

Better Homes: The Play

Educational Resource Packet

An Interdisciplinary Resource Packet for Teachers

Prepared by the South Bend Civic Theatre

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Better Homes: The Play

November 10-19 at the South Bend Civic Theatre

November 30 at the History Museum

November 30 and December 1 school shows at the History Museum

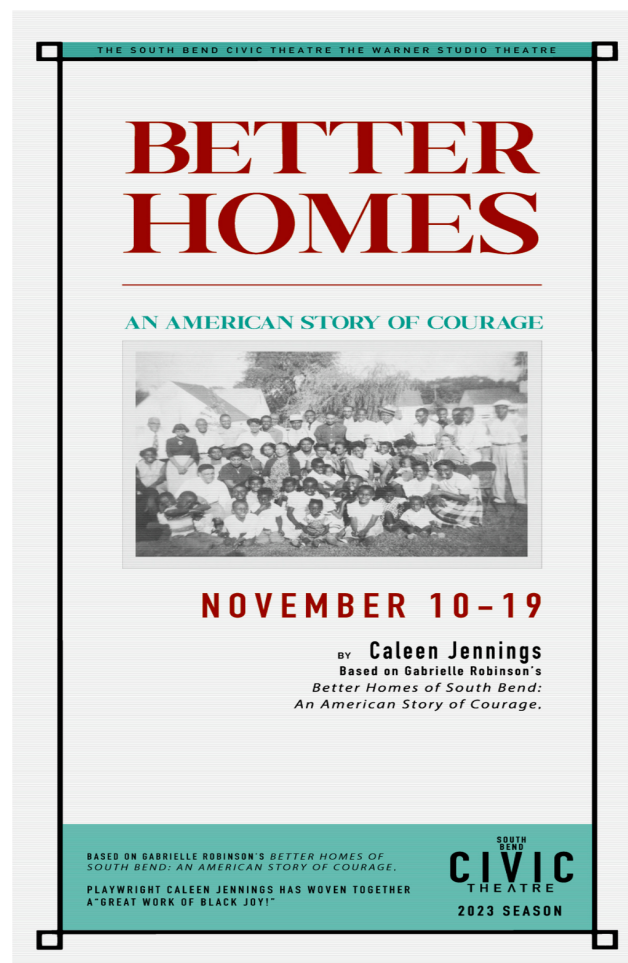


Table of Contents

The History of the Better Homes Group	2
Black Life in South Bend in the 1930s	4
Spotlight: Gabrielle Robinson, author, biography	5
Spotlight: Calleen Jennings, playwright, biography	7
Background Information: Housing in the US	
Brief history of South Bend	
Spotlight: The Great Migration	
Timeline: Black Housing in South Bend	12
Redlining in South Bend	13
Spotlight: Undesign the Redline	15
The History Museum Overview	16
Spotlight: Worker's Home	17
Spotlight: Civil Rights Heritage Center: South Bend, IN	18
Spotlight: Oral Histories	
Spotlight: Musical Traditions within Black culture	19
Reputable web resources	21
Bibliography	24

The History of the Better Homes Group

The Better Homes group was a collection of Black individuals in South Bend who banded together to achieve the common goal of owning homes in nice neighborhoods. This group set up a corporation to purchase lots of land, get the loans, and important licensing paperwork necessary to build houses in previously white only neighborhoods. Each member contributed to the total \$2000 that was needed. The group started with a collection of \$9.55 placed in the treasury.

Initial Members/Officers:

- Lureatha Allen - president - and Arnold Allen
 - Daughter: Nola Allen
- Earl Thompson - vice president - and Viro Thompson
 - Children: Earl Jr., Gloria, and Patricia
- Louise Taylor - secretary - and Robert Taylor
- Ruby Paige - assistant secretary - and Sherman Paige
- Bland Jackson - treasurer - and Rosa Jackson
 - Children: Gregory Donald, Michael Ray, Blandette Rose
- J. Chester Allen - Better Homes attorney - and Elizabeth Allen
 - Children: J. Chester Jr, Irving, and Sarah
- Leroy and Margaret Cobb
 - Son: Leroy Jr.
- Bozzie and Lila Williams
- Clint and Cleo Taylor
- Marcus and Lelar Cecil
- Gus and Josie Watkins
- John and Millie Fleming
- William and Katherine Bingham
- Beautha and Wade Fuller

Initial Board of Directors

- J Chester Allen - resident agent
- Beautha Fuller - one year term
- Robert Allen - one year term
- Florence Adams - one year term
- Clint Taylor - two year term
- Millie Fleming - two year term
- W.C. Bingham - two year term
- Gus Watkins - two year term
- Louise Taylor - three year term
- Lureatha Allen - three year term
- Bland Jackson - three year term
- Marcus Cecil - three year term and board chair

TIMELINE

To secure the lots to build each member had to contribute \$100. \$50 was due within the first few weeks of forming the Better Homes organization. The other \$50 was due the following week. In total, each member needed to pay \$400 and whomever paid their full amount first was given their choice from the lots that were purchased.

