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Blockbusting and the challenges faced by black families in building wealth through housing in the postwar United States

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Online Appendix: Blockbusting and the Challenges Faced by Black Families in Building Wealth through Housing in the Postwar United States

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Abstract

This online appendix outlines the data collection procedure for determining whether and in which neighborhoods and decades blockbusting occurred in the 60 most populous cities in the United States as of 1950.

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A1: Blockbusting Data Collection Procedure

Our process for identifying blockbusting activity within a city consisted of four steps.

- 1) We began with a simple Google search for “Blockbusting in [city]”. We carefully examined the first three pages of results. This yielded many of the most well-known instances of blockbusting, as reviewed in academic journals, books, newspaper articles, urban history websites, dissertations, and other sources.
- 2) As a second step, we expanded the Google search to include alternative terms, including “panic peddling,” “panic selling,” and “white flight.” Note that these terms are distinct from blockbusting, but discussions of those subjects often bring up sources that also discuss blockbusting.
- 3) The third step was to search for “Blockbusting in [city]” and alternative terms in Google Books. Again, we carefully examined the first three pages of results.
- 4) Finally, we searched for “Blockbusting in [city]” and alternative terms on Google Scholar, and examined the first three pages of results.

When we identified a potential textual source, we looked for evidence of blockbusting, the specific neighborhoods where it occurred, and the years in which it occurred. Blockbusting can be identified either by name or through the description of blockbusting tactics. It is difficult to verify these reports of blockbusting, but given that the practice was legal until 1968, we take most plausible accounts at face value, with the only exceptions being instances of conflicting accounts, which garnered closer examination. Reference to racial turnover within a neighborhood alone was not treated as a sufficient indicator for us to conclude that blockbusting activity had occurred.

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