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David L. Kirp, John P. Dwyer, Larry A. Rosenthal. *Our Town: Race, Housing and the Soul of Suburbia.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995. ix + 272 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-2253-1.

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Our Time: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia

The exclusion of poor and minority citizens from affluent suburban communities has been a long recognized reality throughout the U.S. Despite the recognition of this problem and a number of initiatives formulated to allow poor minorities to overcome residential barriers, economic and racial segregation has remained a dominant feature evident on the metropolitan social landscape. This easily recognizable problem has been so difficult to overcome due to the complex combination of the various social, economic, political and geographical factors.

In their treatment of the path-breaking zoning litigation involving the community of Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, the authors of *Our Town* discuss the ways in which such factors have combined to influence where much of society may call "home." In short, the Mt. Laurel story led to the complex task of (re)defining the responsibility of any community to provide for the right to adequate housing for less affluent residents and minorities. The authors utilize the story of Mt. Laurel as a lens to view some of the broader problems that society faces, such as the economic disparities between suburbs and central cities, continued racial injustice, the lack of affordable housing available to the poor, governmental complexities involved with administering rapidly expanding metropolitan areas and the tension between legislative and judicial jurisdictions when dealing with the provision of social justice. The authors use this story not only to discuss the historical formation of such concepts as "fair share", "general welfare" and "home," but they also highlight the wider importance of such concepts and the extent that individuals, communities, and institutions will go in order to attain them, or in some cases resist sharing them with others.

The scope and purpose of this work can be best understood through the author's depiction of the Mount Laurel decisions as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* of fair housing. The fascinating, if somewhat disturbing, story began in 1970 when an organization representing African-American residents of Mt. Laurel was denied the right to initiate the construction of a small number of affordable garden apartments within the community outside of Camden, New Jersey. This denial led to a lawsuit charging the rapidly growing suburban township with the promotion of zoning regulations that were exclusionary to the point of being unconstitutionally discriminatory. This seemingly insignificant initial event resulted in over fifteen years of litigation and had a far reaching impact outside of the local area. As the authors explain, the Mt. Laurel situation led to a recognition of the role that exclusionary zoning has on the promotion of extreme racial and economic segregation. The authors overall purpose seems to be to provide an unveiling of the institutional arrangements that have resulted in such social phenomena. In the two hundred and sixty-seven pages of this excellent book, the authors effectively accomplish this goal.

The authors illustrate the importance of this litigation through an examination of the large number of actors involved in the various legal cases that resulted in the passage of a state Fair Housing Act in 1985. They include both individuals and institutions that actively pursued the inclusion or prevention of affordable housing in the suburb. Through such pursuits these actors and institutions significantly impacted the overall social milieu. The individuals that the authors focus on include; Chief Justice Frederick Hall, who was willing to judicially intervene in defining and enforcing the right to adequate housing, Governor Thomas H. Keane, who denounced such intervention as "communistic_", state senators who were willing to alter the state constitution in order to uphold suburban communities' rights to a perceived self-preservation, and Peter O'Conner, a legal reformer committed to the social integration of the U.S. Perhaps the most important individual involved was Ethel Lawrence, an African-American citizen who, according to the authors, functioned as the Rosa Parks of fair housing. While

initially this woman was simply committed to ensuring that her family and friends had the opportunity to reside in what had always been their home, she eventually expanded that commitment to include a desire for communities to do the "right thing." It was the purpose and desire of Ethel Lawrence and many others like her that are often overlooked when leaders in metropolitan communities deal with the complexities involved with the provision of integrate housing for less affluent residents and minorities. The authors clearly explain that the complexities discussed in regard to Mt. Laurel have yet to be adequately dealt with by most communities in the United States.