On June 18, 1950, They optioned (that means they had the right to buy these particular lots) twenty six (26) lots on North Elmer Street for \$350 each. The total of \$9,100 had to be paid within ninety (90) days.

In June of 1950, They used some of the treasury money to purchase their charter and file with the state to become an official and legal corporation.

In August of 1950 they set up a bonded treasurer which protected the Better Homes Corporation's money and assured banks and lending companies that their investments were safe.

They then created a Construction and Development Committee. This was made up by Chairman Fred Crocker, J. Chester Allen as counsel, along with William Bingham, Arnold Allen, and Lurethea Allen.

By August 12, 1950 they had the warranty deed for eighteen (18) lots on North Elmer Street which cost \$6,300. It was also decided that once someone got their house deed they would no longer have voting power within the corporation. They then purchased eight (8) more lots in October for \$2,800 and another fifteen (15) lots in December for \$6,270.

Starting in November 1951 financing had been found to pay for the construction of the houses and each family could then obtain mortgage loans. In 1952 members of Better Homes began meeting with South Bend bank officials to work to secure the loans.

By 1953 the houses were built and people began to move in.

Black Life in South Bend in the 1930s

“There are people who think that the Negro is in the same environment that the white man is, since they are living side by side in a city. They are not.” Rev. Buford Gordon *The Negro in South Bend: A Social Study*, 1922

Black people comprised less than 2% of the population in the 1920s and 1930s. Alongside Black people who came up from the South seeking a better life the city was populated by a number of immigrants from places like Poland and Hungary. In general all these groups got along well living side by side.



Beverly Cobb and Wlandette Jackson on Elmer St. 1900's. Courtesy Beverly Reynolds

Despite that, there were distinct differences when it came to employment and accessibility to community spaces. In many of the major companies of the day there were few Black individuals employed and few, if any, in leadership positions. Nearly 40% of the Black community were unemployed.

Many of the restaurants and social societies, such as the YMCA, were not open to Black people. The public pool was segregated as well. Those businesses that did serve Black individuals still insisted on segregating their services in a Jim Crow type format. As a result the Black community created its own robust community of small businesses on Chapin Street and Birdsell and Listen Streets.

Church participation and the community it created were highly important to Black individuals. Olivet African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first Black church founded in South Bend in 1873. Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church, originally known as Mt. Zion Baptist Church, was another early Black church in the South Bend community founded in 1890.

An incredibly important social gathering place within the Black community of South Bend was Hering House. The building, located on Division street (later Western Avenue) was originally a church until it was bought, in 1924, by Frank E. Hering, the University of Notre Dame head football coach from 1896 to 1899, and his wife Claribel Hering. They donated the building as a black cultural center and it became the center of learning and cultural activities for the African American community in South Bend until it closed in 1963; a public space where people could gather for events of all sorts whether they were sports, music, community events, political meetings, etc.



A 1924 South Bend News-Times photo of Hering House.
<https://www.southbendtribune.com/picture-gallery/news/2017/02/09/hwback-thursday-when-hering-house-gathering/46456489/>

Spotlight: Gabrielle Robinson, author, biography



<https://www.gabriellerobinson.com>

Gabrielle tells stories about people that reveal their personal situation within its historical context.

One reason for her fascination with the intersection of the personal and historical stems from her own experience. Born in Berlin in 1942, her father's fighter plane was shot down in 1943. After her family was bombed out twice, they fled Berlin in 1945 and became refugees in a North German village.

This was the beginning of a string of migrations, from a village in Northern Germany to an Ursuline boarding school in Vienna, another on the Baltic Sea, then several years in Darmstadt where she earned a Baccalaureate.

In 1962 she moved to Urbana, Illinois with her mother and stepfather. After a 1964 BA, she won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and got an MA at Columbia University in 1965. She then moved to London with her Scottish husband and earned a PhD from the University of London in 1968. Gabrielle taught at the University of Illinois, where her only son was born, at Indiana University South Bend, and abroad.

Gabrielle now is settled in South Bend, Indiana, with her husband Mike, a sociologist turned sustainable neighborhood developer, and their cat Max. Her son is an English professor at SUNY Stony Brook.

