Logan Mallory

Professor Jorgensen

Memory & Retrospective Justice

12 December 2023 – WC: 1976

Unraveling White Rhetoric To Support Neighborhood Reparations

Creating a country on the fundamental differences between two races, one the master and one the slave, will create and perpetuate a harmful narrative throughout said country's existence. White Americans have repeated the same anti-black rhetoric to create a culture that views black people as less than white. One of these pieces of rhetoric is the infamous 13% of the population and 50% of the crimes statistic (Anti-Defamation League). Through white American rhetoric, we have been led to believe that the figures are the whole story, but this is not true. Dismantling these myths is valuable because understanding why there is more crime committed proportionally will inform my version of reparations. By understanding the perpetuation of black falsehoods in America, we can know why using them as sources of anti-black rhetoric is harmful and only increases blame on American society and detracts it from black Americans. The statistics tell us that black people, on average, commit more crimes. Throughout this paper, I'll be contextualizing the racist history in America and the specific policies and actions that created a society where black people commit more crimes. These specific policies and actions will support my neighborhood-based version of reparations yet to be laid out.

Crushing The Middle School Message

Throughout middle school, I recall being told, “13% of the population, 50% of the crimes.” It was a simple message: You knew who the 13% was because of what you’d seen on TV and in the news your whole life. Well, as an adult with a harshly contrasting perspective from myself seven years ago, I think I must use my philosophical abilities to deconstruct the false psyche still deeply embedded in my and every white American's brain. Dismantling and contextualizing the narrative of black crime is the aim of this paper. Although statistically higher in crime, structural injustice, historical racism, and anti-black government action forced the black community to commit more crimes. Moving chronologically will work best as the period of reconstruction following the Civil War withheld black socioeconomic mobility. One of the most prominent policies is convict leasing.

