

## **EPISODE 2: “Segregating the City” TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations**

**ALEXANDRA PASQUALONE:** Hey. It’s Alex, if you haven’t listened to episode 1 go back and start there. This episode will make more sense.

**KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER:** So Alex, do you consider yourself a gamer at all?

**AP:** I dunno, I do enjoy playing some Zelda from time to time.

**KLB:** That’s cool, that’s cool. My thing is SimCity. On PC.

**[MUSIC]**

**AP:** Huh, ok. I don’t think I know that one.

**KLB:** Yeah, you’re pretty young. It’s *retro*. ... My favorite version is SimCity 2000. It dropped in ‘93. They don’t make ‘em like that anymore.

**AP:** Sounds... neat.

**KLB:** Yeah, it’s pretty sick. In the game you’re the mayor, right. And you have to design a whole city from scratch. You get to choose where different neighborhoods go... like what’s residential, and commercial, and industrial. And you collect taxes to pay for schools and hospitals and roads and stuff. But, like, if you don’t put enough money into power lines or sewers, or whatever, all the little residents will get mad and move away...

**AP:** Wait, this reminds me of Rollercoaster Tycoon!

**KLB:** Pssh, Rollercoaster Tycoon is derivative! *SimCity* is a perfect allegory for pre-war American society... the shift in cultural identity from agrarian pastoralism to a nation powered by urban industrialization... The idea that shaping and ordering cities—their avenues, their neighborhoods, their infrastructure—could shape and order the nation’s character itself...

**AP:** Really? A perfect allegory? So SimCity gets into issues like discriminatory zoning and lending practices? Redlining? School segregation?

**KLB:** Well... no. It’s a computer game from the nineties. That’s what a public history podcast is for...

**[INTRO MUSIC]**

From the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History, this is *Reorientation*, a podcast exploring the history of UW–Madison you won’t get on your campus welcome tour. I’m Kacie Lucchini Butcher.

**AP:** And I'm Alexandra Pasqualone... We're devoting this season to the issues surrounding student housing at UW-Madison. Why finding a place to live as a college student is such a persistent challenge. And how it got this way.

**KLB:** But before we can make sense of the housing struggles in a city like Madison, we need to understand why cities look the way they do. Because it didn't happen by accident. Most American cities were really starting to grow at the same time that field of urban planning was taking off.

**AP:** But we're not just talking roads and schools and water lines. A lot of this planning had to do with people. Who could live and work where. Who was welcome or unwelcome. In this episode, we're looking at the foundations—literally—of how housing inequality was built into American cities, long before the university started running out of dorms.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** It's pretty easy to find photos online of Madison around the turn of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Apparently people already thought it was *very picturesque*. Some things look really similar. All the streets coming off the Capitol Square are the same ones we have today. The university is down on the other end of State Street. And you can pick out old buildings that are still standing.

**AP:** But it's also clearly way smaller. Off in the distance you can see empty farmland that's all neighborhoods now. Closer in, there are empty lots and groves of trees scattered between houses. And UW is still a handful of buildings on Bascom Hill with open space around it. It looks thought-out, but also still a little haphazard.

**KL:** So how did we go from that to the Madison we know today, where every scrap of land is spoken for, neighborhoods are clearly delineated and the vibes in different parts of town vary noticeable?

**WALTER STERN:** In the early 20th century, there was a significant city planning movement.

**KLB:** That's Walter Stern.

**WS:** I'm Walter Stern. I'm an associate professor of Educational Policy studies and History at University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**AP:** As Walter was saying...

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<sup>1</sup> We recommend utilizing the UW–Madison Library's UW Digital Collection (UWDC), available here: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/search/digital>

**WS:** And so as cities were growing, industrializing, there were greater efforts to think about how to manage and organize growing cities and there was a push among city planners and, and city policy makers to create clear, cleaner divisions between different sectors of cities. So isolating manufacturing and industry from residential areas, thinking of working people's housing in certain parts of the city, more professional people living in other sections of the city.

**KLB:** It's just like SimCity... All these little squares are housing. And we can put in a strip of commercial zoning next to it. But we also need some chunks of the map for industrial use... but that should go over on the other side of town.

**AP:** Are you having fun?

**KLB:** Always...

**AP:** Great. Back to Walter and actual cities though. One of the main things he studies is the way that *schools* shaped US cities.

**WS:** During the 19th century schools influenced urban development in a range of ways and, and in ways that sort of set the tone for more specific impacts during the 20th century.

**AP:** Now, I know we're supposed to be focusing on higher education, not K12, but it all fits in together.

**KLB:** There are schools in SimCity, did you know that? I'm still with you on it!

**AP:** Well, as Walter explains it, in the live-action SimCity that was the later 19th century America, public schools weren't just about education—they were urban strategy.