Perhaps it's a sign of having found a home at last that Gabrielle has won a number of local and statewide awards for her writing and community engagement.¹

Mrs. Robinson first became aware of the Better Homes project because of Leroy Cobb. He was, at the time, the last surviving member of the original group. He had been twenty when the group first formed. As he told her the story she grew caught up in and began to learn more about the West Side making friends and learning about traditions and the culture of the area. Even today she still takes people on tours of the area because as she states "we have



Leroy Cobb, original member of Better Homes, and Gabrielle Robinson at dedication of Better Homes State Historic Marker 2016
<https://www.gabriellerobinson.com/better-homes-of-south-bend>

¹ Gabrielle Robinson. (n.d.). Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <https://www.gabriellerobinson.com/>

restricted lives” and don’t always know everything that’s right around us.



She was responsible for the two state history markers here in South Bend. The first is at the original site of the Better Homes and the second is in downtown and commemorates the lawyer for Better Homes and his wife.

When asked her thoughts on *Better Homes of South Bend* Mrs. Robinson shared that she is very excited and loves the playwright Caleen Jennings. She said that everyone in the audience at the first reading was very emotional because seeing the play as opposed to just reading about the history

is different. That’s “the power you can bring out in a play”.

Gabrielle Robinson was on the committee for *Undesign the Redline* and said that to her knowledge there is not another instance in the north of something like Better Homes though she believes there had to have been some things in more industrial cities.

She shared that there is still inequality due to the racial wealth gap and that redlining still exists where businesses won’t invest in certain areas and individuals cannot get loans. She discussed the fact that still African Americans are often not able to get loans to buy houses.²

Spotlight: Caleen Jennings, playwright, biography



arch 6). personal.

Caleen Sinnette Jennings is Professor of Theatre Emerita. She joined the faculty in 1989, directed for the main stage and taught thirteen different courses in the theatre and general education programs. In 2003 she received American University's Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award.

In 2016 she became the founding Chair of the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, and in 2018 she received the University's inaugural Award for Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. During her tenure at A.U. she was Director of the

<https://www.folger.edu/bio/caleen-sinnette-jennings>

Theatre/Musical Theatre Program and Chair of the Department of Performing Arts. She has been a faculty member of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Teaching Shakespeare Institute since 1994.

Dramatic Publishing Company has published 8 of her plays: *Elsewhere in Elsinore: The Unseen Women of , Inns & Outs, Playing Juliet/Casting Othello, Free Like Br'er Rabbit, Sunday Dinner, Chem Mystery, A Lunch Line, and Same But Different*. Her play, *Uncovered* is published in the Lane/Shengold Anthology, *Shorter, Faster, Funnier* and her play, *Classy Ass* is published in five anthologies. Jennings' play, *Darius & Twig* was produced at the Kennedy Center Family Theatre and did a national tour in 2017. Her *Queens Girl* trilogy plays have received both live and virtual productions at Theatre J, Mosaic Theatre, Everyman Theatre, Clackamas Repertory Theatre and Hangar Theatre. She received a \$10,000 grant from Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays and the Heideman Award from the Actor's Theatre of Louisville.

She is a five-time Helen Hayes Award nominee, and founding member of The Welders, a D.C. based playwrights' collaborative. She retired from A.U. in spring 2020.³

Ms. Jennings was first introduced to the book *Better Homes of South Bend* through a friend who heard that the South Bend Civic Theatre was hoping to use the book as a jumping off point to tell the story of the Better Homes community members. After she connected with Mrs. Robinson and the Theatre she began the work of connecting with the surviving relatives of the Better Homes group.

Ms. Jennings said she was particularly impressed with the way in which Mrs. Robinson wrote *Better Homes of South Bend*. Even though this text is clearly a scholarly researched book it is a compelling story and has a dramatic structure which lent itself to a play well.

Like all of August Wilson's plays and Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun* the play *Better Homes* explores the themes of home, place, location, and land. For people that were forcibly taken from their original homes the concepts of home, place, location, and land become even more important. The desire to be able to put down roots and find a place to raise their families and call it home becomes even more valuable and meaningful.

³ *Caleen Jennings*. American University. (n.d.). Retrieved March 10, 2023, from <https://www.american.edu/cas/faculty/ciennin.cfm>

The play *Better Homes* features a lot of music because the church played a critical role in the success of the Better Homes movement. The church was very much a part of the Black/African American community in South Bend at the time and still is. Because of the members' connection through their church communities they were able to build trust and relationships with one another that allowed them to pool their money together and trust one another for years and also keep their activities quiet. The church was their "focus and anchor".

Ms. Jennings notes that part of the power of art is that it helps build empathy. History comes alive with flesh and bones when names, faces, and stories are attached. She hopes that as people watch her play they can start to feel connected to the story of the Better Homes community. Even though these characters are fictionalized they hold close enough ties to the historical figures that allow the audience to really grasp the scope of what the Better Homes members did. She also hopes that as individuals see this they will begin to recognize the agency they have in their own lives to make decisions and affect change.⁴

Background Information: Housing in the US

Until the 1950s housing in the US was under strict restrictive racial covenants. The official code of ethics for the National Association of Real Estate Brokers read "A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood or character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood". This was changed in 1950 to eliminate the reference to race and nationality.

