Houses on Hudson: Using Documentary Film to Explore Exclusionary Zoning and
Affordable Housing Development in the New York Suburbs

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I use the medium of documentary filmmaking to examine efforts to develop
fair and affordable housing in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Hastings is an affluent,
predominantly white suburban town located in Westchester County; increasingly high
housing prices and exclusionary land use practices uphold local housing segregation,
mirroring many other suburban communities across the country. Specifically, this thesis
explores how stated values of inclusion and progressive ideology come in tension with
underlying desires related to homeownership. The result is a short documentary, "Houses
on Hudson," and an accompanying narrative outlining the motivation, process, and
takeaways from this artistic intervention.

Thesis supervisor: Devin Michelle Bunten
Title: Edward H. and Joyce Linde Assistant Professor of Urban Economics and Housing

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This thesis required a lot of love and care from a lot of people, and I am grateful to them all.

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Introduction

"I did not yet understand the psychic cost of defining oneself by the place where you are from." - Sarah broom, The Yellow House

Growing up in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, I was shown from an early age that I belonged. Driving through this hilly, 8,000 person, tree-lined town in Westchester County today, I remember the building blocks of my childhood there – memorizing my address in my Kindergarten class, birthday parties with neighbors. But in this town, which was over 90% white when I grew up there, there were also signs that not everyone belonged here. When, in college, I learned about the forces that perpetuate racial residential segregation and unequal access to educational resources, I thought back to memories of racist comments and subtler forms of exclusion. The forces that perpetuate racial segregation can sometimes seem obscure, but growing up, I saw them playing out in my small-town context time and time again.

Hastings-on-Hudson is my hometown and the subject of this thesis project. Through the medium of documentary filmmaking, I examine the ways that land use policies and housing practices have created and upheld this predominantly white suburban enclave 15 miles north of New York City in the second most segregated region nationwide (Frey 2010). The goal of this media thesis is to uncover how stated values of inclusion amongst progressive residents come in tension with underlying desires to keep Hastings "the way it is," as one interviewee put it. It is my hope that this film will spark deeper conversations in the village about housing practices and inclusion in the village.

Situating Hastings

Hastings is, in many ways, a product of decades of federal policies aimed at racial and economic exclusion. Once an immigrant working class community with steel factories lining the waterfront, suburbanization and the outsourcing of manufacturing in the 1950s brought a demographic shift, turning Hastings into the bedroom community it is known as today. According to the U.S. Census, the population in this three-square mile town grew by about 2,000 people between 1950 and 1970, the height of suburbanization. By 1990, when most of the population growth had taken place, 88% of residents were white and 3% were Black. During the same period, family household income increased substantially. Today, the median household income is nearly $140,000 (compared to $71,855 statewide) and the typical home sale price is over $800,000 (American Community Survey 2014-2018; Zillow 2020).

Figure 1. Hastings-on-Hudson Demographics

	Hastings-on-Hudson	NY Metro Area
Population Density (people/square mile)	4,057	5,421
Age of residents		
Under 18 years	25%	21%

18-34 years	13%	25%
35-64 years	44%	39%
65 years and over	19%	15%
Race and Ethnicity		
White, alone	82%	42%
Black/African American, alone	3%	18%
Asian, alone	5%	11%
Other race or multiple races	3%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	7%	26%
Educational Attainment (25 yo +)		
Less than high school	3%	15%
High school diploma, no more	23%	45%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	75%	40%
Income		
Median household income	$140,000	$75,400
Families below poverty line	1%	11%
Commuting Characteristics		
Share of residents commuting to NYC	25%	--
Share of residents working in Hastings	9%	--
Housing Characteristics		
Owner-occupied units	78%	46%
White homeowners	90%	63%
Non-white homeowners	9%	37%
Renter-occupied units	22%	54%
Average home value	$811,552	$668,403*
Change in home prices over last year	+7.5%	

Source: American Community Survey, 2015-2019; Census On the Map 2018; Zillow Price Estimates 2020. This home price represents Westchester County and New York City only, not the full Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Since its inception, the United States has protected and promoted property ownership for white Americans while denying the same opportunity to Black and Indigenous people – enshrined through the Revolutionaries' goal of protecting private property in enslaved people (Bouie 2019). During the 20th Century, the government and real estate industry used their heavy hands to promote racial segregation in the Northeast, creating yet another chapter in America's story of racist housing practices that are particularly relevant for the context of Hastings-on-Hudson. In the early and mid-20th Century the government and private actors transformed the concept of homeownership into "an ideological necessity and installed it at the very center of American housing policy," yet denied the opportunity of homeownership to Black families (Vale 2014, p. 39). Through a myriad of racist practices ranging from redlining and covenants (in which Black families were explicitly barred from living in certain homes and neighborhoods) to federally backed mortgages for private, predatory developers, public and private actors segregated the New York region (ibid; Taylor 2020; Greene et al. 2018). Concurrently, federal funding for highway construction and urban renewal supported the transportation networks necessary for white suburbia and catalyzed paralleled disinvestment of predominantly Black and Brown urban neighborhoods (Crockett 2018; Massey and Denton 1993). The relics of these policies and practices remain pronounced nationwide, evident through everything from the racial wealth gap to a wildly unequal landscape of

opportunity that threatens the health and wellbeing of communities of color (Plumer et al 2020; Faber 2020; Greene et al. 2018).

The fabric of Hastings-on-Hudson reflects this recent history. As highway arteries transformed the New York region, white residents fled the Bronx and the government subsidized their mortgages — but denied the same support to Black homeseekers — leading to white, affluent population growth in Westchester County (Roby 2008; Hastings Historical Society n.d). As one of the first Black residents of Hastings told me on a phone call, racial covenants in the deeds of houses prevented Black homeseekers from buying property in the village. Even though *Shelley v Kraemer* (1948) and then the Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited this type of overt discrimination, housing discrimination in Hastings persists. In 2006, advocates brought a lawsuit against a Hastings real estate firm for steering Black homeseekers toward homes in other towns where the schools were lower quality (O'Connor 2006). While the firm was ultimately exonerated, many town residents and fair housing activists remain skeptical that no steering takes place today, and investigations into adjacent suburban communities reveal illegal and disturbing rates of racist housing discrimination (Choi et al 2019).

Source: New York Times archived newspaper clippings from the 1960s-1980s highlighting the rise in Westchester suburbs and how transportation networks ripped through the Bronx to support it.

Beyond overt discrimination, subtler tools and policies like zoning – the legal process in which localities determine what land uses are permitted within a given area – also exacerbate racial segregation. While zoning can be used to promote the public health and general welfare of a place, it can also be used as a tool to exclude certain groups from living somewhere (Greene and Ellen 2020). As Bunten (2018) writes, "zoning that

mandates costly development practices exclude those who can't afford the costs, and zoning that limits changes to the built environment will tend to limit changes to the types of families who can move in." Numerous studies have documented how zoning restricts housing supply and thereby increases housing costs in metropolitan areas that continue to see population growth (Glaeser et al. 2006; Gyourko and Molloy 2015; Furth and Gray 2019; Murray and Schuetz 2019).

The village of Hastings-on-Hudson adopted single-family zoning in the 1950s, around the time that demographic shifts were taking place there and regionally. Today, the bulk of the village's zoning code remains limited to single-family residences of at least 10,000 square feet. This type of zoning is what many would refer to as "exclusionary zoning" — single-family requirements with large minimum lot sizes — which creates barriers to access for the many who cannot afford the homes permitted (Serkin and Wellington 2013; Cowan 2006; Anacker et al. 2017). As Vale (2007) writes, the invention of comprehensive zoning "enshrined the single-family home with special prominence," yet another example of public policy promoting homeownership as the pinnacle of success while creating barriers to achieving homeownership for people of color with lower incomes (p. 17). The housing cost trends in Hastings over the last ten years alone match what scholars document as the result of a restricted housing market: in the last 10 years, home values have risen upwards of 32 percent (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Typical home values in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York
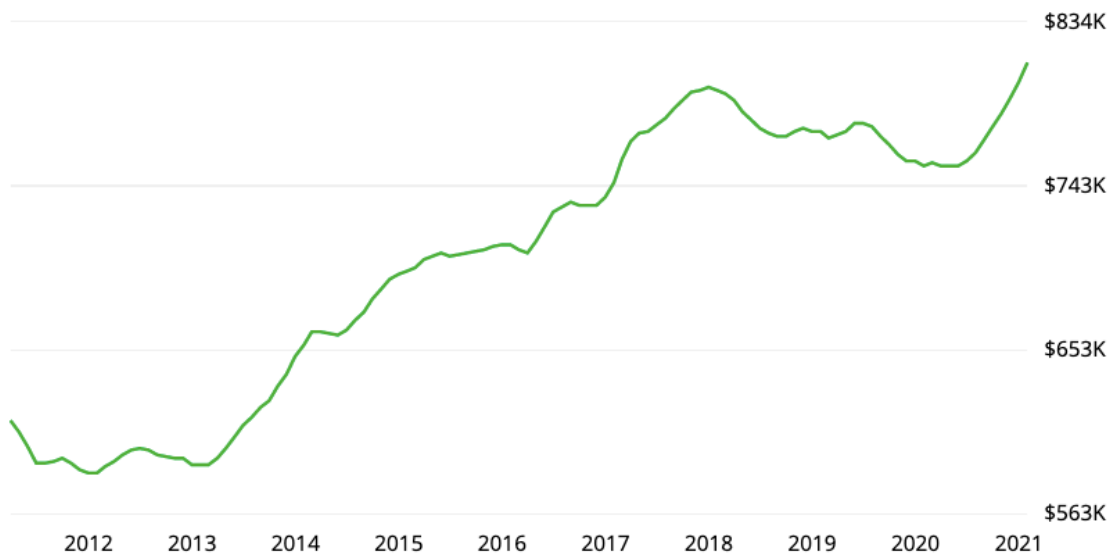
Source: Zillow Home Value Index. Accessed February 2021. https://www.zillow.com/hastings-on-hudson-ny/home-values/

