

DAY 9: Where Will I live? Housing Affordability and Homelessness

You may be wondering what housing has to do with racial equity. The reality is that housing affordability and who experiences homelessness is largely influenced by our country's history of racism, and Washtenaw County is no exception.

In the early 1800s to 1900s, Ypsilanti was home to a free black population, many of which were laborers and slaves fleeing the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act. Much of this population located in the area, which is now considered the Historic South Side of Ypsilanti. After the Civil War, as the Jim Crow era began with laws codifying discrimination and segregation, separate districts for African American cultural and social organizations and businesses grew in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor and other communities in the area.

While there are no "redlining" maps on record for Washtenaw County, oral histories provide stories of housing discrimination and segregation. For example, in response to a surge in employment for the Willow Run Bomber Plant in the 1940's, African American and Black workers were not allowed to live in most neighborhoods. The Southside of Ypsilanti (city) was one of the few nearby areas where people of color could purchase a home, and today, is known as a racially concentrated area.

Deed restrictions and racially restricted covenants were used to enforce racial segregation. Records from the Washtenaw County Register of Deeds provide examples in various parts of the county used in the 1940s. Looking back to census data from 1960, the areas with higher concentrations of African American Population are the Water Hill/Kerrytown neighborhoods of Ann Arbor, the South Side of Ypsilanti, including historic African American neighborhoods, and portions of Superior and Ypsilanti Township on the east side of the county. Our County's housing policies resulted in the gentrification of the Water Hill/Kerrytown neighborhoods. ([Source](#))

Did you Know? Jones Elementary school, which was the only predominantly African American elementary school in Ann Arbor, is today the location of the whitest and most affluent school in the County, Community High School.

Today's Challenge:

Option 1: Review the [2019 Washtenaw County Point-in-Time Count](#) one-pager to learn about the demographic breakdown of people experiencing homelessness in our county. Check out the [Community Debrief](#) for additional statistics. (*this Count was not conducted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic*).

Option 2: Read the [ABCs of housing affordability in Washtenaw County](#) to learn more about what is considered affordable housing and what housing affordability looks like in our county. [Then, check out this article on the fall 2020 passage of Proposal C by Ann Arbor City Council](#), which will levy an additional tax that will create about 1,500 units of affordable housing, with up to about a quarter of those units being set aside as permanent supportive housing.

Option 3: Listen to the [Washtenaw United episode interviewing Janice Williams](#) on how the New West Willow Neighborhood Association is working to make the future of Ypsilanti Township brighter.

Option 4: Check out a [graphic on national data](#), that shows that even when controlling for poverty, African Americans are dramatically more likely than whites to become homeless.

Option 5: Watch this 5-minute [video from the Urban Institute exposing how housing discrimination](#) against racial and ethnic minorities occurs today.

Option 6: Check out the work of local historian, Matt Siegfried, on the history of Ypsilanti's historic Black community during the 1900s. [His website is here](#), and you can [listen to a brief talk by him here](#).

Option 7: Journal on your own experiences of home and property. Did your parents own a home or land? How did they acquire it? If not on a reservation, how did the land transition from Indigenous stewardship to your family? Was the community racially integrated or segregated? How did it end up that way? How have property values and demographics in that community changed over time? How does this history of land ownership affect your economic situation?

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag [#unitedforequity](#) and tag [@uwwashtenaw](#).