

The Neighborhood Unit: Schools, Segregation, and the Shaping of the Modern Metropolitan Landscape

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Background/Context: *In the first half of the 20th century, American policy makers at all levels of government, alongside housing and real estate industry figures, crafted mechanisms of racial exclusion that helped to segregate metropolitan residential landscapes. Although educators and historians have recognized the long-term consequences of these policies for the making of educational segregation, they have not yet fully perceived how strongly ideas about public schools mattered in the shaping of these exclusionary practices.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: *This historical study examines the “neighborhood unit” concept, its origins, and its influence, to illustrate the centrality of schooling in shaping mechanisms of racial segregation. The “neighborhood unit” concept, advocated during the 1920s by planner Clarence Perry before becoming central to local-level planning as well as federal-level housing policy, imagined self-contained communities within cities. Each of the units featured multi-purpose school-community facilities at their literal spatial as well as conceptual center. Perry and the influential cadre of planners who adopted the concept thought it would make metropolitan areas more livable, vibrant, and socially cohesive. But their neighborhood unit idea also encouraged racial segregation, in both schools and residential areas.*

Research Design: *Sources for this qualitative historical investigation include published and unpublished primary sources from individuals, organizations, and government entities involved in making and using the idea of the neighborhood unit as well as extant historical scholarship.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *The history of the neighborhood unit shows that ideas about schools were central in the creation of the modern metropolitan landscape and enduring patterns of racial segregation. This evidence furthers the growing historical interpretation that housing segregation and school segregation operate not as separate terrain, but in deep connection with one another. By acknowledging and incorporating this historical perspective, educators and policy makers can reconceptualize segregation’s roots, and perhaps its remedies.*

INTRODUCTION

In the first half of the 20th century, residential segregation became institutionalized and nationalized in the United States in unprecedented and varied ways. Although in many cities and towns segregation already existed and was enforced via brute power or quotidian acts of discrimination, new and more formal approaches helped to harden and systematize residential segregation from the 1910s through the 1940s. Municipal ordinances reserved particular streets for Black or White residents exclusively. Racially restrictive deed covenants allowed occupancy only by White residents. Mortgage lending guidelines matched federal power and dollars to locally informed patterns of segregation. White borrowers received the overwhelming majority of federally subsidized mortgages, the vast majority of which were for homes in the suburbs. Public housing development and urban renewal projects proceeded along segregationist lines as well.¹

Some mechanisms of residential segregation received censure from the courts—as when the Supreme Court in 1917 struck down segregationist municipal ordinances as unlawful restrictions on individual property rights.² Yet others endured, or even flourished, with direct support from government agencies and actors. They divided the American metropolitan landscape throughout the 20th century, and their impact remains visible today.

Many educators understand this history of U.S. residential segregation to be fundamental to the making of the historical as well as modern-day landscape of American education. That African American families were locked out of growing White suburbs via discriminatory lending, exclusionary zoning, and deed restrictions, and that poorer families were concentrated in city centers by intentionally segregating public housing policies, helps explain how today’s schools came to be highly racially segregated. Prevented from accumulating home equity and wealth as their White peers did, Black families bore the brunt of the impact of urban renewal, highway construction, and industrial decline.³ Historic state-sponsored segregation in housing thus undergirds not only continued patterns of residential segregation by race but also marked racial disparities in wealth. For their part, enrollment and zoning policies across the North and South further formalized or worsened segregation in schools.

This is a crucial story for educators to understand, but told this way it is incomplete. Schools see their enrollments shaped by residential segregation, surely. But ideas about schools have been central to the making of residential segregation for nearly a century. Since at least as far back as the early 1900s, city planners and other architects of metropolitan development have asked where schools should sit in residential landscapes, and what schools should mean for communities and neighborhoods. How they answered these questions played a large yet not previously appreciated role in developing core mechanisms of segregation in the early 20th century. In the same years in which discriminatory mortgage lending and public housing policies took shape, ideas about schools sat at the center

of influential conceptual schemes to organize the American residential landscape and helped inform enduring structures of segregation.

The “neighborhood unit” concept, popularized in the 1920s but broadly influential for decades thereafter, used the presence of a school and the scale of its enrollment zone as a defining element of the residential neighborhood.⁴ Clarence Perry was not a trained city planner, nor was he the neighborhood unit’s sole creator, but from his position on the staff of the New York City-based Russell Sage Foundation and its relationships with the era’s national social reform and nascent city planning networks, he became its most devoted and effective advocate. Although the neighborhood unit concept emerged first in quasi-private networks like those of which Sage was a part, it became a part of state-sponsored segregation when it influenced the Federal Housing Administration’s mortgage lending guidelines and urban renewal project design.⁵ Reflecting on the concept’s reach at the turn of the 21st century, New Urbanist leader Andres Duany called Perry’s visual schema of the neighborhood unit the “most famous diagram in the history of American planning.” The concept left its mark on the developing suburban landscape while also serving, in the words of historian Samuel Zipp, as “the social vision behind the superblock form” of countless U.S. public housing projects.⁶

Although historians of urban planning have scrutinized many aspects of the neighborhood unit, the place of schools—at the spatial and conceptual center of the unit—has not been investigated fully.⁷ The school-centered neighborhood unit concept took shape in elite intellectual networks of the Progressive era, as we demonstrate by tracing one of its key advocates, Perry, and the educational and social ideas that influenced his work. Then the concept moved into practice and policy nationally and internationally, including into key segregative mechanisms of U.S. housing policy. Alongside varied examples of local implementation, the national career of pioneering, and segregationist, planner Harland Bartholomew shows this process well. Via Perry, Bartholomew, and their influential engagement with the school-centered neighborhood unit concept, we see how centrally ideas about schooling figured in making basic technologies of American residential segregation. Recognizing the range of ways that ideas about schools, housing, and segregation have been linked should encourage policy makers to think vigorously and creatively about what forces—particularly in the realm of urban planning—might be marshaled to bring about meaningful desegregation. We explore this possibility in more detail in the conclusion.

Our account of the school-centered neighborhood unit adds to historians’ growing understanding of how housing segregation and school segregation operate not as separate terrain but in deep connection with one another. Recent historical work highlights the ways in which schooling and housing have been connected within consumer spheres and popular discourse. “Shopping for schools,” when consumers treat schooling as a commodity to be purchased alongside housing, has often led to increased segregation.⁸ Voluble calls for “neighborhood schools” from White protesters opposing desegregation from the 1950s through the 1980s offer more direct evidence that many thought housing, schooling, and segregation fit together.⁹ Recognizing these relationships has pushed scholars to view residential and educational segregation not as discrete systems but as parts of broader webs of inequality.

Yet a full understanding of the relationship between housing and school segregation requires appreciating how ideas about schools have helped shape fundamentally powerful mechanisms of state-sponsored housing segregation over nearly a century. When key actors in the making of the American metropolis thought about schools, they thought also and simultaneously about housing and segregation; conversely, when they thought about housing and segregation, they thought about schools. Their work pre-dated, and in many respects set the conditions under which, later generations of Americans would defend segregated “neighborhood schools” or would assume the ability to “shop for schools.” The neighborhood unit, a major conceptual influence on powerful mechanisms of segregation in the city and metropolis, put the school at the center. In the pages that follow, we trace how the concept of the school-neighborhood unit came to figure so prominently as a tool for promoting segregation.