In New York state, zoning laws are under the jurisdiction of local governments, and at the time of writing there are no state laws mandating affordable housing development or increased density in exclusive neighborhoods (Kazis 2020). As the authors of *Neighborhood Defenders* write, "land use regulations gain their power, in part, from the people who use them to their advantage" (p. 15). Homeowners (especially higher-income,

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whiter residents, research shows) display their "Not in my Backyard" (NIMBY) sentiments to prevent low-income housing (ibid). Together, these policies and power dynamics continue to enshrine racial segregation in the landscape of suburbs like Hastings. As Lung-Amam (2017) writes, "The dominant norms and standards that govern the landscape and limit expressions of difference in suburbia also reinforce White Americans' privileged place within it" (p.7).

Despite increasing diversity in the surrounding region and suburbs more generally, the population in Hastings today is 82% white and only 3% Black (the larger New York region is only 42% white, Westchester County is 14% Black). The hyper-local spatial allocation of resources (particularly public education) in the United States has allowed suburban communities to hoard resources while using mechanisms like zoning to prevent inclusive access to these resources. Localized property tax policies and municipal fragmentation allow affluent suburban towns to accumulate resources that they can funnel into educating their own children, furthering educational disparities along racial lines (Kruse and Surgue 2006). Some point to mobility programs like Moving to Opportunity — in which low-income families use vouchers to access high-income neighborhoods and schools — as a mechanism to reduce issues related to unequal access. But this type of integration approach runs the risk of failing to address the underlying ways that norms of whiteness are backed into the geography of suburbs. As Patillo (2014) writes, "promoting the means to improve the lives of Blacks stigmatizes Black people and Black spaces and valorizes Whiteness as both the symbol of and the measuring stick for equality." Patillo argues that integration rhetoric and policies pin the problem on Black bodies, rather than "within the fabric — political, economic, and social institutions — of American society."

In principle, the 1968 Fair Housing Act's goal of Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) aims to ensure localities make all neighborhoods places of opportunity where anyone, regardless of their identity, has the opportunity to live. The federal law text requires the "Cooperation of Secretary and executive departments and agencies in administration of housing and urban development programs and activities to further fair housing" (42 U.S. Code Ch. 45). The enforcement of the AFFH rule has been the subject of partisan fights – the focus of internal conflict during the Nixon era, and then essentially ignored for 40 years, strengthened under the Obama administration and most recently repealed under the Trump administration (Taylor 2020; Steil and Kelly 2019; Julian 2020; Lung-Amam 2020).

Under the Obama Administration, Westchester County was the site of one of the more famous lawsuits regarding the AFFH clause of the Fair Housing Act. In 2009, the government joined a local fair housing litigator in a lawsuit against Westchester, finding that it was "engaging in total obstruction" of their dire fair housing issues and failing to affirmatively further fair housing (Hannah-Jones 2012). During the suit, fair housing advocates explicitly cited zoning as an example of a restrictive barrier to fair housing that the County was not addressing, therefore lapsing in their obligations under the Fair Housing Act to further fair housing goals (National Alliance for Fair Housing 2010; Anti-Discrimination Center 2014). This suit ended in a settlement in which, among other

demands, Westchester County had to create 750 affordable housing units in wealthier areas, including Hastings (Gerhman 2017; Hannah-Jones 2012). Over the last 10 years since the settlement, Westchester County's progress has been slow. As of 2015, Hastings had developed four of the 93 units it was obligated to build as part of the settlement (Table C in Westchester Housing Report). Recent studies show that Westchester continues to have some of the highest real estate prices and property taxes in the country, and has issued fewer building permits per new resident than any other Northeastern county (Kazis 2020).

A window into spatialized liberal whiteness

"Racism is as profoundly American as the Declaration of Independence."
- Dr. Kenneth Clark, Psychologist and former Hastings resident

Part of my interest in examining structural racism in housing through the lens of this town is its familiar American qualities: Hastings is a window into white suburban geographies where, despite its liberal residents voting for a national racial justice agenda and adorning lawns with *Black Lives Matter* signs, there has been little progress at racial inclusion locally. As one interviewee said, "One of the things that's interesting about Hastings is it's microcosmic." In regions across the country, white students and communities remain the most segregated and, as previously mentioned, the layered web of spatially allocated resources, implicit biases, and land use politics incentivize residents who have found their way into these segregated affluent towns to exclude others from entering (Ifill 2014; Frey 2020; Silver 2019; Hanselman and Fiel 2017). Having grown up in this community where segregation was seldom discussed, I am interested in how conversations about affordable housing development can serve as a lens into understanding how values of inclusion and shared humanity square with property value and opportunity hoarding interests.

Interestingly, Hastings does diverge from some otherwise similar suburbs in its stated commitment to affordable housing development. The Hastings Affordable Housing Committee began in 1990 with the goal of ensuring people who were employed in the town (namely teachers and municipal workers) did not have to commute long distances to work. Articles in the local newspaper have cited Hastings as an exemplar case for affordable housing development. In addition, the village passed a 15% affordable unit set aside on new multi-family developments that goes above the 10% countywide requirement (even though the zoning code limits where these multi-family developments can be) (Lupo 2013). As of this year, Hastings has developed 39 units of affordable housing, about 1% of their total housing stock. Because of the high cost region that Hastings sits in, affordable housing at 60% of the Area Median Income is closer to middle-income housing than low-income housing. This fits with the intentions of many town residents I spoke to, who envision affordable housing for teachers and local employees who otherwise would face long commutes to serve this village.

In the wake of the divisive 2016 election, Hastings residents formed local groups to work toward ensuring Hastings was an inclusive place. As uprisings in response to continued

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racist police brutality erupted across the nation in summer 2020, conversations in the village turned toward discussing whiteness and racial justice more explicitly. Today, it is hard to drive around Hastings for more than a couple of minutes before seeing a yard sign saying that all are welcome here or that in *this* house, no person is illegal. It is also hard to drive for more than a couple minutes without seeing a single family home on a half-acre lot with a recent appraisal hovering around $1 million. Housing development and racial inclusion in the suburbs have been inextricably linked since their inception, yet ongoing conversations about racism in the village do not broach the subject of housing. To the contrary, in interviews, people's stated values of inclusion and interests in property appreciation and maintaining the "character of the town" quickly came in tension with one another. My documentary brings these tensions to the forefront, using conversations about values as a window into larger reflections on housing policy and inclusion.

Approaching Housing Policy through Documentary Filmmaking

"When it comes to building public support for this agenda, there is a lot of work to be done."
-Tiffany Manuel

The Role of Narrative in Housing Policymaking

Policy is value-laden. As Lowndes (2016) explains, "every new piece of legislation...is a narrative in its own right, which links together beliefs, actions and institutions" (p. 103). Housing policy in the United States is built atop a set of values that understands housing as a commodity, pitting the "deserving" – those who are deemed worthy of this resource – against the "undeserving" – those without the means to afford shelter. As the previous section highlights, those in power use race and income as proxies to determine who is worthy, and we can point to countless illustrations of the policy narratives that support this concept. In promoting white suburban homeownership while denying those same opportunities to families of color, for example, policymakers sent a message that white wealth and stability is more important. In pouring more federal resources into mortgage deductions than rental assistance, the federal government crafted a narrative that homeowners are more worthy than renters (Fischer and Sard 2017). And in failing to address the lasting barriers to racial inclusion in suburban housing markets, suburban regions are sending a message that they value the way things are.

However, despite this clear connection between narratives, values and policymaking, many in the housing policy field shy away from making explicit the values that undergird centuries of U.S. housing dynamics. In response to recent public opinion research highlighting the progress needed on educating people about structural inequity in housing policy, Axel-Lute (2020) wrote that housing has had "a lot of research on specific policies and virtually nothing on framing." Advocates and public opinion researchers agree that the lack of framing and narrative clarity creates a political will issue. A 2016 report on housing messaging noted:

> "with piles of data but no alternative frame to hang them on, housing advocates may be seeing renewed interest from local legislators but are facing an increasingly unsympathetic public" (Manuel, p. 4).

