

## I

## Introduction

Fear ruled everything around me, and I knew, as all black people do, that this fear was connected to the Dream out there, to the unworried boys, to pie and pot roast, to the white fences and green lawns nightly beamed into our television sets.

– Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, p. 28

City services sustain, prolong, and even save lives. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, urban populations and economies were booming. But so too were their filth, disease, and divisions. By 1900, infectious and parasitic diseases killed nearly eight in every thousand residents, accounting for more than 45% of all deaths (Tippett 2014) and more than 60% of deaths among children (Guyer et al. 2000). In some cities, 30% of babies would not live to celebrate their first birthday (Meckel 1990). But between 1900 and 1940, the overall mortality rate in the United States declined by 35% (Linder and Grove 1947), and the infectious disease mortality rate declined by 75% (CDC 1999, adapted from Armstrong et al. 1999).<sup>1</sup> Estimates indicate that between one-quarter and one-half of this decline can be attributed to the development of public water and sewer systems – systems that were financed, built, and maintained not by the federal or state governments, but by cities.

Across the United States, local public works significantly reduced outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, diarrheal diseases,

<sup>1</sup> Total mortality declined from 17 per 1,000 persons to 11 per 1,000 persons.

and malaria (Cutler and Miller 2006; Troesken 2004).<sup>2</sup> Over time, the growth of municipal fire and police forces, street cleaning and refuse disposal, childhood vaccination and physical examination programs, regulation of food supplies, and the implementation of building codes all worked to prolong life expectancy (Condran and Cheney 1982; Haines 2001; CDC 1999).

But such benefits were neither inevitable nor universal. Although all major cities would eventually come to provide basic services, development was uneven. Nearly fifty years separated the delivery of publicly accessible water in Philadelphia and Boston (Cutler and Miller 2005). At the turn of the twentieth century, some cities spent as little as \$100 per resident on services, while others spent more than \$900. And, from the beginning, poor and minority neighborhoods received fewer and lower-quality services. They were less likely to be connected to sewers, to have graded and paved streets, or to benefit from disease mitigation programs.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the quality of public goods in the United States remains highly variable. Some people have access to good schools, well-paved and plowed roads, sewers that rarely overflow, public parks with playgrounds and restrooms, adequately staffed police and fire forces, and clean water. Others do not have access to these resources. As the epigraph by Coates illustrates, the availability of the American Dream for some, has for the entirety of American history, depended crucially on the denial of that Dream to others.

The quality of services one experiences in the United States is largely a function of the neighborhood in which a person resides. When the poor and people of color are concentrated in residential locations apart from wealthy and white residents, we say that a place is segregated. It is segregation that permits unequal access to public goods and services. Yet, the extent of segregation varies from place to place, and throughout the United States patterns of segregation have changed dramatically over time. This book asks how segregation becomes entrenched, why its form changes, and

<sup>2</sup> The dramatic improvement in mortality from the implementation of water and sewer systems required the development of filtration and treatment techniques, which were not immediately available when the systems were first built.

<sup>3</sup> This book explores race and class divisions in local politics and residential locations. There are many ways one might go about defining these groups. As explained in more detail in Chapter 3, I focus on divisions between whites and nonwhites and between homeowners and renters. I use the terms “minority” and “nonwhite” interchangeably. I also use the terms “black” and “African American” interchangeably.

what the consequences are. I argue that local governments have generated segregation along race and class lines. Striving to protect property values and exclusive access to high quality public goods, the preferences of white property owners have been institutionalized through the vehicle of local land use policy, shaping residential geography for more than 100 years. In the early part of the twentieth century when cities began their rapid ascent, local governments systematically institutionalized discriminatory approaches to the maintenance of housing values and production of public goods. They created segregation. These institutions persist, narrowing options for some residents and creating and recreating inequality and polarization today.

Between 1890 and 2010, the spatial scale of residential segregation along race and class lines changed (Logan et al. 2015; Reardon et al. 2009; Lee et al. 2008). In the late 1800s, whites and people of color, renters and owners, poor and wealthy were separated from each other in small clusters, so that residential segregation occurred on a block-by-block basis. By the middle of the twentieth century, segregation patterns had transformed; residents became segregated neighborhood by neighborhood. Throughout the postwar period, segregation between whole cities arose as the nation suburbanized. In recent decades, this city-to-city segregation has remained remarkably persistent despite decreasing neighborhood segregation. Because political representation is geographically determined, these changing patterns have had profound political consequences, generating opportunities for exclusion and increasing polarization. Local governments have been instrumental in driving and shaping these patterns.