⁴ Jennings, C., & Twietmeyer, M. (2023, March 10). Personal.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) also declared that “Protective covenants are essential to the sound development of proposed residential areas” and that “If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes”.

November 5, 1917 - In *Buchanan v. Warley* (Louisville), the Supreme Court rules racial segregation by municipal zoning ordinances unconstitutional.

June 13, 1933 - Under the New Deal, the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC) provided private mortgage refinancing, but also helped to lay the groundwork for redlining

June 27, 1934 - The National Housing Act created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which helped to provide mortgage insurance on loans made by FHA-approved lenders.

September 1, 1937 - The United States Housing Act of 1937 (Wagner-Steagall Act) created the United States Housing Authority, a public corporation under the Department of the Interior, which offered millions of dollars in loans for the construction of low cost housing

November 12, 1940 - In *Hansberry v. Lee*, the Supreme Court rules that a racially restrictive housing covenant can be challenged in court.

May 3, 1948 - In *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the Supreme Court rules that “racially restrictive covenants” in property deeds cannot be enforced

July 15, 1949 - The Housing and Urban Redevelopment Act of 1949 worked to get rid of slums and promote community development and redevelopment programs by starting a policy of urban renewal that worked to attract investors

1949 - US Congress passes the National Housing Act which works to provide “a decent home in a suitable living environment for every American family”.

1950 - creation of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing

1957- creation of the Civil Rights Commission

1962 - President John F. Kennedy signs Executive Order 11063- Equal Opportunities in Housing

September 2, 1964 - The Housing Act of 1964 allows rehabilitation loans for homeowners.

April 11, 1968 - The Fair Housing Act bans discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

December 31, 1975 - President Ford signs the Housing Mortgage Disclosure Act, an attempt to reduce discriminatory lending by requiring financial lending institutions to keep a public register of mortgage loan applications including the race, ethnicity and gender of the applicant.

2006–2009 - Increased foreclosure rates among U.S. homeowners lead to a crisis that adversely affects home valuations and reverberates throughout the nation's mortgage markets, Wall Street hedge fund investments and the industries of home building, real estate, retail home supply and banking.

November 21, 2010 - Emergency Homeowners' Loan Program provides emergency mortgage relief to homeowners who are unemployed or underemployed and at risk of foreclosure.⁵

⁵ Milestones: A history of housing in the United States. The House I live in. (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/thehouse/milestones-for-the-house-i-live-in-a-history-of-housing-in-the-united-states/>

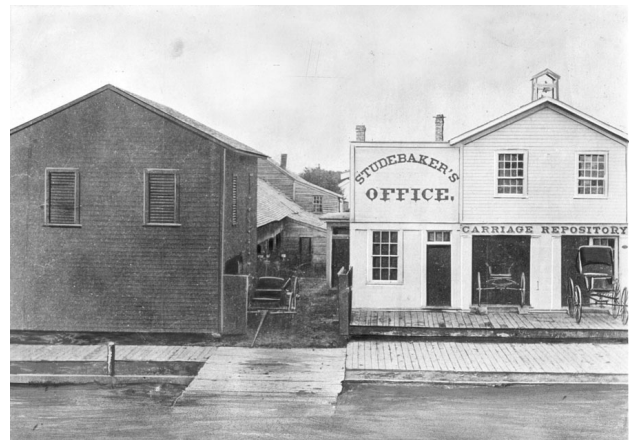
Brief History of South Bend

South Bend was founded in the 1820s by Pierre Navarre of the American Fur Company and Alexis Coquillard of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company.

In the 1840s Coquillard dug the East Race of the Saint Joseph River.

James Oliver arrived in the 1830s. His company, Oliver Plow Works, was an iron works giant and was a major employer in South Bend and the surrounding community. He built the Oliver Hotel, original South Bend Opera House, the first city hall, Copshaholm, and multiple other houses.

In 1852, Clement and Henry Studebaker opened a blacksmith shop in South Bend. They would eventually transition to horseless carriages (cars) for which they would become well known. Studebaker's factories would become one of the largest employers in the area until it went out of business and shut down nearly 100 years later. The Studebakers invested in the community building multiple buildings that were used for civic, community, religious, and residential reasons.



The Studebaker Museum Archives & Education

From 1900 till the 1930s the city of South Bend thrived as more industry was drawn to the city especially because of the ability to use hydraulic power from the East and West Race of the Saint Joseph River.

As the Great Depression of the 1930s hit the city struggled.

