REPAIR THE WORLD

סוכות – Sukkot – סוכות

GUIDE NO / 02

HISTORY OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION



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HISTORY OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION



Land ownership has always been restricted in the United States. Through the first half of the 19th century, as the United States continued to annex of Native lands, additional restrictions were placed on who could own property. Discrimination by race, religion, and country of origin was rampant, permitted by policies that either actively encouraged or did little to prevent it. Policies in the post-Civil War period continued to limit BIPOC property ownership.

Around the turn of the 20th century, a new wave of housing and land-use policies were introduced across the United States to facilitate the dispersal of households from crowded cities and encourage more property ownership. Underlying many of these laws was a concerted effort to segregate households by race and ethnicity. Industry groups rated neighborhoods with large concentrations of Black households and other distinct racial/ethnic subgroups as being the least stable and outlined these in red, giving rise to the term ‘red-lining’ to describe the exclusion of most households of color from accessing low-cost mortgage credit and better quality housing. Federal policies and funding were also instrumental in the displacement of communities of color, to make room for new highways, commercial centers, and other ‘urban renewal’ efforts.

Despite the 1968 federal Fair Housing Act making race-based housing discrimination illegal, disparate treatment of BIPOC in property and mortgage markets has continued over the last 50 years, through a combination of weak enforcement and regulation against discriminatory practices, and new policies built on the legacies of past inequities. The Fair Housing Act was passed without systems for holding perpetrators of housing discrimination accountable, nor for providing relief to families negatively affected. The Act did not define what constituted a discriminatory act, giving license to housing industry agents to develop alternative ways to disadvantage families of color, like neighborhood steering and direct marketing. The Fair Housing Act also provided no means to undo the damage of the prior two centuries of racist housing policies, which left a serious gap in which all subsequent housing policies were applied.

Houselessness is also experienced at a disproportionate rate by individuals identifying as members of the **LGBTQ+ community**. Transgender adults are almost three times as likely as their queer cisgender counterparts to be unhoused, and eight times as likely as heterosexual cisgender adults. There are even higher rates among BIPOC transgender individuals, though studies do not have concrete statistics on this. 17% percent of cisgender and genderqueer LGB individuals reported being unhoused at some point in their lives, which is more than twice the rate of the general population. As a result of family rejection, discrimination, criminalization and a host of other factors, LGBTQ youth represent as much as **40% of the homeless youth population**.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Judaism teaches us to value the preciousness of each human *(kavod ha'briyot)* and to put the safety of life above all other religious obligations. In the Jewish calendar, this year is a Sabbatical year (known as *shmita*), the seventh year in a seven-year agricultural cycle. Traditionally during the *shmita*, all debts are forgiven, agricultural lands lie fallow, private land holdings become open to the commons, and staples such as food storage and perennial harvests are redistributed and accessible to all. Just as Sukkot invites us to welcome in guests, the *shmita* invites us to hold ourselves accountable for the needs of our community. The first step to combating systemic injustice is to recognize that it is occurring, and take strides to reduce the immediate impact. This is both a communal and individual responsibility and each person in a community has a role to play in addressing it. Below is a non-exhaustive list of next steps you can take to start combating housing injustice in your community.

01. **Create care kits to donate to a local organization or to distribute to your unhoused neighbors.**

02. **Donate water bottles and can openers to your mutual aid groups and local food pantries.**

03. **Donate your time through volunteering in the housing justice sphere; check out what's happening in our Repair the World cities**

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04. Make eye contact with and/or say hello to your unhoused neighbors. Whether or not you have something tangible to give, each of us can recognize the preciousness of every human being.

05. Ask your unhoused neighbors what they want when you offer to buy them something to eat. This could also include cash or a gift card to a local food establishment so they maintain the dignity of choice in the process of receiving.

06. Commit to/register for your local Point in Time Count, the annual survey of houseless individuals in the United States. NOTE: In most cities, these take place in January.

01/ BUILDING CONNECTION

Unhoused members of our community deserve respect. Here are ways to empathetically engage and build connections with houseless community members.

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01. **Don't make assumptions.** It's hard to discern if someone is houseless by looking at them. Respectfully: say 'hi,' make eye contact, or send well wishes to people you meet regardless of their situation.

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02. **Respect their privacy.** People who live on the street may have limited privacy. Be mindful not to interrupt them, as they may not want to interact.

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03. **Ask them what they need.** People with unstable housing may not have access to storage for non-essentials. Ask what they need and then do your best to provide those supplies.

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04. **Seek a point of connection.** This can be as simple as a shared smile and eye contact, or a full conversation.

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05. **Work with a local organization.** Research which organizations are doing work in your community and support them

02/ DISTRIBUTE ESSENTIAL ITEMS AND ASSEMBLE CARE KITS

Distributing essential supplies (such as food and hygiene items) is one way to offer support to your unhoused neighbors. We recommend that you find a local organization serving the unhoused. They will know what items are the most requested in your area, and may have access to distribute the supplies directly.

Here are a list of items that may be useful for you to carry around to distribute to unhoused individuals requesting support:

- Cash (preferred) or debit-card style gift card
- Masks and hand sanitizer
- Hygiene items: toothbrush, toothpaste, bar soap, shampoo, conditioner, body lotion, shave gel, deodorant, comb, razor, lip balm, facecloth, bandages, tissues, nail clippers, hair ties, baby wipes, and menstrual care products (tampons and pads)
- A pair of new socks
- Bottle of water
- Non-perishable snacks with high nutritional value. High-protein options such as: beef jerky, tuna salad and cracker packs, peanut butter cracker packs, breakfast/protein/granola bars that won't melt, raisins, craisins, and other dried or fresh fruit.