**WS:** One really important thing, I think to, to note is that as cities were establishing public school systems in the, during the 19th century, often the reformers who were pushing for school systems, viewed schools as a means of promoting economic development, and urban growth.

**AP:** Schools weren't just places to send your kids. They were kind of city infrastructure—like roads or railways—that could attract families, stabilize neighborhoods, and signal a city's modernity.

**WS:** They wanted schools to train people for an industrializing economy. They wanted schools to promote a more common culture and stabilize increasingly diverse and often transient urban populations. And they thought establishing school systems could really be engines for competing with other cities, attracting residents.

**KLB:** In other words, schools were valued. They were treated as economic investments. So where they were built influenced who moved where, and eventually who *could* move where. By the early 20th century, those decisions were feeding into something much bigger... and much more poisonous.

**[MUSIC]**

**AP:** By 1917, the US Supreme Court had outlawed zoning ordinances that were explicitly based on race. A city couldn't have policies *on the books* that said 'this is a Black neighborhood. This is a white neighborhood.'<sup>2</sup>

**WS:** But in the absence of the ability to have explicitly racist and racial zoning policy, communities turn to ostensibly race neutral zoning mechanisms, but often with the intent and, and the impact of, of promoting segregation. And so zoning policies that dictated lot size and the type of property that could exist in one part of a city, so limiting single family residences in certain areas, permitting multi-family residents in other areas... Since race and class were often closely linked due to discriminatory employment and labor practices, these class-based zoning restrictions had the impact of, of also promoting residential segregation by race.

**KLB:** This is the backdrop as American cities are frantically growing. Urban planners see their job as trying to "organize" the chaos erupting in urban areas. Their vision for a city often looked very divided.

**WS:** And this is, I think, one of the places where schooling really enters into the equation because as city planners were thinking about how to better organize growing and increasingly diverse cities they thought of schools as central to a neighborhood. And so a famous planner, Clarence Perry developed the idea of this neighborhood unit. And literally on the maps of his neighborhood units, he had neighborhood units for middle class neighborhoods, for working class neighborhoods. Schools were literally at the center of the maps that he created.

**AP:** Sounds sensible, right? Neighborhoods centered around schools, which were these symbols of progress. But there was a catch. The maps that Perry and other urban planners were coming up with weren't about accessibility; they were about homogeneity. These neighborhoods were designed with clear class and racial boundaries in mind.

**WS:** It kind of became an article of faith that homogeneity was preferred, not just in terms of types of building, types of uses, isolating industry from residences, but class segregation was viewed as central to cohesion, as was racial homogeneity, racial

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<sup>2</sup> In 1917, the Supreme Court ruled in *Buchanan v. Warley* that racially segregated zoning ordinances were unconstitutional. For a good overview, see the Zinn Education Project's teaching guide, available at <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/supreme-court-rules-against-segregated-housing/>

**segregation. And so a sort of organizing principle was that cities would actually be more better functioning, more unified if there was segregation across multiple levels.**

**KLB:** And it didn't stop with city planners. The real estate industry took that logic and ran with it. In the early 20th century, housing segregation wasn't just tolerated as a bug in the system. It was the business model.

In 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards adopted a code of ethics that stated:

**[OLD TIMEY VOICE WITH MUSIC]**

A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.<sup>3</sup>

**AP:** The real estate industry baked segregation into its own code of ethics. White neighborhoods were valuable. Black people moving in? A threat. Segregation, enshrined in law, policy, and culture, was good for business. And schools, again, were not bystanders. As public education expanded in the early 20th century, where a school went could define the identity of an entire neighborhood.

**WS:** As the city population was growing, as the school population was growing, schools and the location of schools and the racial designations became ways of effectively giving an area a racial identity. And in cities like New Orleans, in the South, where segregation was the law of the land, there were separate schools for black and white students.

**KLB:** It was more explicit in those Southern cities, where racial segregation was mandated by law. Schools didn't just reflect neighborhood demographics—they helped produce them. If a school was labeled "white," white families moved in. If it was designated "Black," public investment dried up, and white residents fled.

**AP:** But this wasn't just occurring in the South. Many of the same factors were at play in Northern cities where segregation on paper was illegal. By and large, public schools were anything but integrated. Wisconsin never had segregated schools on paper. But take a closer look at neighborhoods in Milwaukee and Madison, or big cities in other Midwestern states: Chicago... Detroit. By the mid 19th century, you'd see lines just as clearly.

**WS:** And it happened through a variety of mechanisms. First all of the factors that were encouraging residential segregation through housing policy and, and practice in the, in the South were also at play in the North. So zoning that led to more segregated areas,

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<sup>3</sup> You can view the full 1924 Code of Ethics written by the National Association of Real Estate at: <https://www.nar.realtor/about-nar/history/1924-code-of-ethics>.