The author names six misguided messages that the housing policy field needs to overcome to shift the public narrative to support housing policy. Among these six are "the separate fates and zero-sum thinking backfire," in which people who have housing believe it is not their responsibility to solve others' problems. Another example is "The NIMBY and Natural Segregation backfire," wherein higher-income people default to American Dream-esque messaging of working your way up and express grief over the concept of living near poor people (ibid, p. 5). Together, these backfiring messages

threaten the political success of housing legislation and maintain a status quo of housing injustice.

How do we work to transform this lack of public will for housing justice into public support? Storytellers, organizers, and narrative scholars have long understood the importance of values-based messaging in transforming public opinion. Storytelling is a process that constructs agency, shapes identity and motivates action (Ganz 2001). While storytelling can build agency, people also use storytelling to absolve themselves of responsibility. As Duncombe said, "the truth does not reveal itself by virtue of being the truth: it must be told, and we need to learn how to tell the truth more effectively. It must have stories woven around it, works of art made about it" (p. 20). In addition to uncovering truths and debunking myths that those in power promote, Lowndes (2016) documents several other ways in which narrative can be useful to the field of policymaking. First, narratives can help explain why and how policies come about, uncover underlying values and motivations that those with power have. In addition, as Bruner (2002) also documents, stories enable agency, and can be used by policymakers to motivate solutions. Lastly, narratives "make policy 'stick', gain traction and endure," ensuring they can weather partisan storms and budget cycles (p. 110).

In my own prior work as a housing policy researcher at a non-profit research organization, I sometimes grew frustrated with how we applauded evidence-based policymaking that shied away from values-based propositions, sometimes in the hopes that quantitative data alone would change hearts and minds. As Axel-Lute reports, "Leading with facts and figures...doesn't do so much to persuade. Leading with values, on the other hand, activates emotions and opens an audience's hearts and ears to the message" (ibid). What's more, I craved communicating with the audience that was not yet convinced about the issues I was researching, recognizing the potential power of voters, tenants, and homeowners in housing policy making. Manuel (2016) echoes the power of public education, saying that "stories that balance the people, places, and systems perspective" and "widen the public's view of who is responsible for taking action and resolving outcomes" (p. 17). Similarly, Epstein et al. (2014) highlights policy makers' "limited shared repertoire with the lay members of the public as a significant barrier to participation" and they propose narrative storytelling as a more productive alternative for overcoming this barrier (p. 1). This thesis is my first formal attempt to use narrative tools to tell a story about housing. It stems from a desire to connect with a more general audience about housing policy.

Using Documentary Film as a Narrative Tool

There are endless narrative tools that can support conversations about social change, and in this thesis, I specifically focus on the tool of documentary filmmaking. Documentary film is "a form of art that supplies the civic and narrative imagination that is vital – well beyond simply knowing facts and information – to shaping a culture that can understand...the lives we live" (Chattoo 2020, p. 6). In combining journalistic qualities

and artistic visuals, documentaries about social issues have shaped policy agendas, public debates, and made material differences in people's lives (Marfo 2007).

In *Story Movements,* Chattoo argues that documentaries play a unique and invaluable role in policymaking by combining human-centered narrative approaches with factual insights. The impact, she argues, is that documentary films can "unlock the paralyzing gridlock of facts, statistics and long-standing myths or assumptions about people and problems" (p. 145). In digging into documentary subjects (whether it be people or places), documentarians can "establish compelling narratives and understandings that are not so easily dismissed by partisan ideological framing" (p. 208). While of course not the only tool necessary for social change, documentarians' ability to combine facts, stories, and communicate the complexity at play makes them an especially compelling tool to fill the void of values-based messaging in a housing policy field rife with data and complexity.

Given my interest in using narrative to speak to a general audience, I also gravitated toward the documentary film medium because of its accessibility. Short documentaries are extremely accessible — a passive activity that can be streamed right from your computer for less than 15 minutes. In addition, documentary films create opportunities for collective accessibility. Unlike a long form written piece, which is often read in solitude from the comfort of one's home, a documentary showing can be used as a tool to bring together a community to discuss an issue. Given that the focus of this film is a community, it felt like an exciting approach to have the final narrative product be something that people can experience as a collective through screenings at the public library, outdoor movie nights, and within classrooms in Hastings High School. What's more, since the aim of this film is to spark conversation (rather than provide answers), these documentary film screenings can serve as a starting point for people to connect and begin to process together.

Documentary filmmaking is often used to give voice to those ignored or unheard, but in this thesis I instead feature voices of a dominant group, suburban homeowners. My decision to do this is strategic: I aim to use this medium to document and reflect how people who live in highly resourced communities and claim anti-racist identities understand their own agency in effecting change. The reality of current housing policy in New York state is that suburban homeowners have the power to dictate land use patterns in their region, so it is my hope that juxtaposing interviews with factual context will push this audience to grapple with the ways they exercise their power and discuss their own values related to property, racism, and housing development. While perhaps not the most common approach to social change documentaries, scholars do note that this medium can be used as "a mirror to reflect what's wrong and a portal to imagine what could be, to spark public conversation, and to shape social norms" (Chattoo 2019). Furthermore, they can "expose social problems long relegated to obscurity" (p. 145). While housing segregation may be front and center for some, this topic is seldom discussed in Hastings; in background interviews, students mentioned getting no education about structural racism, and those leading conversations on race locally admitted they do not broach the topic of housing. As such, I intend to use this medium to help Hastings residents reflect

back on their own rarely discussed collective land use identity, in the hope it catalyzes deeper engagement with issues around housing inequity.

Taking Cues from Other Narrative Projects

I looked to prior artistic interventions and organizing campaigns related to housing justice and policy narratives to develop the approach for this thesis.

The Affordable Housing Musical[1]
Orange County, California

This musical — set in the (not so) fictional town of Church Mound, based on Chapel Hill in Orange County, CA — aims to catalyze a conversation about affordable housing and NIMBYism in the area. Residents of Chapel Hill, many of whom had personal experiences with housing insecurity, joined together over the shared belief that Chapel Hill should be a home for all, and decided to make a musical about the topic that combines satire and powerful stories. Through public theatre, the cast aims to "illustrate this crisis in a new way, [create] an outlet for dismay at the pace of change, and an outcry for a greater sense of urgency" (Affordable Housing Musical).

The use of satire, mirroring, and collective art in this project provides helpful frameworks for how to use artistic interventions for housing narrative change. First, the satirical tone encourages people to reflect on certain aspects of the town that they may be aware of but not focus heavily on. For example, in one of the opening songs the town is described as "*A liberal place without big city issues. Olympic-sized pools, where even our trees have PhDs!*" Here, the cast chooses to juxtapose "liberal" and "excessive," putting these two ideas in tension for the audience. Later in the musical, we learn that liberal ideologies do not translate to affordable housing advocacy, making this point more explicit. Second, similarly to my goals, this project shines a mirror up to a community that is passively thinking about housing justice, in the hopes it will make them actively take up the cause. The play's website says it "puts a magnifying lens" to issues around local politics and housing development, encouraging residents to understand their town dynamics through a more critical lens. Lastly, the community-produced element of this play highlights a collective "us" that unites those experiencing housing insecurity and affluent residents. This removes any resident audience member perception that they do not have a role to play in the change.

A Beach of Our Own: Long Island's Enduring Black Beachfront Community[2]
Sag Harbor, New York
Director Joshua Kissi, released on NYT Magazine October 2020

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[1] For more information on the Affordable Housing musical, see
http://www.affordablehousingmusical.org/
[2] The film can be viewed at: https://www.nytimes.com/video/t-magazine/100000007367495/long-islands-enduring-black-beachfront-community.html?action=click&gtype=vhs&version=vhs-heading&module=vhs&region=title-area&cview=true&t=556

This short documentary tells the story of a Black community living in Sag Harbor through the perspective of current residents. This film weaves in a larger history of Black migration, segregation, and homeownership by honing in on personal narratives of families who have lived in this area for generations. For example, after seeing a redlining map, you hear from a Black resident speaking personally about how he found financing for his home. This tactic of contextualizing the legacy of segregationist policy through personal narratives illuminates the role that policy plays in the everyday lives of communities and conjures emotions in the viewer that propel them to want to act in a way that the map alone might not. In addition, the Director made cinematic choices that matched their motivations to portray Black homeownership in a new light, like using wide framing of homes during interviews. Overall, this film showcases how documentary filmmaking – both in its layering of the policy and personal and its cinematic elements – can be used as a narrative tool to discuss the hyper-local dimensions of macro policy and reframe narratives about space, homeownership, and race.

