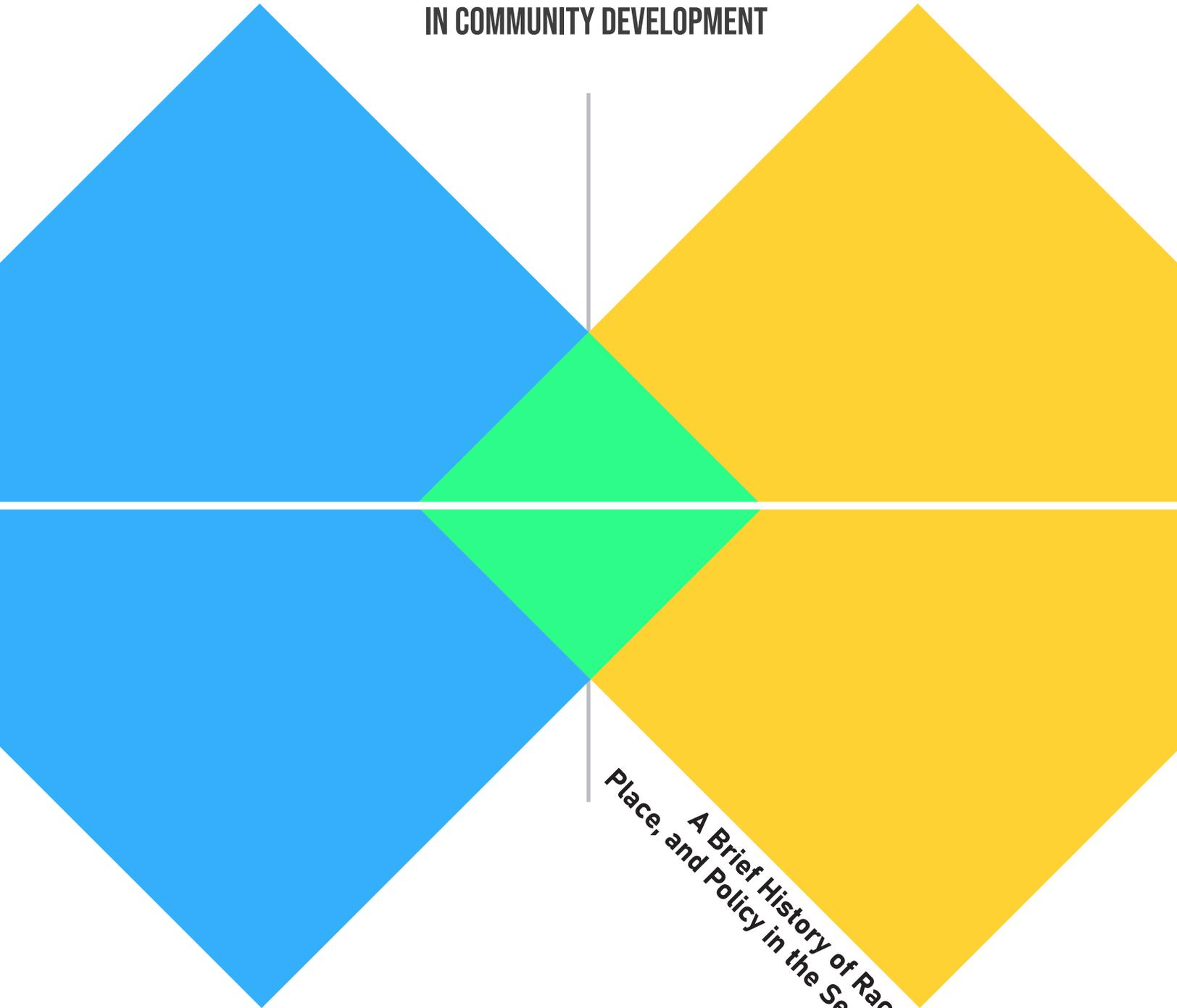


**TOWARD AN ANTI-RACIST PARADIGM
IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**



**A Brief History of Race,
Place, and Policy in the Sector**



ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) contracted ThirdSpace Action Lab to lead a research project to increase understanding of how structural racism shows up in the community development sector and to begin to identify specific ways to increase the sector's embrace of explicitly anti-racist approaches in order to achieve health equity.

The project is grounded in a large-scale literature review and a set of interviews with a broad range of community development practitioners. In this report, ThirdSpace provides a brief (and certainly not comprehensive) overview of the history of community development, with particular attention to American notions of race and place; how the sector has evolved from its origins; and the implications of that past on policy and practice today.

A single learning product on its own cannot do justice to the full nuance of all the findings that were surfaced from the research project, and the information shared by ThirdSpace in the following pages is intended as the beginning, rather than the end, of a series of materials intended to help facilitate long-term conversations about anti-racist community development.



ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION (RWJF)

RWJF is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have.