In 1963 the Studebaker factory finally shut down. This affected all of South Bend as the factory was a major employer in the area. ⁶

⁶ ENR // Marketing Communications: Web // University of Notre Dame. (n.d.). *History // building south bend // university of Notre Dame*. Building South Bend. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://buildingsouthbend.nd.edu/history/>

Spotlight: The Great Migration

Between 1910 and 1970, approximately six million African Americans relocated to the north or west during the Great Migration. By 1950, over 8,000 had settled in South Bend in search of better employment opportunities and to flee Jim Crow laws and violence. To put this in perspective, there were 572 African Americans living here in 1900. Just before the Great Migration began, nearly 90% of all African American people were living in southern states, a carryover from the days of slavery. Many of those who had previously been enslaved found it nearly impossible to leave, trapped by the system of sharecropping where farmland rent at high interest rates kept them in a perpetual state of exhausting work, debt, and endless poverty. And in many cases, individuals were still living and working on the very plantation where they had once been enslaved. To add to oppressive challenges, unpredictable weather, and crop-damaging pests such as the boll weevil made farming less and less profitable and sustainable, providing no way of making those sharecropping payments.

Generations of families were eventually born into this vicious cycle with no promise of upward economic mobility. By 1910, the need to find stable work with a livable wage became a matter of life-or-death, and industrial jobs in the north seemed to be the answer to prayers. After World War I, immigration to the United States from Europe was significantly compromised by two Acts—the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924. This halted the once-steady supply of immigrant workers, making it necessary for northern factories to recruit workers elsewhere, and the focus shifted south. Recruitment agents set up posts in southern towns, offering job prospects and train tickets to young men, groups of men, and even entire families. Success stories of those who made it north were published in southern newspapers, spurring excitement and hope and more and more migration.

The Second Great Migration began in 1940 with the mobilization of America's wartime economy. Millions of jobs were created through government contracts, creating even more manufacturing opportunities in the North. Studebaker, Oliver, Bendix, Ball-Band, Singer, South Bend Toy, and more all switched over to wartime production, and this pulled a great deal of people to the area, increasing South Bend's overall population by 40% between 1920 and 1940 alone, climbing another 15% by 1950. The resulting competition for jobs and housing was extremely serious, causing a surge in discriminatory hiring practices and a high unemployment rate for African American men in particular. African American citizens responded to these inequities on a national level, organizing protests and bannings together to give voice to their grievances. The fight for social change was beginning to accelerate.

In response, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which declared "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries and in Government, because of race, creed, color, or national origin." The Order also established the Fair Employment Practices Committee to investigate incidents of discrimination and paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Timeline: Black Housing in South Bend

1930s - the city starts dumping toxic waste into LaSalle Park, Beck's Lake, 500,000 acres of wetlands and swamp

1937 - Citizens' Housing Committee argued for more federal dollars to support public housing as the housing that African Americans were crowded into were often deplorable without working toilets or bathtubs/showers. The city council voted against more public housing.

March 5, 1941 - creation of the South Bend Housing Authority on the work of the Housing Committee and the mayor George W. Freyermuth

1943 - LaSalle Park, Beck's Lake, is designated as site for houses for African Americans to be built by the federal government in order to house workers to assist with the production of materials for the war effort

February 28, 1950 - *South Bend Tribune* reported that the South Bend City Council refused a grant that would've provided funding for 1,023 low rent public public housing units- most of which would've been for African Americans

April 4, 1950 - again the city council turned down funding that would've help construct 332 units of public housing

March 19, 1963 - public hearing regarding housing segregation organized by Notre Dame Law professors Thomas Broden and Conrad Kellenberg that revealed African Americans for the most part were still unable to buy/rent homes or purchase lots in neighborhoods that weren't white

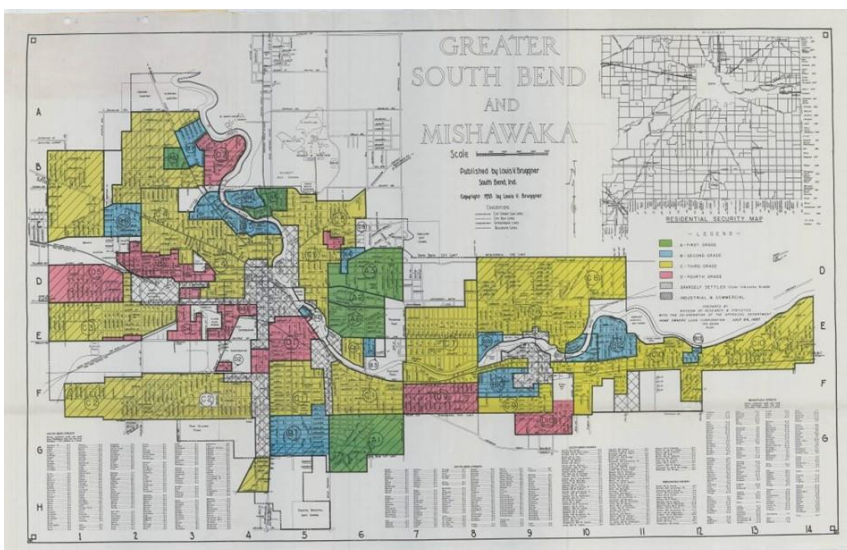
2013 - LaSalle Park, Beck's Lake, is put on the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List due to its soil being contaminated with arsenic, lead, cadmium, and other poisonous substances such as asbestos and oil