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP)[3]
San Francisco, California

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) combines data visualization, analysis, and oral histories to document the eviction landscape in San Francisco. Their story maps transform points on a map into detailed stories about the eviction process and its personal impact, allowing the reader to pair stories with larger contextual information. In *Data Feminism*, authors D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) discuss the work of AEMP as a window into a larger conversation about the importance of data pluralism. They write, a "multiplicity of voices, rather than one single loud or technical or magical one, results in a more complete picture of the issue at hand" (p. 136). This approach contrasts the idea of consensus, offering instead a variety of stories and narratives that together paint an arguably more accurate and fine-grained portrait of the issue at hand. While the storytelling medium that AEMP deploys deviates from filmmaking, this concept of using storytelling and artistic interventions to delve deeper into personal stories that are often overshadowed by policy discussions is something I aimed to incorporate into my own project from the start. Furthermore, their decision to include stories and information that contradict or complicate one another serves as inspiration for my own layering of contradictory interviews in this documentary.

Sanctuary[4]
Colorado, multiple locations
Director: Brett Storey, released in Mother Jones October 2020

In this short documentary, geographer Brett Storey showcases different perspectives on an ongoing heated policy debate around gun control in the state of Colorado. She splices state house debates with interviews of four Coloradans to illustrate the underlying values

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[3] For more information, see the website for the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project: https://antievictionmap.com/
[4] To view Sanctuary, visit https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/10/film-documentary-colorado-red-flag-law-opposition-sanctuary-second-amendment/

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of safety, control, and masculinity that create the contours for a contentious policy conversation. In juxtaposing information about policy with these personal narratives, Storey is able to illuminate the human side of policy and make explicit the relationship between values and policies. In addition, from a cinematic approach, Storey uses her b-roll footage to communicate the geography and economy of rural Colorado to the viewer. Scenes of cornfields are layered with news anchor audio about gun control, and shots of houses are seen alongside audio of domestic violence survivors. Given that my documentary also aims to showcase the relationship between geography, policy, and values, I look to this short film as an example of how to layer cinematic techniques to give the viewer a more holistic understanding of how a physical place and its cultural fabric are reflected and enforced through policy decisions.

Behind the Scenes

Having never previously been involved in documentary filmmaking, one of the biggest challenges and learning opportunities of this thesis was navigating the production process. In this section, I provide a look "behind the scenes," documenting the process and reflecting on key decisions made along the way.

Building a Film Team

While I came to this project with an interest in educating a more general audience about housing policy, I lacked the technical filmmaking skillset to do it through this medium. During summer 2020, I began talking with a close childhood friend and NYC-based documentary filmmaker, Lucy Adams, about my desire to work on this type of housing policy-meets-narrative project. Together, we came up with the idea to combine my housing policy interests and her filmmaking expertise to make this documentary. We decided that I would produce the film, conduct the research (both through archival and current sources), co-direct, interview subjects, analyze footage and support the editing phase. Lucy acted as the co-director, cinematographer, sound technician, and editor. In addition, the Jacob Burns Film Center in Westchester County advised us on the scope and stylistic elements of the film. We pitched the idea to them in August 2020 because of their Westchester County audience and commitment to supporting local projects. Throughout the year, our conversations with them provided an important third-party perspective on how to use this medium to ilict emotion from the audience and better target the narrative to captivate our intended audience of Westchester residents. This team of film experts complimented my content knowledge and provided me with ample opportunity to learn about documentary filmmaking over the last year. One of the most rewarding aspects of this thesis was working with people who had a complimentary skillset, and reaping the educational rewards of a cross-disciplinary endeavor.

Phase 1. Pre-Production

The pre-production phase, which lasted from July to October, was essential for defining the scope of the film and collecting necessary context to develop interview guides that would allow for rich conversation.

PART 1. PRE-PRODUCTION

JULY-AUGUST 2020

Defined and articulated film scope and audience. Developed a 2-page pitch document and shared it for feedback from advisors.

SEPTEMBER 2020

Background research on housing in Hastings (newspaper scans, meeting minutes, and Facebook page reviews). Developed a list of Hastings public officials and affordable housing advocates for initial outreach

OCTOBER 2020

Background phone conversations with over 20 Hastings residents, including students, parents, local officials, and affordable housing residents

Defining the Scope

Initially, I was motivated to make a short film about the recent Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing lawsuit in Westchester County. As mentioned above, this lawsuit found that the county was failing to promote integration and ended in a settlement requiring the county to, among other things, develop 750 affordable housing units in high-income towns (Hannah-Jones 2012). Through conversations with friends and family who grew up in Westchester, it became clear that very few people residing in Westchester knew the story of the lawsuit or the role that zoning and land use policy play in racial exclusion. This motivated me to combine my housing policy and narrative change interests to create a film about housing discrimination where I am from.

However, the challenges of making a short documentary about Westchester County became apparent the moment I began planning. As we agonized over how we would successfully capture the facts, diverse perspectives, and geographic breadth of the county in a 15-minute documentary filmed during a pandemic, I was forced to revisit three underlying questions, all of which led to narrow the scope to focus on Hastings instead:

1. ***What/where is my story to tell?*** Westchester is a diverse and segregated county, and to tell an accurate, meaningful story about the lawsuit that featured the range of perspective present in the county would require a longer documentary and more time to forge relationships. While I had come to the project out of a personal motivation to tell this story about where I am from, I recognized that my knowledge of Westchester was actually grounded in a familiarity with the town where I was raised, not the larger region.

2. ***Why am I drawn to telling this story?*** Early conversations with friends and advisors helped me understand that I was motivated to tell the story of contradiction between seemingly inclusive values and exclusive tendencies. While this is true in much of the County, pockets of Westchester are Republican, and other pockets have housing stocks that never implemented predominantly single-family zoning (parts of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and White Plains, to name a few). In understanding the motivating questions that propelled me forward in this project, I realized that Hastings was actually the type of community that most interested me for this project, making it a better fit than Westchester at large.

3. ***What story can I tell within the timeline confines of this thesis project?*** On a more pragmatic note, the pre-production phase included a realistic assessment of my thesis timeline. As Lucy and I looked at the map of Westchester (which takes over 2 hours to traverse), we became daunted by the undertaking of this project within the confines of our timeline. In addition, I was aware how much time would be needed to find the right people in different pockets of the county to illuminate a compelling and accurate story. This process would require us to build trust with new people to ensure they were comfortable being honest on camera. While limiting the project to Hastings would still require time to build trust with

interviewees (most of whom I had no prior connection to), starting from the common ground as Hastings residents helped establish a base level of trust and good intentions. Overall, realizing that we could narrow the geographic scope helped create necessary boundaries to ensure this project could be accomplished within the allotted time.

Policies and practices that create and maintain structural racism in the housing market usually play out on urban, regional, state, and federal levels. As such, I found it challenging to decide to zoom into the hyperlocal context of Hastings-on-Hudson, afraid that it would obscure the larger forces at play. As we introduced our idea to others, numerous people would say things along the lines of "these issues are beyond Hastings," suggesting that the level of geography that the short documentary film allowed for was misapplied. On the other hand, however, choosing a small geography allowed the characters (and by extension, the viewers) to realize their agency. Discussions about structural racism can often have the effect of making someone feel as if they lack agency, or are absolved of responsibility. In focusing in on a geographic boundary and community that our audience identifies with, we were able to cultivate a sense of personal responsibility that extends beyond simpler acts of democracy like voting or showing solidarity.

While the geographic focus remained on Hastings for the duration of this project, the thematic scope changed numerous times after the pre-production phase. As I listened to interviewees wrestle with the tension between valuing and desiring racial inclusion and wanting to preserve the way the town was, the scope adopted to include these reflections and focus in on understanding how this predominantly progressive town grappled with questions of inclusion. During the editing process, as we poured over archival material about demographic changes in Hastings, I became intrigued by how much Hastings has changed over the last century, and wanted to focus in on people's resistance to change. In the final product, all of these narrative threads remain to tell the story of housing exclusion in Hastings through the eyes of current residents.

Background Research

Once we finalized the geographic scope, we began having background conversations with the Mayor, students, and village leaders to help us understand what our audience knew about housing in the village thus far, and what people with power in the village were working as it relates to housing inclusion. These initial background conversations affirmed that documenting affordable housing development politics and structural racism playing out in Hastings would make for a ripe story, and point to larger themes about housing segregation and property values. In total, I had 25 conversations with Hastings residents who have been involved in conversations or work related to affordable housing, village politics, and/or racial inclusion in the village. I asked them about what they like

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about living in Hastings, their understanding of affordable housing development in the village, why they think Hastings is predominantly white, and about their involvement in conversations related to race, inclusion, and housing. In addition to helping with the essential fact finding phase of this process, these conversations also served as a key opportunity for me to introduce myself and build trust with the resident, aware that I might want to interview them on camera in the future.