**realtors and banks that were denying loans to Black people or refusing to allow black people into, to certain neighborhoods, racially restrictive covenants that limited where people could live. They got really creative in how they drew the attendance zones that determined which schools students attended, so ... school boundaries increasingly were drawn in a way that that increased or concentrated Black students into particular schools. ... All that was going on in the North.**

**KLB:** When we look back on these histories of segregation, it's easy to pick out the fundamental cause: Racism. But you miss a lot if you chalk up such large, systematic discrimination to 'well, everyone was just prejudiced back then.' Yes, there was *a lot* of that. But what about in this context? Where people live? Where their kids went to school?

**WS:** Yeah, that's a, that's a really important question because racism is sort of the, the obvious answer, but doesn't really actually tell us that much. There's this racial theory of property value, that the presence of black people drove down property values. That was certainly part of the, the, the driver for white opposition to integrated housing. People thinking, well, if, if one Black person moves into this neighborhood, then others will move in and this will drive down the value of my home. I'll lose the equity I've built in it.

**AP:** These concerns were often tied into racist stereotypes about criminality. And fears of miscegenation. But another part of it was about resources. White families feared losing something.

**WS:** I think a lot of white people implicitly understood that there were structural forms of racism, particularly in terms of the resources provided to black students, teachers, schools. And just as black people recognized that sort of like money followed white people and resources into schools, I think white people either, explicitly or implicitly recognized or feared that the presence of Black children in their kids' schools would mean fewer resources.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** So what about Madison? And UW specifically? How does this get us back to college student housing? Well, for one thing, all of these systems of segregation and discrimination were happening here. Madison has never been as diverse as Milwaukee, or Chicago, or Detroit. So the scale was smaller. But it was still going on. Neighborhoods here had racial covenants preventing minorities from buying homes. That language, while unenforceable, is *still on the deeds* of some houses today.

**AP:** You can look up the maps from the '30s showing redlining and greenlining—which neighborhoods and schools were singled out for investment and loans... and which weren't.

And if you know Madison, you can see how those same neighborhoods have carried those designations through the decades. What parts of town are “safer”? Have higher home values? Which high school has mostly white students? And which one is known for being “diverse”?

**WS:** In many, many places and many cases, the segregation that, how the residential segregation that developed and became fortified over the course of the 20th century remains in effect. Not only has segregation persisted in terms of identify—areas of cities that are, were recognized as, segregated areas for people of color a hundred years ago that remained there today. But that also that many of the underlying ideas and stereotypes and things that fuel practices like real estate steering and the denial of loans and over policing. You see evidence of that from, a century ago. And then you see either identical or very close variations of it today.

**KLB:** And as all this was going on over the course of a century... as cities were exploding... and being systematically divided ... higher education in America was going through huge transformations of its own.

**AP:** Remember back to those old-timey photos of Madison around the turn of the 20th century that we talked about at the beginning of the episode? When it was still on an early level of SimCity, if you will? And UW was just a handful of buildings on a hill? Well, back then the number of students was much smaller too. Co-ed at that point, but almost exclusively white and well-off.<sup>4</sup>

**KLB:** And with a smaller, more homogenous student body, housing was... *simpler*. Some students lived in small residence halls on campus. Or in nearby rooming houses, and some of the early fraternities and sororities. But SimCity keeps on rolling. Industrialization, two world wars, a baby boom — these filled up all the little squares on the map in Madison and other cities across the country. And it meant that college was suddenly more accessible to way more people.

**AP:** It wasn't just a select group of white students anymore. By the midcentury, students of different races and ethnicities... different religions... different class backgrounds... were all coming to campus for the first time. And they needed somewhere to live.

**[MUSIC]**

**AP:** While UW isn't a K-12 school, it is still an educational institution at the center of a neighborhood. It has its own distinct character, its own culture, and frankly, its own ideas of who is welcome, and who is not.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the early history of UW–Madison, we recommend Cronon, Edmund David, and John W. Jenkins. *The University of Wisconsin: A History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

**KLB:** And that might not pose a huge problem if some of those empty spaces in town and around campus were filled up with housing that welcomed everyone. But when your rapidly growing university town is being built on a scaffolding of geographic segregation, unequal resources, and exclusion... Well then you might be sewing the seeds of a housing shortage that persists for decades to come. That's on the next episode of *Reorientation*...

**NAMA PANDEY:** You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at [campushistory.wisc.edu](http://campushistory.wisc.edu). That includes a link to some of Walter Stern's work on schools and urban development.

Reorientation is written by Kacie Lucchini Butcher, Alexandra Pasqualone, Nama Pandey, Taylor Dickson, and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode. Additional help from Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

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