

“Who Is My Neighbor?” Catholic Social Teaching and the California Housing Crisis

Patrick Caslin

The California Housing Crisis

- 40% of households are “cost-burdened”
- Median home price is $> \$700,000$
- California has the highest poverty rate of any state once cost of living is taken into account
- Lack of supply
 - Estimated shortage of 3.5 million homes
 - California has fewer homes per capita than all but one other state (Utah)
 - New housing opposed by NIMBY groups

CST and the Housing Crisis

The housing crisis is primarily a problem of solidarity.

- *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: solidarity is “not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people,” but rather, “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good...because we are all really responsible for all.”
- NIMBYism is a rejection of the very idea of solidarity
- What would a housing politics informed by solidarity look like?
 - Politics, not policy
- 6-part framework for evaluating housing issues in light of CST

Housing as a Right

- First identified in CST documents by John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961)
- Greater access to home ownership

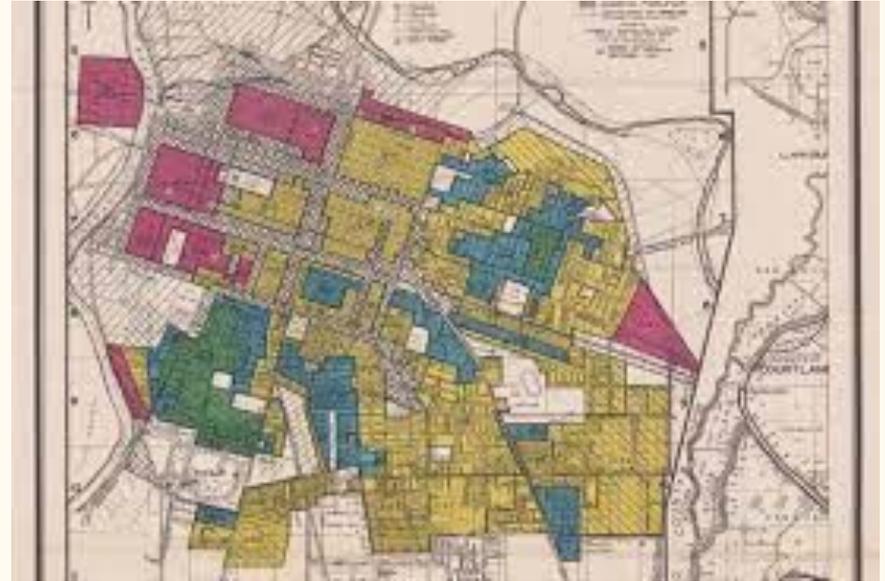
Option for the Poor

California housing politics suffers from an “option for the wealthy.”

- Concerns over “neighborhood character” can kill affordable housing developments
- Wealthy cities and counties exempted from affordable housing requirements
- Exclusionary zoning, lot size minimums, bans on dense housing, etc.
- Article 34

Commitment to Anti-Racism

- California cities were heavily “redlined” during the 20th century, preventing Black families from becoming homeowners
- USCCB: “The housing needs of racial minorities remain critical and the unfulfilled dream of open housing cannot be abandoned. An absence of racial discrimination is no longer enough. We must insist upon effective programs to remedy past injustice.”

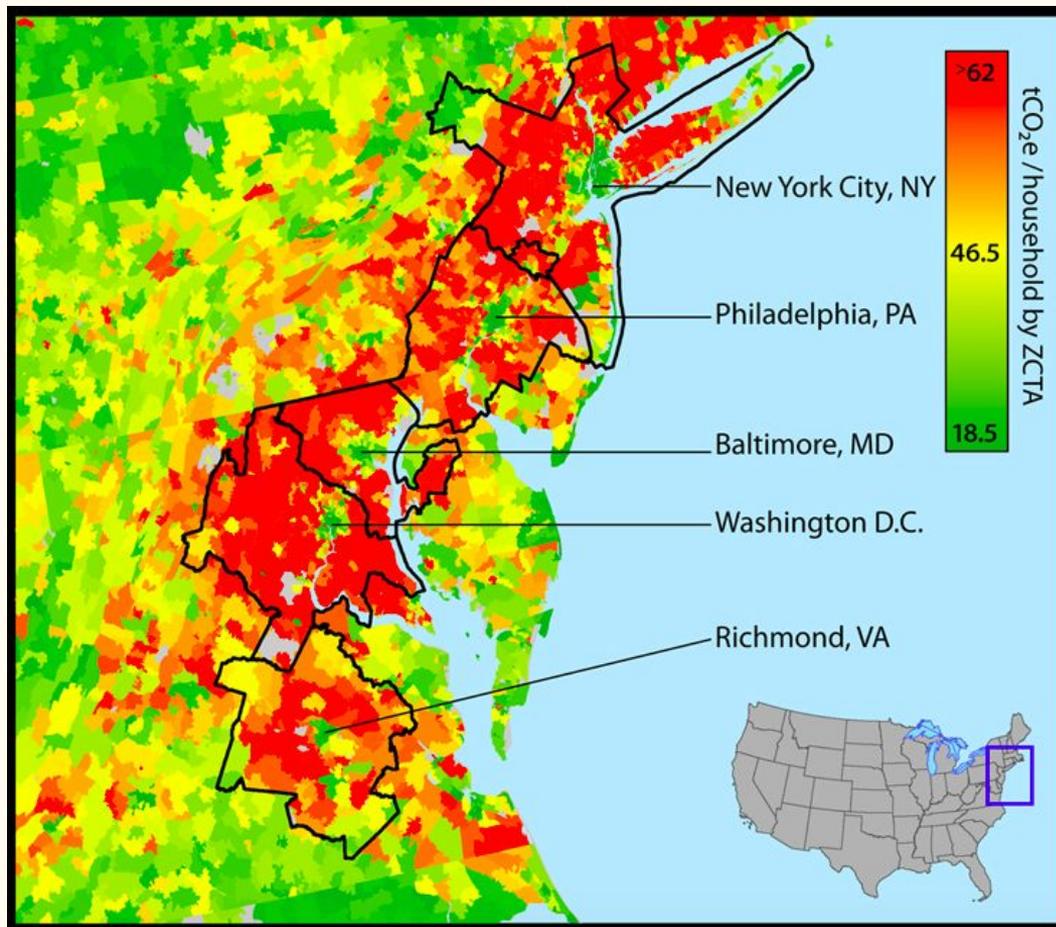


Redlining maps of Sacramento, 1933

Care for Creation

Suburbanization \Rightarrow dependence on cars

- As housing costs rise in central cities, residents are pushed out to exurbs. Long commutes become a significant source of pollution.
- How to combat this problem?
 - Allowing dense housing in central cities - walkable neighborhoods and shorter commutes
 - Transit-oriented development
- *Laudato Si* - throwaway culture



Proper Understanding of Subsidiarity

- NIMBYs typically invoke the “local control” argument in bad faith
- Subsidiarity does not preclude a larger institution from stepping in if local institutions have failed to correct injustice

A Politics of Neighborliness and Community-Building

- Parable of the Good Samaritan - who is my neighbor?
- How do we develop a politics of neighborliness?
 - Francis: urban design that favors integration and connection, not isolation and exclusion
 - “How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others!” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 210)
 - John Paul II: self-sacrificial love for others
 - “One’s neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One’s neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 40)

How are these issues at
play in your hometown?

— In South Bend?