One way the Foundation advances this mission is through targeted investments in community development policy, practice, and systems. By directing resources to communities that historically have experienced a lack of investment, RWJF is able to support improvements in health equity and increase attention to conditions of place.

ABOUT THIRDSPACE ACTION LAB

ThirdSpace Action Lab was created to disrupt the vicious cycle of disinvestment + displacement that negatively impacts the vitality of communities of color with low incomes. ThirdSpace is a grassroots solutions studio dedicated to prototyping creative, place-based solutions to complex socio-economic problems. The organization works as institutional + community organizers, turning multidisciplinary research into evidence-based strategies and activating “third places” to co-create more liberated spaces for people of color.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH APPROACH

To support the Anti-Racist Community Development project, it was important to ground the exploration in the practical experiences of community development practitioners. ThirdSpace’s goal was to organize + conduct what we believe to be the largest research project ever conducted on structural racism in the community development sector. ThirdSpace reviewed a total of 85 information sources in a comprehensive literature review and conducted a total of 87 one-on-one, semi-structured, 60-minute stakeholder interviews, using 6 different discussion guides. We supplemented the interviews + literature review with additional research on the history of community development policy + practice, some of which you will see in the following pages.

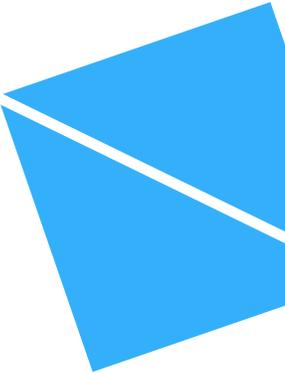
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A HISTORY OF POLICY + PRACTICE THAT MATTERS



As a sector, community development is no stranger to urgency. Working in communities that have been starved of investments + resources means having to constantly chip away at large-scale gaps in housing needs, food needs, employment needs, and small business needs. The list of pressing challenges doesn't stop, and it also doesn't stay constant. Community development organizations often need to toggle between working on the ground to leverage + preserve community assets and combat the challenges that residents face, while also pushing against bigger systems + structures that perpetuate harm, particularly in communities of color – a pandemic, a foreclosure crisis, offshoring of jobs, climate disasters, spikes in violent crimes – another endless list.

Against this backdrop, it can be easy to want to jump into triage + problem-solving, but if we want to truly address structural challenges, we need to understand what came before our present moment. The long history of federal policy before community development was even a recognized field of practice matters. The equally long history of grassroots community innovation + collective action matters. The political formalization of the sector matters. The evolution of the sector toward more of a real estate market orientation matters. The long decline in public community development funding matters.

Before we can get to what community development looks like today + what it could look like in the future, we think it's important to acknowledge what community development has been. Both our interviewees + the authors in our literature review lifted up the importance of understanding how this history has shaped American notions of race + place because it has informed virtually every aspect of community development, from who works in the sector, to how the work is funded, to what the work even looks like. To be sure, this history is contested, and both interviewees + authors bring different perspectives on where the community development sector has been, what that history means for where we go next, and what approaches are most likely to get us there.

What appears pretty uniform, though, is an appreciation among authors + interviewees for the prominent roles that both federal policy + the practices of community development organizations on the ground have played in shaping the sector. In the following pages, we take a preliminary (and by no means exhaustive) look at the story of policy + practice in the community development sector and consider what it might tell us about an anti-racist community development future.



BEFORE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A SAMPLING OF RACIST POLICIES + HOW THEY SHAPED AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Throughout American history, the ways in which we have collectively approached land use, ownership, and the distribution of wealth have been profoundly + explicitly racist. The United States' founding was deeply entwined with the genocide + forced migration of Native peoples; the enslavement of Africans and native-born Black Americans; and the government transfer of land + means of production to white immigrants and native-born white people. Even well into the 20th century, the same patterns of exploitation and racial segregation + economic divestment were enshrined in federal law and in the administrative practices of federal, state, and local government officials.

The Federal Home Loan Bank Act (1932), the Home Owners Loan Act of 1933, and the National Housing Act (1934) created new federal infrastructure to help reduce the impact of the Great Depression on Americans' housing vulnerability. The legislation ushered in an era of easier access to mortgages, greater opportunities to refinance existing mortgages, and insurance to offset risks for private banks' home lending. The legislation ultimately safeguarded the housing of millions of Americans and opened up pathways to homeownership for generations to come – but largely not for Black people or other people of color living in the United States. The Home Owners Loan Corporation's requirement of uniform appraisal standards led to systematic nationwide “redlining” in communities of color, and the Federal Housing Authority routinely refused to insure development in redlined communities (and required that homes not be sold to Black people in white communities), effectively cutting off both private + public investment.

