes to African Americans at inflated prices.

Not in My Neighborhood is commendable for situating the general practices of residential discrimination within a specific context (Baltimore) and illustrating how local and national government housing actions influenced each other. For readers who are already familiar with redlining, restrictive covenants, and blockbusting, the book effectively uses extensive archival research and interviews with former real estate agents to depict the Baltimore actors who employed these tools. For example, a band of blockbusters called the “Forty Thieves” colluded to purchase homes at public auctions for the cheapest price before reselling the properties. As recently as 1972, Baltimore County Executive Dale Anderson directed real estate agents to inform the police of any property sales made to African Americans. These individuals and related anecdotes enliven the well-trodden story of discrimination and residential segregation.

While many scholars have examined residential segregation in the United States, much of this work has focused on segregation by race. *Not in My Neighborhood* contributes to this literature by highlighting religious segregation in addition to racial segregation: the Baltimore housing market featured separate tiers for whites, African Americans, and Jewish residents. The reader learns that the powerful builder and philanthropist Joseph Meyerhoff blocked fellow Jews from buying or renting homes in his developments. The author also portrays the tense relationship between residents and the tools of real estate exploitation. “What whites condemned as destructive blockbusting, blacks hailed as liberating desegregation, a long-awaited opportunity to move into better housing” (p. 175). Pietila points out that white civil rights leaders opposed blockbusting because it carved an uncomfortably hasty path to integration.

Although the book has many strengths, the author’s claims about the role of the eugenics movement and the generalizability of Baltimore’s experience appear underdeveloped in places. For example, the author states that the similarity between a government official’s risk assessment and eugenicists’ work shows the wide influence of the eugenics movement because nothing in the official’s background revealed a special interest in eugenics. But surely there could be other reasons, like discrimination, for the resemblance. Similarly, the author’s suggestion that Baltimore is representative of the nation’s history of residential segregation seems inconsistent with the city’s special position on the border between the North and the South. The

attention paid to the individual personalities involved in the Baltimore housing market led me to further question if the city’s experience is generalizable.

Lastly, the author maintains that racial animosity led to residential segregation, but this reason does not explain why whites and African Americans often worked together in the real estate market. I offer a possible explanation for the collaboration: profit motives. The desire to make money crossed racial—and political—lines, as shown by the following examples I have taken from the book. First, a white convict formed a real estate company in 1953 with an African American entrepreneur. The company became enormously successful at blockbusting, which it championed as a civil rights imperative. Perhaps overwhelmed by the zeal for desegregation, the company engaged in deception and false advertising; the partners profited handsomely as a result. Second, around the same period, African American leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties purchased house listings from white real estate companies and then sold the properties to African American families. Given the high demand for housing in the African American community, maybe this rare instance of bipartisanship should be unsurprising. Third, an African American attorney, whose purchase of a rowhouse in 1910 launches the historical narrative in this book, was a real estate speculator “motivated by profit” (p. 17). The attorney bought the house from a white seller who could neither find any white tenants nor afford to keep the property vacant. More emphasis on the interplay of various factors influencing the housing market, including financial incentives, would have enriched our understanding of the complex processes that fostered residential segregation in Baltimore.

Despite these concerns, *Not in My Neighborhood* offers a lively, informative portrayal of how real estate practices throughout the twentieth century contributed to the segregated cities we see today. In a brief epilogue, the author voices optimism that increasing demographic diversity in the United States will lead to a more integrated future. After reading about the history of discrimination and the enduring legacy of residential segregation recounted in this book, I think the future will have to wait.

Steven A. Moore

Pragmatic Sustainability: Theoretical and Practical Tools. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010. 312 pp. \$155.00 (hardback); \$35.95 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-0-415-77937-1 (hardback); ISBN-13: 978-0-415-77938-8 (paperback)

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Sustainable development and sustainable management of natural resources are fundamental components of the agreements made at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico. Global climate change discussions took on a more holistic problem-solving approach with this