ORIGINS: ORDERING THE EARLY 20TH-CENTURY CITY AROUND NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCHOOL

The “neighborhood unit” concept had its roots in the dynamic, at times bewildering, early 20th century U.S. city, with its staggering population growth and industrial clamor. Immigration produced broad cultural diversity, with new arrivals drawn to the city by economic opportunities or pushed out of many European countries by poverty, persecution, or war. As international migration slowed during World War I, the internal migration of African American rural southerners to northern and Midwestern cities accelerated. Elite and middle-class professionals in cities such as New York and Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis, built social reform networks that confronted immediate urban challenges in public health, education, and acculturation, and sought to order what they often experienced as a chaotic landscape around them. Some, most famously Jane Addams, created neighborhood-based social service agencies like Hull House in Chicago. Others used the tools of the nascent discipline of sociology to describe and predict how cities changed and would change in the future. Still others looked to the landscape itself, to ask what kinds of city or neighborhood design could make their communities more livable, more beautiful, more humane, or more economically efficient.¹⁰

City planning developed as a professional enterprise in this context. Planners immersed themselves in designing the physical aspects of urban and suburban life—everything from housing codes and park design to transportation systems and land-use zoning. They worked as government officials, situated within newly formed municipal planning departments, as consultants hired by city governments, or as local or national advocates based in foundations or reform organizations. Although planners often had broad portfolios, their work touched at times directly on education, as when they made or consulted on decisions about school construction and location.¹¹

Planners often wanted to order the chaotic city they perceived around them, and their ideas of order tended to hinge on separation and homogeneity—both in terms of land use and population distribution. Pioneering planners such as John Nolen and Bartholomew supported the separation of White residential areas from industrial and commercial uses. They also made casual references to racial segregation that evidenced broad acceptance of Jim Crow among White elites, not only in the recalcitrant south but also in the nation as a whole. Planners called for divisions within residential zones: one neighborhood for blue-collar White workers, another “segregated

fine residence section,” or a “Mexican” or “Negro” neighborhood.¹² By 1917, explicitly segregationist zoning was unconstitutional, but segregationist ideas continued to flow freely through both private and governmental networks.¹³

Out of this milieu emerged the concept of the school-centered neighborhood unit. Chief among its proponents was Perry, who viewed such units as a tool for fostering healthy social life via the intentional organization of residential, educational, commercial, religious, and public space. Perry was not the neighborhood unit’s sole originator, but his vision ultimately became one of the most widely distributed. In the early 1920s, he sketched a model neighborhood unit for a low- to medium-density area spread over roughly 160 acres, within boundaries defined by major arterial roads or other visual or physical markers. At the center of the neighborhood sat community facilities, including a park, church, and, crucially, a school. In fact, the neighborhood’s size and structure followed directly from the school’s needs. The 160-acre scale stemmed from the decision to house a thousand families, itself chosen to yield sufficient children to fill what Perry and colleagues thought to be an ideal-sized elementary school of 1,000 students.¹⁴ Other planners’ contemporary interpretations of the neighborhood unit took the idea one step further, grouping three or more elementary-school-focused neighborhood units around a shared high school.¹⁵

Perry first unveiled his neighborhood unit concept publicly in 1924 and 1925, primarily for audiences of social workers and sociologists. It received a much broader audience when included within the highly influential 1929 *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, one of the nation’s first metropolitan-scale planning efforts.¹⁶ Through the vehicle of the *Regional Plan*, Perry became the American planner most closely affiliated with the neighborhood unit concept, and it was his accompanying graphic that became the leading and most widely circulated representation of the idea (see Figure 1). Easily adaptable to a variety of metropolitan locales, the neighborhood unit shaped new suburban development across the country but was also deployed in urban centers such as New York City.

Figure 1: Clarence Perry’s neighborhood unit, 1929



The school building was named “community center” in this diagram, a reflection of Perry’s earlier work on using school buildings as community centers for youth and adult activities.

Source: *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* (New York: Regional Plan Association, 1929), Vol. VII, 88.

Perry saw in the neighborhood unit an opportunity to meet myriad social needs. He wanted to create safe residential spaces protected from the real risks of high-speed through-traffic that claimed many pedestrian lives in the early 20th century city before the advent of freeways and speed limits. But he also hoped to foster “family life community,” to encourage healthy social interactions among individuals and families.¹⁷ Perry and many of his contemporaries believed that the twin pressures of industrialization and urban growth were fraying such bonds. For Perry, the neighborhood unit model was as much a social intervention as a physical one.

Perry did not invent the neighborhood unit idea out of whole cloth. Instead, he consolidated into one stream the varying tributaries that had been developing on both sides of the Atlantic since the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ One of these was the “City Beautiful”

movement, whose advocates sought sweeping reworkings of the urban landscape to make congested, polluted cities more beautiful, livable, and orderly.¹⁹ Another tributary, this one developing in the United Kingdom, was the “Garden Cities” movement, led by planner Ebenezer Howard, with its call for intensively planned residential communities that became the model for some American developments. Perry and his family resided in one, Forest Hills Gardens, developed by the Russell Sage foundation.²⁰ As part of this movement, U.S. planners Clarence Stein and Henry Wright designed the suburb of Radburn, New Jersey, while also creating their own neighborhood unit diagrams very similar to Perry’s.²¹ That the neighborhood unit idea had multiple advocates during the early 20th century only attests to its reach and increasing ubiquity in the field of planning. Nonetheless, from his perch at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City, Perry became the idea’s most concerted and single-minded advocate, continuing to write on its behalf from the mid-1920s past his retirement from Sage in 1937.

Although Perry’s work has received ample attention from other scholars of urban history and planning, the centrality of the school to his work has remained largely unexamined.²² Perry’s professional (and to some extent personal) biography included as much attention to education as it did to planning. Before he started to think about cities and neighborhood design, Perry was a teacher and a principal. He spent the first years of the 20th century working in U.S. colonial schools, first in the Philippines and then in Puerto Rico. In the latter posting, he made the acquaintance of Leonard Ayres, a senior member of the Russell Sage Foundation’s division of education. At that time, the foundation was a hub of progressive social research and reform efforts in the areas of health, labor, and education, as well as city planning. Ayres brought Perry to Sage in 1909 and helped him find a post in the recreation department.²³ That department exemplified the widespread Progressive-era fascination with the power of structured community interaction and the physical environment to support social ideals. Illustrating the mix of the physical and social, department members sponsored the construction of city playgrounds, designing the built environment before programming it with educational and “Americanizing” experiences for children.²⁴ This mixture of physical and social planning ran through Perry’s work at Sage over three decades and characterized the planning profession of the day.²⁵

Perry’s work on education and recreation at Sage helps address a question that historians have asked but not yet fully answered: whether Perry was committed to racial segregation in conceptualizing the neighborhood unit, or whether his idea became a segregating tool only after it left his hands. Many historians have taken the latter view.²⁶ But considering Perry’s remarks on projects in education alongside those in planning supports a different interpretation. In fact, Perry’s work grew out of a segregationist logic and served to reinforce the color line, as becomes visible in tracing his projects at Sage in three phases.

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTER OF COMMUNITIES, AND OF “AMERICANIZATION”

Working at Sage to advocate the “wider use” of educational facilities, Perry understood schools not simply as public infrastructure for a residential area but as a social node in the making of community.²⁷ Contemporary educational philosopher John Dewey, and the school administrators and leaders he influenced, thought of the school as the center of the community for adults as well as young people. Dewey’s 1902 call for “The School as a Social Centre” made specific suggestions for school programming consistent with the philosopher’s interest in cultivating democratic citizenship and lessening the barriers between students and the adult community.²⁸ Education leaders in Rochester, New York, pioneered in putting these ideas into practice, opening their public schools for a variety of purposes including neighborhood meetings, adult language and trade classes, dances, voting, and youth programs.²⁹ Perry brought his commitment to the “wider use” of the school building into later neighborhood unit planning, where he titled the building that housed the school a “community center” to convey its broader function.³⁰

Some of the era’s discussion of the wider use of the school building sounded like it included conscious efforts to support socially diverse spaces, but the limits of this rhetoric became clear in practice. Writing in the 1910s, Perry and his colleagues spoke of the school-as-community-center bringing Americans of diverse origins together into the schoolhouse. Sage colleague Luther Gulick’s forward to Perry’s book *The Wider Use of the School Plant* (1911) started forcefully: The “foundation of democracy” was “personal understanding and mutual confidence.” “Communities must have . . . material and social machinery by which various classes shall come to know each other.” Something needed to go beneath “racial, financial and social strata” to “touch fundamental human interests.” The “most natural” and “most available” such instrument, Gulick argued, was the school.³¹ In the nearly 400 pages of text that followed, Perry detailed various ways—from demonstrations of folk dancing to millinery classes—that schools could bring immigrants and native-born citizens together to foster democracy and what he called, without any hint of radicalism, “race amalgamation.”³²

Perry’s discussion of “race” echoed the era’s particular use of the term. By “race,” in 1910, Perry often meant what today would be described as ethnicity.³³ For example, he applauded performances by young Italian American folk dancers before what appear to be all-White audiences as “New York Girls Breaking Down Race Prejudice.” And he celebrated when otherwise combative European immigrant groups learned to play together inside a school-as-community center, noting what he called cross-racial interaction between Poles, Slavs, Italians, or Jews. Only twice do African Americans appear in his wider use volume—as participants in an all-black “baby class,” or as the one “colored Baptist” serving on a school committee in Rochester.³⁴ Perry spoke in terms of diversity and heterogeneity, but with very clear limits. The wider use idea gained steam and spread nationally in the 1910s and 1920s, but gradually what Perry meant by cross-class or cross-racial interaction, in a period of shifting racial ideologies, became clearer.