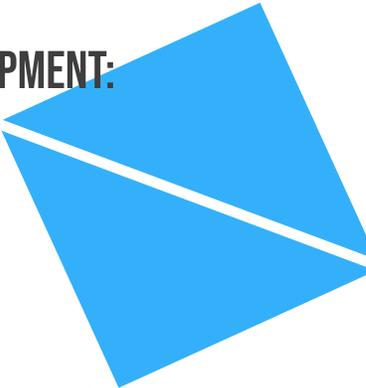
The United States Housing Act of 1937 established a system for federal funding + loans to public housing agencies. Local public housing authorities overwhelmingly operated racially segregated public housing communities and steered disproportionate investment into those properties housing white residents.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (also known as the GI Bill, 1944) extended a range of benefits to World War II veterans, including homeownership + tuition supports. It remains one of the most sweeping federal investments in wealth-building in American history, but it was disproportionately not made available to people of color. States were left to administer the law's benefit, effectively cutting off access to resources for Black Americans in the Jim Crow South, and Veteran Administration loans were made almost exclusively outside of redlined neighborhoods.

The Housing Act of 1949 created a system of large-scale federal subsidy in housing development to address pent-up housing demand. This facilitated an explosion of development in new suburbs, but local governments across the country enacted racially restrictive covenants that prevented sales to people of color, and the Federal Housing Authority routinely required that financed subdivisions could not sell to Black residents. The Act also provided funding support + authorization for eminent domain for local governments to engage in “slum clearance,” which was typically wielded to advance demolition + forced relocation in communities of color.

The National Interstate + Defense Highways Act (1956) structured massive federal investment in developing highway infrastructure nationwide, what ultimately would be the largest public works investment in American history. Local + state officials routed highways in ways that overwhelmingly created the greatest destruction + forced relocation in communities of color and communities of low income. Meanwhile, the newly created highways helped facilitate + subsidize suburban development, exacerbating white flight from cities.

BEFORE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: GRASSROOT RESPONSES



These racist policies + racist implementation strategies concentrated poverty largely (but not exclusively) in American cities – and in cities, within a relatively small number of neighborhoods. All of the broader national systemic inequities (in housing, healthcare, employment, education, environmental contaminants, and the carceral system) found homes in these communities. The result has been demonstrably different life outcomes that vary widely zip code by zip code, census tract by census tract, and even block by block.

Despite these dire conditions, impacted communities have demonstrated their skill + willingness to draw attention to key priorities; to organize for policy reforms; to build off of under-resourced assets; and to pilot community-level innovations that have inspired broader change. Many of these efforts preceded the formalization of community development as a field of practice – and created strong reference points for the eventual formation of the sector.

The **settlement house movement** of the mid-to-late 19th century modeled the potential for community anchors that address a variety of challenges in one location, while also providing opportunities for residents of different socioeconomic backgrounds for joint learning, cultural engagement, and political organizing.

Mutual aid societies founded between the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century leveraged modest membership dues to circulate community resources that otherwise were structurally difficult to obtain, from healthcare to emergency food supplies to employment opportunities. They were particularly common in communities experiencing the brunt of racist policies, including Black, Chinese, and Latinx communities. Even earlier precursors to formally named mutual aid societies, like the **Free African Society** in the late 1700s, leveraged membership dues in support of community service projects that directly addressed the needs of the formerly enslaved.

