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Museums & Cultural Organizations from Across the U.S. Share How Discriminatory Housing Practices Shaped their Communities in a New Online Exhibit

NAPERVILLE, IL. — *Unvarnished: Housing Discrimination in the Northern and Western United States*, a free online exhibit on the history of discriminatory housing practices and segregation, is now available to view at UnvarnishedHistory.org. Supported through an Institute of Museum and Library Services Museum Leadership Grant and the Healing Illinois Grant Program, a consortium of six history museums and cultural organizations from across the country collaborated from 2017 to 2022 to research and present their community’s history of exclusion. The project was developed and directed by Naper Settlement, an outdoor history museum in the Chicago metropolitan area administered by the Naperville Heritage Society.

Online visitors will learn how housing discrimination, often based on race, ethnicity, or religion, was a large-scale system that resulted in segregation patterns across the Northern and Western United States that intensified over the twentieth century. Nearly two dozen interactive articles, accompanied by in-depth explainer videos, photos, interviews, and other primary sources, showcase how formal systems of segregation were developed through individual practices and were expanded through federal policy, sustained over time, and continue to affect today’s communities.

In addition to the national context, visitors will examine how system-wide discrimination shaped six communities in the Northern and Western United States. Each of these six communities is represented by the project’s consortium – Appleton, WI (African Heritage Incorporated.), Brea, CA (Brea Museum and Historical Society), Columbus, OH (Ohio History Connection), Naperville, IL (Naper Settlement and the Naperville Heritage Society), Oak Park, IL (Oak Park River Forest Museum and The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest), and West Hartford, CT (Noah Webster House and West Hartford Historical Society). By examining communities in these regions, the project aims to educate visitors and encourage every community to look at their own histories.

“The very heart of this project is showing the similarities in places that might otherwise not seem to have something in common, other than that they have a history that has not been widely discussed,” said Charmaine Jefferson, the project’s Cultural Advisor. “When you peel back the layers and connect the dots, legacies of segregation are widespread, and the six participating communities are representative of so many other places across the Northern and Western United States.”

The online exhibition includes teacher resources for middle and high school students. In four inquiry modules, students will explore compelling questions that will help them discover and

share the local dimensions of national segregation patterns and see them through the wide lens of American history. The four inquiry modules are based on the National Council on Social Studies and Common Core Standards for Literacy in History and Social Studies.

“We are so grateful that the Institute of Museum and Library Services honored this project with funding in 2017. This five-year journey uncovered many primary sources, materials, and documents that tell a complex story of how a nationwide system of exclusion was carried out. Exactly how discrimination and segregation played out in each of the six participating communities differs, but all toward the same result. It is our hope that this project will act as a model and inspire other communities to research, share, and reflect upon their own history. It is through this process that we are able to engage with the totality of history to better understand today and guide our decision-making for the future,” said Donna Sack, Vice President and Chief Program Officer at Naper Settlement and Project Director of *Unvarnished*.

In conjunction with the online exhibit, Naper Settlement will host an onsite exhibit allowing museum visitors to further examine Naperville, IL’s history from June 1 through October 28, 2022. The onsite exhibit explores Naperville’s exclusionary practices, the Fair Housing Movement, and the community’s significant demographic change over the past 50 years. Naper Settlement officially launched the project at an exhibit opening on May 31, 2022, with local community members and supporters in attendance including Congressman Bill Foster, Senator Laura Ellman, Senator Diane Pappas, and Representative Janet Yang Rohr.

For more information on *Unvarnished: Housing Discrimination in the Northern and Western United States* online exhibit, please visit UnvarnishedHistory.org. Please visit, NaperSettlement.org/Unvarnished to learn more about Naper Settlement’s on-site exhibit.

About Naper Settlement

Naper Settlement is a nationally accredited, award-winning outdoor living history museum set on 13 magnificent acres in the heart of Naperville. Located 30 miles from Chicago, the museum is home to thirty-one historical structures dating back as early as the 1830s. Featuring exhibits, special events, educational programming and more, Naper Settlement is where history comes alive and the community comes to connect. For more information, visit www.napersettlement.org or call (630) 420-6010.

About The Institute of Museum and Library Services

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