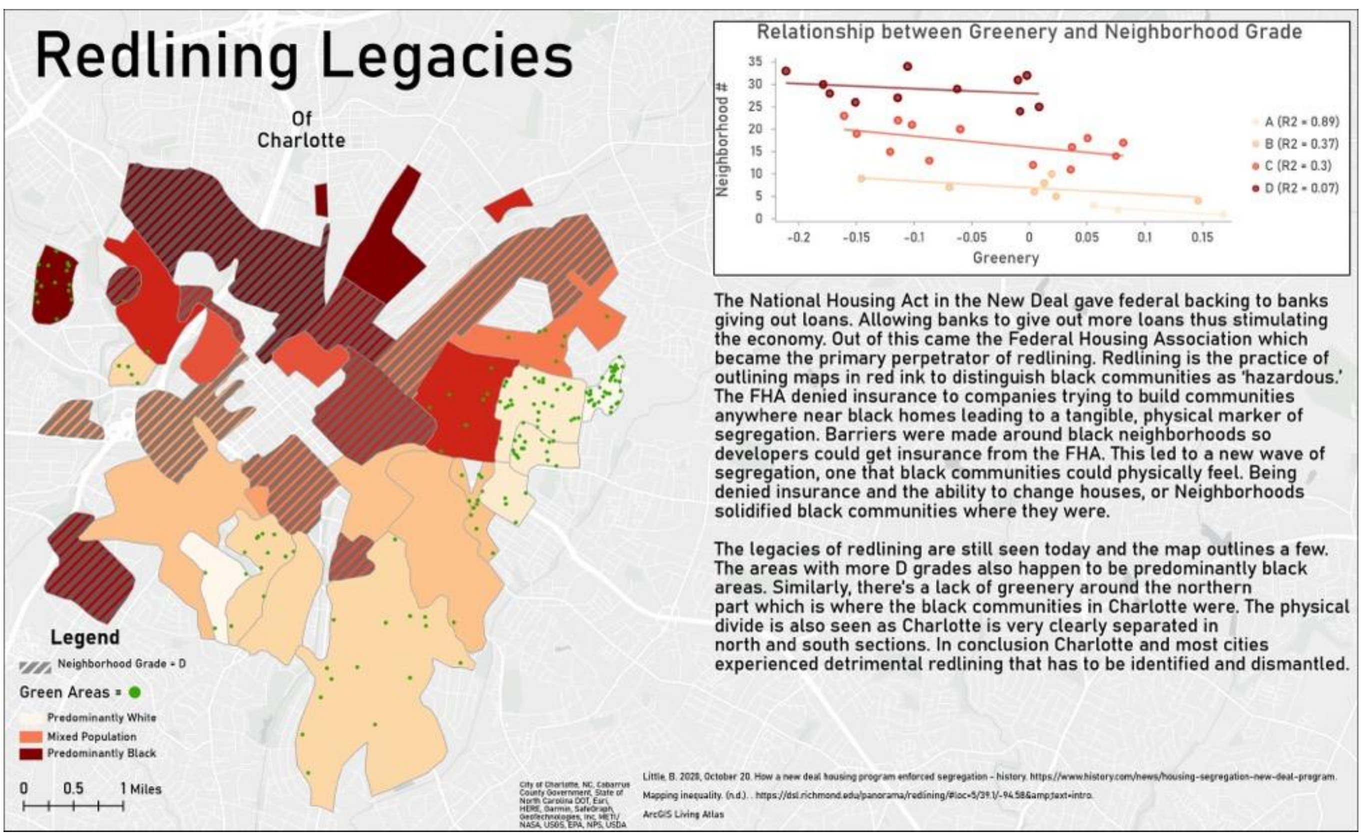
Freedom Without Being Free

Convict leasing started as a scheme to keep unpaid black laborers imprisoned. Convict leasing was the practice of employing assumed criminals. The logic behind convict leasing is without slavery, we must find a new way to enslave black people, make criminals laborers, and make every black person a criminal. To understand the lucrativeness of this, in 1898, 73% of Alabama’s annual state revenue came from convict leasing (Perkinson, 2010). When it becomes profitable for specific peoples to be imprisoned, legislation, police enforcement, and civic activity suddenly becomes about getting as many black convicts as possible. Almost all Southern states had convict leasing, and thus, all of their incarcerated African American statistics skyrocketed around the years following the Civil War (Shelden, 2005). Black voter suppression and violence were also prevalently disenfranchising black Americans. The oppression and suppression of black votes & black Americans deterred any protective legislation from passing, especially following Johnson's appointment to the presidency. For example, the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished in 1872, very soon after the Civil War, not leaving enough time for black Americans to become truly self-sufficient. Mixing racist culture and a lack of protective legislation also alters law enforcement mindsets. Cops have quotas, responsibilities, and personal pride to uphold. I believe it's easy to imagine a scenario of any black man loitering, petty theft, or assumed harassment where a cop has no desire to free the black man once there is any notion of possibly sending them to prison. This hypothetical scenario refers to historical interactions circa 1866-1964 (Civil Rights Act). In response, one might question why the black man committed any crime, especially if they're aware of the unbalanced response they would cause. Black codes were a set of racist policies enacted to disenfranchise black Americans further. Black codes restricted jobs made it hard to quit jobs, and left little economic opportunity besides labor for black Americans, who often had to turn to crime out of necessity (Geo, Nat 2023). Furthermore, violence committed toward black families left many without alternatives. You couldn't move out of your town with no money, and you couldn't get a different or easier job as a black man. Black populations have ended up committing more crimes due to a combination of variables, including convict leasing, a structurally unjust system, voter disenfranchisement, anti-black violence, and the absence of protective services or options post-slavery. These factors, as well as black codes, worked to not only enforce white supremacy and increase segregation but also to continually perpetuate the master and slave culture even if the labels had vanished.

The Physicality of Racism

A counterargument may arise: It has been 80 years; there is no more racism or anti-black violence. Or we have no more racist policies now. It's just the mindset of black people to steal. To this, I raise the practice of redlining. Arguably, it is one of the most physical markers of racism in our country, and it persists. Redlining was a set of racist policies enacted in every neighborhood across America. Redlining was the practice of separating and grading sections of neighborhoods; consistently, neighborhoods with any black population would get a C grade, and most received a D. “The FHA began redlining at the very beginning of its operations in 1934, as FHA staff concluded that no loan could be economically sound if the property was located in a neighborhood that was or could become populated by black people, as property values might decline over the life of the 15- to 20-year loans they were attempting to standardize” (Rose, 2023). The FHA effectively established ghettos by pushing black communities into segregated parts of cities, effectively distancing them from any means of wealth creation as well. The capital is in areas of prosperity, and those are areas of whiteness where the black man is not allowed. Generational wealth then became an issue. A black mother or father could never give their kids the facilities to make their situation any better than their parents because nobody had any money. A broken pipe and the racist landlord came up with a scheme to rip as much money from the family. This environment fosters deviance. Think about how many of these ghettos didn’t have fathers, coaches, mothers, relatives, and pastors to guide the youth and instill discipline and morality. It takes one criminal in a black neighborhood. They aren’t going to go all the way to the white neighborhoods to do it, with higher security and worse punishments if caught. This leads to black-on-black crime, all contained in the same neighborhood. Once someone is hit, the victim wants revenge, and then that victim gets their friends to create even more violence. Once again, the counter-argument may be statistically accurate. There may be more black men proportionally who commit crimes. However, that is not due to innate violence in black men, that is not due to an increased desire to steal within black men. It is about the culture and society that white people crafted that put black people into these positions of impoverishment that forced them into positions of criminality that then created ghettos, leading to a continuation and perpetuation of black-on-black crime that then evolves and leaks into black-on-white crime. The government is also aware of the fact that they can catch more criminals by over-policing impoverished areas, which just so happen to be primarily black communities, leading to inflated statistics.