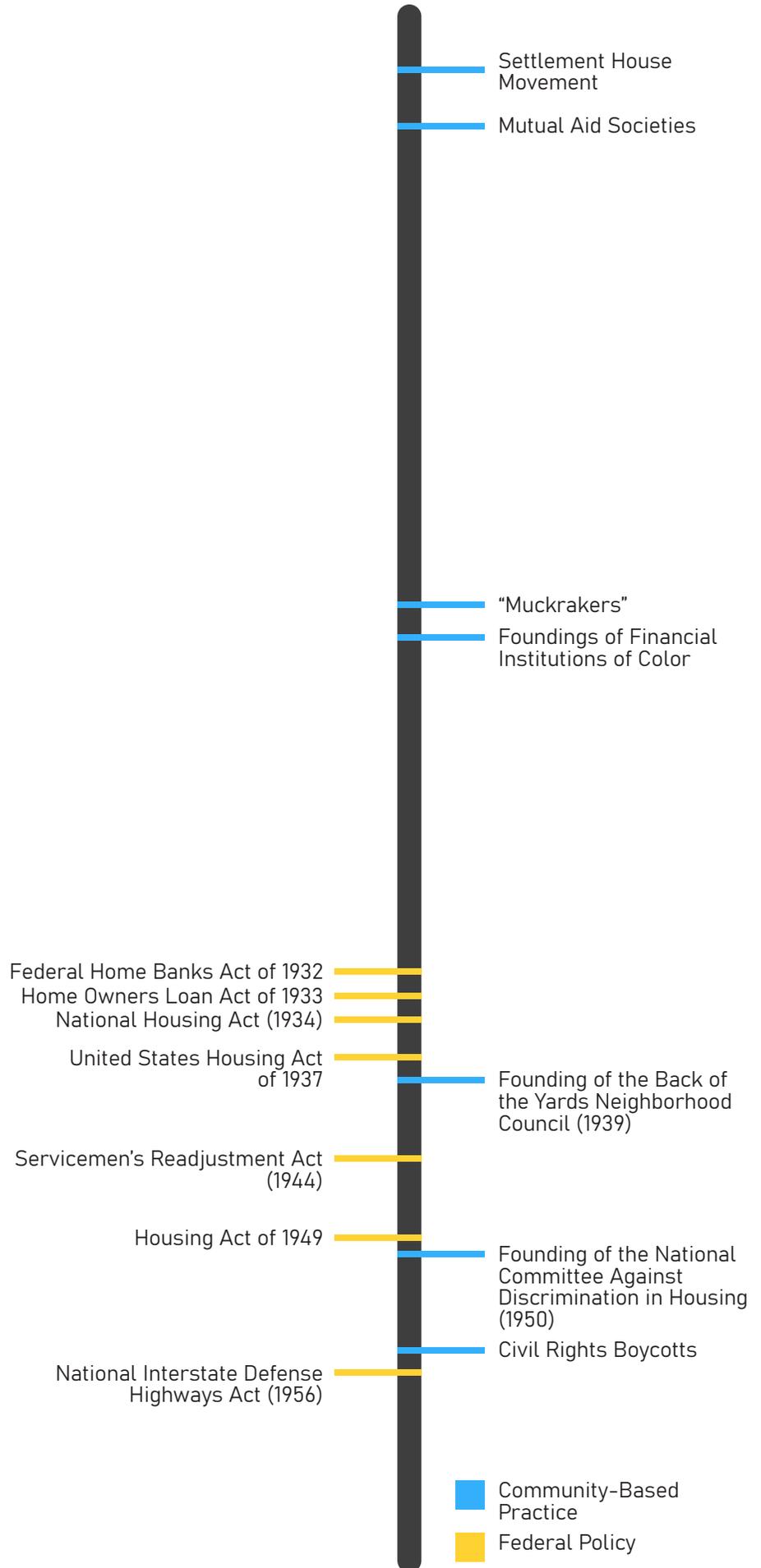
In the late 19th century + early 20th century, “**muckraker**” **journalists** + **novelists** like Jacob Riis, Upton Sinclair, and Ida Tarbell used long-form storytelling to reveal how systemic injustices were manifesting at a community level. While their work was deeply contextualized within specific cities + even neighborhoods, it would ultimately build support for sweeping federal policy reforms in issues like housing + workplace standards, transparency + accountability mechanisms for elected officials, and anti-monopoly practices.

The late 19th + early 20th centuries also saw the rise of **financial institutions owned + operated by communities of color**, such as Capital Savings Bank, Mechanics + Farmers Bank, the Bank of Cherokee County, and Canton Bank. Opposite large-scale financial discrimination against people of color in the banking industry at large, these institutions modeled a range of community-based investment approaches long before the formal federal recognition of Minority Depository Institutions + Community Development Financial Institutions in the 1980s + 1990s.

The **Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council** was founded in 1939 to address systemic challenges of the Great Depression at a community level. The organization modeled a range of early community organizing + programming practices that continue to play important roles in the community development sector, including innovating in scalable community programming (like free school lunches) and creating formal mechanisms for resident control (like resident elections of its board of directors).

The launch of the **National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing** in 1950 created a platform for community-level action around housing access, while also supporting joint policy work at state + national levels. By the late 1950s, this work began to take root in anti-discrimination policy reforms at a municipal level (beginning with New York City) and a state level (Colorado), well ahead of the Fair Housing Act's passage in 1968.

Civil rights boycotts of the 1950s + the 1960s raised the visibility of discriminatory practices of both government + private businesses, including in education, hiring, retail access, and transportation. Carefully crafted events worked to contextualize how racism was manifesting within specific communities + specific establishments, while drawing national attention to these injustices – an early example of developing strategic alignment between local community organizing + national movement work.





THE 1960S + 1970S: FEDERAL POLICY SHIFTS + COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FORMALIZES

Even as community-based organizations continued to fight back against unjust federal policy, federal policy itself began to shift in fundamental ways. Throughout the 1960s + the 1970s, land use, ownership, and wealth policies advanced in a) recognizing, formalizing, and funding community development as a field of practice; b) establishing mechanisms for at least some level of decision-making closer to the ground, including more discretion over approaches + uses of funding at municipal + neighborhood levels; and c) explicitly naming + targeting racial discrimination in housing, retail, and public services. These reforms were in no small part due to the Civil Rights Movement's centering of calls for community-based investment in housing, schools, and small business support as part of its broader efforts. They were further buoyed by the broader policy focuses of both Civil Rights + Great Society legislation.