This book is divided into three main parts, plus a brief introduction which summarizes the underlying theme of the book. In the introduction, the authors incorporate a quote from the then mayor of Mt. Laurel which reflects the attitude that many suburban communities still have towards the provision of lower cost housing. The mayor responded to those wishing to rezone a minute portion of the community so garden apartments could be built by saying; "If you people can't afford to live in our town, then you'll just have to leave." In the introduction the authors also set the story in a context of both place and time through a brief discussion of the institutional factors that have resulted in discriminatory conditions such as those in Mt. Laurel. Perhaps more importantly, the authors use this introduction effectively to place this story in a more contemporary perspective. They accomplish this through a description of more recent events that illustrate the effects of continued racial discrimination and the inadequate provision of lower cost housing. For example, while issues of racial segregation have dropped from the public agenda, most children attend schools that remain highly segregated by race. The fact that school attendance zones closely correspond with demographic boundaries has led to a situation where most minority students attend schools that are financially strapped.

The first part of the book comprises two chapters, which describe the geographical and historical background to the Mt. Laurel cases. While these two chapters deal specifically with Mt. Laurel and the neighboring city of Camden, New Jersey, events and processes similar to those described by the authors have occurred elsewhere. The first chapter outlines the history of the economic and political demise of Camden and the social effects resulting from this process. The second chapter discusses the rise of surrounding suburban communities, such as Mt. Laurel, a process so intimately intertwined with the decline of Camden that the two go hand in hand. In this first part of the book the authors relate these processes to a number of factors which at least indirectly reinforced extreme racial and economic segregation. Among these are the failure of FHA assistance to provide for minorities' homes outside of the ghetto, the redlining on the part of banks and mortgage institutions, the detrimental impact of urban renewal on minority communities, discriminatory practices on the part of realtors, the changing geography resulting from highway construction, and the clustering of public housing in inner cities. The authors explain that it was within the background of such events and processes occurring simultaneously that a locally formed organization representing African-American residents of Mt. Laurel unsuccessfully attempted to lobby for the construction of a very modest number of affordable apartments.

In the second part of the book, the authors describe the judicial ruling declaring zoning in Mt. Laurel unconstitutional, the failure of suburban communities in New Jersey to adequately respond to this ruling, the judicial intervention in formulating a methodology to address this lack of local compliance and finally the public reaction to the whole affair. This reaction resulted in a final court case that placed zoning back within the state legislature. As the authors thoroughly explain, this process eventually permitted suburban communities, the legislature and the courts to distance themselves from the main goal of the initial ruling, which was the racial and economic integration of suburban communities. Chapter four discusses how the New Jersey Supreme Court determined that by zoning out poor people, Mt. Laurel was essentially institutionalizing poverty and thus deliberately creating a racially and economically segregated community. The court thus determined that communities, by having a responsibility to serve the general welfare, must be sensitive to the needs of the state's citizens "beyond the borders of the particular municipality." This regional interpretation of general welfare is viewed as a major turning point for the provision of fair housing both in New Jersey and on a national scale. In chapter five, the authors illustrate the failure of such judicial rulings to lead to any real social change. The authors represent this vividly through a depiction of various attempts on the part of New Jersey communities to resist adherence to the housing policy outlined in the judicial ruling. Many of these attempts where successful in maintaining the status quo in terms of the demographic and economic profiles of such communities.

In chapter six, the authors address the core of the problem related to the provision of lower cost housing, the political tension between suburban communities and central cities and between legislative and judicial

branches of government. In explaining what they refer to as the "politics of no," the authors illustrate how the combination of a legislature with a strong suburban bias and a State Court unwilling to tread the waters in regards to fair housing policy resulted in a watered down state Fair Housing Law. In chapter seven, the authors describe the result of this process through an examination of the failure of the legislatively created agency to address adequately housing needs outlined by the context of the initial Mt. Laurel case. As they explain, this was accomplished by an explicit focus on providing a very modest amount of affordable housing, while issues of racial and economic segregation and any real attempts at opening up the suburbs were largely ignored.

