

Richard Rothstein. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017. Pp. 345. Hardcover. \$27.95.

Richard Rothstein, American historian and Senior Fellow at the Haas Institute at UC, Berkeley School of Law, analyzes the laws and institutions that reinforce the hegemonic control of white, Protestant, middle class Americans. He demonstrates through clear, historical examples how federal, state, and local governments fortified racial segregation such as The Black Codes of 1865 and 1866, Jim Crow laws and *Plessey v. Ferguson*. Despite federal precedents, segregation in America is often believed to be generated by individual prejudices, racial stereotypes, and socio-economic differences. This viewpoint is intensified by court cases and landmark legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 that have immeasurably improved accessibility for African Americans. These legal “triumphs” make it difficult to believe that the federal government contributes to deepening the racial disparity today. Rothstein reveals that de facto segregation is a stratagem in the systemic blockades set up to perpetuate racial segregation in America and that racial segregation is more de jure than we think, particularly in regard to housing. Rothstein explains how residential segregation in America came to be after major judicial and legislative rulings that should have prevented discrimination against African Americans. To provide context, he uses examples from as far back as the Reconstruction Era to as recently as 2016, and cities such as Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, as epicenters of housing segregation. He argues that the covert associations between governments, housing developers, and banks perpetuate racist practices.

The first half of the book focuses on the history of residential segregation in America. Rothstein illustrates how difficult it was for all African Americans, particularly veterans living in the San Francisco Bay area post-World War II, to obtain housing in predominately white neighborhoods. He exhumes the origins of public housing in America and policies enacted to solidify the racialized ghettoization of government housing projects, with little or no resources given to the black community.

Suburbanization further propagated residential segregation and the exclusionary zoning ordinances played a role in urban and suburban planning and development throughout America. The book further investigates injustices against black families through discriminatory Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage policies enforced in predominately black areas, an example of government exclusionary practices that consequently contributed to institutionalized racism and housing segregation.

The second half of the book underlines the rationale behind the mass exodus of white Americans from integrated neighborhoods and explores this phenomenon in relation to bank and mortgage lending practices. Rothstein explains the dark past of hostile, state sanctioned violence exercised in black neighborhoods and why the wealth and income gap between African Americans and whites and residential segregation are difficult to reverse. He exerts much effort to address the various paths toward reform and dedicates a considerable portion of the book to frequently asked questions that openly address multiple objections to his analysis. In addition, one of the most impressive aspects of Rothstein's work is the vast primary and secondary sources base to expound his argument on the federal government's involvement in housing segregation. He uses court and agency cases, photographs, articles, books, dissertations and archived materials in over forty pages of notes.

His work closely aligns with historian James Loewen's *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (2005). Loewen provides a startling historical investigation on the myriad of communities nationwide that barred African Americans and other minorities, under the constant threat of violence and harassment, from staying in or visiting town after dark. Rothstein, however, illustrates the more fundamental criticism of government involvement in the perpetuation of racial exclusionary practices in housing and zoning.

The Color of Law ultimately reveals that the boundaries of white-dominated society are protected by racial segregation. Rothstein's primary analysis is on the forgotten history of housing segregation in America and audiences interested in disremembered histories, race, politics and economics will enjoy reading this book.

Laura Marshall