BOUNDARIES

Perry and his family were among the first households to reside in Forest Hills Gardens, a planned community developed in 1909 in the New York City borough of Queens by Margaret Sage, philanthropist and widow of Russell Sage. Perry appreciated Forest Hills’ design, which included larger arterial roads bounding the neighborhood and curvilinear streets slowing traffic within it. He also saw these

physical markers as enablers of community attachment. Clearly defined physical boundaries, he believed, helped residents turn inward and distinguished the neighborhood from surrounding areas.³⁵

Life in Forest Hills Gardens also helped foster Perry's view that community bonds depended on social as well as physical boundaries. Since opening in 1909, Forest Hills Gardens operated as an intentionally exclusive community, admitting residents only after background checks and interviews. Approved residents occupied a "narrower range of callings and greater economic similarity" than in the surrounding city, and were exclusively White.³⁶ In its segregation, Forest Hills Gardens was typical of both contemporary and subsequently planned communities, where racial separation was rationalized by a mix of frank racism and what Carl Nightingale called the "racial theory of property value," or the view that preserving property value meant sustaining segregation.³⁷ Perry also gave segregation a particular meaning in connection to community. He thought that Forest Hills' "similarity" or "homogeneity" aided the development of community solidarity among residents. In his view, "apartness" from others, combined with identification with the local "herd," fostered greater "community consciousness."³⁸

Perry's interest in boundaries extended also to his work in social programs in neighborhoods beyond Forest Hills. Like many other social reformers of his day, Perry worried that urbanization would produce anonymity, but he also wanted to manage social connections toward positive rather than destructive ends. One of Perry's projects at Sage pointed him to young adult dance halls to consider how to make community inside social boundaries. The Sage-funded Registered Acquaintance Dance (RAD) Club sought to replace the unstructured interactions of the dance hall or saloon with bounded, closely supervised social engagement. Club-organized dances were open to single men and women, or, at separate events, married couples, all of whom had passed a character test.³⁹ A *New York Times* reporter who went "undercover" at one dance wrote glowingly of the experience and assured her readers that these events were surely not "crudely democratic"—an unintended inversion of the idea of democracy. A *Wider Use of the School Plant* (1911) had conveyed. RAD Clubs operated in various New York neighborhoods, including "among the Negroes" in Harlem.⁴⁰ This Sage effort embodied an idealized version of structured community interaction inside well-defined social and physical boundaries—ideas that continued into Perry's later work on the school-centered neighborhood unit.

"HOMOGENEITY" AND SEGREGATION FOR CHILDREN AND NEIGHBORHOOD

Although earlier phases of Perry's work had encouraged interaction across social, even what he then called "racial," groups, by the 1920s Perry was articulating with increasing clarity a commitment to social homogeneity. Over time, in fact, Perry came to see segregation as crucial to community cohesion and thus a foundational component of his neighborhood unit. In his Sage-funded work on city playgrounds as sites of healthy recreation and Americanization, Perry articulated a general commitment to homogeneity as productive of community: "A certain degree of racial and social homogeneity must be assured among playground patrons or healthy play-life will not occur."⁴¹ Not only adult and family interactions, but also children at play, depended on that "certain degree" of segregation. Perry's own papers do not illuminate what he meant by "a certain degree" of homogeneity, but scholarship on the shifting sands of racial ideology sheds light on his views. If, in 1910, Perry was like many Americans in identifying various groups of European immigrants as distinct "races," by the mid-1920s fewer were doing so. An increasing emphasis on categories of color—"White" or "Caucasian"—trumped previous ideas that divisions among peoples of European descent were "racial." Perry's vision of park or playground interaction among people of diverse ethnicities had not changed. But rather than speaking openly of a heterogeneity that he imagined included various European ethnicities, he was now encouraging a "certain" homogeneity—a homogeneity of people under the consolidating "White" racial category.⁴²

Thinking about playgrounds provided the opening for Perry's work on the neighborhood unit. As colleagues at Sage and beyond compiled the massive *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, Perry tackled the question of where playgrounds should sit in the city landscape. From that narrow question, Perry expanded his thinking, ultimately offering to the *Regional Plan* his neighborhood unit concept for "family life community." In the *Regional Plan*, the neighborhood unit became a basic unit for thinking about the organization of urban space.⁴³

Perry's discussions of the neighborhood unit before professional audiences over the late 1920s and early 1930s merged his ideas of social and physical boundaries, the centrality of schools as community institutions, and the importance of intentional "homogeneity" for community life. Locating a school at the center of a bounded neighborhood was helpful but insufficient. Even more stridently than he had stated his case only a few years ago, Perry, in 1930, now opined: "The great foe to community life is heterogeneity. The [neighborhood unit] . . . produces homogeneity." Perry often spoke of segregation in this manner, though he avoided using its most blunt name. Instead, he employed more gentle tones: "Put like people together and give them common facilities to care for and associations among them are bound to spring into existence."⁴⁴ Schools offered the ideal "common facilities" for these "like people" to care for.

In 1930, Perry explained his interest in "homogeneous" neighborhood populations by calling on the expertise of University of Chicago sociologist Roderick McKenzie. "McKenzie," he wrote, "has pointed out that the segregation of a city population 'along racial, economic, social, and vocational lines' is a normal process and one which is constantly at work," but also one that could be "accelerated and improved in character." Perry hedged a bit, though: "Whether we favor the tendency [toward segregation] or not, a situation is arising that will require a fresh study and reevaluation of this fundamental social phenomenon." Nevertheless, he continued to speak more favorably than critically of separation, asserting that "apartness" from other communities and "homogeneity" helped "in creating community consciousness."⁴⁵

Perry's nod to the work of Roderick McKenzie attested to the import of the University of Chicago's sociology department in influencing aspects of the neighborhood unit concept. Led by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in the 1920s and 1930s, the department became the base for a new scholarly approach to the city—and provided Perry his first opportunity, in 1925, to publish his neighborhood unit ideas.

Through Park's and Burgess's studies, and those of legions of their students, University of Chicago sociologists documented the diverse and dynamic urban landscape and predicted how it would develop. They applied the concept of ecology to explain how immigrant groups formed communities and then became incorporated in the broader city.⁴⁶

Yet the Chicago ecological model had little to offer in the way of nuanced description or prediction for the "social ecology" of Black communities. African Americans faced barriers to geographic and social mobility that limited employment opportunity and restricted housing and educational choices. However, as Alice O'Connor has pointed out, the Chicago school's approach "naturalized" segregation for African American urbanites. Other urban sociologists working at the time, including W. E. B. Du Bois, made space in their work for the role of political and economic action in making segregation, but it was the ecological view that came to predominate in Perry's work and, more broadly, in early twentieth century urban sociology.⁴⁷

Perry remained a committed advocate of the neighborhood unit to the end of his life even though some clear criticism—centered chiefly on the link between the unit and segregation—emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1930, debating a colleague who found his neighborhood unit concept too divisive, Perry avoided the term segregation while remaining attached to his vision of homogeneity. "[E]very voluntary grouping is a drawing together, and a pooling of effort, to achieve some common purpose," which he argued was "as an aggregation rather than a segregation," "a display of unity rather than disunion."⁴⁸ Amid a growing concern over housing shortages in the post-World War II years, criticism also came from public housing advocates such as Catherine Bauer. She agreed with Perry and others that neighborhoods were the "elemental unit in human environment" and that positive "civic organization does not occur by accident." Yet Bauer also questioned the planning field's overall acceptance of segregation by race and class.⁴⁹

Planner and future Harvard architecture professor Reginald Isaacs (who was also a student of sociology at the University of Chicago in the 1940s) took more specific aim at the neighborhood unit. In 1948, he used the magazine of the National Association of Housing Officials to issue a two-part criticism of the neighborhood unit as an "instrument for segregation."⁵⁰ Isaacs indicted Perry's unit for producing a "casual and unconscionable acceptance of segregation." Furthermore, he pointed out that in his city of Chicago, not only did the "neighborhood unit" boundaries match divisions between ethnic and racial groups but also that some of the boundaries of neighborhoods had been "deliberately determined to perpetuate segregation."⁵¹ Isaacs argued instead for a mode of planning in which the "prescriptive task of the planner in a democratic society [is] to break down such barriers and facilitate integration of all people." One factor that kept planners from doing so, Isaacs implied, was the particularly potent intersection of neighborhood definition and school, as "heterogeneous city neighborhoods result in highly mixed . . . groups served by the same schools . . . which usually results in an unhappy situation for the children and is highly disturbing to their parents. Schools are, therefore, the most important reason for flight from the city."⁵² Despite Isaacs's strong calls for breaking down racial barriers, his remarks hinted that even he had not resolved how to challenge segregation in the context of schooling.

