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Liberal Hypocrisy In Seattle: Unveiling The Disconnect Between Progressive Values And Marginalized Communities In Housing

Seattle, often hailed as a "vanguard of the nation's progressive movement," is no stranger to scrutiny due to the presence of liberal hypocrisy within its policies and practices [1-2]. While the city has been recognized as a stronghold of liberalism, its policies on housing, taxes, and other areas have



consistently fallen short of their ideals, resulting in significant negative consequences for marginalized communities [3-4]. By delving into the interplay between Seattle's historical context, housing policies, homelessness, affordable housing initiatives, and rental discrimination, a disconcerting pattern of liberal hypocrisy comes to light. This pattern reveals how Seattle, despite espousing progressive values, often fails

to effectively dismantle systemic injustices and inadvertently perpetuates inequality, ultimately falling short in prioritizing the needs and rights of disadvantaged groups. It serves as a prime example of how states, or more specifically cities, even with democratic majorities, "fail to live up to their values" [5].

Housing Policies & The Affordable Housing Crisis

One of the most crucial factors contributing to the housing crisis in Seattle is the historical legacy of discriminatory practices prevalent across the United States, such as redlining and racial covenants, having a lasting impact on marginalized communities' access to housing. For example, redlining persisted in the United States in the 1990s, even after it became illegal with the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 [6]. Financial institutions continued engaging in discriminatory practices, such as "steering Black

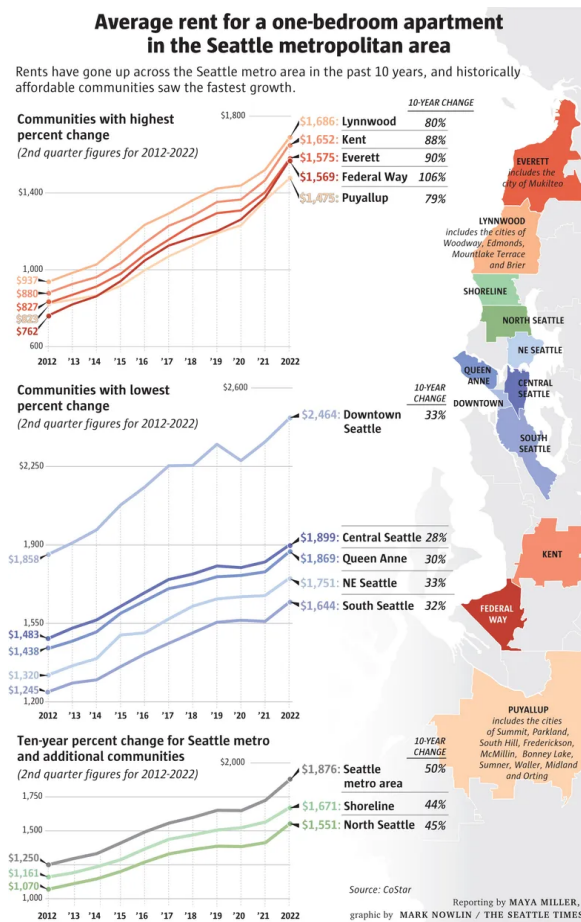
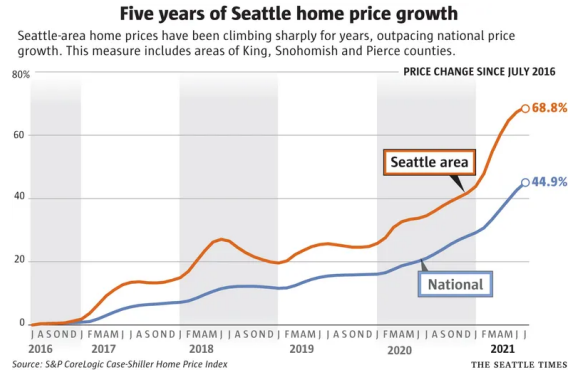
borrowers into subprime loans, even after redlining was banned" and "high levels of discrimination against African Americans and Hispanics nationwide in both rental and sales markets" [7-8]. In Seattle, nevertheless, the rejection of the Open Housing Ordinance in 1964, which aimed to make it illegal to discriminate against people of color seeking housing in the city, reflected its reluctance to confront systemic racial inequities [9-10]. At that time, due to restrictive covenants and redlining, people of color could only live in 10 percent of the city [9]. Norwand Brooks, a homebuyer at the time, shared his experience of discrimination, stating that, "Seattle is just as bad or worse [than Louisiana] because in Louisiana, I knew where I couldn't be. You were never told in Seattle where you couldn't be; they just had it fixed so that you could never get there" [9].



