

REDLINING'S RAMIFICATIONS

Exhibit at National Public Housing Museum explores legacy of Chicago's housing segregation

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Sheila Lewis moved to Chicago from New Jersey 10 years ago.

Her first apartment was in the Loop. She then moved to the Northwest Side near a Brown Line stop. That's when she really got a sense of how segregated the city is.

"I've never been more aware of my blackness than on the Brown Line," Lewis said.

On Thursday, Lewis and a dozen others were on hand at the National Public Housing Museum for the opening of its new exhibit, "Undesign the Redline."

The exhibit centers on the legacy of "redlining" in Chicago and how the practice helped manufacture the racial and wealth divides that define the city today.

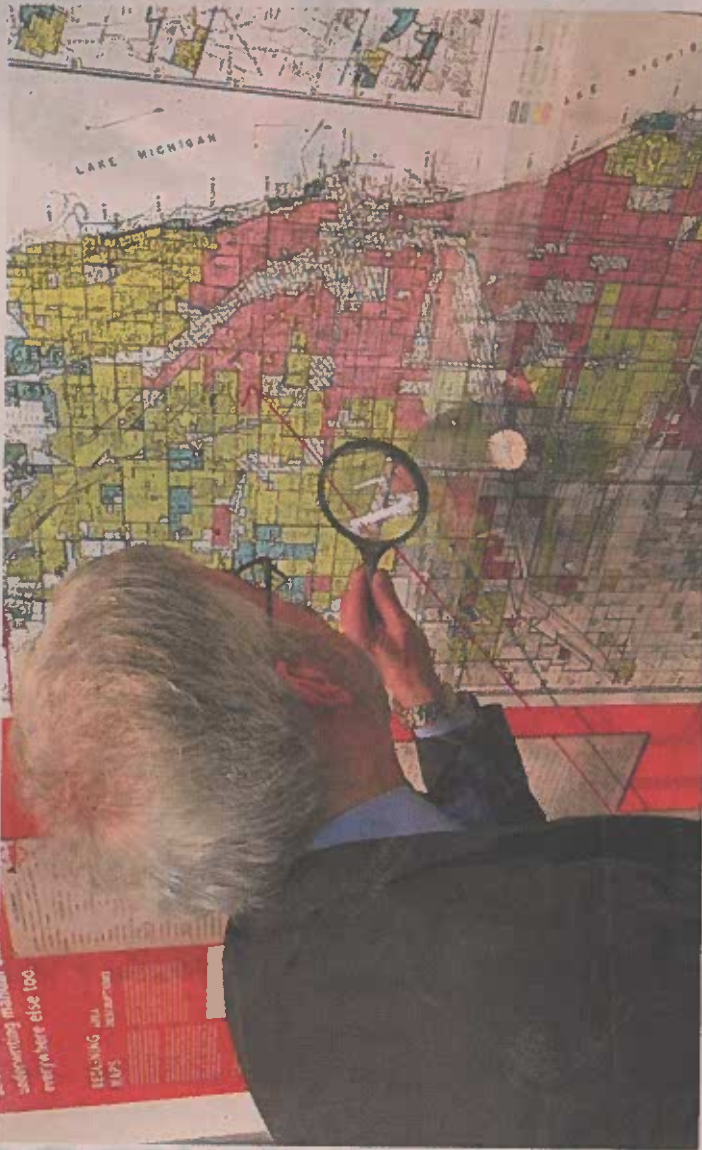
Redlining refers to the practice of denying loans and real estate services to people living in majority-black and inner-city areas.

The exhibit features an exhaustive timeline that outlines the roots of redlining and its ramifications from the 1800s up to present day.

At one end of the timeline is a blown-up copy of the infamous "Residential Security" map of Chicago drawn in 1939 by the government-sponsored Home Owners' Loan Corporation.

On the map, majority-black and immigrant areas are colored in red for "hazardous" or yellow for "definitely declining." Loan officers would deny families living in these neighborhoods access to capital to buy or improve a home.

In contrast, the city's white and affluent neighborhoods are colored blue and green, signaling strong economic confidence and credit-



ABOVE: An attendee interacts with the HOLC map of Chicago. **RIGHT:** Sheila Lewis studies the exhaustive timeline of redlining at The National Public Housing Museum last week. CARLOS BALLESTEROS/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

worthiness.

Visitors are invited to place a pin of where they live on the map and reflect on its color rating.

"I live in Bucktown, and it's all red," Lorelei Stewart said. "It's hard for me to imagine the neighborhood ever being thought of as 'hazardous.'"

Attached to the map are scaled copies of federal documents in which loan officers and appraisers were instructed to list "any threat of infiltration of foreign born, ne-

eral document that says my sheer existence, the color of my skin, is a threat," Lewis said.

The impact of redlining on today's economy is hard to miss.

In the Chicago area, only 39 percent of black households own their home, compared with 74 percent of white families, according to a 2018 report by the Urban Institute.

Nationwide, black families hold just \$5.04 for every \$100 in white family wealth, according to figures from the Census Bureau report published in 2017.

The exhibit also highlights stories of several Chicago public housing activists like Marion Stamps and Dorothy Gautreaux, who fought for better services and public housing in affluent neighborhoods.

Present-day housing issues, including gentrification and the lack of affordable housing, are also touched on in the exhibit.

"The legacies of redlining are still deeply part of our city, and we need to go upstream to solve these issues," museum director Lisa Yun Lee said. "And for us, upstream means going back in time and becoming astute students of history to understand how these systems came to be in order for us to undo them for our collective futures."

The "Undesign the Redline" exhibit runs until May 31. Admission is free at the National Public Housing Museum, at 625 N. Kingsbury St. The museum is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Carlos Ballesteros is a corps member in Report for America, a not-for-profit journalism program that aims to bolster Sun-Times coverage of Chicago's South and West sides.



gro, or lower grade populations" into a certain neighborhood before listing a home on the market.

"It's one thing to know about institutional racism and segregation, but it's another to see a fed-