The legislation of this era has not, however, been without its critiques – namely, for its incrementalism, for largely universal application regardless of state + local context, and for naming racism as a fundamental problem but generally bringing forward race-neutral policies in response. Nonetheless, the policies of this era were a stark contrast to how the federal government had approached community conditions as recently as the 1950s.

The Housing + Urban Development Act (1965) established the Department of Housing + Urban Development (HUD) – the federal government's primary organizing body then + today for community development policy + funding support – as well as specific investments in housing subsidies, public housing funding, water + sewer facilities, and acquisition + development funding for neighborhood community facilities.

The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 established Demonstration Cities (later known as Model Cities), which provided large-scale, competitive grants to support local poverty interventions that took into account both physical redevelopment + health + human service offerings.

A core component of the sweeping **Civil Rights Act of 1968** was the establishment of fair housing protections that prohibited discrimination in housing financing, rentals, and sales (through the part of the legislation often referred to as the Fair Housing Act).

The Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act (1971) established research + demonstration programs for increasing understanding of lead paint impact + effective ways to remove lead paint, especially from residential properties.

The Housing + Community Development Act of 1974 eliminated several HUD programs but created the Community Development Block Grant program + the Section 8 housing voucher program to increase state + local flexibility in how federal community development funding is applied.

The Housing + Community Development Act of 1977 included the Community Reinvestment Act, which sought to end the practice of redlining, created new requirements for financial institutions around their lending practices, and established a regulatory framework for examining financial institutions' compliance with the Act.



THE 1980S + 1990S: MOVEMENT TOWARD THE MARKET

Federal policy reforms in the 1980s + 1990s continued to play a core role in how community development operates. This era was marked by a tough-on-crime stance that extended to housing access; a consolidation of federal community development initiatives into broader, more flexible block grant funding; and, perhaps most notably, a movement toward using tax credits + other financial mechanisms to try to incentivize financial investment in low-income communities.

Evidence suggests that emphasis on markets has resulted in more private development investment (the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, for instance, is now the nation's single largest source of affordable housing funding), but not without some perceived shortcomings, including weak reporting requirements, an emphasis on investing in places with low incomes without attention to investing directly in people with low incomes, and a failure to meaningfully address segregation through tax credits. It is also notable that the increase in private market incentivization has happened opposite large-scale declines in federal investment in flagship programs like the Community Development Block Grants and the Public Housing Capital Fund; estimates suggest declines in some core HUD programs of up to 80% since 1980.

The Tax Reform Act of 1986 made large-scale changes in tax bracket rates (decreasing upper-income taxes + increasing lower-income taxes), expanded the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction, and established the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, which incentivized direct investment in the production, renovation, and refinancing of affordable housing.

The Indian Housing Act of 1988 created a new set of housing support programs for Native American + Alaska Native communities and clarified the roles + regulations of Indian Housing Authorities compared to Public Housing Authorities more broadly.

As part of sweeping “war on drugs” legislation, **The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988** increased eviction standards for public housing tenants convicted of crime. Subsequent legislation in the 1990s strengthened this standard to include applications for public housing + mandated applicant screening, including for drug + alcohol abuse.

The Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (1990) required government recipients of HUD funding to submit housing affordability strategies; mandated affordable housing energy standards; and established the Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE) initiative to incentivize homeownership supports + resident management among public housing residents.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing + Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act of 1993 established the Urban Revitalization Demonstration program (HOPE VI), which provided funding for the redevelopment of severely distressed public housing + emphasized integrating resident supports, including for residents forced to relocate due to construction.

As part of a broader budget aimed at deficit reduction, **the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993** established Empowerment Zones + Enterprise Communities, a nationwide set of designated low-income areas where businesses could receive large-scale tax credits + low-interest loans in support of employment of residents within the areas.

The Riegle Community Development Banking and Financial Institutions Act of 1994 expanded mortgage disclosure requirements; prohibited making loans without regard to borrowers' ability to repay; and established the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund to increase dedicated investment capital available to Community Development Financial Institutions, also defined within the law.

The Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 established new standards for tribal sovereignty over housing development + assistance and consolidated a variety of federal supports into the Indian Housing Block Grant.

THE 2000S + 2010S: INTEGRATING APPROACHES + RESPONDING TO CRISIS



The 2000s + 2010s continued to bring forward new tax incentives for investment in targeted geographies, as well as new initiatives designed to resource cross-sector, multi-organization (and hopefully integrated + holistic) approaches to community development. Particularly following the American foreclosure crisis of 2008 + 2009, this time period was also marked by a movement back toward tighter financial + housing regulation. Federal policymakers continued to grapple with how to balance protections against predatory lending practices, forced evictions, and displacement against continued large-scale need for community investment, particularly within communities of color + communities with lower incomes.

The Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000 expanded financial incentives through previously created Empowerment Zone designations and through the establishment of Renewal Communities; and created the New Markets Tax Credit to incentivize private investment in acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of properties in low-income Census tracts.

