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CMS 251
11-3-19

<u>Flawed Housing Policy Creates Polarization and Hate Crimes</u>

Probably the most popular social topic in academic circles, many of Calvin University's teachers often address it, is the problem of racism, and rightly so. Contrary to what many whites think, the evidence of America's Great Sin remains written in our country's culture, institutions, and at least some of our hearts until this day. Many whites struggle, in fact, to engage people in discussions that revolve around racism and white privilege. Regardless of the reason, this lack of communication has led America to become increasingly polarized, both in terms of racial tensions and politics, thus perpetuating racism. This paper seeks to demonstrate that housing discrimination, zoning laws, modern media, and highway development generated the political polarization we see today, which directly correlates to hate crimes. Lastly, we will examine what can be done to reduce this problem and bring about racial reconciliation.

Housing and interstate development over the past 100 or so years contributes to hate crimes in variety of ways. These policies prioritize suburban housing, which reduces people's engagement in normal interaction and discourse, essentially placing everyone in their own bubble. This isolation has been associated with more and more extreme views.[1] Furthermore, discriminatory housing practices created residential and racial separation, which leads to a lack of empathy, encourages discrimination, and creates stereotypes.[2] The federal government started this process in the 1900s.

In response to the Great Depression, President Roosevelt signed the National Housing Act in 1934, which created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which guaranteed long term, low-interest loans for both individual buyers and whole subdivisions.[3] The FHA favored single family homes of recent construction, thus prioritizing suburban housing. They also prevented African Americans from obtaining access to these homes. Additionally, the 1944 GI

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[1] See below.
[2] Joe R. Feagin, "Excluding Blacks and Others from Housing: The Foundation of White Racism," *Cityscape*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act (1999), pp. 79-91, 85.
[3] Lee Hardy, *The Embrace of Buildings- A Second Look at Walkable Neighborhoods* (Grand Rapids Calvin College Press 2017), 3, 5.

Bill of Rights guaranteed zero down payment home loans for sixteen million returning GIs, but very few of these were given to African Americans.

Private companies, organizations and technology also contributed to this discrimination. The Home Owner's Loan Corporation secretly color coded maps, placing African American neighborhoods in the red, and discouraging banks from giving them federally insured home loans, thus red lining them.[4] The construction of the interstate highway system and the downfall of public transportation in the 1960s also encouraged suburban development.[5] The modernist housing movement essentially eliminated mixed use property and replaced it with single use, destroying diversity by zoning people to areas according to their economic ability.[6] Together, these forces made car ownership necessary, and encouraged people to move further from one another, increasing racial segregation.

Not only have these policies created the economic stratification and racial segregation that we see in America today, they are also responsible for political polarization and microaggressions. Bill Bishop, in his 2008 book *The Big Sort*, pointed out that homogenous groups living together become more extreme in their views, social division, and political partisanship as they hear their views reflected and amplified.[7] The internet contributes to this problem by creating a place for like-minded people to socialize and consume media without their ideas being challenged, making them more open for manipulation by the media.[8] The internet also allows people to engage in microaggressions behind a protective veil of anonymity that they would be ashamed to say in public.[9]

Political forces on both the left and the right exploit political polarization and racism to strengthen their power by intentionally and unintentionally encouraging racial tension. Originally, the south instituted Jim Crow after elites encouraged poor whites to blame African Americans rather than the wealthy for their lack of good paying jobs.[10] Today, elites use subtle

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[4] Ibid., 3-4.
[5] Ibid., 10-11.
[6] Ibid., 56-62, 66-69, 77.
[7] Ibid., 44.
[8] Ibid., 47.
[9] Julie Minikel-Lacocque, "Racism, College, and the Power of Words: Racial Microaggressions Reconsidered," *American Educational Research Journal* (2013), 453.
[10] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press 2012), 16.

methods like racialized rhetoric to gain and hold onto political power, such as defaming the character of political rivals, and drumming up anger against illegal aliens and minorities.

Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan started the War on Drugs, reinforcing stereotypes like the criminal black man. The War on Drugs unfairly targeted African Americans by increasing police presence in their communities and creating sentencing disparities between drugs that were known to be in these communities compared to the ones in wealthier, white communities. For example, crack cocaine received a sentence 18 times greater than what people received for powder cocaine, which destroyed communities. Thus, the number of African Americans incarcerated as well as the amount of time they were serving "vindicated" the stereotype. The political right utilizes these stereotypes to play on the fears that many whites use to justify their prejudice. Politicized rhetoric specifically targets people with authoritarian personalities, who are prone to being prejudiced.[11] Not only does this use of rhetoric encourage people to vote for the right, it inspires them to engage in hate crimes. In 2014, the FBI reported 5,479 incidents related to hate crime, but this number increased by 17% to 7,175 in 2016, the year president Trump was elected.[12] Trump's rhetoric literally hurt people.

The left plays the same game when they label political arguments as racist and misogynistic to garner votes. The left consistently uses this type of rhetoric to paint an immoral picture of Republicans for their political views on border security, immigration, vouchers, abortions, affirmative action, etc. While this rhetoric may galvanize voters, it also discourages political dialogue that has already been made difficult simply by people's residential position. Furthermore, painting another's political rhetoric in a racialized manner urges people to feel like they are under siege, inspiring them to embrace the only power left to disenfranchised people: violence. While FBI statistics indicate that hate crimes are committed are more to be anti-black, anti-white crime remains substantial.[13] This is understandable, though not excusable, given the perception that blacks have of whites.

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[11] Mooney, L. A., Knox, D., & Schacht, C. *Understanding Social Problems* (Cengage Learning 2015), 291.
[12] Yanqi Xu, "Explaining the numbers behind the rise in reported hate crimes," April 3, 2019, truthometer@politifact.com.
[13] Ryken Grattet and Valerie Jenness, "Examining the Boundaries of Hate Crime Law: Disabilities and the 'Dilemma of Difference'" (Northwestern 2001), 663.

So, how can America reduce hate crimes and improve race relations? While it is unlikely to tear up its highways or eliminate internet access, there are many ways to reduce microaggressions, political polarization, and improve race relations. Many scholars agree that dialogue about racism is necessary to reduce racism. However, many whites refuse to engage in dialogue. Some become defensive because they feel that they are personally being blamed for the historical oppression that their ancestors imposed upon African Americans. Others may not want to expose themselves by unknowingly saying something racist. This fear may be sometimes valid, as some like to play the "gotcha" game, in which they attempt to get someone to say anything, including valid political beliefs, that could be interpreted as racist.

Reducing tensions in racial dialogue requires a reduction in unnecessary rhetoric. Discussions about racism often turn people's minds towards radical redefinitions of racism that academics have proposed, including ideas like "all whites are racist," or "only whites can be racist" because they are the only ones with institutional power. Regardless of the merits of these positions, they sabotage the discussions necessary to reduce the oppression that these ideas are allegedly supposed to combat. Race relations cannot be improved by labeling people as evil because of the color of their skin, even if whites have historically oppressed minorities in this country. Such a broad stroke helps no one.

When dialoguing about racism, whites should acknowledge institutional racism, white privilege, etc. Ideas like claiming that we live in a post-racial world or a "colorblind" society today allow people to ignore discrimination and injustice. However, racial progress should not be overlooked. Today, the common form of racism originates through unconscious bias by well-meaning people, while consciously racist people engaged in violent actions without reprisal in the past, the latter of which are no longer socially condoned.[14] While fringe groups that engage in the type of behavior seems to be expanding since the election of Donald Trump, such rhetoric and behavior needs to be condemned and combated.

One of the problems with destroying such groups revolves around the fact that racial epithets are protected by First Amendment. However, it could be argued that racial epithets violate something akin to California's 1987 "Interference with Exercise of Civil Rights" statute,

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[14] Minikel-Lacocque, 435.

which prohibits people from oppressing or intimidating others because of their "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, or sexual orientation."[15] Perhaps this should be expanded nationally. Any black person who has a white person call them the N-word is certainly going to be fearful that they could be subject to violence at any moment. This subject requires further investigation to determine whether or not government watch lists are effective to investigate such individuals and prevent them from committing more hate crimes.