Segregation is *not* simply the result of individual choices about where to live. Neither racial antipathy nor economic inequality between groups is sufficient to create and perpetuate segregation. The maintenance of property values and the quality of public goods are collective endeavors. And like all collective endeavors, they require collective action for production and stability. Local governments provide this collective action. So, supported by land-oriented businesses, white homeowners have backed a succession of maneuvers to keep their property interests and public benefits insulated from change – even as cities have grown, aged, redeveloped, suburbanized, and adjusted to industrialization. Battles over the control of urban space have always been the primary driver of city politics. At stake is the quality of life accessible to residents and markets available to commercial interests. The result has been *segregation by design*.

## CHERRY HILL AND CAMDEN

An example from southern New Jersey illustrates changing patterns of segregation, rising inequality, and the role of local governments in producing these patterns. Camden and Cherry Hill are similarly sized cities, both just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. Camden is home to two Superfund (toxic waste) sites; Cherry Hill is home to none.<sup>4</sup> In Camden only 1.7% of state roads had good pavement in 2004,<sup>5</sup> compared with 35% in Cherry Hill.<sup>6</sup> Camden has twenty-two combined sewer overflow outfalls (where raw sewage and storm water may be released to the surface during wet weather), while Cherry Hill has zero. Camden offers no electronic waste recycling and no yard waste collection; Cherry Hill provides both. In 2012, Camden's water supply ran so low that residents were required to boil water for consumption and were prohibited from watering their gardens.<sup>7</sup> Cherry Hill has a clean, plentiful water supply. Cherry Hill Public Library has more than 400,000 circulating materials, more than 300 adult programs and classes, and 67 public computers.<sup>8</sup> In 2011, Camden shuttered the doors of its main library and handed control of the remaining two small branches to the county.<sup>9</sup> Cherry Hill offers sixty-three recreational facilities (parks, art centers, tennis courts, and so on) for its residents and supports thirteen different swim clubs.<sup>10</sup> Camden has twenty-five parks and eight community centers.<sup>11</sup> Between 2007 and 2012, Camden's city budget declined by about \$245 per resident, while Cherry Hill's increased by about \$12 per capita. Clearly, living in Camden is unlike living in Cherry Hill. So, how did Cherry Hill and Camden get to be so different?

The story begins with a focus on Camden at the turn of the century. In 1900, Camden had a population of nearly 76,000 residents. The city boasted 55 miles of sewers and 79 miles of water mains, and about 38% of the city's streets were paved – figures that suggest that Camden's development was right in line with national averages. Also similar to

<sup>4</sup> [www.epa.gov/superfund/search-superfund-sites-where-you-live](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/search-superfund-sites-where-you-live)

<sup>5</sup> [www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/njchoices/pdf/camden.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/njchoices/pdf/camden.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with New Jersey Department of Transportation. The NJDOT provided data from the NJDOT Pavement Management System by email. Available from the author by request.

<sup>7</sup> [www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/06/camden\\_residents\\_advised\\_to\\_bo.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/06/camden_residents_advised_to_bo.html)

<sup>8</sup> [www.chplnj.org/about/documents/2015%20Annual%20Report%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.chplnj.org/about/documents/2015%20Annual%20Report%20-%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/02/main\\_branch\\_of\\_camden\\_public\\_l.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/02/main_branch_of_camden_public_l.html)

<sup>10</sup> [www.cherryhill-nj.com/Facilities](http://www.cherryhill-nj.com/Facilities)      <sup>11</sup> [www.ecode360.com/8508679](http://www.ecode360.com/8508679)

other cities were Camden's levels of race and class segregation, which were generally low. By the turn of the century, Camden was home to two well-established free black communities: Fetersville and Kaighnsville (Garwood 1999). Established in the 1830s and 1840s, these communities were comprised of small lots and affordable to people of modest incomes, many of whom were African American. One of Fetersville's neighborhood churches, the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Although the majority of Camden's black residents lived in Fetersville and Kaighnsville, both neighborhoods were predominately populated with white, working-class residents.