In the third and final part of this book, the authors focus on the deeper underlying social divisions that lie at the heart of events such as those that occurred in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey. By summarizing views of researchers and pundits, such as Henry Cisneros, Anthony Downs, and David Rusk, the authors illustrate the severe racial divisions that exist and are evident in the provision and/or denial of housing. In discussing the failure of various legislative initiatives to promote real change in regards to alleviating racial and economic segregation or in the provision of fair housing, the authors provide evidence that these severe divisions remain a social reality that remains to be dealt with. This is highlighted through a discussion of the continued demise of Camden, a process which is intertwined with the political and economic emergence of suburban communities such as Mt. Laurel. Undoubtedly, these processes are related to a variety of factors. However, as the authors explain, continuing racial tension is in essence both a cause and effect of these related processes. Further, this same tension is not only an issue that must be dealt with in providing lower cost housing in affluent suburban communities. The issues of race and those of equal opportunity to the harmony that we call "home" are issues that are intertwined within many of the problems that society faces. This final summation is very thoughtfully explained throughout this excellent text.

Despite the strengths of this book, like most scholarly endeavors, it leaves a few questions about the subject matter unanswered. There is no doubt that the rise of affluent communities such as Mt. Laurel is related to processes occurring simultaneously in Camden. This relationship could be assured by the geographic proximity of the two communities. While the authors imply this connection, the reader does not get exposed to an explicit description of the geographic relationships between them. For example, how much of the population growth occurring in suburban communities such as Mt. Laurel can be attributed to demographic migration from the city of Camden? Also, has the metropolitan region historically been highly segregated racially or have levels of residential segregation increased dramatically since the rise of suburbs? The racial and economic segregation of metropolitan areas involves events that occur at local, state, regional and national levels. In many cases, the real cause and effects of events at one scale cannot be understood without considering events occurring at different scales and in different places. One way in which this problem is minimized in this book is through the inclusion of a chronological time-line, which summarizes in tabular form events occurring in Camden and Mt. Laurel, New Jersey courts, New Jersey politics and in the world outside of New Jersey. This tool is an excellent component of the book, as it allows the reader to view events discussed in a broader geographical and historical context. However, this tool would perhaps function more effectively as a means of reinforcement rather than the primary means of exposure.

One other issue that deserves attention is the story of Ethel Lawrence. She is described as a significant actor in the introduction and her role in the struggle for the provision of affordable housing undoubtedly was important. Much like her purpose in calling for the provision of housing, which was to do what was right, her role in this book appears largely symbolic. This reviewer would find a more thorough description of her involvement and the roles of others like her fascinating. Regardless, no author should be criticized for limiting the treatment of individuals, events and processes which could never be covered in a single volume. Considering the necessity of having a limited scope when dealing with a project as complex as this one, the authors should be commended.

Overall this book provides an excellent summary of how questions of race, both explicitly and implicitly, lie at the core of many of society's more complicated problems. The reader is exposed to the bureaucratic and institutional arrangements that hinder attempts to alleviate the most evident social injustices. Yet it is these same bureaucracies and institutions that provide the means to efficiently deal with such problems. However, as the authors illustrate, the jurisdictional dispute between the legislative and judicial branches of government can tend to minimize real social change. Discussions of racial tension and severe racial and economic segregation is not new to academic discourse or to the popular literature. However, even within the academic community the role of housing in regards to these problems is largely overlooked. A recent report in *Population Today*

by Reynolds Farley attributes the high levels of racial segregation within metropolitan areas in the northeast and midwest to the lag in the housing market. Metropolitan areas within the south that experienced recent housing booms were more integrated residentially. In *Our Town* the undeniable importance that the housing market has in the realization of integrated communities is well represented. The authors also do a good job of illustrating how such socially important issues, as the provision of fair housing, are significantly effected by convoluted political processes involving large numbers of actors having their own agendas. The authors should be especially commended for their effective depiction of political and judicial processes which by nature are complex and often difficult to discern. Further, the authors do an excellent job of focusing on the particular story of Mt. Laurel, while at the same time providing a macroscopic overview of the issues of racial and economic discrimination in regards to the provision of housing. Finally, the authors effectively relate these issues to the broader tensions associated with economic and political disparities between financially strapped central cities and economically and politically powerful suburban communities. In conclusion, the macroscopic yet locally specific focus of this book would make it an excellent source for any scholar or layperson interested in the fields of history, geography, urban studies, political science or race relations.

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