The American Dream Downpayment Act (2003) expanded the HOME program to provide downpayment assistance to first-time homebuyers living with low incomes; revised HOPE VI criteria to take into account displacement; and established a multi-year intergenerational housing pilot.

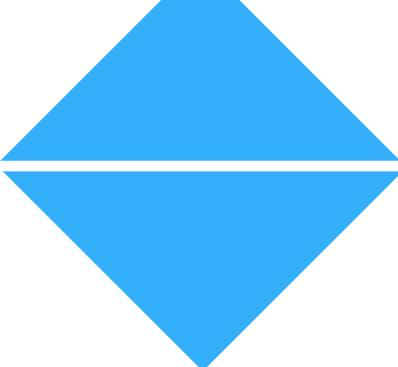
The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 incentivized cross-organization, regional planning + coordination around assistance + support for unhoused residents through Continuum of Care and Housing First frameworks; expanded federal definitions of homelessness; and required a set of education supports for unhoused children.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act (2010) launched the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative within the HOPE VI program, providing competitive funding for investing in severely distressed public housing while integrating housing interventions into broader, cross-sector community development planning + implementation strategies.

In the aftermath of the American foreclosure crisis, **the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform + Consumer Protection Act (2010)** represented sweeping regulatory reform of the financial sector. As part of that broader framework, the legislation curtailed predatory mortgage practices; created supports for access to inexpensive checking + savings accounts; assembled capital to support CDFIs' small loans; and required financial institutions to track lending made to minority-owned + women-owned enterprises.

As part of a broader education reform policy, **the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)** formalized the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, which had been operating as part of the Fund for the Improvement of Education programs. The initiative provides financial resources to cross-sector, multi-partner efforts to integrate "cradle-to-career" education supports into broader neighborhood development strategies.

The Tax Cuts + Jobs Act (2017) put into place a large-scale restructuring of corporate + individual tax rates and also reduced the mortgage interest deduction and established Opportunity Zones, which provided tax incentives for a broad range of long-term real estate + business investments in underresourced Census Tracts.



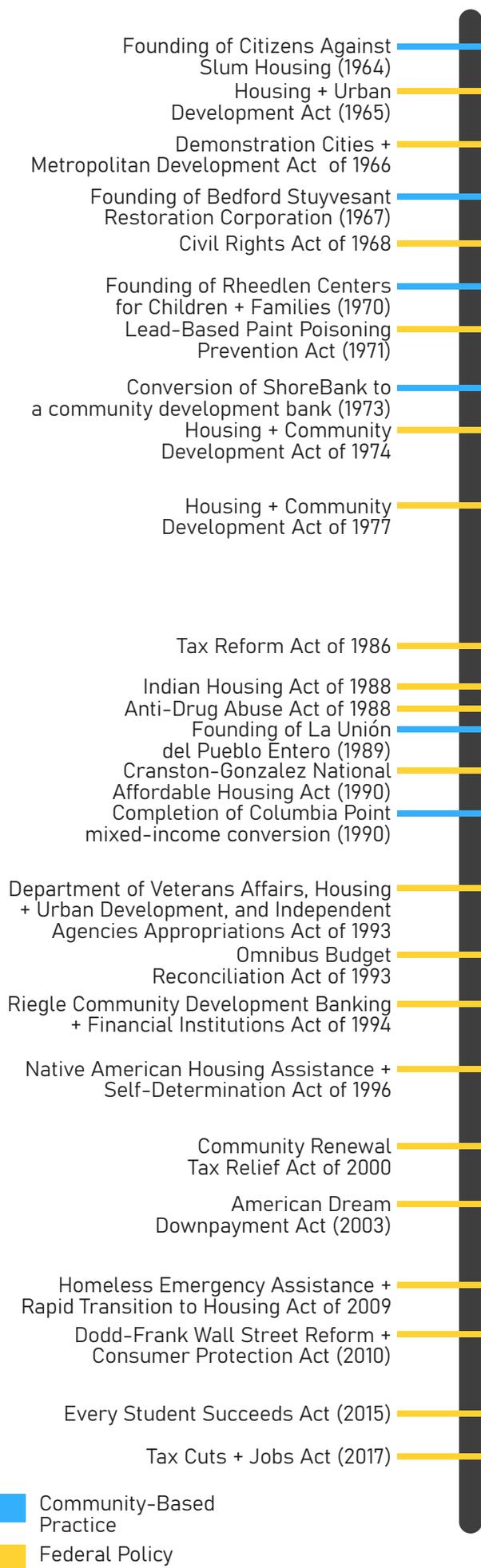
BIDIRECTIONAL REFORM: BOTTOM-UP + TOP-DOWN CHANGE IN CONVERSATION

Federal policies of the 1960s + 1970s created specific frameworks for recognizing, financially supporting, and regulating community development as a formal sector. This in turn gave rise to a new generation of community-based development organizations that began to themselves influence local, state, and federal policy. The relationship between community development organizations and policymakers is not straightforward or linear; community-based organizations have informed + sometimes inspired new approaches at a national level, but those same organizations have also depended on the legal recognition, enabling conditions, and funding streams that federal policy has created. What does that relationship look like in practice? The following section outlines how this toggling between federal policy (including a number of federal policies outlined in the previous pages) + community innovation has played out in the community development sector - and shaped the sector's future in the process.

