

UnTextbooked

A history podcast for the future.

Transcript: [Did segregation in America ever really end?](#)

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Guest	Richard Rothstein, PhD
Season - Episode	2 - 14
Released (YYYY-MM-DD)	2021-12-02

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Gabe Hostin 0:04

Education has always been important. I'm textbook producer Jonathan Dabel. He and his family have sacrificed a lot to get to where he is now. Like sending them away from his home in Haiti to live with family in Mississippi, so that he can get an American education. But it didn't take long for him to notice how normal it was for American kids to separate themselves along racial lines.

Jonathan Dabel 0:25

One day I came to school, I came in the cafeteria in I could see how like segregated school was like the African American kids would like sit here and all the like white kids will sit over there. And I think it's very hard for someone who like grew up in the US like see that way. Because that's what they're used to. That's where they grew up in.

Gabe Hostin 0:44

Jonathan's High School was racially integrated. But each year he noticed more and more of his black classmates ended up leaving school altogether.

Jonathan Dabel 0:52

So when I was in high school freshman year, most of my friends that were African American were with me, and my senior year, only a few of us graduated. And no one really cared that much because it's been happening for so long. And it doesn't only happen at my school, it happens all over the US. So I started to ask myself, why is this going on? Why is no one talking about it? That's why I thought about this like laws. US government created policies, specifically housing to segregate United States.

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Gabe Hostin 1:23

racially discriminatory housing laws were officially banned in the 1960s. But it's not exactly a switch that you can just turn off. Black people haven't had the same access to generational wealth and education as their white counterparts. And even after schools became desegregated, the discrepancies remained

Jonathan Dabel 1:40

like there are many factors that play a role in that like how much funding your school have depends on like where that you live in you can see how past policies created ghettos. So like that's the reason why we see like things like poverty, unemployment, economic inequality in the US. Past housing policies actually falls into like so many things. I think that's the pillar to like so many other issues because it's like, every action has a reaction. So if I do something today, something is gonna happen tomorrow.

Gabe Hostin 2:12

On this episode of UnTextbooked, Jonathan interviews, Richard Rothstein, author of the color of law of forgotten history of how our government segregated America I'm good Hostin, and you're listening to UnTextbooked.

Jonathan Dabel 2:29

UnTextbooked. Thank you so much for taking the time for doing this interview. We really appreciate it.

Richard Rothstein, PhD 2:41

Thank you for your interest. I'm grateful to you.

Jonathan Dabel 2:43

So um, the first question that I want to ask is, what some redlining to people who might not really understand what redlining is,

Richard Rothstein, PhD 2:50

or redlining was a policy, both of the federal government and by banks to deny conventional loans, mortgages, or FHA Federal Housing Administration with Veterans Administration mortgages, to the families who lived in predominantly black neighborhoods. The term arose because a an agency in the 1930s, the Federal the homeowners Loan Corporation, Drew maps of areas that it determined were too high risk for the federal government to guarantee mortgages. In and one of the characteristics they considered when deciding if was too high risk was whether it had a African Americans living in it and it true maps and color those areas red. So the term redlining comes from that and it was say, say a policy both of the private sector of banks, insurance companies as well to deny credit insurance to people who live in those neighborhoods. Kind of

Jonathan Dabel 4:05

a follow up to that question, how did this show zoning in high poverty neighborhood affect the way kids living in poverty, specifically, like children in terms of like, how well they will do in the future? And do you think those are outcomes were like intentional, like do people meant to create those rules so that the results could be intentional?