Charlotte Redlining Map



By: Logan Mallory

Creating Equal Footing By Addressing Redlining

What, then, am I arguing for? Well, the unique thing about redlining is that neighborhoods have effectively become segregated, and it is clear which neighborhoods were victims of redlining. The historical redlining maps are all available and consistently line up with areas of highest crime. The government should stimulate these neighborhoods through policy. Reed brings up the slew of issues: “But the question of compensation opens a plethora of technical problems. Should payments go to individuals or to some presumably representative corporate entity? If the former, who qualifies as a recipient? Would descendants of people who had been enslaved elsewhere be eligible? And what of those no longer legally black people with slave ancestors” (Reed Jr, 2000). The technical issues make reparations so complicated that many people become exhausted by the question before any real suggestions are made. Methods of stimulating neighborhoods include education reform, increased access to healthcare, food, libraries, and gyms, lowering police presence, creating neighborhood communities, and alleviating immediate economic pitfalls through stimulus. These may seem like no-brainer good policies to enact, but if they’re localized, isolated, and targeted toward neighborhoods that have been historically redlined and are now trodden with crime, it will help rehabilitate them sooner rather than later. Increasing opportunities for economic prosperity and generational capital should be priority number one. The reason I find this to be a more attractive solution than individual reparations is because of our political climate. H.R. 40 is a bill that suggests a committee meant to study the idea of reparations, and it has been repeatedly brought to the floor for over 30 years; only once has it made it out of committee. The possibility of reparation payments being implemented as policy is next to none. However, by addressing the wrongdoings of redlining, we could effectively generate black wealth and stimulate previously disenfranchised black communities. Proposing the idea as an anti-redlining act may make it a more palatable solution for those in Congress who don't quite understand the severity of historical anti-black action.

> *"With segregation, with the isolation of the injured and the robbed, comes the concentration of disadvantage. An unsegregated America might see poverty and all its effects spread across the country with no particular bias toward skin color. Instead, the concentration of poverty has been paired with a concentration of melanin."*
>
> ***Ta-Nehisi Coates***

Revitalizing Redlined Communities

In conclusion, black Americans have been forced into a uniquely disadvantaged situation due to the crafting of society done by white people. Convict leasing led to the practice of using 'freed' people who were 'criminals' as laborers. This led to the culture of viewing black people as criminals as well as imprisoning millions of newly freed slaves. Black voter suppression, the black codes, and anti-black violence all also contributed to the creation of an anti-black culture while simultaneously ensuring no protective legislation passed and left southern black families as victims to the whims of racist neighbors and cops. Now, black Americans had lost relatives to prison or killings, few jobs could be worked besides laborious ones, and they're surrounded by racism. Redlining segregated black people from white neighborhoods and put them in areas that lacked sanitation, accessibility, and methods of wealth generation—redlining established ghetto neighborhoods where crime ran rampant from a lack of infrastructure. This practice distanced black people from areas of wealth and prosperity, leaving them to their own devices. To address this, I suggest the U.S. government investigates all redlined neighborhoods that have become victims of the vicious cycle created by white people and stimulate economic advancement.

Works Cited

Robert Perkinson (2010). Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire. Henry Holt and Company. p. 105. ISBN 978-1-429-95277-4.

Geo, Nat. 2023. "The Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws." Education. Retrieved December 7, 2023 (https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/black-codes-and-jim-crow-laws/).

Rose, Jonathan. "Redlining." Federal Reserve History, Federal Reserve, 2 June 2023, www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/redlining.

Reed Jr., Adolph. "The Case Against Reparations." The Progressive, December 2000.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." In We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy, 163-208. One World, 2017.

"13/52 & 13/90." *ADL*, Anti-Defamation League, 3 May 2022, www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/1352-1390.

Shelden, Randall G. "Slavery in the Third Millennium, Part II." *The Black Commentator - Slavery in the Third Millennium, Part II - Issue 142*, 16 June 2005, blackcommentator.com/142/142_slavery_2.html.