In the end, criticisms such as Isaacs's, coming from within the planning field, made little impact on the professional embrace of the neighborhood unit. The National Association of Housing Officials gave the last word to James Dahir, a known advocate of the neighborhood unit, who patronizingly diminished Isaacs's critique as stemming from "emotional involvement." In a subsequent issue of the magazine, the organization published a few letters in response to Isaacs—some positive, but one scathingly dismissive, referring to Isaacs as "using neighborhood unit planning to fight the Civil War."⁵³

Notwithstanding such debates, the segregating view of the concept remained influential during the postwar era. In the 1940s and 1950s, as in earlier decades, the neighborhood unit had powerful allies in the field of planning that profoundly affected local practices across the United States and other parts of the world. Its reach extended both domestically and internationally through both national-level and local-level practice, as we document in the next section.

THE PROLIFERATION OF SCHOOL-CENTERED NEIGHBORHOOD UNITS

Even though Perry never trained formally as a city planner, his vision of the school-centered neighborhood unit quickly became a mainstream, literally textbook, doctrine in urban planning from the early to mid-twentieth century, and its legacy for the built landscape continued decades longer.⁵⁴ In the decades following the release of the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, Perry's concept helped shape federal urban renewal standards, as well as the underwriting guidelines of the Federal Housing Administration—thus affecting untold numbers of new housing developments constructed from the 1930s through the 1960s. The neighborhood unit also appeared in the policy frameworks adopted by a broad range of influential organizations including the American Public Health Association, the national Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Planning Association of America, and the Urban Land Institute.⁵⁵ The school-centered neighborhood unit represented and divided urban and suburban space in ways that helped form the cognitive map of the American metropolis in a period of intensive and intensifying segregation.

Perry's neighborhood unit idea also played a pivotal role in shaping local planning practices, both in the United States and throughout the world. During World War II, Leslie Patrick Abercrombie and John Henry Forshaw incorporated Perry's work in the *County of London Plan*. Published in 1943, Abercrombie and Forshaw's proposal called for the division of the war-ravaged capital city into "separate and definite" neighborhood units, each "with its own schools, public buildings, shops, open spaces, etc." As with Perry's original model, the London plan reflected an education-centered vision of the city, with elementary schools as "the determining factor in the size and organization of . . . neighborhood units." Abercrombie and Forshaw, like Perry, endorsed self-sufficient, spatially and socially segregated neighborhoods as a means of increasing neighborhood cohesion and community "interdependence."⁵⁶ Three years later, the British Parliament helped further codify Perry's concept in legislation that applied neighborhood unit-style planning to nearly two dozen small and medium-sized cities scattered throughout the island.⁵⁷

On the European mainland, postwar planners employed neighborhood units in a variety of nations including Sweden, Greece, Germany, and the Soviet Union, leading one planning scholar to claim they had taken strong root “throughout the Western world.”⁵⁸ British planners working in newly independent India took them there, while Greek modernist architect Constantino Doxiadis carried the idea to Pakistan.⁵⁹ Versions of Perry’s neighborhood units also appeared in the master plans produced for Jerusalem, Nairobi, and other Middle Eastern and African cities at around the same time, as well as in Latin America and Canada.⁶⁰ Reflecting on the dominance of the neighborhood unit concept within 20th-century planning circles, scholars Tridib Banerjee and William C. Baer went so far as to conclude, “For more than fifty years, it has been virtually the sole basis for formally organizing residential space.”⁶¹

Although by the 1950s proponents of neighborhood units could be found in virtually all corners of the globe, Perry’s concept gained perhaps its greatest traction in the United States. Beyond the dozens of government agencies, real estate organizations, and professional and trade associations that formally endorsed the neighborhood unit model, leading intellectuals and planning practitioners such as Frederick J. Adams, Lewis Mumford, and Ladislav Segoe endorsed versions of Perry’s approach. Adams, a professor of city and regional planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, published widely on the benefits of neighborhood units and served as an adviser to numerous city planning commissions seeking to implement Perry’s concept.⁶² In his influential 1954 article, “The Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Unit,” Mumford, the renowned urbanist, advocated Perry’s work, referring to it as “elementary common sense.”⁶³ For his part, Segoe, a planning consultant, included school-centered neighborhood units in master plans for Detroit and Lansing, Michigan; Richmond, Virginia; and dozens of other municipalities.⁶⁴ During a 1945 meeting regarding the Detroit plan, Segoe articulated his fundamental belief in school-based urban development, claiming, “The elementary school is the most important factor nucleating a neighborhood.”⁶⁵

Segregationist practice in housing and schooling had important regional variation but many fundamental commonalities as well. The neighborhood unit concept mattered in Michigan as well as Virginia, New Jersey as well as Tennessee—its appeal crossing regional dividing lines. Officials in Flint, Michigan, did not credit Perry directly, but they were clearly in his debt. For five decades, in fact, they operated a “community schools” program that defined the boundaries of neighborhoods in relationship to schools and used these boundaries to preserve segregation.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, in Nashville, Tennessee, local planners cited the neighborhood unit concept directly when, in 1959, they divided their city landscape into “planning units” and made these the basic organizing principle for many planning decisions, including school locations linked to new segregated suburban development and new segregated public housing development.⁶⁷

Many others agreed. Among the countless intellectuals, public officials, and consultants who helped to enshrine Perry’s school-centered work as planning orthodoxy, few were as consequential as Harland Bartholomew, the so-called dean of comprehensive city planning in the United States.⁶⁸ Historians of cities and of planning have long recognized Bartholomew’s importance in the field, as well as his adherence to the neighborhood unit, but they have not traced how thoroughly Bartholomew adopted the school-centric nature of that planning concept.⁶⁹ Recognizing his use of neighborhood units, alongside his impact in shaping locally and nationally powerful mechanisms of exclusion in zoning and restrictive covenants, Bartholomew’s career indicates how the school-centered neighborhood idea influenced the institutionalization of U.S. segregation.

Born in 1889 in Stoneham, Massachusetts, Bartholomew spent much of his childhood in New England before moving to Brooklyn, New York, as a teenager. Upon graduating from high school, Bartholomew attended Rutgers College, where he studied civil engineering for two years. During this period he first encountered the nascent world of urban planning, and soon after leaving Rutgers he landed a job with E. P. Goodrich, a civil engineer and planner.⁷⁰

Spanning six decades and numerous cities, Bartholomew’s planning career was varied and extensive. He moved from early work in municipal planning in Newark and St. Louis to his role as chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission in Washington, D.C., from 1953 to 1962.⁷¹ Between 1918 and 1956, Bartholomew also held a non-resident professorship at the University of Illinois, teaching a variety of urban planning and design courses. He also published prolifically and influentially on topics such as zoning, transportation planning, and urban renewal.⁷²

Bartholomew’s career as a consultant allowed him to exert his greatest influence over the metropolitan landscape. In 1919, he founded Harland Bartholomew and Associates, of which he served as partner-in-charge until 1961. He oversaw the creation of more than 500 comprehensive plans for cities and counties, primarily in North America, as well as thousands of professional projects, including a comprehensive zoning code for the state of Hawaii and the redevelopment of the Colonial National Parkway in Virginia.⁷³

Through this consulting work, Bartholomew helped institutionalize the neighborhood unit approach to city planning. Bartholomew’s commitment to school-centered neighborhood development took shape in the 1910s and 1920s, as an extension of his City Efficient philosophy. In contrast to the aesthetic orientation of the City Beautiful, City Efficient reflected a new focus on the economic, technical, and administrative aspects of city planning. The new paradigm prioritized governmental efficiency and economic growth over all else. In this context, the “wider use” of schools appealed as a cost-saving mechanism.⁷⁴ Although Bartholomew had no special interest in schools or education, his predilection for efficiency predisposed him to endorse concepts such as the neighborhood unit, which offered tremendous cost savings via the multi-purpose uses of schools, parks, and other public facilities.⁷⁵ Bartholomew found in Perry’s notion of the “wider use” of schoolhouses a cost-effective way to use existing educational infrastructure on an expanded, around-the-clock basis to meet the pressing need for recreation and community-building in cities with surging population growth and still-limited infrastructure.⁷⁶ In his 1920 comprehensive master plan for the city of East St. Louis, Illinois, Bartholomew readily acknowledged the economic considerations that drove his interest in schools-based neighborhood planning: “Because of the number of buildings required and the large amount of equipment necessary for a complete system of community [and recreation] centers, it would be financially impossible in most cities to establish centers and construct buildings solely for community work.” “The public

school buildings can well be adapted to the needs of community work.”⁷⁷ Schools-based recreation and community building projects were logical extensions of Bartholomew’s embrace of the City Efficient.

