



## Making Invisible Histories Visible

Omaha Public Schools

Activity Title: Redlining in Omaha and the Civil Rights Movement

Prepared by Ms. Kisicki, Bryan High School

Intended Audience: students in U.S. History

Background: This activity was designed in conjunction with student history projects exploring the impact of redlining on African American and working class and working poor immigrant neighborhoods in eastern Omaha. Their projects can be found here: <http://invisiblehistory.ops.org/StudentProjects/RedlininginOmaha/tabid/1335/Default.aspx>

Map Analysis	Group Activity	Whole Class Activity
Redlining impacts in the Civil Rights Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Analyze primary source documents</li><li>- Understanding the impact of redlining beyond maps and data</li></ul>	Same
Sources needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Omaha Star Newspaper picture and caption (Artifact A)</li><li>- Omaha star article (Artifact B)</li><li>- Oral History of Arthur Pittman (Artifact C)</li><li>- Oral History of Robert Meyers (Artifact D)</li><li>- Aerial Photographs of North Omaha from 2018 &amp; 1962 (Artifact E)</li></ul>	same
How to record information/ to get students to breakdown the info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Graphic organizer</li></ul>	same
How the activity will look	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students will break up into groups of 4-5</li><li>- Groups will spend 10-12 minutes with each artifact and fill out</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Strategically place the documents in an order from hardest to breakdown to easiest to breakdown</li></ul>

<p>Total time: 1 class period with preview and activity</p>	<p>appropriate boxes on graphic organizer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Then repeat process until all artifacts have been viewed</li> <li>- Bring students back together to discuss the articles as a whole.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Go through 2 as a whole group on the board and have students fill out their own graphic organizer</li> <li>- Then have students do 1 with an elbow partner with whole group check</li> <li>- Then have students do 2 with partner no group check</li> </ul>
<p>Formative Individual Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have students answer a short answer (compare/contrast)</li> </ul>	<p>Same</p>

**Handout**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Redlining's Impact in Omaha**

	Who	What	When	Where	Why
Omaha Star Newspaper picture and caption					
Omaha star article					
Oral History of Arthur Pittman					
Oral History of Robert Meyers					
Aerial Footage from 2018 & 1962					
	Who made this source? OR Who what is this source?	What does the document say? Is it biased? What is the tone?	When was this source created? What historical events were occurring?	Where did it come from?	Why was this document included in this activity?

What do all these documents have in common?

Can you write out an answer guide for this part? Can be bullet points!

How did the redlining impact Omaha?

Think back to the 1950s, and the 1920s activities with Redlining and the Great Migration. Has Omaha been impacted? Yes or No? Explain.



ANSWER SHEET

Redlining's Impact in Omaha

	Who	What	When	Where	Why
Omaha Star Newspaper picture and caption	African American newspaper	Picture of concerned Omaha citizens on their way to Lincoln	April 14 <sup>th</sup> 1967	Omaha/Lincoln	To testify for fair housing
Omaha star article	African American newspaper	Talks about students trying to change housing practices that discriminate against A-A	April 21 <sup>st</sup> , 1967	Omaha	In order to bring attention to the issue
Oral History of Arthur Pittman	Arthur Pittman conducted by Dr.Mihelich	His story and pictures	Interviews conducted from 1983-1984	Omaha	His experience trying to buy a house in white neighborhood and how difficult it was even if you had money.
Oral History of Robert Meyers	Robert Meyers conducted by Dr.Mihelich	His story and pictures	Interviews conducted from 1983-1984	Omaha	He had to pay a white man to pose as him in order to build his house until it was complete.
Aerial Footage from 2018 & 1962	Images retrieved from <a href="https://www.dogis.org/">https://www.dogis.org/</a> on 9/18/19.	Maps of the same area in different time periods	2018 & 1962	24 <sup>th</sup> and Franklin area	In the 2018 aerial photos, the buildings along the same stretch of 24 <sup>th</sup> Street are gone; they have been replaced by empty lots.