While other cities embraced the Open Housing Ordinance as a step towards dismantling discriminatory practices, Seattle stood in opposition [10-11]. It was only after significant events like the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. that Seattle began to reconsider its position, “ultimately passing an open housing ordinance in 1968 unanimously, driven by the fear of protests and social unrest” [10]. However, even after the passage of housing equality measures, the impact of historical injustices persisted in Seattle, where the lack of clear directives or overt discrimination left marginalized communities unaware of the places they were excluded from, making it “challenging to challenge or address the systemic biases that persisted” until recently [12].

Currently, Seattle has been grappling with a severe housing affordability crisis, with skyrocketing home prices and rental costs that have outpaced wage growth [13]. Despite the city's reputation as a progressive hub, its housing policies have often failed to address the needs of marginalized communities. For instance, while it is true that “Seattle’s booming tech economy has altered the regional real estate market,” our attention should be pointed towards “increasing the density of America’s cities,” e.g.,

“legaliz[ing] small apartment buildings in our neighborhood of charming, million-dollar single family homes” in order to address the pressing issue of housing affordability [14-15]. However, in Seattle, “decades of anti-density policies [...] have created tight housing supply and higher prices,” where “it’s



still illegal to build relatively inexpensive duplexes, for example, on most of the city’s single-family zones,” which “make up around 75% of residential land” [16]. In essence, "liberals want affordable housing, but liberal policies make it impossible" [17-18]. Local politicians, “seeking to protect the interests of incumbent homeowners, have established a web of regulations, laws, and norms that make blocking the development of new housing remarkably simple” [19-21]. These policies, “including height limits, density restrictions, design review boards, mandatory community input, and other veto points in the development process,” limit the

construction of dense and affordable housing options, exacerbating the housing crisis faced by marginalized communities, especially the homeless [22]. Why? The homelessness crisis is “driven by a constant flow of people losing their housing” and “is most prevalent in



places with low vacancy rates,” where even "low-income" housing is still very expensive, forcing people to spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent [23-24].

Moreover, inadequate support for low-income housing initiatives, such as the lack of investment in public housing and the limited effectiveness of incentive programs, further contributes to the crisis and



ARCH lost dozens of affordable homes in King County to foreclosures

Watch

The KING 5 investigators learned ARCH and city governments did not exercise a clause to save affordable properties as investors snatched them up for quick profits in King County.

highlights the hypocrisy of professed progressive values. Although initiatives like Seattle's Fair Chance Housing Ordinance and the Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) have been implemented to establish fairer housing standards, notable setbacks have been encountered in their execution. For example, in ARCH, “an agency that collaborates with

affordable housing providers to construct and preserve housing,” homes intended for low-income buyers

have been making their way into the portfolios of real

estate investors, as “they were at an artificially lower price because of the ARCH program” [24-25]. Though

records showed that the “cities that ARCH represents

have language in the ARCH contracts to save these properties from sale on the open market,” the “cities