According to the 1900 US Census, the wards representing Fetersville and Kaighnsville were about a quarter African American. For a city in which African Americans only comprised 8% of the total population, it is clear that blacks were not evenly spread across the city. But the extent and scale of black segregation would increase dramatically over time, climbing more than 50% in the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1930, Camden was a bustling central city. It had more than 118,000 residents and spent nearly \$950 (in 2012 dollars) per capita on municipal expenditures – well above the national median. Cities with high levels of service provision, such as Camden, were more likely to have high property values, high tax rates, and high rates of homeownership compared with cities with smaller city budgets. And they were much more likely to be early adopters of land use regulations because they were more invested in protecting their high values and good services, ensuring that both were delivered to the residents with the most political power – white property owners. Camden first authorized zoning in 1928 and, like other early zoning adopters, moved quickly to ensure that land use policy was used strategically to “conserve the value of property” and protect the interests of white home-owning residents (Cunningham 1965). Thus, from early in the twentieth century, Camden's segregation was state-sponsored.

Figure 1.1 shows that by 1940, the black concentration exceeded 50% in the central part of the city, even though African Americans only made up 11% of city residents. After generating this segregated community, Camden's city government proceeded to underprovide services to and locate public nuisances in its black neighborhoods (Helzner 1968a, 1968b; Silvotti 1968).

As was the case for many large cities, the stress of the Great Depression left Camden with an enormous burden of vacant and uninhabitable properties, a disproportionate number located where black residents lived (Allen 1942). And so Camden became one of the earliest recipients of

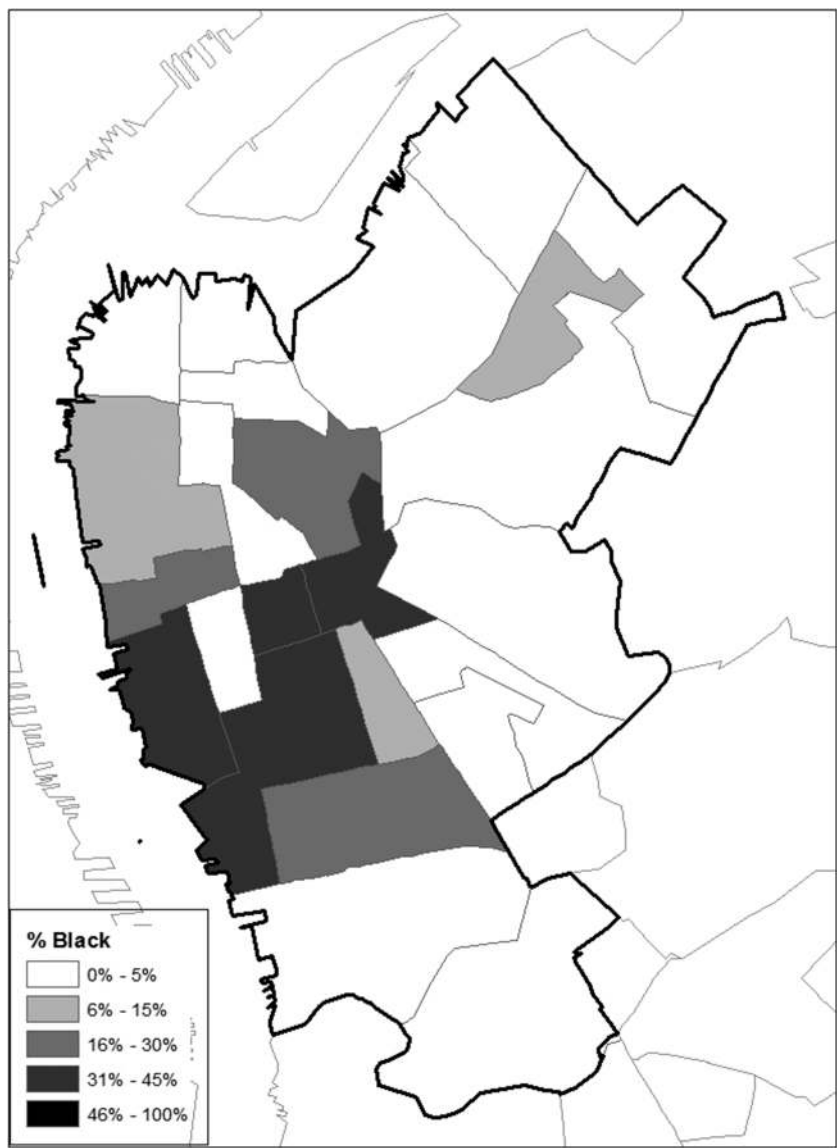


FIGURE 1.1 Segregation in Camden, 1940

federal slum clearance and public housing funds in the 1930s (Pommer 1978). In 1938, two public housing complexes were erected – one for whites and one for blacks. When the program was expanded in the 1940s, two more projects were built – also segregated. Unsurprisingly, the