					Shows what has changed.
	Who made this source? OR Who what is this source?	What does the document say? Is it biased? What is the tone?	When was this source created? What historical events were occurring?	Where did it come from?	Why was this document included in this activity?
<p>What do all these documents have in common?  They all tell the story of redlining and its impact on Omaha and its citizens.</p> <p>How did the redlining impact Omaha?  Answers may vary</p> <p>Think back to the 1950s, and the 1920s activities with Redlining and the Great Migration. Has Omaha been impacted? Yes or No? Explain.  Answers may vary</p>					

**ARTIFACTS:** The following artifacts are used in this teaching activity.

**Artifact A:** *Omaha Star* Newspaper Photograph and Caption.

Citation: *Omaha Star*, April 14, p. 1 (1967)





FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 1967

Page Three

# Youth Makes Plea for Fair Housing Bill

"I've tired of living in the Housing Project," a 13-year old girl told members of the Unincorporated Legislative Miscellaneous Subjects Committee Thursday afternoon at the State House in Lincoln. "If we play on the grass, we will get kicked out. If we play in the streets, the police get after us."

Rajana Washington, 2009 N. 20th Ave., explained to the Committee that when her family had attempted to find a home outside of the Negro ghetto "there was always some reason why they couldn't sell to us" when they found the family was Negro. "LBJ's would help us find a home," the Topeka Junior High student declared. "I hope you will pass it."

Rajana was one of an array of speakers who appeared before the Committee using that Sen. Edward Dineen's statewide fair housing practices will be sent to the floor of the Unincorporated Legislature. The Committee held the measure for further action.

An Omaha school teacher told the Committee that the restriction of the housing market to the Negro produces "staggering" overall effects on the child as well as the school community.

Margaret Lennox, speaking for the Omaha Chapter of Links, Inc., explained most often when the child comes to school from these conditions he is "tired and out-of-control."

"The lack of space, privacy and adequate fixtures in the home make life unpleasant for him," the Lehigh kindergarten teacher declared. "... How can he concentrate on learning history and the democratic way of life when he has spent the night battling the rat around the bed he shares with six three or four brothers and sisters? What possible identification could he have with Tom, Susan and Patsy and their sterile, orderly way of life?"

Miss Lennox asked: "Education, for what?"

"Does he see himself doomed to slum existence after efforts of his family have failed to remove them from that environment solely because of the color of their skin," she further inquired. "Therefore, for what reason does a Negro slum-dweller need an education?"

She explained that the school community is attempting many approaches to solve its problems, adding that the school cannot remove the child "from his environment. . . . Don't protect the child from peer group dynamics and slum conditions."

She said in open housing market so "those with the desire as well as the financial status could obtain dwellings suitable to their needs" would aid in relieving "overcrowded and unhealthy conditions" and provide that "incentive and motivation for learning and responsible citizenship that is lacking now."

A Gering, Neb., Creighton University student told the Committee that LBJ's should become law because "it is lawful, just, profitable and, most of all, necessary."

Joe Masch, speaking for the 10-school Nebraska Intercollegiate Association for Human Relations, declared that "justice demands that the unfair distinction of being in a minority group should not be a barrier to rights which all citizens should demand and receive."

He said the Dineen-sponsored measure would be "an obvious step forward in the alleviation of the ghetto problem" and provide "a key for breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment in which minority groups are caught."

Jack Clayton, executive director of the Omaha Urban League, told the Committee that "adequate shelter is a basic need for individual and family life."

"We believe that every family should be free to select its shelter in accord with its interest, needs and income, and should not be limited in its bid into a total housing supply in order to achieve that goal," Clayton asserted.

Clayton cited figures showing that 86 percent of the houses in

the Negro ghetto in Omaha were built before 1925. "Because of high overcrowding and old houses in the North Westside area, the Negro home buyer would have to look outside the area if he wishes to buy a decent, safe and sanitary home," he said.

"But as soon as the Negro attempts to buy a new home, he is lobbied by a builder who will not sell to him," he added. "Attempting to buy a used home in a neighborhood outside of the ghetto, the Negro is confronted with the refusal of realtors who claim to be acting for the owner."