Bartholomew, like Perry, also saw a variety of additional benefits—many of them social—accruing from the expanded use of school facilities. Writing at the close of World War I, Bartholomew described some of the virtues of schools-based recreation and community building programs, claiming, “If the morale of our army helped to bring world peace, can we not build up a national morale, through community play and recreation, that will accomplish more than armies—a spirit of good fellowship, fair play and the other elements of real democracy.” Sounding quite like Perry writing nearly a decade earlier, he added that “More parks, more playgrounds and more community centers mean more good citizens, better soldiers of democracy and with them we promote that greatest of all reconstruction measures—the conservation of human life and happiness.”⁷⁸ For Bartholomew, then, schoolhouses were much more than cost-efficient venues for recreational activities. They were also spaces in which urban residents could forge communal bonds—in Bartholomew’s words, a “community of interests.”⁷⁹ In his 1921 plan for Lansing, Michigan, Bartholomew and his planning team drew from the same progressive impulse that inspired Perry in advocating the expanded use of school facilities: “The adoption of the policy of building schools adapted to the wider use of the community will be well in keeping with the spirit of progressive municipalities.”⁸⁰

Bartholomew’s vision of community was strictly delineated, however. In fact, Bartholomew’s advocacy of school-centered neighborhoods was inseparable from his commitment to social “homogeneity,” a term he and his contemporaries used as a euphemism for strict racial and class segregation. Most planners wanted to protect existing White neighborhoods from industry, low-rent housing, and other “encroachments”—including Black residents—that they believed threatened property values. As did Perry, Bartholomew viewed segregation as a precondition for the creation of economically viable and socially harmonious communities.⁸¹

Consequently, many of Bartholomew and Associates’ early plans suggest the creation of segregated school-recreation districts. In the 1920 plan for East St. Louis, for example, Bartholomew and his colleagues proposed a schools-based recreation program organized along both geographic and racial lines. The plan included a map of school-park facilities and their catchment areas, several of which are designated as “colored.”⁸² Similarly, the firm’s 1927 plan for Evansville, Indiana, suggested that school-park-community center facilities “should serve a homogeneous residential district approximately a mile square and should be as nearly as possible in the center of that district.” To maintain the homogeneity of such facilities, Bartholomew and his representatives suggested a range of measures including racial deed restrictions on housing, strict zoning controls, and the formation of neighborhood improvement associations.⁸³

Already proponents of the wider use doctrine, Bartholomew and colleagues greeted the publication of the 1929 *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, which featured Perry’s iconic neighborhood unit diagram, with immediate enthusiasm. First, and most practically, they saw neighborhood units as a useful tool for institutionalizing “wider use” principles. By creating an entire city of discrete, socially homogeneous neighborhood units, Bartholomew believed that he could organize and allocate schools, parks, community centers, and other public facilities on a systematic, cost-efficient basis.⁸⁴ More broadly, though, Bartholomew viewed the neighborhood unit as a useful tool for studying and comparing urban land uses, housing quality, municipal service costs, tax collections, and other local conditions. Based upon such neighborhood-level studies, members of the firm then offered specific plans to meet the challenges faced by each of a city’s neighborhoods.⁸⁵ During the 1930s, for instance, Bartholomew oversaw a detailed citywide survey of St. Louis—a first step toward creating a comprehensive land use policy for the city. As part of that process, surveyors divided the entire municipality into, first, 26, and ultimately, 52 homogeneous “neighborhood units,” most of them delineated by major thoroughfares. Bartholomew then used these segregated units as the geographic basis for surveying conditions in the city and designing individualized neighborhood improvement plans. Over time, Bartholomew and his colleagues incorporated this same method into virtually all of their master planning projects.⁸⁶ For Bartholomew, who in 1932 dubbed neighborhood unit planning as “the opportunity of the century,” Perry’s concept was nothing short of foundational.⁸⁷

In 1937, Bartholomew lent his support to neighborhood unit planning by co-authoring (with Frank Watson of Purdue University) “The Neighborhood Improvement Act,” a model state statute “for the protection and improvement of neighborhoods through the action of property owners.” Commissioned by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the legislation included an unambiguous endorsement of the neighborhood unit. According to the act, “The important elements of family life and security of home ownership rest, in no small degree, upon the character of a neighborhood. The neighborhood must, therefore, be the new unit upon which effective city planning is built.” Section 3 of the law empowered municipal planning agencies to “prepare a plan of the city dividing all or part of the city into neighborhood areas.” The law also mandated that public hearings be held to determine all neighborhood boundaries. In an era in which the vast majority of White Americans (who, at the time, accounted for a large majority of the population in many American cities) endorsed strict racial segregation, Bartholomew’s emphasis on citizen participation effectively guaranteed racial segregation in most instances. With neighborhood units in place, residents had the power to draft mechanisms “for the development and restriction of such neighborhood areas.” Such plans, according to the act, could include new zoning proposals, street improvements, and building restrictions.⁸⁸ Here and elsewhere, the neighborhood unit idea represented a new segregationist logic through which policy makers, should they be so inclined, could maintain and extend the color line.

At around the same time as he was working on the model legislation, Bartholomew instructed his colleagues to include neighborhood units in virtually all of the firm’s master plans. In a 1961 letter to his biographer Norman Johnston, Bartholomew recalled, “We would make and leave maps in practically every city in which we worked after 1937 showing division of the city into neighborhood unit areas.”⁸⁹ All available evidence seems to confirm Bartholomew’s recollection. Between the late 1930s and 1984, when another company purchased the firm, members of Bartholomew and Associates devised neighborhood unit plans for hundreds of cities and towns. Bartholomew and his fellow consultants used the same basic neighborhood unit template (and often the same exact words) for each master plan.⁹⁰

Bartholomew and Associates' 1954-55 master plan for Bloomington, Illinois, is illustrative. The report on schools and parks opens with a recognition of the expanding role of educational institutions in urban life. "Public education is continually broadening its scope; it is now extending its service to the very young and to adults. . . . The modern public school is becoming a focal point in the life of the community." Therefore, the authors of the plan surmised, "The logical center for a residential neighborhood is a neighborhood park with an elementary school which can also serve as the community building." The report also includes an illustration—one that Bartholomew and Associates incorporated into most of their master plans—entitled "General Standards for Recreation Facilities." The illustration features a map of an ideal neighborhood unit with a combined school-park-community building at the center. A caption above the drawing of an elementary school reads, "The 'center of community life' for the average family is the elementary school and the neighborhood park." Another caption lists some of the characteristics of an ideal neighborhood unit. Elementary schools, it states, "should have an enrollment of at least 300 pupils and should not exceed 500; a site of 5 acres plus one acre for each 100 enrollment, site should not be located on major streets; a one-half mile radius of service; a playground with supervision; facilities in the school building that can serve as a community center."⁹¹

Bartholomew and Associates' Bloomington plan also included a report on housing and the general appearance of the city. Within that section, they identified key characteristics of neighborhood units, drawing heavily from Perry. "Each neighborhood should be generally homogeneous in character. . . ." "Each neighborhood should be of sufficient size to maintain and protect its own environment. The area ordinarily tributary to an elementary school is a desirable neighborhood size." Each of the city's neighborhoods, the consultants added, "should be provided with all utilities and essential community facilities, including a combined school and community center and properly located shopping districts," and should have "definite and recognizable boundaries."⁹²

After dividing cities such as Bloomington into neighborhood units, Bartholomew and colleagues then turned to familiar mechanisms of exclusion to reinforce and defend these neighborhoods' segregation along lines of race, class, and ethnicity. Drawing from the 1937 model legislation, members of the firm advocated strict zoning controls, neighborhood improvement associations, and, at least until the late 1940s, racially restrictive housing covenants that barred White owners from selling to Black buyers. The school-centered neighborhood unit provided a rationale and an encouragement for powerful mechanisms of exclusion.

