

# Systemic racism, exclusion and discrimination in housing

Portland's housing emergency has deep roots in systemic racism, classism, inequality and discrimination. Government has played a significant role in keeping communities of color out of certain neighborhoods, and in confining them or displacing them to others — either intentionally, as a matter of policy, or through the unintended consequences of planning decisions.



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## Treating housing as a private commodity is central to this problem.

People who have access to financial resources are able to own property and build wealth that is not available to those who cannot afford to buy a home. Over the course of generations, these dynamics have become a vicious cycle that has exacerbated the racial wealth divide: according to the Brookings Institute, systemic inequality in the United States allowed the typical white family to amass around \$171,000 in net assets by 2016, while the typical Black family had only one tenth of that, around \$17,000 in assets.

### Oregon has a racialized history of excluding certain communities by force of law.

At various points throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Black people and Chinese people were legally barred from living in the state. In the Portland region, through the use of redlining and other exclusionary practices, Black/African American people were compelled to live in the Albina area of north Portland, then were displaced when Interstate 5, the Memorial Coliseum, the Oregon convention center and Emanuel Hospital were built.

Now, many of greater Portland's low income, BIPOC and other oppressed communities are pushed to the margins by the prohibitively high costs of the private housing market in city centers — and these costs continue to rise at rates much higher than typical wage increases.

- [Bleeding Albina](#), a paper by Dr. Karen J. Gibson of Portland State University, describes the racial history and dynamics of the Albina area, including the Rose Quarter, Emanuel Hospital and Interstate 5 construction. These ventures broke up this historically Black neighborhood and forced hundreds of Black households and businesses to relocate, scattering them around the region — away from family, history and community support.
- [Right 2 Root](#) describes the “root shock” this displacement causes, and the insidious harms that result to health, wealth and other crucial life factors.
- The Fair Housing Council of Oregon hosts a [visual timeline of housing discrimination](#) in the state.
- The City of Portland shares the [history of racist planning in Portland](#).

All these and other historical sources illustrate the roots of this problem.

**Metro, greater Portland's regional government, recognizes that it, too, has played a role in exclusionary and harmful policy making – and is doing its part to rectify these harms by advancing equitable housing policies and expanding access.**

[Learn more about Metro's housing racial equity strategy](#)