projects were placed in communities based on the demographics of their occupants, and the neighborhoods around each became increasingly segregated (Williams 1966a). Later, when Interstate 95 was run through the city, “an attempt [was] made to eliminate the Negro and Puerto Rican ghetto areas,” destroying parks and homes, and increasing density in the remaining segregated black and Latino neighborhoods (New Jersey State Attorney General report, quoted in Rose and Mohl 2012, p. 108).

So it was that the creation of Camden’s segregated neighborhoods echoed the creation of segregated neighborhoods throughout the United States. Camden city government used zoning laws, the placement of segregated schools and public housing, and slum clearance to create and enforce residential segregation between whites and African Americans, as well as between renters and homeowners.

Starting around the time of the World War II, the city faced desegregation pressures on several fronts. As of 1944, no black children attended white elementary schools in Camden, despite a state-level anti-segregation law that was passed in 1881 (Wright 1953; Jensen 1948). When the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sued the district, officials responded that black parents had simply not requested attendance at their neighborhood schools. So, the NAACP took out ads in the *Camden Courier-Post* to convince parents to do just that. In 1947, hundreds of black children enrolled in previously all-white schools (Wright 1953).

School desegregation was just one of the first of many signs of racial transition in Camden. In 1951, the city witnessed its first biracial contest for city council when Dr. Ulysses S. Wiggins, president of the Camden NAACP branch, was nominated on the Republican ticket (Negro Runs for Camden Council Job 1951). He lost; but in 1961, Elijah Perry became the city’s first African American city council member (Riordan 1996). In 1954, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered public housing to be desegregated, and the first black families moved into white buildings in 1966 (Williams 1966a, 1966b). Although contested elections and moves toward the desegregation of public housing represented progress, deep racial disparities in municipal service provisions persisted, and people of color demanded equal treatment from the city government. In 1969 and 1971, the city erupted in violent race riots, touched off by police brutality against black and Latino residents.

The little hamlet of Cherry Hill boasts a much different history. Although Cherry Hill was incorporated as a municipality in 1844, like most would-be suburbs, it remained a small, undeveloped agricultural

community in the first few decades of the twentieth century. In 1940, Cherry Hill had a population of just under 6,000 residents, 91% of whom were white and 9% black (NJSDC 2000; Barnes 1936). Not only small, it was economically weak, having defaulted on its bond obligations and been placed in receivership by the state government during the Depression (*Shay v. Delaware* 1939; Cammarota 2001). But after the war, while housing and schools in Camden were integrating, Cherry Hill's population and economy exploded, as was true of suburbs throughout the nation.

Drawn to places like Cherry Hill by the attractiveness of low-cost, federally insured mortgages, the development of new homes and new employment opportunities in outlying communities, and easy commuting along newly built federal highways, the nation's suburbs grew rapidly and homebuyers moved to the periphery (Nall 2018). But, due to a combination of restrictive covenants and racist lending policies in both the public and private mortgage markets, the opportunity to build a life in the suburbs was only made available to whites (Rothstein 2017; Jackson 1987). During the thirty-year period following World War II, Cherry Hill witnessed a tenfold population increase – nearly all white. Meanwhile Camden lost 13% of its residents.

Figure 1.2 shows the share of the total population living in rural areas, central cities, and suburbs over the twentieth century. The graph reveals that the pace of suburbanization increased sharply during the postwar period so that by 1970, a plurality of the population lived in suburbs.<sup>12</sup> The homeownership rate increased at the same time. This latter fact explains the driving force behind exclusionary zoning adopted by suburban communities. White homeowners in places such as Cherry Hill, intent on raising property values and maintaining exclusivity in their public schools, aggressively shaped the future of their residential communities.