Redlining in South Bend

Redlining (verb) - refusing a loan or insurance to a person because they live in an area that is seen as a financial risk

The term originates with the New Deal era government programs that aimed to help homeowners in the 1930s secure mortgages. These programs had restrictions and requirements that had to be met in order to get funding.

The Home Owners Loan Coalition (HOLC) was a federally-sponsored program that was part of the Federal Housing Association (FHA). The FHA was created during the Great Depression to assist citizens in securing loans so those individuals could buy houses. They created maps, called “residential security maps” that were used by banks when they were deciding whether to approve or disapprove a person for a loan.



Key:

- **Green**- new homes, homogenous areas for American business and professional men, in demand housing
- **Blue**- older homes in “still desirable” areas that had “reached their peak” but were expected to stay stable for many years
- **Yellow** - older homes in neighborhoods that were declining; often sparsely populated that bordered all black neighborhoods
- **Red** - these were black and low income neighborhoods. These were considered to be undesirable locations for home loans

Map of South Bend developed by the Homeowners Loan Coalition of South Bend; 1930s; Courtesy of Indiana Historical Society

Houses that were seen to be in risky areas were colored in red. These maps were used by the federal government and were never meant to be seen by the general public. Many neighborhoods inhabited by mostly African American individuals and other people of color were outlined in red. As a result many people had difficulties getting loans to buy houses or make improvements on their houses.⁷

⁷ Jackson, C. (2021, August 17). *What is redlining?* - *The New York Times*. NY Times. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/realestate/what-is-redlining.html>

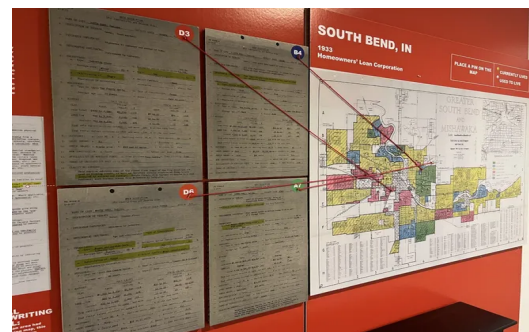
Spotlight: Undesign the Redline

Undesign the Redline is an interactive exhibit, workshop series and curriculum that “explores the history of structural racism and inequality, how these designs compounded each other from 1938 Redlining maps until today, and how [communities] can come together to *undesign* these systems with intentionality.”⁸ Developed by Design The We, a for-benefit design studio that offers consultation, research, development and design services for clients defining strategies and tools for undoing structural inequity, Undesign The Redline connects the history of racial housing segregation to current political and social issues.



The signature piece of the Undesign the Redline project is the traveling exhibit, which travels nationally to cities, towns, and communities and invites participants to “learn about history, interact with the stories and invent the future by undoing structural inequalities.”⁹ The exhibit has traveled to cities such as Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New Orleans and been held in store-fronts, abandoned buildings and conference centers. There is also a virtual exhibit that can be viewed at <http://www.designingthewe.com/undesign-the-redline>

In late 2022, the Undesign the Redline project traveled to the Main Branch of the St. Joseph County Public Library. The interactive display included five panels that explored the history of redlining in South Bend and gave viewers a better idea of what it looked like. Members of a resident board also contributed personal stories and local history.



One of the panels on display at the Main Branch of the St. Joseph County Library during their redlining exhibit.
<https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/2022/12/12/south-bend-history-of-racial-redlining-explored-in-residents-stories/69695265007/>

⁸ *Undesign the redline*. designing the WE. (n.d.). Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <http://www.designingthewe.com/undesign-the-redline>

⁹ *Undesign the redline*. designing the WE. (n.d.). Retrieved September 14., 2023, from <http://www.designingthewe.com/undesign-the-redline>

The History Museum Overview

The History Museum is located at 808 W Washington Street, South Bend Indiana. It was first organized in 1867 and is the second oldest historical society in Indiana.¹⁰ Its mission is to “preserve our region’s heritage and educate the public through our collections, exhibits, and programs to develop an informed understanding of the past.” The museum seeks to “cultivate an inspired community with an expanded knowledge, understanding, and passion for our past in order to appreciate the present and influence our future.”