In addition to conversations with Hastings residents, I also spoke with six housing policy researchers, practitioners and advocates in the New York area. These conversations provided larger context to compliment the hyper-local nature of the film. They also helped me understand what systemic and policy barriers needed to be addressed in the film to spark a conversation that matched the larger hopes of activists and affordable housing practitioners.

Phase 2. Production

In the production phase, which lasted throughout the fall, we conducted 10 on-camera interviews and captured about 40 hours of footage in Hastings-on-Hudson to create the building blocks of our short documentary.

OCTOBER 9-13

Filming week 1: filmed five interviews and shot B-Roll in hastings.

LATE OCTOBER

Revised narrative arc based on what we captured in the first weekend of filming. Had several additional background calls to prepare for second week of filming.

NOVEMBER 3-7

Filming week 2: filmed four interviews and shot B-Roll in hastings.

EARLY NOVEMBER

In addition to filming, production phase included visits to the Hastings Historical Society to collect archival material.

PART 2. PRODUCTION

Meet the Cast

To a large extent, the documentary format constricts the story line to what the interviewees say on camera. As such, deciding who to interview on camera and what to ask was one of the most important decisions we made during this process. As shown in Figure 3, we interviewed 9 people on camera, collecting almost 20 hours of interview footage.

Figure 3. On Camera Interviewees

Name	Title
Niki	Current Mayor of Hastings-on-Hudson
Peter	Former Mayor of Hastings-on-Hudson
Sue	Original Chair of the Hastings-on-Hudson Affordable Housing Committee
Arthur	Current chair of the Hastings-on-Hudson Affordable Housing Committee and local real estate agent
Georgia	Hastings-on-Hudson Village Board of Trustee and co-founder of Hastings Race, Inclusion, and Social Equity (RISE) organization
Damaris-Long	Founder of the Parents of Children of Color (P-COC) organization
Sabine	Hastings High School student who is a member of the Students of Color Affinity Group
Nick	First Hastings-on-Hudson resident to live in affordable housing
Jacob Faber	Professor of Sociology and Public Service at NYU

Our "main characters" are people who hold power in the village and have self-elected to work on issues related to housing and race in the village. We felt that this group of individuals was the most capable of explaining affordable housing goals and development and how the village understands its responsibility toward fostering inclusion. In addition, revealing their thought processes would allow us (and the viewers) to discern potential gaps or room for improvement in the community's collective thinking.

In addition to these primary characters, we felt it was important to include the perspective of a student for three reasons. First, having gone to Hastings public schools from Kindergarten to 12th grade, I was aware of how much what happens in the school system there impacts the perspective of younger residents. Second, discussions about housing policy and inclusion rarely include student or youth perspectives, despite so much of the rhetoric centering around doing what is best for children's access to opportunities. Lastly, many of the students of color who I spoke to during the pre-production phase expressed sentiments of feeling like guests in the town or school because of their identity, which contradicted white residents' perceptions of the town as being inclusive and welcoming. I felt it was especially important to highlight this perspective to portray an often more hidden narrative of life in Hastings.

We also felt it was essential to interview someone who lived in affordable housing. Not only is Nick's perspective helpful for explaining the value of his own affordable homeownership opportunity, but it gives the viewer a sense of who the affordable

housing is for when the village had preference categories (which prioritized teachers, firefighters, EMTs, village employees, and school staff).

Lastly, throughout the interviews with Hastings residents, I found myself processing what they were saying through three lenses: the lens of a former Hastings resident, the lens of a documentarian, and the lens of a housing policy student. The last lens in particular led me to constantly contextualize what residents were discussing in a larger framework of regional racial segregation and housing exclusion. It felt important to have this outsider, more macro perspective of a housing policy expert to lend context to the discussion and push some of the main arguments and ideas forward. Jacob Faber — a sociologist who researches racial segregation, place and urban policy — provided this perspective. Ultimately, during the post-production process we chose to exclude his interview from the film because it felt out of place in an otherwise personal and Hastings-centric storyline. That said, conducting this interview and analyzing it alongside our other footage was essential for our understanding of what other information we wanted the viewer to get.

It was a challenging task to build trust within the small timeframe that a one-year thesis allows, and this this informed who we were able to interview for this project. As a filmmaker, my priority was that all residents we spoke to felt comfortable and secure. Simultaneously, I found it important to share the perspectives of residents who do not often get a platform to speak, since this would illuminate a more hidden narrative within the village that problematized notions of community and inclusion. The challenge of limited time to build trust did confine who we were ultimately able to include on screen.

Conducting Interviews

I chose to conduct all of the interviews in a conversational, informal manner, using interview protocols as a guide (for full interview guides, see Appendix A). We began each interview (except Dr. Faber's) with the same set of questions about why the interviewee chose to move to Hastings. Not only did this serve as a warm up and icebreaker, but it also grounded the conversation in the place that we were focusing on and gave them a first opportunity to process their own decision for moving to Hastings. From there, the interview protocols deviated based on the individual expertise, background, and perspective of the individual. The last section of each interview included a set of forward looking and hypothetical questions to prompt the interviewee to ruminate on what they think is possible for the future of Hastings' housing stock.

As a former qualitative researcher, I expected the interview process to be similar to prior research endeavors. However, conducting interviews on camera about topics that people are not used to or comfortable discussing created new types of challenging. I found myself deviating from the interview guide in an attempt to both meet the interviewee

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where they were and also push them to be more explicit in their thought process. In discussing race, especially, I found interviewees to be extremely coded and hesitant, making it difficult to get the footage necessary to make a movie that addresses racism. The pre-conversation and introductory part of each interview key for building trust and making the subject feel more comfortable. In addition, I used the technique of circling back to a more difficult question after time had passed helpful for "peeling the onion layers" of a person's perspective.

Confronting COVID-19

Filming a movie that hinges on the success of long, intimate interviews, in the middle of a global pandemic, was extremely difficult. Throughout the process, social distancing created obstacles to everything from who I could interview, what shots we could get, and how to collaborate with Lucy from afar. Most notably, our need to interview people outside restricted our production timeline to warmer fall months. The joint constraints of COVID-19 and the required thesis defense timeline hindered our ability to pursue subjects that we learned about later in the production process or establish longer-term relationships with subjects that might have built more trust and led to more honesty and vulnerability on camera.

Phase 3. Post-Production

The post-production phase included analyzing interviews for common themes, stitching together footage to create a story arc, and then over a dozen editing rounds to create the final product.

PART 3.
POST
PRODUCTION

NOVEMBER 2020

Transcribed interviews and coded interviews based on common themes to gain better understanding of narrative arc

DECEMBER-JANUARY 2021

Developed rough cut of film

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

Edited film in iterative manner and gathered feedback from key film advisors

APRIL 2021

Final edits on picture-locked film, including color correction, sound mix, etc.

Determining the tone of the film

In the beginning of the editing process, we had to decide how information heavy we wanted the film to be. Our first cut packed an immense amount of informative material, splicing up the interviews to cover concepts from exclusionary zoning to home values to opportunity hoarding and the history of housing in Hastings. However, watching it back, there wasn't much emotional pull, nor did the viewer get a chance to feel connected to the characters. Ultimately, we decided to change our
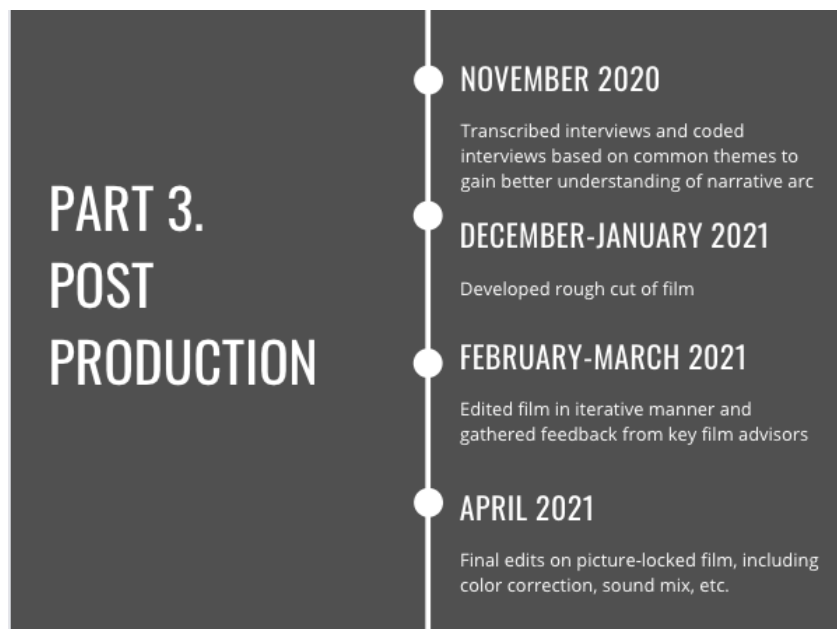
approach to strike a balance between eliciting emotional connection and providing information. We chose to give each interviewee the space to provide one full thought (rather than cutting it up), which created more of a conversational and measured feeling.