Although Bartholomew and his colleagues made few direct references to race in their reports, the planning documents they produced—particularly for cities in the South—occasionally reveal their commitment to segregation via the use of the neighborhood unit.⁹³ In 1941, Bartholomew and Associates submitted a plan to city officials in Louisville for the development of a new neighborhood unit-style community called Douglas Park. The proposed subdivision was to include 549 single-family homes surrounding a park, with an elementary school near the edge of the neighborhood. To ensure racial homogeneity in the new development, Bartholomew's team included a racially restrictive housing covenant barring Black people from residing in the area. Under the terms of the covenant, "No land or interest in this subdivision shall by any persons or corporations be sold or resold, leased, released, rented to or in any way occupied, used or acquired by persons other than those of the Caucasian Race."⁹⁴

In the company's 1944 master plan for Dallas, the consultants indicated that the city's Black population was too decentralized to create homogeneous neighborhood units. The report states, "The scattering of Negro population in small haphazard patches is unsatisfactory because it makes any provision for satisfactory and convenient schools and parks impossible, it is a constant source of conflict, and it precludes homogeneous neighborhood development."⁹⁵ To remedy the problem, Bartholomew's planners suggested an extensive program of slum clearance and the relocation of thousands of Black residents into nine rigidly segregated neighborhood units—most, if not all, of them centered on Jim Crow schools and parks.⁹⁶ Similarly, in their 1957 plan for Waco, Texas, consultants from Bartholomew's firm suggested that "residential areas . . . should be organized into neighborhood units of between one-half square mile and one square mile in area." "The exact size and form of the various neighborhoods," they admitted, "should be related to the various social and income groups to population density and to the physical characteristics of the city."⁹⁷

By the late 20th century, Bartholomew and his numerous associates—dozens of whom became directors of planning in the cities they got to know as consultants—had spread Perry's concept to hundreds of cities and towns scattered throughout the United States.⁹⁸ They then reinforced the boundaries of the school-centered neighborhood unit by endorsing segregative zoning and restrictive covenants. In doing so, they helped to cement the place of schools in the field of urban planning. While more research is needed to determine the full extent to which municipal policy makers implemented neighborhood unit-based plans to further segregation at the local level, a review of Bartholomew's vast body of work confirms that he incorporated Perry's model to become one of the most prolific segregationists in modern American history.

CONCLUSION

The school-centered, racially and economically homogeneous neighborhood unit shaped countless suburban and urban residential developments in the United States and around the globe. Untold numbers of urban renewal projects, public housing developments, and subdivisions intentionally feature schools at their center. City planners like Clarence Perry, Harland Bartholomew, and their counterparts in municipal government were influential, if underappreciated, actors in U.S. cities and their schools. They put schools at the center of the cognitive map of the segregated American landscape.

The neighborhood unit's impact reached beyond those places where the concept was enacted directly in local planning and development practices. The Federal Housing Administration picked up the concept's standards and incorporated them in its segregationist lending guidelines; pioneers in shaping zoning and restrictive covenants, like Harland Bartholomew, crafted these tools in part to defend neighborhood unit-based plans. The school-centered neighborhood unit interacted with and helped inform the powerful mechanisms of residential exclusion and segregation that developed in the first half of the 20th century and have left their mark to this day.

Recognizing the origins and impact of the school-centered neighborhood unit reveals that enduring segregation in schooling has its origins not solely in the individual and collective choices of U.S. parents, citizens, and consumers. Nor does it rest solely on powerful mechanisms of segregation in housing that can at first appear to develop separately from any consideration of schooling. Instead, the school-centric neighborhood unit conjoined ideas about housing, schooling, and race, and then forged these ideas into a powerful mechanism of segregation. Schools had a key conceptual place in the building and strengthening of American segregation.

The history of school-centered neighborhood units helps to illuminate the significance of American schools and of the place of education in American life. Yet the story of neighborhood units also has clear implications for current policy discussions. Today, school segregation remains strikingly apparent, and it compounds the educational challenges and inequalities that face poor children of color.⁹⁹ At the same time, however, legal shifts—most important, the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved*—sharply constrain the use of race-conscious approaches in student assignment. In essence, the courts have brought to an end the legal pressures against school segregation. Educators concerned about persistent school segregation thus face the question of what basis on which they can build new approaches to desegregation. The history of the school-centric neighborhood unit and its place in the story of American segregation points in two interestingly distinct but not necessarily contradictory directions.

If housing and schooling have been so thoroughly connected, as the neighborhood unit shows, efforts to further desegregation by linking the two together have historical precedent. Housing and schooling are not separate areas of policy making, but have in fact long operated together in distinct and identifiable ways. Thus when advocates point out that “housing policy is school policy,” or when they call for inclusionary or desegregating housing policy in the interest of increasing school desegregation, they are seeking to activate a well-established historical connection.¹⁰⁰ But they hope to turn it toward desegregating, rather than segregating, ends.

Put differently, educators could see in the segregating history of the neighborhood unit precedent for new, desegregating efforts to link housing and schooling. Segregation was constructed through a robust use of state power in various forms; could desegregation be achieved through the same?

The same history might suggest another approach to desegregation, as well. If residential segregation and school segregation have been so tightly bound together, both conceptually and via policy, should desegregation be pursued by first breaking links between residence and school assignment? School choice advocates—from Milton Friedman in the 1950s to those who decry correlations between zip code and academic outcomes today—support this approach. They suggest that equity can be best pursued when individuals, free of attachments to particular school zones, select schools. Perhaps tellingly, neither Friedman nor most of today’s choice advocates make desegregation central to their view of educational improvement.

In truth, though, modern-day school choice does not fully break the bonds between residence and schooling. As James Ryan has rightly pointed out, in practice school choice plans operate within the highly segregating boundaries of American school district lines rather than across them. Therefore, particularly wealthy and majority White suburbs—whose demographics are in many respects still traceable to earlier waves of segregationist housing policy—remain largely exempt from school choice.¹⁰¹ Choice within these structural and geographic limits has more frequently worked to segregate than to desegregate.¹⁰² Although connections between schooling and housing have, as we have shown through the story of the neighborhood unit, often worked to reinforce segregation in both, the recent history of school choice efforts suggest that simply breaking the ties between school and home within district lines does not generate meaningful desegregation.

Like most historical examples, the history of the neighborhood unit does not point directly to a particular policy intervention. But its story should still help expand our imagination for desegregation’s possibilities. Past desegregation efforts have drawn criticism as overreaching interventions into the private marketplace, or even as interventions into “natural” patterns of segregation. Rezoning students in favor of desegregation, supporting inclusionary zoning policies, or weighting charter or public school enrollment in favor of desegregation all seem quite modestly scaled when compared, more accurately, with the breadth of previously segregating forces and actions that rested in part on the relationship between schools and housing.

The origins and reach of the school-centered neighborhood unit help us to appreciate the power of schools in conceptualizing the American landscape, and of the breadth of ideas and policy mechanisms that have been created to segregate. Whether via binding schools to housing or separating residence from school assignment, desegregation will require a robust commitment of resources and political will—one perhaps no smaller than the commitment of resources and political will that constructed the segregated American landscape in the first place.

Notes

1. Core works on the history of residential segregation include: Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). See also Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Norton, 2005); Carl Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Jeffrey Gonda, *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

2. *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917).