Housed on the museum grounds are The Oliver Mansion and Worker’s Home. The Oliver Mansion was home to the industrialist J.D. Oliver and his family for over 72 years. It is a 38 room mansion and was one of the first houses in South Bend to have electricity. Worker’s Home opened in 1994 as “a changing exhibit with a mission to convey the history of work, workers, and their families, with special attention to the many ethnicities of the St. Joseph River Valley Region.”¹¹

The museum sits adjacent to the Studebaker Museum and has research databases that allow visitors to conduct research on local history, Indiana history, and specifically the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

Their website is <https://www.historymuseumsb.org/>.



<https://www.visitsouthbend.com/listing/the-history-museum-and-oliver-mansion/8651/>

¹⁰ <https://www.visitsouthbend.com/listing/the-history-museum-and-oliver-mansion/8651/>

¹¹ <https://www.historymuseumsb.org/workers-home-transformation-project/>

Spotlight: Worker's Home

On the campus of The History Museum sits the Worker's Home. This home was built in the 1870s for the Oliver family's domestic staff. It has been repurposed as a museum to help educate modern museum patrons on the lives and living conditions of working class families in South Bend. The home first opened to the public in 1994 and showcased a Polish working class family of the 1930s. After the renovation the house will represent the living conditions of a working class African American family 1950s and it will open on November 9, 2023

WORKER'S HOME RENOVATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Built in the 1870s, the **Worker's Home** was moved to the property of industrialist J.D. Oliver in 1907, and became home to a succession of Oliver domestic staff until the mid-1980s. Now part of The History Museum's campus, the home opened in 1994 as a changing exhibit with a **purpose to advance public understanding** of the history of work, workers, and their families, with special attention to the **pluralistic ethnic heritage** of the St. Joseph River Valley Region.



In 2023, the home will be transformed to represent that of an **African American family set in the 1950s**. The new iteration will represent a local family working in a nearby factory, shopping in local businesses, and attending local schools. Guests will be immersed in period decor and finishes and learn about **life in South Bend during the Great Migration and Civil Rights Era**. Artifacts and props will help docents interpret working, civic, religious, and family life. All of this will be guided through an interpretive plan for visitors as well as curricula tailored for Indiana schools. These will be developed with input from the advisory committee through their own lives and experiences and **ending on a theme of hope and resilience**.



This project will create new connections within our own community, broadening our impact and showing our continued investment into **representing marginalized groups** in our region. African Americans comprise over 25% of South Bend's population, making this project an excellent step to fulfilling the original purpose of the Worker's Home.



The home will open to the public on **November 9, 2023**.



Spotlight: Civil Rights Heritage Center; South Bend, IN

The South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center is located at 1040 West Washington in South Bend. It is the site of the former Engman Public Natatorium. This public pool was opened in 1922. The pool was named after Harry Engman, an executive with the South Bend Malleable Steel Range Company, who donated the land.

Those who ran the pool barred African Americans from swimming there. Given that the pool was funded by tax dollars it should've been open to all people regardless of their race. In 1936 local leaders filed a petition with the state of Indiana. The state conceded that all people should have access to the pool but did not support Black and white people swimming together. Instead the pool was open to Black residents one day a week.

The pool was finally opened to all people regardless of race in the 1950s.

Due to costly repairs and the fact that it was no longer located in a predominantly white neighborhood the city chose to close the pool in 1978. In 2010 South Bend residents worked with Indiana University South Bend campus employees to purchase, restore, and remake the pool as a museum.

It plays host to college courses and community cultural and educational events.¹²

Their virtual exhibit can be viewed at <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=xKwAY4WDAd9>.



¹² *Civil Rights Heritage Center*. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://clas.iusb.edu/centers/civil-rights/index.html>

Spotlight: Oral Histories

The following is an excerpt from the oral history of Mrs. Willie Mae Butts, demonstrating the difficulties in securing housing. She and her husband moved to South Bend in 1950. He was a physician with two established practices—one in Elkhart and one in South Bend on Walnut Street. For a time, they lived in an apartment within the same building of the practice, but as the practice grew, so did the need for space, making it necessary for them to find a new place to live. The Butts were active in local Civil Rights activities, specifically with the desegregation of the Engman Natatorium. In the excerpt, Mrs. Butts is being interviewed by David Healey, one of the founders of the Civil Rights Heritage Center.

HEALEY: When the practice grew and you had to leave, where did you go next?

BUTTS: We built this house.

HEALEY: And this was at?

BUTTS: 744 North Jacob. Not because we wanted to. I saw a house in the newspaper. You know how they put homes in there and how much they cost. Everything we wanted and in the price range. Everything. And I tried to get it, and I couldn't get it.

HEALEY: Why was that?

BUTTS: Because of my color. And I went to the house. It's over here on Colfax. And I went to see it, and I looked at that house every time I passed it. That hurt me through my heart, and we had some friends that said they would buy it for us.

HEALEY: These are white friends?