The decision points around what informative elements to include or exclude were perhaps the most difficult part of the entire process for me. Aware of the immense amount of information we had collected during our interviews and archival research, I was eager to pack in as much as I could in an effort to teach the viewer everything they needed to know about housing practices in Hastings. However, as we began to take out information and replace it with footage of the town, I noticed the importance of giving the viewer some breathing room between information and interviews. In this sense, I adopted a "less is more" approach to the information provided, and started playing around with this framework. In one cut, we deleted all the text, forcing ourselves to think about which textual elements were really necessary. While we ultimately added some back in, it was more intentionally placed than prior edits. In addition, at one point we experimented with removing characters to see who is essential to communicate what we want to say. This ultimately aided us in our decision to not include all nine interviews in the short film. Creating boundaries and providing time to iterate was essential in going from 30+ hours of footage to a mere 13 minutes.

Meeting people where they are, pushing them forward

Throughout the editing process, there was a tension between simply documenting what people said and critiquing it. Unsurprisingly, I came to this project with many preconceived beliefs about what Hastings residents should think and how the village could transform their housing policies and practices. While there is room in a documentary to use film elements to critique interviews, it is difficult to get the viewer to reach a conclusion far beyond what the interviews display. Unlike a podcast where the host is prominently featured, documentaries rarely include footage or interviews with their creators. Unlike a paper where the author is at liberty to control what words end up on the page, a documentary requires you to feature other voices, and be limited by what they choose to share. When I tried to incorporate elements of my own voice or an academic's perspective, it felt removed and disjointed from that of the characters. While in hindsight both a podcast or a paper would have allowed me to push the reader/listener further than this short documentary, the visual aspects of film allowed me to tap into familiar imagery to offer subtle critiques. This section focuses on decisions I made to balance meeting people where they are and pushing them forward within the confines of the documentary filmmaking medium.

Mirroring

As previously explained, documentary films can serve as mirrors, documenting seldom-discussed topics in an otherwise familiar place. From the beginning of this project, I set out to use this medium to subtly recast the village that so many residents know and love in a new light that was less comfortable for residents, prompting them to introspect. In the final product, this approach comes through in several ways. We use familiar imagery of the village that people have strong associations with, juxtaposed with new information, to recast these spaces as sites of contradiction or tension. For example, we juxtapose classic Hastings imagery like the Hastings Water Tower (a beloved icon) with details of housing discrimination and the lawsuit, making the audience confront discomfort despite familiar imagery. Similarly, after hearing from a local realtor that Hastings is "built out," we use a wide-angle lens to show familiar open space in Hastings to cue the viewer into realizing that land use practices in the village are by choice, rather than by constraints.

Mirroring also comes in the pacing of the film. Hastings is not a fast-paced village, and growing up memories accreted over long periods of time. In fact, it is a quiet town that people move to with the intention and financial ability to put down roots and stay for decades. We took a slow approach to the pacing for various reasons, including that it allowed the viewer to get to know the characters more and meet the town at the pace it

operates. In doing this, we hoped that local viewers would feel a stronger emotional connection with the content and imagery. Since the goal of this project was to motivate people to introspect about their potentially contradicting values as it relates to housing inclusion, the slower pacing also allows for these thoughts to begin to percolate in real time, giving space for the viewer to chew on the content as it appears. In addition, the slower pacing allowed us to create an eerie vibe, a sense that something was off in the village. Importantly, choosing a slower pace for the film does not mean that the film lacks boldness or the potential for changing minds. The pacing was a stylistic choice aimed at promoting emotional connection and calling attention to contradicting details, rather than an attempt to shy away from discussing important issues.

Not just how far to push, but also how to push?

From the outset, it was clear that the decision to make a film about housing exclusion, the fair housing lawsuit, and value contradictions would stir up conversation locally. In fact, early discussions where I told village residents about our intentions to make this film and they reacted defensively or uncomfortably affirmed that for a community that rarely discusses these issues, this would be a project that pushed the community. However, while I set out to push the viewer far in the direction of abolishing racially unjust single family zoning, the lack of willingness and/or comfort to explicitly discuss housing exclusion and racism in Hastings during on-camera conversations with interviewees limited the amount of footage I was able to capture on the topic and forced me to rethink how far I could push the envelope.

In the editing phase, I learned that elements like text, news clippings, and graphics can help the viewer get from one concept to another, pushing the bounds of what we could explain and illuminate. We used the text elements to push the viewer to situate Hastings in a broader context of unaffordability and racial segregation, and to introduce topics that weren't fully explained in interviews (e.g. the lawsuit and exclusionary zoning). Even with these helpful tools, it was a challenge to figure out what the "right amount" of information to provide was. On the one hand, having the viewer read text that introduced new ideas or pushed far beyond the bounds of the interviews would potentially allow them to walk away with more information or a firmer grasp of their own agency. On the other hand, using textual elements to create new storylines or introduce additional critique might overwhelm the viewer (who was already learning and absorbing a lot of new information) or detract from the emotional connection they have with the imagery.

Ultimately, I came to terms with the fact that the subtle, slower-paced approach would provide significant room for information and intrigue even though it would not leave the viewer with all the answers or arguments that I set out to provide. I also got relief from

the fact that this 13-minute film would not be the only opportunity they had to think about or consume information related to housing inclusion. In fact, I began brainstorming other ways to set up the film to support further learning, and settled on having a screening with my intended audience followed by a panel. This would allow viewers to hear from additional voices not in the film (e.g. fair housing activists, county policymakers, academics, myself) who might be able to further push residents to grapple with the concepts the film introduces and more explicitly talk about continued racism in the housing market. In addition, recognizing that watching a film is often a passive and independent process, this supplementary panel would allow for a more active format of dialogue that could nicely compliment the otherwise passive movie-watching process. Despite my lofty goals in this project, I learned along the way that it is unrealistic to assume that a short film will be a sufficient medium for framing, problematizing, *and* providing solutions to the issue of housing injustice in Hastings-on-Hudson. Ultimately, this is one tool in a large ecosystem of approaches for swaying public opinion and changing local policy. It is important that this tool, given its introductory and subtle approach, be paired with other approaches that get at the issue from more direct or conversational angles to support progress.

Personal meets professional

As is likely clear by now, this project is as much personal as it is academic: an opportunity for me to revisit the place I call home through a new lens. I often asked myself why I chose a project not just "so close to home," but about home itself! It would have been, in countless ways, easier (albeit strange perhaps) to helicopter into a less familiar place and critique their housing practices instead. But I believe it is important for us to work on changing the communities we are part of, and this project embodies that.

The personal nature of this work created both opportunities and challenges during the filmmaking process. On the one hand, it is because I am from this community that I was able to go from idea to creation in such a short amount of time. What's more, the speed, interest, and openness with which many people replied (some of whom I knew and some of whom I did not) was likely helped by my personal connection to the subject. I was able to explain that my interest in this project comes from a desire to improve the place that I loved growing up in, and that helped build trust. Furthermore, at key moments throughout the interview I would intentionally insert my own reflections (*e.g. growing up I don't have memories learning about racism in housing, why do you think that is not discussed here?*) to help the subject dig deeper with me and create a conversational environment. In a sense this interview style reflects my larger goals of the movie related to calling in this community that I have known for so long. Lastly, in the post-production phase, my familiarity with the audience (Hastings viewers) allowed me to sequence and pace

footage in a manner that, as described in the "mirroring" section above, I believe will be especially intriguing and impactful.

That said, exploring a topic that was personal to me also came with its roadblocks, particularly in the pre-production and production phases. In a couple cases, I found myself hesitant to push back too much on interviewee remarks because of some sense of shared community or closeness. Occasionally, I found myself worried by the prospect of being seen as disrupting this group that I myself belong to. I would leave conversations with Hastings friends and family feeling worried that I was embarking on a project that was unwanted, driving me to second guess my process and questions. In the end, I recognize this is part of the process of broaching important but seldom-discussed topics of housing exclusion in this community, and part of the learning process throughout this thesis.

Visual Approach

Interviewees sitting in front of their homes remind the viewer of the importance of home and give the audience additional information about the character, making them feel more connected to them. Throughout interviews, subjects pointed to their home to explain concepts like "single family zoning" or affordable housing development on their block, highlighting the importance of this home to the topics discussed in the short film.

These interviews contrast **meditative sequences** of peaceful, idyllic suburban imagery, capturing the events of a typical day in the town (children walking to school, commuters getting on the train, people shopping in the village) that provide reflective pauses and challenge notions of picturesque sameness and uniformity. Over the course of the film, these shots follow a day (starting early morning and ending at dusk) to give the viewer a sense of change and time amidst otherwise stagnant interview sequences.

Aerial shots help viewers zoom out of their eye-level perspective and see Hastings from a new angle. It is our hope that this approach helps people reorient to this town in a new light as they learn new information, and reinforces concepts like single family zoning. Aerial shots give the viewer a glimpse of how this town's planning practices were not natural, but rather by design. These camera techniques create an almost-surveillance, eerie vibe that can make the viewer especially alert in an otherwise the familiar setting.