In the early 1960s, New York community activists began developing a series of interconnected community support programs in the Bedford Stuyvesant community. Senator Robert F. Kennedy's tour of these efforts (together with tours of the Mississippi Delta + Los Angeles' Watts neighborhood) would play key roles in the Senator's anti-poverty agenda, including the amendment of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to enable federal investment in newly formed community development organizations through the Special Impact Program. Through community donations, philanthropic support, and a large-scale investment from the Special Impact Program, the **Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation** launched as the country's first community development corporation. The Ford Foundation was an early supporter of Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation and credits that investment with the launch of its large-scale community development portfolio, which has supported the formation + operation of community development corporation, community development financial institutions, and networks + intermediaries like Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) + Community Change. This marked a large-scale departure from how national foundations approached the revitalization of cities. As recently as the late 1950s, the Ford Foundation itself had focused its revitalization funding on organizations like the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods (ACTION), which promoted accelerating the urban renewal agenda of forced resident relocation + demolition in support of downtown development. ACTION itself began to found community development corporations in the late 1960s in response to the shift in philanthropic priorities.

In the mid-1960s, Dorothy Mae Richardson and other residents of Pittsburgh's North Side formed **Citizens Against Slum Housing (CASH)**, an effort to address neighborhood disinvestment by establishing opportunities for renters to become homeowners. CASH was able to secure local government + financial institution collaboration in establishing a revolving loan fund to facilitate this effort. Richardson + fellow residents also supported the replication of the model by counseling other resident groups in forming similar organizations across the country. In 1978, Congress formalized support for the approach through the establishment of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (NeighborWorks America) and direct federal line-item investment through the U.S. Department of Housing + Urban Development's budget allocation. Currently, this investment stands at approximately \$170 million annually. Since 1992, NeighborWorks has celebrated Richardson's central role in the formation of the national network through the Dorothy Richardson Award for Resident Leadership, which recognizes resident leaders across the country for contributions to advancing change in their communities.

In 1962, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta founded what would ultimately become United Farm Workers of America, a national mobilization effort to protect the economic + labor rights of farmworkers that had been excluded from basic protections in the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. In 1989, Chávez + Huerta launched **La Unión del Pueblo Entero**, recognizing that farmworkers' needs extended beyond their employment + required supports around housing, transportation, and other material needs. For the past 20 years, the organization has developed deep roots in the Rio Grande Valley. LUPE remains a key example of strategic alignments between national mobilization + local community organizing, as well as how a community development model can be adapted to serve the needs of rural communities of color.

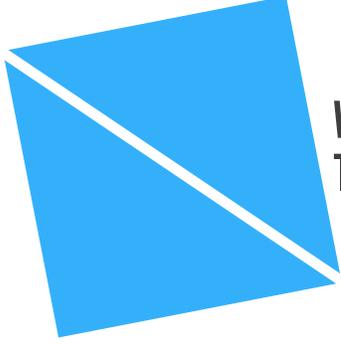


■ Community-Based Practice
■ Federal Policy

In the early 1970s, activists purchased South Shore Bank, which had been accused of racist lending practices and was in the process of attempting to leave the South Side of Chicago. With its purchase, **South Shore (later renamed ShoreBank)** became the country's first community development bank. Over 37 years, the bank would inspire additional formalization + legislative support of community development financial institutions.

The Boston Housing Authority's 50-acre **Columbia Point** was developed in the 1950s. By the late 1970s, the complex had fallen into disrepair + was suffering large-scale vacancy – like other U.S. public housing communities that had experienced chronic underinvestment. The City of Boston secured federal approval to redevelop the site as a mixed-income community, with both market-rate + subsidized units. The model ultimately inspired the launch of HUD's HOPE VI program in 1992, which invested billions of dollars in similar conversions across the country. The program was celebrated for its role in deconcentrating poverty and for integrating more community assets into public housing properties. It was also strongly critiqued for contributing to a reduced overall number of public housing units + for causing long-term displacement of residents during construction. Choice Neighborhoods replaced HOPE VI in 2010, at least in part to address the former program's shortcomings through stronger tenant protections + more holistic models that integrate public housing redevelopment into broader community development strategies.

