

Racial segregation was restored across the south,

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Racial segregation in Boston has clear and defined boundaries.

Walk two miles north or south from the center of the South End, a diverse neighborhood characterized by its uniform rows of red-brick structures, and cross the Boston Extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike. Walk two miles north, and one arrives on the brick, narrow, gaslit streets of Beacon Hill, where 86. 8% of the population is white and the per capita income is \$78, 569. Walk two miles south, and one arrives in Roxbury, where 56. 9% of the population is black (whites make up 8. 1%) and the per capita income is just \$18, 998.

Outside Boston, the suburbs are almost entirely white. What happened in Boston in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s to create such a city reflected what was happening in major industrial cities all across the United States. A postwar black Great Migration into northern urban cities was followed by white flight and racist housing policies, and the construction of highways straight through and around urban areas served only to make clearer the physical separation between whites and minorities in metropolitan areas. Whereas urban highways once promised a future of economic prosperity and cultural gathering to Bostonians and other city Americans, in reality, they had the opposite effect. Urban highways racially and economically segregated American cities by facilitating white flight to the suburbs, by destroying local, predominantly minority businesses and communities during construction, and by providing a physical and symbolic barrier between various communities. The construction of highways through and around Boston in the 1950s and 1960s, along with mass movements of blacks into Boston and federal housing guidelines, created two distinct cities. In the end, it was

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these three factors, and not self-segregation, that created the deep racial segregation that exists in the Greater Boston area today. Modern segregation in major northern industrial cities began immediately after the end of the post-Civil War Reconstruction efforts, as white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation was restored across the South, but exploded in the 1940s and the 1950s during the Second Great Migration.

The motivation of migrating blacks remained the same post-Reconstruction and post-WWII: Southern lynching, anti-black riots, Jim Crow racism directed at black WWII soldiers, and white efforts to eliminate black advancement. In 1910, the percentage of blacks living in the South was 89%, and in 1940 this figure stood at 77%. By 1970, this had decreased dramatically to 53% as a result of the Second Great Migration.

Boston reflected the overall pattern of the nation. In 1930, Roxbury as a whole was only about 14% black, and in Boston, blacks remained a small minority until the Second Great Migration. As the black population rapidly increased, they expanded into other parts of Roxbury in search of housing, and later into Dorchester and Mattapan. Even as Boston became blacker and more diverse, segregation in the metropolitan areas continued to rise. As black populations began to increase, whites fled Boston to its outer suburbs. In 1940, Boston was 96. 7% white and just 3. 1% black; in 1960, it was 90.

2% to 9. 1%; in 1980, 70. 0% to 22. 4%. Thus de facto segregation was created: white flight to the suburbs led to increasingly segregated, isolated black populations in inner-cities. Racist federal housing policies directly contributed to the separation between the races. A major part of residential

segregation was redlining, the practice of “ denying or limiting financial services to certain neighborhoods based on racial or ethnic composition”. Although residential segregation had existed before, the formal practice of redlining in the housing industry began with the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934.

A 1936 FHA Underwriting Manual instructed potential lenders to protect themselves and their neighborhoods against “ adverse influences” – defined as “ the infiltration of business and industrial uses, lower-class occupancy, and inharmonious racial groups.” It claimed that this would “ tend to lower the levels of land values and to lessen the desirability of residential areas” and “ if a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same racial classes.” It even went as far to support segregation in education: “ schools... should not be attended in large numbers by inharmonious racial groups”. In 1935, the FHA created “ residential security maps” to appraise neighborhoods and indicate the level of security for mortgage insurance in 239 cities across the United States.

On the maps, the newest areas, those considered “ desirable”, were outlined in green and known as “ Type A” (these were usually white suburbs). “ Still Desirable” neighborhoods were outlined in blue and known as “ Type B”, and “ Declining” areas were labeled “ Type C” and outlined in yellow. “ Type D” neighborhoods, considered the riskiest for investment, were outlined red, and were almost exclusively black. A 1936 FHA map for the Greater Boston area shows Roxbury almost entirely redlined, while large portions of Dorchester and Jamaica Plain are redlined. In the 1950s, as blacks

began settling in the predominantly Jewish American area around Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester from Roxbury to Mattapan, Boston real estate companies and banks developed a blockbusting plan for the area: they convinced white property owners in white neighborhoods to sell their houses for below-market prices by pushing them to believe that racial minorities would soon be moving in, resulting in the “decline” of the neighborhood along with plummeting property values. Along with blockbusting, the Blue Hill Avenue area (and major sections of Roxbury and Dorchester) was redlined so that only the newly arriving African-Americans would receive mortgages for housing in that section. The implementation of these federal policies aggravated residential racial segregation and urban decay.

FHA policies stripped the inner city of middle-class inhabitants while also funneling blacks into racially segregated neighborhoods due to limited housing opportunities. Even when blacks managed to attain property, it was substandard in quality, overcrowded, and had lower assessed property values. Whereas the Underwriting Manual institutionalized racism and segregation within the housing industry, the FHA maps were used to geographically segregate blacks from whites.

While housing discrimination institutionalized racial segregation in Boston, the development of highways magnified the effects of segregation by providing an escape route for whites out of the city and into the suburbs (away from minorities). In the Greater Boston area, suburbanization was driven by the development of Route 128, an outer beltway around the city. The construction of Route 128 between 1960 and 1965 coincided with the

migration of blacks into Boston. As blacks moved into the city, whites moved out as housing renewal for the urban work force was accomplished by relocation to the suburbs. Economic activity also moved out of the city as the white workforce fled the city, and left Boston to rely on a commuter (rather than resident) workforce.