Harvey I. Anderson, personnel specialist with Northern Natural Gas Co., said that efforts to attract industry and to recruit top flight Negro students into employment in Omaha is being hampered by the lack of fair housing legislation.

He pointed out that one of the first questions potential Negro employers ask is whether there is fair housing in practice or law in Omaha.

Anderson, who served as executive secretary of the Omaha Human Relations Board, explained that the greatest critical area is that of rentals, especially apartments.

A member of the Human Relations Board declared that Omaha "is presently a very turbulent area . . . because of racial unrest and social discord."

Mylys E. Rheingrover, co-chairman of the Board's housing committee, said in a prepared statement that "none of the causes for such unrest can be attributed to our city's history of racial segregation in respect to housing."

He said there exists "a concerted effort on behalf of certain interests to prevent residential mobility" and that because of this a fair housing bill is needed.

## BEAUTIFICATION



Transplanting and Watering Now that spring is actually here, all of us who love to garden are eager to begin.

Many will wait a little longer for the sun to warm the earth more, especially to plant seeds outside.

However, some of us are ready to transplant seedlings or larger plants now.

Seedlings should be transplanted as soon as their permanent forms are formed. (These are the third and fourth leaves to form.) They also should be planted before they become large enough to become crooked.

For even better results, transplant the seedlings to a convenient pot. Keep inside for a week and then plant the pot and the seedling. Pot-grown plants do not receive any shock when they are set in the open garden. Often plants removed from flats have to reestablish themselves.

Always water seedlings and potted plants well when transplanted. Keep seedlings damp until they are established in their new home. When watering allow the water to run as slowly as possible. Take the nozzle from the hose and let the water penetrate deeply into the soil. Insufficient watering tends to encourage the roots of plants to grow toward the top of the soil. Early in the morning or in the evening are the best times to do your watering.

Some gardeners believe that using some type of mulch helps to keep the soil moist. You might try it in part of your garden. If it is successful, then mulch the remainder.

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**FAMILY BUNDLES**  
**FLUFFS & FOLDS**  
 Strip Rugs Washed & Dried  
 Shirts and Pants Finished  
**ALSO DRY CLEANING**  
**LEAVENWORTH**  
**LAUNDRY**  
 2425 LEAVENWORTH ST.  
 342-2210

**Johnny Byrne's Market**  
 QUALITY MEATS  
**Open Sundays**  
 24th and Cass Streets 342-7517

## **ARTIFACT B, Version 2- Typed Out.**

*Omaha Star*, April 21, 1967, p. 3

### **Youth Makes Plea for Fair Housing Bill**

“I’m tired of living in the Housing Project,” a 13-year old girl told members of the Unicameral Legislature’s Miscellaneous Subjects Committee Thursday afternoon at the State House in Lincoln. “If we play on the grass, we will get kicked out. If we play in the streets, the police get after us.”

Rajuana Washington, 2008 North 30<sup>th</sup> Ave., explained to the Committee that when her family had attempted to find a home outside of the Negro ghetto “there was always some reason why they couldn’t sell to us” when they found the family was Negro.

“LB358 would help us find a home,” the Tech Junior High student declared. “I hope you will pass it.”

Rajuana was one of an array of speakers who appeared before the Committee urging that Sen. Edward Danner’s statewide fair housing practices bill will sent to the floor of the Unicameral for consideration. The Committee held the measure for further action.

An Omaha school teacher told the Committee that the restriction of the housing market to the Negro produces “staggering” overall effects on the child as well as the school community.

Marjorie Lennox, speaking for the Omaha Chapter of Links, Inc., explained most often when the child comes to school from those condition he is “tired and out-of-sort.”

The lack of space, privacy and adequate fixtures in the home make life unpleasant for him,” the Lothrop kindergarten teacher declared. “...How can he concentrate on learning history and the democratic way of life when he spent the night battling the rat around the bed he shares with his three or four brothers and sisters. What possible identification could he with Tom, Susan and Pony and their sterile, orderly way of life?”

Miss Lennox asked, “Education, for what?”