Richard Rothstein, PhD 4:26

Well, there are lots of questions there and that one question let me separate a few of them. The reason that children living in segregated low income neighborhoods achieve at lower levels than children living in higher opportunity places, is because there are so many social and economic challenges that those children face that impede their ability to learn. So for example, African American children and low income segregated neighborhoods, as you may know, have asthma at a much higher rate than middle class children that have asthma at a higher rate than middle class children because they live in neighborhoods and more polluted closer to industrial facilities, more trucks driving by their homes, more dilapidated buildings, more vermin in the environment, more empty lots kicking up dust and if a child has asthma, that child is more likely the child who doesn't have asthma, to be up at night wheezing and then coming to school drowsy the next day. And if you have two groups of children who are otherwise identical to identical groups, same racial composition of each group, same social economic backgrounds, same family structure, but one group has a higher rate of asthma than the other. That group is going to on average, it's not true in every case, but on average, be asleep peer group in school and be able to achieve less as a result now asthma costs of is a very tiny cause of the lower treatment of African American children. But then you begin to think of all the other conditions that challenge their ability to learn as much as I mentioned that lead poisoning lead poisoning has a measurable impact and decreasing IQ. And African American children have lead poisoning at a higher rate than white children because they live in those polluted neighborhoods. They live in frequently in buildings that are older where lead paint was used, which is now prohibited in newer buildings. But if the pain starts to flake, the building's not well maintained. The children exposed to with African American neighborhoods are more likely to have pipes lead pipes bringing water to their homes. So African American children have a higher rate of lead poisoning. than white children do. Homelessness, economic insecurity, lack of access to health care, dental care, for example, African American children are more likely to have untreated dental cavities that causes pain. They're more likely to be uncomfortable and distracted and they come to school. None of these are a big factor in depressing their achievement, but we can begin to add them all up. You pretty much explained that the lower achievement of African American children in school, which then leads to life outcomes. Not as rewarding as the outcomes of children who come to school, healthy, well rested, well nourished and economically secure homes. Now it's one thing if a child has asthma or lead poisoning or homelessness or economic insecurity or lack of access to medical or health care, it's another thing when you have a school where every child has one or more of these challenges, that school is unable to address the needs of every child to make accommodations for every child.

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And so the achievement of all children is depressed by the concentration of disadvantage in the school if children want with one or more of those disadvantages. Were in the school when not every child had those disadvantages. That isn't an integrated school. School could pay special attention to that child, give that child a special attention that he or she needs. But in a school where every child has those disadvantages of segregated school. That kind of special attention is impossible. And the achievement gap between black and white children is exacerbated.

Unknown Speaker 8:40

What's the difference between de facto and de jure segregation?

Unknown Speaker 8:45

Well, de facto segregation is really a myth that doesn't exist. De facto segregation is the idea. The reason we have segregated neighborhoods in every metropolitan area of this country. Is because of private discrimination. Because white landlords or homeowners wouldn't sell to African Americans and white neighborhoods or private banks or real estate agencies or developers discriminated for people just like to live with each other have the same race or economic differences that prevent African Americans from having the means to buy homes and white neighborhoods. That's what they call de facto segregation. And it doesn't exist this the cause of segregation in this country. The reason we have really an apartheid system of residential neighborhoods is because of government action. That requires those private actors to segregate residential neighborhoods. So when the government creates segregation, that's called de jure segregation. I prefer to call it state sponsored segregation state enforced segregation so that people understand what we're talking about. Now, it may be that the private actors in fact it is the case that the private actors happy with that. They liked segregating, like being able to discriminate but it's the federal government had exercised its constitutional responsibilities. By requiring those institutions when they got federal aid to administer their their housing programs on a non discriminatory basis. They would have had to have done so and every community in this country would be a non segregated place. In the post world war two period, federal government created suburbs throughout this country and require them to be segregated and finance developers of suburbs to discriminate against African Americans now as I say, the developers may have wanted to anyway, but the federal government had told them that will guarantee your bank loans only if you sell your homes on a non discriminatory basis, they would have had to do so regardless of their private views. So that's why I say de facto segregation is a myth doesn't exist. There is no segregated community in this country that was segregated by private actors alone without the government embracing, endorsing and requiring their private segregation.

Jonathan Dabel 11:20

Most people imagine and they have this argument that slavery was 100 years ago, and there are no excuse for an African American to not do well in this country. So I was wondering if you could explain.