The Hastings Historical Society has a rich selection of **archival material**, and we use these materials to help illustrate the story of how Hastings' housing practices and demographic changes have led to the town today. I collected over 80 historical articles, images, maps, and advertisements to understand and visualize the development and shifting demographics of Hastings over the last two hundred years.

1929 map of Warburton and Washington avenues.

Themes

1. Contradicting national and local political ideology

The film opens with the explicit discussion of the difference between national political beliefs (rooted in values of access and justice), and local action (which is more focused on maintaining property values and school quality). Throughout the course of this short movie, the viewer is reminded of past and ongoing exclusionary housing practices in their own backyard, forced to reckon with their own stated value of racial and economic inclusion and what they are learning in real time.

"People in Hastings are for the most part liberal, in a fairly very left-leaning way. Um, and that is their national political beliefs. Everybody belongs, everybody should be included. Everyone should have access to everything, and we exercise our democratic rights for sure. But on a local level it's very different. Local politics is more about your personal property, your personal space, your kids. So a lot of this national moral values thing can kinda disappear a little bit when you're protecting what's yours and what you pay for and it's funny because money matters the most — what you pay for, what you own, where you pay your kids to go to school." – Georgia

Similarly, later in the film concerns about racism in Hastings surface, showing that although the town enjoys painting itself as an inclusive village with few issues on this front, even its younger residents see through this portrayal.

"People being insensitive. There was one circumstance where there was an old pharmacy in town and that he was a drug dealer and using that medication for bad. I

didn't expect that in Hastings and most people don't, but that stuff still does happen. And not just to my Dad." – Sabine

2. Constrained supply, by design

Throughout the film, the topics of land use and zoning raise questions about the dominant single-family landscape of Hastings. On the one hand, we have affordable housing advocates discussing how little land there is to build on, indicating their hands are tied. On the other hand, we have the discussion of zoning, which pushes back on this concept of land scarcity. The hope is that these contradictions and dialogue will make clear that Hastings' land use processes build in exclusion and property appreciation, coming in tension with residents' stated values of inclusion and access.

"And then there's zoning. And the essence of the quarter-acre zoning, single fam home on a quarter acre plot, this [gestures at house, seen below], any house on this block. This essence of that guarantees that housing stock is going to be expensive moving out from this point forward." - Peter

3. Affordable for whom?

The work that Hastings-on-Hudson has done to support affordable housing hardly begs the question "affordable for whom" since, from the beginning the answer was explicit. Preference categories prioritized affordable housing for school employees and municipal workers. As part of the lawsuit, Hastings had to get rid of its preference categories to receive aid, but interviews made it clear that these housing goals remain in tact.

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Importantly, some of the reasons for not prioritizing low-income housing relate to federal policy – area median income calculations and limited funds make it difficult to build low-income housing in rich communities. However, the inclusion of the "affordable for whom" theme hopes to reorient the viewer to understand that the progress that has been made is rife with preconceived notions of who is "worthy" of an affordable house in Hastings.

"At the infancy of affordable housing in Hastings, they had a preference category of school employees, village employees, fire department and police department. I fit into two of those categories being a school employee and volunteer fire dept. What happened is they took money from the state and once you take money from the state it has to open up to everybody, so when we post a complex or apartment there may be a list but it could include thousands of people." – Nick

"People confuse low-income housing with affordable housing. It's not housing people who are homeless or different kinds of populations. It's people like yourselves they just don't have the wherewithal to live in this community because of the housing costs" - Sue

4. Upholding Whiteness and Affluence

Over all of these themes is a common implicitly stated undertone of Hastings residents seeking to keep Hastings the way it is: white and affluent. From exclusionary zoning and high house prices, whiteness has become quite literally embedded in the geography of the village. And as previously stated, even the work related to affordable housing development was with certain "types" of people in mind, in an effort to uphold the wealthy status quo of the village. One of the things that was most difficult about bringing out this theme was that people were, for the most part, unwilling to explicitly discuss it.

However, quotes like this one, below, when placed in context, became indicative of the intersection between white supremacy and affordable housing development in the suburbs:

"I think it's change, we don't like change. They see somehow losing control of their neighborhood. We're a tiny little neighborhood and they get used to it and it's their right to do on their property and sell it to whoever they want to" – Sue

Conclusion

"I'm searching for the complex ways in which people inhabit the contradictions of actual existence."
- Brett Story, Geographer and Filmmaker

In a country where we spatially allocate essential resources like public education and reap immense wealth out of property ownership, affluent communities are, in many ways, incentivized to exclude. As shown in my film, in a liberal, predominately single-family homeowner community like Hastings, this pits homeowners' interests in value accumulation in direct tension with redistributive values. Often times, people are hesitant to admit this basic truth.

The goal of this thesis was to motivate people in the town that I call home to delve further into the topic of local housing exclusion, or as one interviewee called it, "the mandatory part of the discussion, without which you're just mouthing platitudes." In early literature reviews and coursework focused on narrative change, I learned that tapping into shared values enable agency and can motivate political will. But this assumes that a person has a

tidy set of values that are not in tension with one another. On the contrary, as this project shows, people are everyday navigating what filmmaker Story describes as the "contradictions of actual existence" – the contradictions of values pitted against one another.

Overall, while my project began with a quest to enable agency to realize housing justice, I realize in hindsight that was too lofty of a narrative change goal, for wading through the contradictions of explicit and implicit value sets is a necessary first step. In a place like Hastings – where residents proudly wear progressive values while, without hesitation, flaunting their love for the character of the (singly family, expensive, predominantly white) town – the first task of untangling values is no small project.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Affordable Housing Committee Representatives

Intro
- When did you move to Hastings?
- Why did you decide to move to Hastings?
- How would you describe Hastings to someone who is looking for a place to move to and wants to know more?
- [FOR ARTHUR]: How would you pitch Hastings to a family looking to purchase a home?

Evolution of affordable housing in Hastings
Let's talk about the evolution of affordable housing in Hastings, and how that maps onto conversations that were happening at the County and federal level.
- For someone looking to understand the history of housing and development in Hastings, what key points in the evolution of the town would you explain to them?
- What is the origin story of the Affordable Housing Committee?
- Can you walk us through an affordable housing project? What are the steps that it takes to build a multi-unit site in Hastings?
- What were some of the early challenges you faced in introducing the idea of the affordable housing committee and the initial projects (e.g. on Warburton Ave) [Probe: NIMBYism, lawsuit on Pinecrest that we discussed on the phone]
- How did the work in Hastings change after the Westchester County Fair Housing Act settlement in 2009? [Probe: preference categories for firefighters, etc.]
- From your perspective, what is the difference between affordable housing and fair housing? How has Hastings' understanding of *fair housing* changed over time?
- How do you think Hastings' work on fair and affordable housing compares to that of other parts of Westchester?

Barriers to inclusion
- Let's talk about people's resistance to affordable housing. What do you think are the main reasons people do not want affordable housing in their neighborhood?
- Can you describe how increasing density can be used as a tool to further fair housing?
    - Have there been conversations about making Hastings a denser town? Have there been conversations about changing the zoning code to allow for more density? Subdividing plots?
    - You mentioned on the phone that Hastings doesn't have much available land, but there is a lot of open space (parks, woods, people's backyards).
- Who do you think holds power within Hastings when it comes to fair and affordable housing development? Who do you think should hold the power?
- Why do you think Hastings remains predominately white?

Looking ahead
- What would a racially inclusive Hastings look like to you?
    - What is preventing this vision from being a reality?
    - What would you be excited about to have this vision fulfilled?
    - Would anything about housing dev have to change to realize that vision?
- What do you think a genuine and productive conversation about the intersection of race and housing in Hastings would entail?
- If a [3-story, 25 unit] affordable housing development for families with vouchers were being built on your block and you and your neighbors gathered for a meeting about it, what would you say about the project? [laying out these elements, this is why it has to be all of these things]
    - What do you think would come up at a meeting like this, or how would people respond to what you would say?
    - What are your concerns that would arise from a proposal like this?
    - Do you think there is a tension for people about losing something and gaining something?
- Is there anything else you'd like the opportunity to share through this platform to your fellow Hastings residents/beyond?

Mayor

Introduction
- When did you move to Hastings?
- Why did you decide to move to Hastings?
- How would you describe Hastings to someone who is looking for a place to move there?
- Tell us about your evolution from Hastings resident to village mayor. What motivated you to get involved in local governance and run for Mayor?

Housing development
- What do you see as your role as Mayor and part of the Board in furthering affordable and fair housing in Hastings?
- How would you explain the difference between affordable housing and fair housing, and how do you think these goals are playing out differently in the village?
- What steps has the village taken to develop more affordable housing? [PROBE: how does this compare to other towns, affordable housing committee, allocation plan, ADUs]
- What are some of the main challenges associated with affordable housing development?