3. See Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
4. Clarence Arthur Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit: A Scheme of Arrangement for the Family Life Community," in *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, Vol. VII: Neighborhood and Community Planning* (New York: Regional Plan Association, 1929).
5. Jason S. Brody, "Constructing Professional Knowledge: The Neighborhood Unit Concept in the Community Builder's Handbook" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 2009).
6. Duany quoted in Michael W. Mehaffy, Sergio Porta, and Ombretta Romice, "The 'Neighborhood Unit' on Trial: A Case Study in the Impacts of Urban Morphology," *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 8, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 199-217; Samuel Zipp, "Superblock Stories, or, Ten Episodes in the History of Public Housing," in *Rethinking History* 17 (March 2013): 38-73, quotation on 60.
7. Tridib Banerjee and William C. Baer, *Beyond the Neighborhood Unit: Residential Environments and Public Policy* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1984); Howard Gillette, "The Evolution of Neighborhood Planning: From the Progressive Era to the 1949 Housing Act," *Journal of Urban History* 9, no. 4 (August 1983): 421-44; Christopher Silver, "Neighborhood Planning in Historical Perspective," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 51, no. 2 (June 1985): 161-74; Lloyd Lawhon, "The Neighborhood Unit: Physical Design or Physical Determinism?" *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 2 (February 2009): 111-32; Donald Johnson, "Origin of the Neighbourhood Unit," *Planning Perspectives* 17 (2002): 227-245.
8. See Jack Dougherty, "Shopping for Schools: How Public Education and Private Housing Shaped Suburban Connecticut," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (March 2012): 205-224; Erica Frankenberg and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "Public Decisions and Private Choices: Reassessing the School-Housing Segregation Link in the Post-Parents Involved Era," *Wake Forest Law Review* 48 (2013): 397-426; Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "City Lines, County Lines, Color Lines: The Relationship between School and Housing Segregation in Four Southern Metro Areas," *Teachers College Record* 115, no. 6 (2013): 1-45.
9. Matthew Delmont. *Why busing failed: Race, media, and the national resistance to desegregation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016).
10. Key works on progressive reform in the early-20th century city include Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003). On education in this context, see David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Paula S. Fass, *Outside in: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
11. Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of City Planning in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Blackwell, 1988); Christine M. Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); Howard Gillette, *Civitas by Design: Building Better Communities, from the Garden City to the New Urbanism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
12. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 169. See also David R. Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).
13. *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917).
14. Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit." See also his "The Relation of Neighborhood Forces to the Larger Community: Planning a City Neighborhood from the Social Point of View," in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 415-421 and "The Local Community as a Unit in the Planning of Urban Residential Areas," in *The Urban Community: Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the American Sociological Association*, ed. Ernest Burgess (New York: Greenwood Press, 1925), 238-241. The 1,000-student scale appeared in "The Local Community as a Unit," 239.
15. Kermit C. Parsons, ed., *The writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of the planned community*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
16. Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit." See also works in note 7.
17. Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit."
18. Although some scholars have described the neighborhood unit as Perry's unique synthesis (see Banerjee and Baer, *Beyond the Neighborhood Unit*, 6), Johnson, "Origin of the Neighbourhood Unit," argues that its originator was in fact not Perry, but Chicago architect William Drummond. It is clear that Perry's neighborhood unit was an agglomeration more than an original creation, fed in part by his Russell Sage-facilitated interactions with leading planners of the time (see Lawhon, "The Neighborhood Unit," 117-119).
19. City Beautiful's most famous examples are Daniel Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: The Commercial Club, 1909) and in the work of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (designer of New York's Central Park).
20. Perry's daughter Janet explained the link between Forest Hills Gardens and Perry's neighborhood unit work in a biographical letter. See Letter to Ray Lubove, February 9, 1966, series 3, file 119d, box 13a, Russell Sage Foundation papers (hereinafter, RSF),

Rockefeller Archives Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY. Perry underscored the same in “The Rehabilitation of the Local Community,” *Social Forces* 4, no. 3 (March 1926): 559. Lawhon, “The Neighborhood Unit,” calls Forest Hills Gardens Perry’s “working laboratory,” 117-118, quote on 118.

21. Parsons, ed., *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*. See also Patricia Mooney-Melvin, *The Organic City: Urban Definition & Community Organization, 1880-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987).

22. See note 7. The exception in the history of education is the brief discussion of Perry’s “wider-use” and neighborhood unit work in William W. Cutler III, “Cathedral of Culture,” *History of Education Quarterly* (April 1989): 1-40. Writing before Perry’s work had come in for examination by a new generation of planning historians who benefitted from new historical work on the policy roots of segregation, Cutler did not investigate Perry’s work in relationship to segregation.

23. Clarence Arthur Perry, “Personal Data Regarding Clarence Arthur Perry,” September 7, 1927, RSF, box 13a, file 119d, Rockefeller Archives Center. See also John Glenn, Lillian Brandt, and F. Emerson Andrews, *Russell Sage Foundation, 1907-1946*, 2 vols. (New York: Russell Sage, 1947), esp. 72. Lawhon, “The Neighborhood Unit,” 119-120, mentions the links between Perry’s earlier projects at Sage and his neighborhood unit work, as does Banerjee and Baer, *Beyond the Neighborhood Unit*, 22. With early-career experience in U.S. colonial possessions before a long and influential career in elite domestic organizations, Perry joined the class of men moving between colonial and domestic influence, a development documented by Sarah Manekin in “Spreading the Empire of Free Education, 1865-1905” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2009).

24. On Sage’s playground work, see Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Ocean Howell, “Play Pays: Urban Land Politics and Playgrounds in the United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of Urban History* 34 (September 2008): 961-994.

25. On debates between physical and social determinism in Perry’s work, see Gillette, “Evolution,” and, Lawhon, “The Neighborhood Unit.”

26. See works in note 7.

27. Perry, Clarence Arthur. *The wider use of the school plant*. New York, NY: Charities Publication Committee, 1911.

28. John Dewey, “The School as a Social Centre,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 81-93. On the democratic potential of “social centers” and other Progressive-era education models, see Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy during the Progressive Era* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), esp. 48-86. Mattson does not discuss Perry in detail, but does portray his shift from community center work to physical planning as part of a break with local-level democracy in favor of distant, elite approaches (125). Perry’s writing across the 1910s through the 1930s shows a more fluid relationship between the two. Mattson also describes Perry’s community center work as focused on preventing class and race-based antagonism (70), but does not explain how this goal related to Perry’s emphasis on developing class and race-specific communities.

29. Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public*, 51-65; Perry, *Wider Use of the School Plant*; Clarence Arthur Perry, *The Community-Used School* (New York: New York City and Russell Sage, 1911); Clarence Arthur Perry, *How to Start Social Centers* (New York: Russell Sage, 1913); Clarence Arthur Perry, *The School as a Factor in Neighborhood Development* (New York: New York City and Russell Sage, 1914); Clarence Arthur Perry, *The High School as a Social Centre* (New York: New York City and Russell Sage, 1914); Clarence Arthur Perry, *School Center Gazette, 1919-1920* (New York: New York City and Russell Sage, 1920); Perry, “The Neighborhood Unit.” See also Cutler, “Cathedral of Culture,” 24-25, 30.

30. See Figure 1. The vagueness of this term may be one factor in explaining why educators have been slow to appreciate the centrality of the school to the neighborhood unit concept.

31. Luther Hayes Gulick, forward to Perry, *Wider Use*, vii.

32. Perry, *Wider Use*, 370-71.

33. Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a different color*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

34. Perry, *Wider Use*, 176-77, 371-373, and passim; Clarence Arthur Perry, “School Center History in Chicago: Some Beginnings and Their Significance,” *Journal of Social Forces* 3 (1925): 291-293, quotation on 293. For a discussion of the “wider use” effort and its links to segregation, see [citation omitted to protect author anonymity].

35. Letter to Ray Lubove; Perry, “Rehabilitation,” 558-62, 559; Clarence Arthur Perry, “The Tangible Aspects of Community Organization,” *Social Forces* (1930): 558-64.

36. As of 1940, the first year in which New York City’s census used tract divisions, the Forest Hills Gardens tract was 99.56 percent white. U.S. Census, 1940, via www.socialexplorer.com, accessed October 13, 2015.

37. Nightingale, *Segregation*.

38. Perry, “The Tangible Aspects,” 432, and n41. See also the Forest Hills by-laws, reprinted in Perry, “The Neighborhood Unit,” 137-140.