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Richard Rothstein, PhD 11:32

Well, slavery ended 100 years ago, more than 100 years ago, over 150 years ago. And the at the end of the Civil War, there were three constitutional amendments adopted, that were designed to ensure that the formerly enslaved could exercise the full rights of American citizenship. The 13th amendment, prohibited second classes and ship of any kind. The 14th amendment prohibited discrimination against African Americans of any kind because they were enslaved. And the 15th Amendment prohibited restrictions on voting rights of African Americans at the end of Reconstruction, which only lasted a little more than 10 years, the Supreme Court and Congress effectively annihilated those three amendments. So the slavery was never really a completely ended. second class citizenship was never completely ended. African Americans have never enjoyed the rights, the full rights of American citizenship and the policies that the federal government followed to ensure that African Americans would not enjoy those rights. Were so powerful that they continue to this day. For example, as you know, that when I mentioned before how the federal government subsidized the suburbanization of this country, for whites only because it gave guaranteed loans to developers to create all white suburbs. The result was that white families bought those suburbs in the immediate end of World War Two gained wealth as they bought homes that were inexpensive at the time, and then grew in value over the next couple of generations. So that homes that white families bought with federal guarantees for in today's money \$100,000 In like 1950 all over the country, but now sell for 300 400 \$500,000 African Americans are prohibited by government policy, in violation of the Constitution. from participating in this program. The result is that white families gained wealth when their homes appreciated. They use that wealth to send their children to college they use it to perhaps take care of temporary emergencies. Use it to subsidize their retirements and they use it to bequeath wealth to children and grandchildren, who then had down payments for their own homes. African Americans were prohibited from gaining that wealth. The result is that today on average African American incomes are 60% of white incomes. And that enormous disparity between the 60% income ratio and the 5% wealth ratio is entirely attributable to unconstitutional federal housing policy. It was practiced in the mid 20th century in the seven bin remedies so that's an enormous difference that impedes the ability of African Americans to emerge from the shadow of slavery even though it was over 150 years ago. The legacies of slavery have never been addressed, never been remedied. They continue to this day, and that's why we need much more aggressive policies to address the segregation of African Americans the fact that we have a system of apartheid when it comes to metropolitan areas, the that has never been addressed.

Jonathan Dabel 15:17

So one last question that I have is aside from politics, what can we do to help undo what has been done?

Richard Rothstein, PhD 15:26

Well, we had a civil rights movements in the 1960s that engaged in marches demonstrations, civil disobedience, to challenge other forms of segregation, like segregation of restaurants or for transportation, but we need a new civil rights movement today. It's like the one in the 1960s that

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is going to directly challenge segregation and inequality of African Americans experience. I hope we'll see one emerge, you have a much more accurate and passionate understanding about how segregation happened, about how racial inequality happens. The things that I've been describing to you before, a more passionate and accurate understanding of that we ever have had before in American history. We had 20 million Americans dissipate and Black Lives Matter demonstrations a year ago. Most of those participants were white that kind of awareness of racial inequality is unprecedented in American history. And the issue is whether that those demonstrations, which reflected in awareness of racial inequality, whether they will lead to organization that will challenge segregation so far, has not, but I'm hopeful that it will

Unknown Speaker 16:53

Richard Rothstein is the author of the color of law. Mr. Rothstein, where can we find more of your work?

Richard Rothstein, PhD 16:59

Well, I could send you a link to the website of the Economic Policy Institute. I'll send a link to that. I'll also send a link to an organization that's trying to create that civil rights movement that I described, and you ask what an individual can do. It will be a link for where they can sign up. So thank you very much, Jonathan. Good luck to you. And thanks for your attention and interest in my work. Thank you.

Gabe Hostin 17:37

Richard Rothstein is a distinguished fellow of the Economic Policy Institute and a senior fellow emeritus at the Thurgood Marshall Institute of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Jonathan Dabel is a sophomore at the University of Mississippi. Our website is untextbooked.org and we're on social media and UnTextbooked. Our music is by Silas Bowen. And Coleman Hamilton UnTextbooked is edited by Bethany Denton and Jeff Emtman. Fernande raine is our executive producer. UnTextbooked is a project of Got history, an organization that believes in a world where all young people can advance civic well being for themselves, society and the planet.