While rooting out extreme bigots should be a part of the equation to create safe communities, focusing on educating the younger generation will create a larger yield in reducing hate crimes. Community learning has been shown to not only improve learning, it has increased respect for others, thereby reducing prejudice.[16] Introducing children to role models from different cultures also reduces prejudice.[17] Positive interactions and friendships with members of other groups, as well as practice avoiding using stereotypes and education has been shown to reduce prejudice.[18] Julie Minikel-Lacocque argues that colleges should create infrastructure to make minorities feel more comfortable on campus. This could be accomplished by normalizing African American culture and showing the negative experiences they have had.[19] Colleagues could also help the majority to understand the consequences of microaggressions by raising awareness through mandatory classes and providing a support system to contest racial microaggressions.[20] Such a system should be careful not to punish violators in such a way that creates racial animosity. While a quick expulsion may remove the guilty from the environment, it may prevent people from engaging dialogue altogether as well as embitter the guilty.

Changing our countries' views on housing is an important aspect of reducing polarization and promoting diversity. Embracing New Urbanism will create neighborhoods that promote community. Hardy recommends that they need to have a Center and Edge, Connected

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[15] Grattet and Jenness, 660.

[16] Charles Stangor, *Introduction to Psychology*, (Date NA)
Saylor URL: http://www.saylor.org/books/, 303.

[17] *Starting Small – Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades*, (Southern Poverty Law Center, Washington 2008), DVD.

[18] Stangor, 797.

[19] Minikel-Lacocque, 438.

[20] Ibid., 461.

Streets, Public Transit, Walkable Scale, Mixed Use, and Mixed Housing Types.[21] These promote diversity and interaction between people with different races and economic means. Minikel-Lacocque demonstrated that fewer interactions with different races increases the number of microaggressions that occur.[22] People will fear and stigmatize others less often when they see how similar others are to them.

Minorities must embrace the duty to eliminate racism with an optimistic view. While minorities often talk about the problems of racism, it is full of pessimism to the point that many do not engage the political process. They could invite neighbors to come with them by publicizing the agendas and times of city council meetings, school board meetings, parent-Teacher Association meetings, police commission meetings.[23] They should meet in homes instead of church buildings to increase sense of ownership.[24] Once embraced, the community will take on their problems. Without this, social movements run by well-meaning elites will fail.

Racialized rhetoric in the media needs to be challenged. With today's media systems, people can choose which things they prefer to hear without these opinions being challenged before prejudices lose touch with reality.[25] In the past, this occurred through "third places," or places that are "typically free or inexpensive, located on neutral ground, open to all irrespective of social status, accessible by walking, visited by regulars, and conducive to conversation."[26] This includes coffee shops, diners, barbershops, beauty parlors, bookstores, lodges, clubs, restaurants, and pubs that line the streets of a neighborhood. In such neutral zones, people are willing to revise their demands when they are presented with the reasonable demands of others, in part because these face-to-face interactions encourage civility. However, since zoning laws have prohibited these third places from being in residential areas, people either open their private homes to frequent and sometimes intrusive, unbidden visits from friends, or they reduce their socializing; the latter tends to be the usual choice. If third places were restored by

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[21] Hardy, 28-30.
[22] Minikel-Lacocque, 446.
[23] Perkins, 107.
[24] Ibid., 107.
[25] Hardy, 45-47.
[26] Ibid., 45.

developing sidewalks, new zoning laws, investments in community transportation, people would interact more and demand less extreme views from their politicians and news media.

While many whites shirk the responsibility to engage in racial reconciliation, allegedly because they have not personally engaged in racism, Jesus' story of the Samaritan indicates that He believed that healing people was not optional.[27] According to Timothy Keller, addressing people's pain is a principle that transcends the very laws of God.[28] Likewise, Christians should endeavor to create a culture in which all are treated equally, for differences do not matter in the body of Christ.[29] Furthermore, whites have a collective responsibility to terminate the structures that prevent minorities from attaining a decent living and an equal status. Pointing out the discrimination in housing, zoning laws, and modern media is a necessary starting point. Those who refuse to point out the racism that exists today declare an approval of the status quo and exploit their white privilege.

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[27] Luke 10

[28] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice- How God's Grace makes us Just* (New York: Penguin Group 2010), 75.

[29] Galatians 3:28.

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