39. Clarence Arthur Perry, "Special Item of \$3000 for RAD Club Experiment," September 2, 1920; L. Hanmer Memo. to Mr. Glenn, January 8, 1921, and March 15, 1921, all in RSF, series 3, box 13a, file 119c, Rockefeller Archives Center. See also *New York Times*, March 31, 1912, SM5, November 28, 1920, 21, February 13, 1921, B4, via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed June 18, 2012.
40. Helen Bullitt Lowery, "Get Your Acquaintances at the Agency," *New York Times*, December 12, 1920, BR4, via ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed June 18, 2012.
41. Perry, "The Local Community as a Unit," 238.
42. The authors would like to thank Michael Bowman here for answering important questions on an earlier version that helped clarify this argument.
43. Perry, "The Local Community as a Unit," 238.
44. Perry, "The Tangible Aspects," 563.
45. *Ibid.*, 562-563.
46. Wirth explains the term in his "A Bibliography of the Urban Community," in *The City*, ed. Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925, 1967), 188. See also Sudhir Venkatesh, "Chicago's Pragmatic Planners: American Sociology and the Myth of Community," *Social Science History* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 275-317. For an earlier view of Chicago school sociology as descriptive rather than prescriptive, see Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Silver also discusses Perry's debt to Chicago school sociology. See "Neighborhood Planning," 167-168.
47. Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century US History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). See also Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016).
48. Perry, "Tangible Aspects," 561. On segregation as a progressive project, see McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, Ch. 6. McGerr sees progressives' support for and acceptance of segregation as a contradiction of their commitment to ideas of association (215); for Perry, however, they were necessarily a linked pair. See also Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 79-85, 90-96; Kimberly Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age before Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28-35.
49. Catherine Bauer, "Good Neighborhoods," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 242 (1945): 104-116, quotations on 104. For other criticisms of Perry's neighborhood unit, see Gillette, *Civitas*, 68-69; Silver, "Neighborhood Planning," 169-70. For more on intentionally heterogeneous neighborhood unit development, see Michael Bowman, "Planning School Neighborhoods in an American Cosmopolis: A Spatial Policy History of School District, Housing, and City Planning Collaborations in Seattle, 1930-1980" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2015).
50. For more on Isaacs's criticism, see William H. Rohe and Lauren Gates, *Planning with Neighborhoods* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 30-32.
51. Reginald Isaacs, "The 'Neighborhood Unit' Is an Instrument for Segregation," *Journal of Housing* (August 1948): 215. For a short biographical overview, see <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/reginald-r-isaacs-papers-6425/more#colldesc>, accessed, accessed August 25, 2012.
52. Isaacs, "The Neighborhood Unit," 216.
53. James Dahir, "Neighborhood Planning Is a 'Three-in-One' Job," *Journal of Housing* (October 1949): 272; "Letters to the Editors," *Journal of Housing* (September 1948).
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55. Brody, "Constructing Professional Knowledge," Ch. 4 and 5, traces the idea through professional networks and policy; Gillette, *Civitas*, 68; Anatole A. Solow, Clifford C. Ham, and E. Owen Donnelly, *The Concept of the Neighborhood Unit: Its Emergence and Influence on Residential Environmental Planning and Development* (Pittsburgh: Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, 1969); Banerjee and Baer, *Beyond the Neighborhood Unit*, 25; Nicholas Patricios, "Urban Design Principles of the Original Neighborhood Concepts," *Urban Morphology* 6, no. 1 (2002): 21-32.
56. John Henry Forshaw, Leslie Patrick Abercrombie, and London County Council, *County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1943), 28.
57. M. Pratap Rao, *Planning for Metropolitan Cities: A Suggestive Approach* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1990), 23-24; Cynthia L. Girling and Kenneth I. Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), 67; David Rudlin and Nicholas Falk, *Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood: Building the 21st Century Home* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2009), 49-50. See also Suzanne Keller, *The Urban Neighborhood: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Random House, 1968).

58. Keller, *The Urban Neighborhood*, 131; J. Douglas Porteous, *Environment and Behavior: Planning and Everyday Urban Life* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1977), 72-75.
59. Sanjeev Vidyarthi, "Reimagining the American Neighborhood Unit for India," in *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*, ed. Patsy Healey and Robert Upton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 73-94; William J. Glover, "The Troubled Passage from 'Village Communities' to Planned New Town Developments in Mid-Twentieth-Century South Asia," in *Ecologies of Urbanism in India: Metropolitan Civility and Sustainability*, ed. Anne Radamacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 93-118; Sanjeev Vidyarthi, *One Idea, Many Plans: An American City Design Concept in Independent India* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Keller, *The Urban Neighborhood*, 129; Matthew Hull, "Uncivil Politics and the Appropriation of Planning in Islamabad," in *Beyond Crisis: Re-Evaluating Pakistan*, ed. Naveeda Khan (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 452-481; Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 34-66.
60. Porteous, *Environment and Behavior*, 75; Banerjee and Baer, *Beyond the Neighborhood Unit*, 27; Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 50, 126; Roy Kozlovsky, "Temporal States of Architecture: Mass Immigration and Provisional Housing in Israel," in *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 142-145; Kai K. Gutschow, "Das Neue Afrika: Ernst May's 1947 Kampala Plan as Cultural Programme," in *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories*, ed. Fassil Demissie (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 391. For more on the spread of neighborhood units outside the United States, see Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, Information Department, *Profile of Cuba* (Havana: Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, 1965), 203; James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 167-69, 187; Willem Van Vliet, *International Handbook of Housing Policies and Practices* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 392; Nelliana Villoria-Siegert and Arturo Almandoz, "Transferring the Neighborhood Unit to Caracas: Examples of Foreign Influence in Venezuela," *Critical Planning* 9 (2002): 89-100; Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 79-100; Roy Tyler Bowles, *Little Communities and Big Industries: Studies in the Social Impact of Canadian Resource Extraction* (Toronto: Butterworth's, 1982), 68-70; Kristin Larsen, "Cities to Come: Clarence Stein's Postwar Regionalism," *Journal of Planning History* 4, no. 1 (February 2005): 33-51; Edward Relph, *Toronto: Transformations in a City and Its Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 47-48.
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76. Bartholomew, "Toward the Reconstruction of New York's Lower East Side"; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Report upon Schools and Parks: Urban Area, Decatur, Illinois* (St. Louis: Harland Bartholomew and Associates, 1959), 4. In a 1932 essay published by *The American School and University*, Bartholomew explained his position, recommending that all cities, large and small, adopt a complete system of recreation facilities, including community centers, to be managed by public school officials. "Since school grounds should provide recreational facilities," he claimed, "it is essential that a close relationship and coordination exist between the school and park system. Otherwise, a duplication of areas will result, and unnecessary expenditures will be made." See Harland Bartholomew, "The School System and the City Plan," *American School and University* (1932): 26-27.
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83. Evansville City Plan Commission, *Plan for the Development of a System of Recreation Facilities, Evansville, Indiana* (Evansville, IN: Evansville City Plan Commission, 1927), 18-44, quotation on 18. On Bartholomew's support for deed restrictions, exclusionary zoning, and neighborhood improvement associations, see Bartholomew, "Lack of Community Protection."
84. Bartholomew, "Toward the Reconstruction of New York's Lower East Side"; Bartholomew, "The School System and the City Plan"; Bartholomew, "Technical Problems in Slum Clearance," 11-13.
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89. Bartholomew to Johnston, November 30, 1961, January 25, 1962, August 2, 1963, series 9, box 1, file 1, HBA.

90. For examples of this, see series 2-7, HBA.
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92. Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Preliminary Report: Housing and Appearance of the City: Bloomington, Illinois*, 4.
93. On Bartholomew's occasional reluctance to speak and write openly about his segregationist aims, a tendency that increased over time, see Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 31.
94. "Declaration of Restrictions: Douglas Park: Louisville, Kentucky," 1941, quotation on 5, series 2, box Vol. 35, Part 3, file 3, item 4, HBA.
95. Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Preliminary Report on a System of Parks and Schools: Dallas, Texas* (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1944), 6, series 2, box Vol. 11, file 1, item 3, HBA.
96. *Ibid.*, 7-33; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Preliminary Report upon Housing: Dallas, Texas* (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1944), 6-35, series 2, box Vol. 11, file 1, item 3, HBA.
97. Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Preliminary Report upon Housing: Waco, Texas* (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1957), 5, series 1, box 13, file 2, item 5, HBA.
98. In order to ensure that the firm's plans gained support at the local level, Bartholomew practiced something called "personnel colonization." This term refers to the company policy of assigning consultants to live in the cities for which they were designing plans. Following the completion of such plans, Bartholomew then encouraged his consultants to seek full-time positions in the cities in which they had been working. For more on personnel colonization and the spread of Bartholomew's ideas via the career paths of his former associates, see Norman Johnston, "Harland Bartholomew: Precedent for the Profession," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (March 1973): 117-120.
99. For useful summaries, see essays by Gary Orfield and Richard Rothstein in *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*, ed. Prudence L. Carter and Kevin G. Welner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
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