“Does he see himself doomed to a slum existence after efforts of his family have failed to removed them from this environment solely because of the color of their skin,” she further inquired. “Therefore, for what reason does a Negro slum-dweller need an education.”

She explained that the school community is attempted many approaches to solve its problems, adding that the school cannot remove the child “from his environment . . . (nor) protect the child from peer group dynamics and slum conditions.”

She said an open housing market “so those with the desire as well as the financial status could obtain dwellings suitable to their needs” would aid in relieving “overcrowded and unhealthy condition” and provide that “incentive and motivation for learning and responsible citizenship lacking now.”

A Gering Nebr. Creighton University student told the Committee that LB 358 should become law because it is lawful, just, profitable and most of all, necessary.”

Joe Masek, speaking for the 10-school Nebraska Intercollegiate Association for Human Relations, declared that “justice demands that the unfair distinction of being in a minority group should not be a barrier to rights which all citizens should demand and receive.”

He said the Danner-sponsored measure would be an “obvious step forward in the alleviation of the ghetto problem” and provide “a key for breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment in which minority groups are caught.”

Jack Clayter, executive director of the Omaha Urban League, told the Committee that “adequate shelter is a basic need for individual and family life.”

We believe that every family should be free to select its shelter in accord with its interest, needs and finances and should not be limited in its bid into a total housing supply to achieve that goal.” Clayter asserted.

Clayter cited figures showing that 58 percent of the houses in the Negro ghetto in Omaha were built before 1939.

“Because of the high overcrowding and old houses in the Near Northside area, the Negro home buyer would have to look outside this area if he wishes to buy a decent, safe and sanitary home,” he said.

Harvey L. Anderson, personnel specialist with Northern Natural Gas Co., said that efforts to attract industry and recruit top flight Negro students into employment in Omaha is being hampered by the lack of fair housing legislation.

He pointed out that one of the first question potential Negro employees ask is whether there is fair housing in practice in Omaha.

Anderson, who served as executive secretary of the Omaha Human Relations Board, explained that the greatest critical area is that of rentals, especially apartments.

A member of the Humans Relations Board declared that Omaha “is presently a very turbulent area . . . because of racial unrest and social discord.

Mylles E. Rheingrover, co-chairman of the Board’s housing committee, said in a prepared statement that “some of the causes of such unrest can be attribute to the any city’s history of racial segregation in respect to housing.”

He said there exists, “a concerted effort on behalf of certain interests to prevent residential mobility” and that because of this a fair housing bill is needed.

*END OF ARTICLE*

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### Artifact C: Oral History Interview with Arthur Pittman (Excerpt)

Citation: Oral history interview of Arthur B. Pittman. (1983-1984) Conducted by Dr. Mihelich.

(Courtesy of The Douglas County Historical Society.)

AP: Yeah. He never tried to pass either. So you know--

DM: Proud of his heritage and no need to.

AP: Yeah.

DM: My point in the housing, as you brought it up, did you seem to feel that that was necessary to live in that area?

AP: I had to at that particular time, that was the only place for us to live. When I wanted to go and buy a house, it was interesting, I didn't realize what was happening. I saw a house that I liked and contacted the realtor. They took me out there at night to see it. Well, fortunately, I didn't get it. I didn't particularly like it. But this is the subtle things that they do to you, you know. They didn't want the people in the neighborhood to know that a Black was interested in this particular area or this house. You see. But then again, I kept looking at the lot where I live now, and I liked it.

*The guy* lived in--he lived in California, and I wrote to him and we negotiated by purchasing the lot, of which I bought. I think *somebody* got wind of the fact that I was trying to do it, and this fellow, they told me at that time, he spent \$150 on phone calls to try to keep them from selling it to me. But fortunately I had him tied up so he couldn't get out of it.

DM: Do you recall what year that was?

AP: It must have been 1953, '52-'53. I built the house in '54 and moved in December of '54.

DM: And that house is located at--

AP: 97th and Dodge.

DM: Dodge Street.