Route 128 resulted in explosive industrial growth in many of the suburbs: land in the new Route 128 corridor was cheap, easily accessible by car, and located close to university labs. However, the industrial successes of Route 128 failed to permeate into inner-city Boston areas, and ultimately only benefited suburban whites. Construction of the circumferential route 128 highway then, which opened the gateway to suburban land, permitted problems of housing to be solved by relocation rather than a reconstruction of the city. However, these suburbs were almost entirely white, devoid of almost all black participation (even as Boston's black population was rapidly increasing). New housing developments in the Route 128 suburbs were restricted by racially prohibitive covenants and federal guidelines, and towns like Lincoln and Weston began to use zoning laws to push out low-income residents. As a result, by 1970, all of the suburban towns were 98% white.

Thus Route 128 became somewhat of a border between Greater Boston and the more far-flung suburbs. A quote from a report by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination shows the impact of Route 128: " Route 128's history represents a social failure approaching disaster in terms of its impact on the poor and minority groups... the suburbs are beautiful, although their beautiful was paid for, in part, by the ugliness of others. Their

gains, from the larger perspective, were the region's loss". In essence, the "new housing, jobs, schools, and amenities of suburban life which followed the completion of Route 128 were for whites only". At about the same time that Route 128 was constructed, construction of the Central Artery and Southeast Expressway of Interstate 93 was undertaken. From 1950 to 1953, as the state began to condemn properties, entire neighborhoods and blocks in Chinatown, Waterfront, and North End were demolished, and along with it, businesses and homes.

When the Southeast Expressway of I-93 was constructed, it came to be known as the border between predominantly white South Boston and the predominantly black Dorchester and Roxbury. Despite being intended to spur urban revival, highway projects through Boston only encouraged people to abandon the main city, and sped up the process of suburbanization. The creation of the Boston Extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike was spurred in part due to the poor economic conditions of Boston. In the years following WWII, Boston had fallen into a deep period of stagnant growth. Urban planners sought to end the economic downturn of Boston by undertaking a series of new highway projects. In June 1956, President Dwight D.

Eisenhower signed into law the Federal-Aid Highway Act, which offered state highway departments 90-percent federal funding for their major highway projects. Justified as "essential to the national interest", the act expanded the interstate system to 41,000 miles, and \$25 billion was authorized for fiscal years 1957 through 1969 to construct the network. The passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1956 resulted in drastic change in urban America.

Post-WWII, public officials saw new urban expressways as a way to revive the deteriorating urban core. Crowded urban slums were seen as tumors, and if highways could be routed through blighted urban areas, they could be reclaimed for productive uses. With the Highway Act, federal funds could be used to eradicate these areas and reinvigorate economic activity in the inner city.

Accordingly, a 1944 report by the federal government recommended that highways penetrate American cities, and called for inner and outer beltways encircling cities. This decision was incredibly consequential to the development of the inner city. In most cities, the interstate system's urban highways ripped through residential areas, and expressway construction destroyed low-income, black neighborhoods.

By 1969, federal highway construction was demolishing over 62, 000 housing units annually – forcing as many as 200, 000 urban, low-income, mostly black people from their homes each year. When displaced black residents moved to other city neighborhoods, white residents fled. Thus, postwar urban expressway building brought massive housing destruction and a subsequent racial restructuring of the central cities, as those displaced sought relocation housing.

Even if black residents sought to flee to the suburbs, they couldn't due to racially restrictive housing policies. In many cities, these restrictions left African-Americans crowded into small neighborhoods. This forced relocation of black residents triggered a reorganization of urban neighborhoods. Coupled with limited inner-city housing, a rising black population resulted in

dislocated blacks being pressed further into urban slums. Thus, the Federal-Aid Highway Act, and the expressway construction of the 1950s and the 1960s ultimately created much larger, more isolated, and more intensely segregated black neighborhoods in American cities. Rather than resuscitating central cities, the new highways systems speeded suburbanization and deepened postwar urban racial segregation. In Boston, the Highway Act allowed the Mass Pike to extend all the way into Boston. The Boston Extension required homes and businesses to be torn down in Newton, Chinatown, Brighton, and the South End.

In the 1960s, six lanes of the Massachusetts Turnpike tore apart Newton Corner, and entirely eliminated the historically black neighborhood in the Hicks Street area of West Newton. In 1963, the Pike's construction decimated Chinatown by splitting the neighborhood in two. In Boston, inner-city expressways and access ramps dislocated downtown businesses and destroyed residential areas, including the Chinatown district and part of the city's Italian North End. What migration, housing, and highways left Boston was a city deeply divided into two.

Even as Boston transformed itself into a modern technological city, poverty was left concentrated in the neighborhoods of Roxbury and Dorchester. As whites fled to the suburbs, blacks were left behind in inner-city slums. Urban highways, despite initial visions of a vibrant city, left entire neighborhoods in ruins and failed to bring about that vision, leading to disastrous consequences for America's urban black population. Politically, they reduced

the power of the black electorate by leaving them susceptible to gerrymandering.

To say that this was the result of self-segregation is to ignore a racial injustice. But by acknowledging the history, one can learn a lesson for the future.