[weren't] doing anything to enforce it” [25]. In

addition, many owners of ARCH properties have

violated the agreements they signed with ARCH by


“renting them out for profit, using them as second

homes, or leaving them empty” [26]. As the ARCH

Jared Nieuwenhuis
about 5 years ago

Great reporting by [Chris Ingalls](#) tonight on KING 5. However, to see ARCH (A Regional Coalition for Housing) being misused and manipulated in this manner is extremely disappointing. The taxpayers of Bellevue have invested millions of dollars in this program that was conceived from a study undertaken in the early 1990's by the 'Citizens Affordable Housing Task Force' in Bellevue. There are teachers, police officers, nurses, firefighters, etc that can't afford to live in this city and would love to take advantage of this type of program. While I agree that local government support can play a role to increase the affordable housing supply we must ensure that the proper controls and checks & balances are in place. Clearly, that doesn't appear to be the case and I am concerned how far this level of fraud might extend.

#BVUE #Bellevue



KING5.COM
Olympia power couple's second home is taxpayer funded
Two high-level Washington state government employees who own a wat...

Executive Director Linsay Masters, says, in an interview with The Seattle Times:

Just as important as it is to create affordable housing, it's also important that we do the work to ensure that those who are intended to benefit from those programs are actually benefiting.

These examples highlight the need for greater enforcement to ensure that affordable housing initiatives effectively serve their intended purpose; without adequate oversight and measures in place, the potential for affordable homes to be diverted to wealthier individuals or investors undermines the objective of providing housing opportunities for low-income individuals in King County.

In terms of renting, rental discrimination further exacerbates the housing crisis in Seattle, as when minority communities “try to rent housing in Seattle, they’re treated differently from white people” [27].

In 2016, when the city of Seattle “compared reports from white housing testers and black housing testers in over 60 percent of cases, there was some evidence of

bias” [27]. Moreover, despite the persistence of discrimination, individuals are often reluctant to come forward due to the fear of trouble or simply because they want to secure a place to live [28]. As a KUOW article



highlights, some individuals of color express their hesitation, stating, "We don't want trouble. We found a house. It's a good rent. What if the manager is giving me a hard time because of my parking spot, or if they're being mean to me? I just want to live" [27]. This reluctance to report discrimination demonstrates the fear and practical concerns individuals face when navigating the housing market. The desire for a stable home and the fear of potential repercussions can deter marginalized individuals from addressing discriminatory practices and seeking justice, underscoring the urgent need to address rental discrimination and ensure equitable access to housing for all residents of Seattle.

Though Seattle passed the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance in 2016, which aimed to “provide equal housing opportunities for individuals with criminal records,” the recent striking down of this

ordinance exemplifies the challenges and contradictions that can arise within the realm of liberal policies [29]. Although the ordinance was designed to promote fairness and combat discrimination against individuals with criminal records, its rejection raises questions about the commitment to progressive ideals and the willingness to confront systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities, revealing a disheartening gap between rhetoric and action [30-31]. Despite the initial intentions to address the housing needs of individuals with criminal records, the ordinance's overturning undermines the progress made and perpetuates the cycle of inequality. This instance of liberal hypocrisy showcases how even well-intentioned policies can succumb to resistance or opposition, resulting in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices and hindering the ability of marginalized individuals to secure stable housing and reintegrate into society.

Judge rejects Seattle's 'first-come, first-served' rental law as unconstitutional

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Landlords claimed the first-come, first-served law violated their property, due-process and free-speech rights, and a King County judge sided with them on each point. (Mike Siegel/The Seattle Times)

To address these inconsistencies, Seattle must undertake meaningful and comprehensive efforts, including implementing inclusive policies, addressing historical inequalities, and promoting genuine social change. It requires a thorough examination and rectification of issues such as the ones this essay examined as well as others, such as, but not limited to, the lack of political tolerance [32-37], tax policies [38], performative activism [39-40], and other relationships with a number of communities [41-42]. By actively confronting these challenges, Seattle has the potential to truly embody its professed progressive ideals and become a model for inclusive and equitable urban development. Only through sincere and transformative action can the city reconcile its progressive image with tangible advancements in the rights and well-being of all its residents.

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