Ebony magazine, August, 1949



—World-Herald Photo  
Mrs. Pittman

**Artifact D. History Interview with Robert Myers (Excerpt)** (1983-1984) Conducted by Dr. Mihelich.

(Courtesy of The Douglas County Historical Society.)



*Robert and Bertha Myers, 1965*

Yet even before the enactment of civil rights laws and other betterments, some of these citizens showed the ability to help themselves. Bob Myers took such personal action, breaking through the ghetto wall by guile.

In the late 1950s, with the help of a white banker, he financed the construction of a home for Bertha and himself at Fifty-first and Curtis, outside the invisible ghetto wall. Although the couple minutely

**START HERE**

RM: Yes, real estate. I think Al Kennedy was concerned, but back in those times I didn't have much truck for real estate people because back in '63 is when I built my home. I couldn't buy a home outside the ghetto area. The real estate people refused to show me, refused to sell to me. So I had to build under an assumed name, sight unseen, the house I'm living in now because I was black.

DM: Where did you build that home?

RM: Where I live now, 5120 Curtis.

DM: And that was outside the ghetto?

RM: Yes. We had problems. All the real estate people had excuses to keep us out of that area, to stay down around 24th and Lake. It cost me \$500.00 to buy another person's name, Kaiser, to have my home built under that name and

then deeded over to me from Kaiser.

DM: How did that work? Can you reveal to me what you did?

RM: I can now. I paid \$500.00 to a fellow to use his name, Kaiser. I had all my work done under the name of Kaiser. To anyone interested, he was building my house. If anyone asked, he backed it up, "Yes, I am building a house out there."

DM: Did you know Mr. Kaiser?

RM: No, never met him.

DM: Was there some group that had people around who were willing to do this?

RM: No, no group, no NAACP or any of that. It was me.

DM: You just happened to find this fellow?

RM: No. This part I can't divulge. I had a white friend who knew what was happening and sort of went to bat for me. I supplied the money and he did the contacting of the people to build, whatever, carpet people, painters. He'd bring us samples or we'd get samples and tell him, "Use this color paint," and so forth. We had a diagram to go by. But we couldn't visit the house, no way. We'd drive by at night, just pass without looking too hard to see how it was going on the outside, but we didn't know what the inside looked like for sure. 'Til we got in there, we had no idea what it actually looked like on the inside.

DM: Then when it was completed, you were able to move in?

RM: Yes. But there is a little story behind that. I have papers on the problems, the TV, the World Herald, the letters that were written back and forth. The developer didn't even know. Then when he found out he was offering us some land somewhere else, in another area where there were some blacks. We wrote back saying, "No, this is America, we have chosen the spot we wanted to live in. We have no intention of moving." They showed it word for word on TV, the letter he wrote, the letter we wrote. There was quite a deal about it.