Founded in 1970, the **Rheedlen Centers for Children + Families** sought to reduce truancy in Central Harlem, the first truancy prevention program in New York City. By the late 1990s, the organization had expanded into what became known as the **Harlem Children's Zone**, a multi-prong, holistic approach to better integrate an emphasis on education attainment + success into a community development framework. The organization would ultimately inspire similar efforts in cities across the United States, as well as the launch of the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods initiative in 2010. Over the past 13 years, that program has provided support for efforts that center “cradle-to-career” approaches within community development frameworks. The Harlem Children's Zone continues to support technical assistance needs of such initiatives, in collaboration with PolicyLink + the Center for the Study of Social Policy, through the Promise Neighborhoods Institute. The Institute also continues to advocate for state + federal policy reforms to better support such models, including additional funding support + protections for students of color, students living with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with English as a second language.



WHAT HISTORY MEANS FOR TODAY'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

The history of community development is complex, nuanced, and full of examples of how the trajectory of the field has oscillated in its equity intent + attention to equitable outcomes ... and the history shared in this document barely scratches the surface of how the sector came to be + how it has functioned since. It continues to inform + shape what community development looks like today, and we believe that a baseline understanding of that history is a required precursor to advancing an anti-racist paradigm in the field moving forward.

This is something that we continue to hear throughout the interviews that ThirdSpace is conducting as a core component of this project. To date, numerous interviewees have shared in detail their perspectives on how history continues to reverberate in their work today. There has been widespread consensus that structural racism has manifested broadly in the sector (and continues to today). Some have described community development (and urban planning) as inherently racist in its origins. Interviewees seemed to draw indirectly and particularly (but not exclusively) from community development policies that preceded the formalization of the community development sector. These assessments have generally revolved around four core elements:

- Systems being built intentionally to segregate + marginalize communities of color (and other marginalized groups), with an explicit interest in separating people of different racial identities + precluding opportunities for cross-racial social networking + organizing.
- Systems explicitly targeting investment to white households + white-majority communities, with corresponding generational + systematic underinvestment in communities of color.
- Systems intentionally extracting resources from communities of color even as they withheld investment.
- Systems operating from a primary place of paternalism that prioritize (overwhelmingly white) technical experts far removed from lived community experience, which has carried forward in how community development organizations formed + developed their operating structures, priorities, and practices.

Meanwhile, other interviewees pointed to the community development sector's roots in the racial justice movement of the 1960, particularly the Black Power Movement, and the emphasis on community development as a vehicle for self-determination + for intentional disruption of past racist approaches to policymaking. These respondents were more likely to point to hyper-professionalization (including prioritization of technical expertise + advanced education) as steering the sector away from more equity-oriented roots.

Several interviewees noted that general attention to equitable development + common use of language around equitable development has increased over the past decade – and that it has potentially accelerated during the pandemic. While respondents were able to point to promising racial equity practices in the field (and from outside disruption of traditional community development models), there did not appear to be widespread belief that this attention + language has yet translated into meaningful racial equity action or overall orientation in the field.

Collective analysis (or lack of analysis) of the sector's history matters. Whether the sector has been underpinned by racism since its very formalization; whether it was an antidote to racism that has simply wandered from its roots; whether recent embrace of equitable development is real + tangible or simply virtue signaling; whether all these things are true at the same time, in some kind of murky middle ground ... how we interpret history + make sense of these patterns has profound implications for what norms, practices, procedures, programs, and policies are most likely to move us in a more explicitly anti-racist direction in the future.

Together, many elements of this history + many observations from our interviews paint a bleak picture for the state of racial equity within community development today. It is still our sincere belief (echoed by many of the interviewees we spoke with) that community development can serve as a powerful vehicle – perhaps a uniquely powerful vehicle – for advancing anti-racism work, addressing long-standing health + wealth disparities, and creating more robust + effective local, state, and federal policies.

So where do we go from here? We hope that community development practitioners can continue to unpack the long + detailed history of the sector + connect it back to their work today. We offer three prompts for doing just that:

What does the evolution of the field toward more of a market alignment + orientation mean for community development work today? Are there specific policies + practices that can help maximize racially equitable market outcomes – or that can at least curb racially inequitable outcomes? Is there a value to supporting the organizing, activism, and self-determination work that were so central at the origin of the sector? If so, what kinds of policies + practices can best lift up + sustain that work?

What does the relationship between federal policy + grassroots innovation mean for our collective work in the community development sector? Are there specific strategies we could be employing to bring more grassroots creativity into policymaking processes, without being extractive? Are there specific strategies we could implement in policymaking that would better support grassroots' organizations' ability to explore new ways to advance racially equitable community development?

What does the history of explicitly racialized policy + race neutral remedies mean for trying to do race conscious community development work? Are there specific ways that we could build support for more race conscious policy + minimize the potential for backlash to addressing issues of racial inequity directly?

This is just a start. ThirdSpace is committed to sustaining this dialogue for the long haul. As we move this project forward, we commit to continuing to highlight some of the promising anti-racist practices already taking root within the sector + building community with others working to truly advance anti-racist community development.





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