As Camden rushed to utilize more than \$30 million in federal redevelopment funds to revitalize its flagging urban center, Cherry Hill was busy implementing zoning restrictions that effectively prohibited the development of low- or even moderate-income housing (Cammarota 2001). These economic zoning practices effectively kept out people of modest incomes, but also maintained the racial homogeneity of the city and

<sup>12</sup> Rural here refers to populations outside any metropolitan area. A suburb is an area inside of a metropolitan area, but outside the central city. City refers to the central cities of metro areas. [www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf), p. 33 [www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/owner.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/owner.html)





FIGURE 1.2 Share of total US population living in different types of places  
*Sources:* Demographic Trends in the 20th Century, Census 2000 Special Report; Population Reference Bureau: Reports on America, 2011; Housing Characteristics, 2010 Census Brief

schools. In 1975, black residents of Mount Laurel, New Jersey (a suburb close to Cherry Hill both geographically and demographically), along with several local chapters of the NAACP, won a class-action lawsuit challenging Cherry Hill’s type of exclusionary zoning. As a direct result of this decision, Cherry Hill was required by the state to zone for thousands of low-income housing units. The city declined to do so. As of 2015, Cherry Hill continued to face litigation for its failure to zone for affordable housing.<sup>13</sup> As is true in many places throughout the United States, exclusionary economic zoning cannot be disentangled from race. One activist argued, “[M]any residents carried racist feelings about affordable housing, fearing it would attract poor blacks and Hispanics” (Leonnig 1989, p. 42).

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 reveal how segregation between Camden and Cherry Hill changed between 1970 and 2010. In 1960, Camden was 76% white. This had declined to 60% by 1970. The maps show that although Camden’s population of color had grown, in 1970 the city still had several exclusively white neighborhoods. These white neighborhoods

<sup>13</sup> [www.cherryhill-nj.com/DocumentCenter/View/2562](http://www.cherryhill-nj.com/DocumentCenter/View/2562), p. 8.

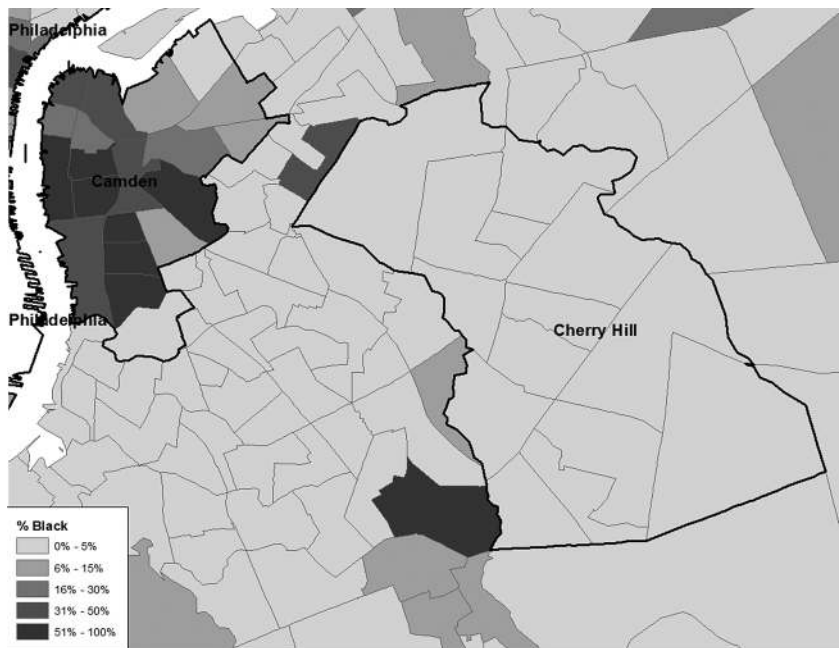


FIGURE 1.3 Segregation in Camden and Cherry Hill, 1970

had *completely* disappeared by 2010. In 2010, a greater share of segregation occurs between Cherry Hill and Camden than within them.

For the most part, the people who left Camden during the postwar period and those who moved to Cherry Hill were largely white, middle- and upper-class. As of 2014, about 39% of Camden’s population owned their homes, 5% were white, and the annual median household income was \$26,000. In Cherry Hill, 80% owned their homes, 75% were white, and the median household income was \$89,500.<sup>14</sup> In 2012, per capita taxes in Cherry Hill were double Camden’s. Camden simply cannot afford to offer the services that Cherry Hill provides.

But it is important to note that no one could have predicted the vast inequality between Camden and Cherry Hill in 1900 or even 1940. Indeed, Camden would have seemed poised to remain a regional economic engine and home to the area’s premier amenities. Writing in 1886, George Prowell proclaimed:

<sup>14</sup> [www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3410000,3400712280,00](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3410000,3400712280,00)