- Which of these challenges we've discussed are specific to fair housing, and what additional challenges does the conversation about racial integration bring?
- Who do you think holds power within Hastings when it comes to fair and affordable housing development?
- There seems to be pockets of the village where conversations around racism and inclusion are happening. To your knowledge, do these conversations discuss housing? Why or why not?

Barriers to inclusion
- Let's talk about people's <u>resistance</u> to affordable housing. What do you think are the main reasons people do not want affordable housing in their neighborhood?
- Let's talk about <u>density.</u> Have there been conversations about making Hastings a denser town? Have there been conversations about changing the zoning code to allow for more density? Subdividing plots?
  - You mentioned on the phone that Hastings doesn't have much available land, but there is a lot of open space (parks, woods, people's backyards).
- Why do you think Hastings remains predominantly white?

Looking ahead
- What would a racially inclusive Hastings look like to you?
  - What is preventing this vision from being a reality?
  - What would you be excited about to have this vision fulfilled?
  - Would anything about housing dev have to change to realize that vision?
- What do you think a genuine and productive conversation about the intersection of race and housing in Hastings would entail?
- If a [3-story, 25 unit] affordable housing development for families with vouchers were being built on your block and you and your neighbors gathered for a meeting about it, what would you say about the project? [laying out these elements, this is why it has to be all of these things]
  - What do you think would come up at a meeting like this, or how would people respond to what you would say?
  - What are your concerns that would arise from a proposal like this?
  - Do you think there is a tension for people about losing something and gaining something?
- Is there anything else you'd like the opportunity to share through this platform to your fellow Hastings residents/beyond?

Trustee + Hastings RISE Founder

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Intro
- When did you move to Hastings?
- Why did you decide to move to Hastings?
- How would you describe Hastings to someone who is looking for a place to move to and wants to know more?
- What do you like about living in Hastings?

Hastings RISE
- What was your motivation for creating the group?
- What were some of the early challenges and successes the group faced as they worked to catalyze conversations about racial inclusion in the village?
    - On the phone you mentioned the difficulties associated with it being a predominately white space. Could you expand on that a bit?
- Why did Hastings RISE decide to focus on education-oriented work?
- What has surprised you about how the group has been received/perceived within the village?

RISE + Housing
- What do you see as the connection between the work of Hastings RISE and housing?
    - On the phone, hard...
- What do you see as the relationship between schools and housing?
- Why doesn't Hastings RISE focus on fair and affordable housing development?
- Why do you think Hastings is a predominately white town?
    - Probe: do you know about the lawsuit

Board of Trustees
- Why did you decide to join the Board of Trustees?
- Who do you think holds power within Hastings when it comes to affordable housing development?
- What do you see as the main challenges to developing more affordable housing here?
- How do you think Hastings might be able to overcome some of these barriers?
- How do you think the village can work toward not just affordable housing (income diversity) but fair housing (inclusive housing)?

Looking ahead
- What would a racially inclusive Hastings look like to you?
    - What is preventing this vision from being a reality?
    - What would you be excited about to have this vision fulfilled?

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- ○ Would anything about housing development/practices have to change to realize that vision?
- What do you think a genuine and productive conversation about the intersection of race and housing in Hastings would entail?
- If a [3-story, 25 unit] affordable housing development for families with vouchers were being built on your block and you and your neighbors gathered for a meeting about it, what would you say about the project? [laying out these elements, this is why it has to be all of these things]
  - ○ What do you think would come up at a meeting like this, or how would people respond to what you would say?
  - ○ What are your concerns that would arise from a proposal like this?
  - ○ Do you think there is a tension for people about losing something and gaining something?
- Is there anything else you'd like the opportunity to share through this platform to your fellow Hastings residents/beyond?

P-COC Founder/Education Advocate

Background

- When did you move to Hastings?
- Why did you decide to move to Hastings?
- How would you describe Hastings to someone who is looking for a place to move to?
- What do you like about living in Hastings?
- How would you describe the political ideology/the politics of people who live here?

P-COC

- Can you describe briefly what P-COC is?
- What was your motivation for creating P-COC?
- Why do you think it's important to have a group like P-COC in Hastings?
- Have people in the village been receptive to the goals of P-COC?
- What are some of the ways you think the school district could work toward being a more racially inclusive place?
- We've heard about the "Candid Conversations: *Do You Even Live Here*" series that P-COC put on. What was your motivation for putting on this session?

General questions

- On the P-COC call, you mentioned how there isn't anything "physically" different about Harlem and Hastings, but rather there's a difference in *resource allocation*. Could you repeat that perspective for the audience and explain, from your understanding, how this difference in resource allocation contributes to racial injustice?
- On the P-COC call, you mentioned that you moved to Hastings for the resources moreso than for the culture. Can you talk about this a bit more?
- We have heard from other interviews that people of color sometimes feel like "guests" in this community. Have you had this experience? How do you think a culture of whiteness might lead to microagressions or feelings of not belonging for residents of color?
- We've heard in other interviews that Hastings residents, particularly white residents, purport to be for racial justice, but don't actually want Hastings to change. Have you noticed any hesitance to change, and if so, why do you think that is?
- If a 3-story, 25 unit affordable housing development for families with vouchers were being built on your block and you and your neighbors gathered for a meeting about it, what would you say about the project?
  a. What do you think would come up at a meeting like this? What are concerns that might arise from a proposal like this?
- What do you think a genuine and productive conversation about the intersection of race and housing in Hastings would entail?
- Is there anything else you'd like the opportunity to share through this platform to your fellow Hastings residents/beyond?

Hastings student

Introduction:

- How long have you lived in Hastings? (If moved: where did you move from)
- What has your experience growing up in Hastings been like?
- How would you describe the town for someone who has never heard of it?
- How would you describe the school for someone new to it?

Affinity group:

- What motivated you to join the HHS Affinity Group? What has your involvement in the group been like?
- What have you noticed about people's comfort levels with talking about race in Hastings? How do you think this might differ between students and adults?
- What do you see as the relationship between housing and education?

- On the phone we talked about how people perceive people living in different parts of town, can you speak to that a little?
- I believe you said you've lived in different parts of town. Can you explain what you've noticed about that?
- Some students of color we've spoken to have talked about the sentiment of feeling like "a guest" in town. Have you felt that at all?

General:

- Do you learn about structural racism or issues related to race in your classes?
- What would you like to see change about the school environment?
- What do you think a productive conversation about racial inclusion in Hastings could look like?
- Do you think people in Hastings are open to change?
- What are some questions you'd like to pose to other students watching this about how they can work toward racial inclusion?

Housing scholar

Suburban enclaves as sites of white affluence and Black exclusion:
- Can you explain what the term "white flight" refers to?
- What and some of the ways that the government subsidized suburban living for white residents while denying the same opportunities to people of color? (e.g. subsidizing white homeownership, redlining, urban disinvestment, highway development). How did this contribute to the racial wealth gap?
- How are these concepts embedded in the built environment?
- Can you explain some of the current practices that exacerbate racial segregation in regions today? (e.g. exclusionary zoning)
- One way that practitioners/scholars frame suburbs are "places of opportunity." Can you explain some of the ways people living in these places work to "hoard" opportunity?
- Demographic data show that suburbs are becoming more diverse. Can you speak a little about these trends and what some of the theories are for why we're seeing increasing diversity in the suburbs?

Affordable & fair housing development:

- Our movie raises the question of "affordable for whom?" Can you explain how the term "affordable housing" can translate to middle-income housing in expensive suburbs?
- Relatedly, proponents of affordable housing in Hastings say things like "it's not like it's low-income housing." Have you seen affordable housing explained in this

way to make it "palatable" to white affluent people? What are some of the ways people use coded language to signal racial/economic biases when it comes to talking about housing.

- Can you explain the concept of affirmatively furthering fair housing?
- There were "preference categories" for affordable housing units until the county was sued in 2009 by HUD (e.g. reserved for people working or offering a service to the town). How can these exacerbate racial exclusion?
- Some say the town is already "built out," but the SF lots are large. Can you talk about how density fosters affordability & access? Relationship between zoning and density?
- Situate these conversations in the regional context — why is it important to build affordable housing in the suburbs of regions with an affordability crisis? Why shouldn't the city just do it all?

Discussion:

- Do you think that people who benefited from structural racism have a responsibility to wealth redistribution? Do you think this redistribution should happen at local scale?
- We're noticed a tension where people say they want racial inclusion but are extremely resistant to anything they fear would decrease their property values. Can you speak to this a bit? Relatedly, the support for national progressive policies but conservative hyperlocal housing practices.
- Can we talk about some of the normative assumptions that motivate integration rhetoric and policies that problematize current ways we discuss integration as the "solution" to housing segregation?
- What forward-thinking, exciting proposals would you suggest regions take to move away from "opportunity hoarding" communities that remain predominantly white?