BUTTS: White friends. I had a couple of them. Well, two of them. They really could do it without any problem and then sell it back to us, but my husband wouldn't do that.

HEALEY: That was not uncommon.

BUTTS: No, and on top of that, we went other places that we didn't know we couldn't get in, like down on Sunnyside. They had a nice little house down there, and we couldn't get in there.

HEALEY: Now you said you couldn't get into this house on Colfax. Was it that the real estate agent wouldn't show you the home?

BUTTS: I got out of the car, and he told me to meet him at the house. And I got there, and when I got there, that makes me sick still now even to think about, when I got there, and I got out of the car, and I went in, and he said, "Oh, are you the lady who called me? You're Mrs. Butts?" And I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, I have a second thoughts and I have to get the okay of the people in the neighborhood because the neighborhood has not been open to colored."

HEALEY: When was this?

BUTTS: '59, '60 . . . it was '58.

Spotlight: Musical Traditions Within Black Culture

Names to Know:



gospel/the-birth-of-gospel-music-in-chicago

Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey is known as the father of gospel music. He earned this reputation due to his combining gospel music and blues music and is credited with writing over 1,000 gospel songs and toured with legendary blues singers Mahalia Jackson and Ma Rainey.¹³

In 1933 he co-founded the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses and through that and his work with Ms. Jackson it is said he helped lead the “Golden Age of Gospel Music” era.¹⁴

Reverend James Cleveland was a self taught pianist and is considered the King of gospel music. He began composing music early in life in his 20s and was considered *avant garde* because of his unique style. He is most noted for songs that combined gospel and rhythm and blues and combining pop and ballads together. He founded the Gospel Music of America. Workshopped a gospel music convention which brought gospel singers from all over the country together and is still a major institution within the gospel music industry.¹⁵

Albertina Walker was mentored by Mahalia Jackson. She was termed the Queen of gospel music especially because of her mentorship of multiple musicians who went on to become great gospel musicians in their own right including Rev. James Cleveland, Inez Andrews, and Dorothy Norwood among others.¹⁶

Sister Rosetta Tharpe is termed as the Godmother of Rock and Roll. She is considered one of the first superstars of gospel music. Her influence on music overall is monumental because of her, at the time, unique way of playing the guitar. Instead of just standard strumming patterns she combined those with the playing of individual tones, melodies, and riff patterns. She worked alongside blues musicians like Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey and also with jazz musicians like Cab Calloway.¹⁷

¹³ *Thomas A. Dorsey*. Hymnology Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/thomas-a-dorsey>

¹⁴ Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.). *This far by faith*. *Thomas Dorsey*. PBS. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from https://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/thomas_dorsey.html

¹⁵ Turner, contributed by: M. (2021, May 20). *James Cleveland (1931-1991)*. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/cleveland-reverend-dr-james-1931-1991/>

¹⁶ *Albertina Walker*. Malaco Records. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.malaco.com/artists/gospel/albertina-walker/>

¹⁷ *"Sister Rosetta" Tharpe (1915–1973)*. Encyclopedia of Arkansas. (2022, December 6). Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/sister-rosetta-tharpe-1781/>

Spotlight: The Long History of Gospel Music

Gospel music started in the spirituals traditions that were present in 19th century Southern America. Enslaved Africans used spirituals in their informal gatherings. These songs held deep ties to Biblical texts and themes. These songs also had a call and response element that is still present in a lot of music. This is where the lead says something and the audience responds.

Once slavery was abolished the spirituals began to morph and change with the creation of African American churches. The call and response format became the standard, led by energetic preachers, and spirituals took on more energetic and upbeat sounds. This was the very beginning of rhythm and blues.

As many African Americans moved to northern cities in the Great Migration many gospel artists began to collaborate with secular (or non church) musicians. As a result the Chicago Gospel musical genre was formed. This is the specific genre that Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey, Rev. James Cleveland, and Albertina Walker were the founders and leaders in.

At this time rhythm and blues and rock and roll were emerging as musical genres in Chicago and around the country. Many early R&B artists acknowledge being heavily influenced by African American gospel music.¹⁸

¹⁸ Clare, N. (2018, March 22). *The evolution of African American gospel music*. cin. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://cincyplay.com/blog-single-post/cincinnati-blog/2018/03/22/the-evolution-of-african-american-gospel-music>

Reputable Web Resources

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Minnesota Public Radio. (2019, February 13). *A timeline of history-making Black Music*. The Current. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2019/02/13/a-timeline-of-historymaking-black-music>

“Black Music Influenced the Culture and Music of the United States and the World” (includes videos)
Keyes, K. (2021, July 10). *Black music influenced the Culture & Music of the United States and the world*. SoundGirls.org. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from <https://soundgirls.org/black-music-influenced-the-culture-music-of-the-united-states-and-the-world/>

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