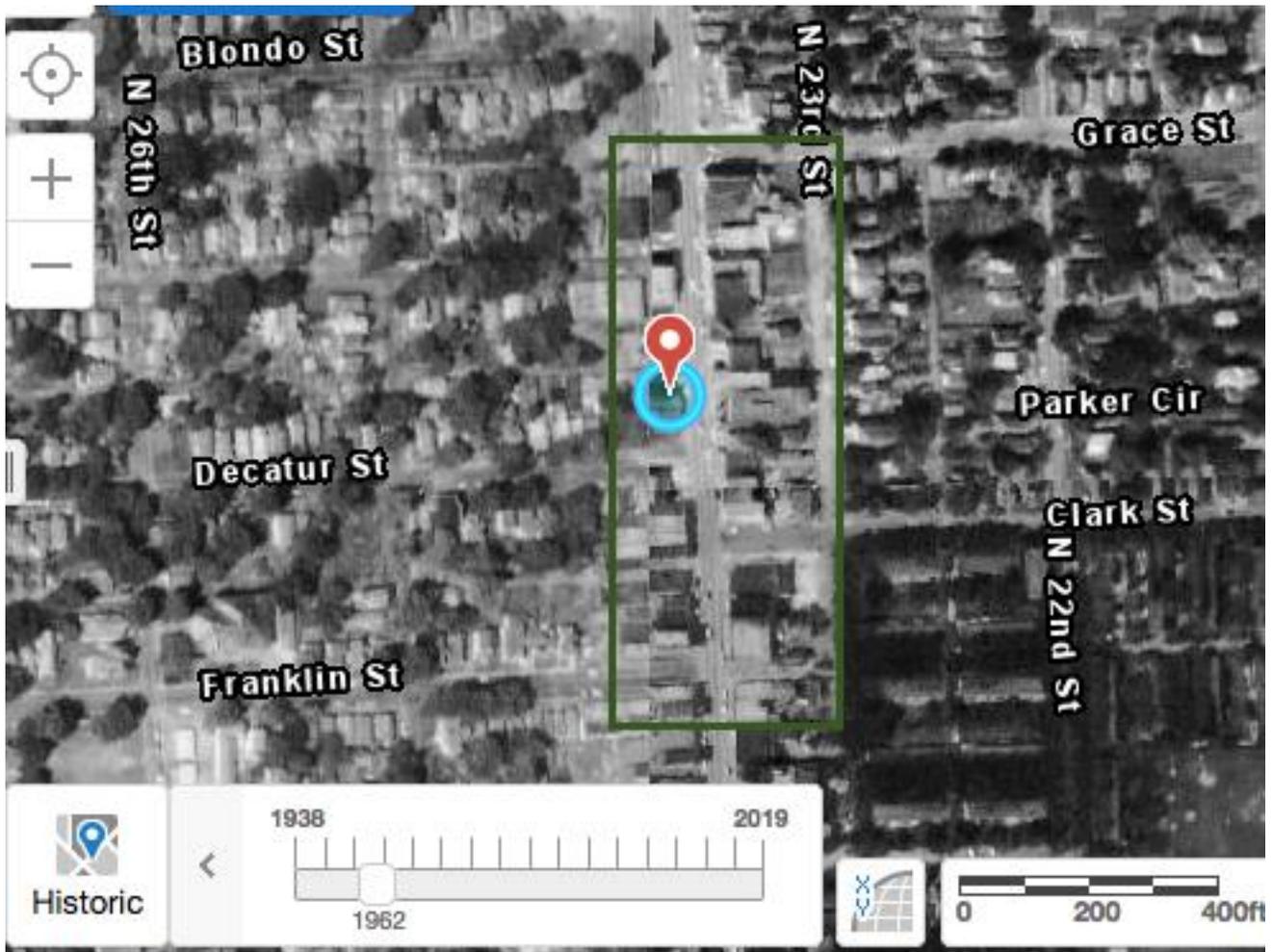
You talk about Kennedy and all -- I was bitter towards

real estate men. Charlie Peters was on the School Board at the time [1963] and I didn't have anything to do with him. He just rubbed me. Like when we had to buy things for the house. Sometimes I had to go myself. I'd tell the guy, "Are you interested in making money and selling carpets or in being part of a social problem?" They'd say, "Make money." I'd given them the specifications, tell them where to put it, give them the name Kaiser on a piece of paper. Tell them if anyone asked any questions, all they knew was Kaiser and that was it. After the work was done and no word about me was mentioned, then I'd send them their money. They didn't like it, but they did it. All went smoothly 'til the very end and the inter-com system. I bought it on one of those deals. It came with Kaiser on the outside, but the packing label had Myers on it. The builder, the realtor and so forth called me to a meeting. They asked if I was the one that built the house. I said, "Yes," and they were all astounded, all saying they knew nothing about it, all trying to talk me out of it. I said, "No, we're moving in tonight," and we did. I had flood lights all around and my arsenal. I was up most of the night, ready for a miniature war, I guess. But that's the story. There was more involved than that. That was the highlights of it.

Artifact E: Aerial Photographs from North Omaha, 2018 & 1962



2018 Aerial Photograph of Omaha's North 24<sup>th</sup> Street, from Grace St. to Franklin St.



1962 Aerial Photograph of Omaha's North 24<sup>th</sup> Street, from Grace St. to Franklin St.