

# Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte

Second Edition by UNC Press, 2020

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### About the book:

Explore how Charlotte grew big – and how it grew segregated, both by race and class.

“Tom Hanchett’s *Sorting Out the New South City* [discovers] surprising things about the development of Southern cities. The segregated Southern city of the mid-20th century originated not in the Old South or the early decades of the New; during those periods, the distribution of races throughout the city was in a ‘salt and pepper’ pattern. Urban segregation, Hanchett suggests, was a later creation, part of the rebellion against Reconstruction. Segregation was not a tradition; it was literally reactionary, a 20th-century reversal.”

--“An Enigmatic Land of Great Expectations,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2010.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/13/arts/design/13museum.html>

See also: “Segregation Had to Be Invented,” *The Atlantic*, February 17, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/02/segregation-invented/517158/>

*Note: At the end of this study guide you will find four maps in color. These were omitted from some paperback printings of the book and were poorly reproduced in the new Second Edition.*

### About the author:

Dr. Tom Hanchett came to Charlotte in 1981 to document older neighborhoods for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. Trained at Cornell, University of Chicago and UNC Chapel Hill, he specializes in community history, finding the rich stories in “everyday” buildings, food, music and more. He is best known for sixteen years as Staff Historian at Levine Museum of the New South and recently was named honorary Historian-in-Residence with the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

For a conversation with Tom Hanchett: <https://uncpressblog.com/2020/02/21/author-interview-thomas-w-hanchett-on-sorting-out-the-new-south-city/> See his website for additional writings about Charlotte, Southern culture and U.S. urban history: [www.HistorySouth.org](http://www.HistorySouth.org)

## Questions to discuss:

1. Today Charlotte is one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. What were some of the forces that pulled newcomers to this place during the 1700s – 1900s? Did Charlotte welcome newcomers? What has pulled you to the city you now call home (or kept you there, if you are a native)? Have you felt welcomed?
2. The idea of “community” is a central theme in this book. What makes you feel part of a community? Sometimes community is place-based, sometimes not. Can you think of examples of each in your own life?
3. In the 1870s, “the town’s enterprises were still small. Interactions between social groups remained deferential, with men of property holding control of political life.” As Charlotte grew, social relationships changed, the book suggests. How so?
4. The chapter *Insolence* is an important “hinge in history” as the author tells this story. How did the political events of the 1890s grow out of wider economic and social changes in Charlotte? How did they disrupt earlier assumptions?
5. “An ‘exclusive neighborhood’ ... I’d never thought about that term,” admits the author. “It’s just a synonym for ‘good neighborhood,’ right?” As you read Chapter 6 *Creating White-Collar Neighborhoods* and Chapter 9 *The Federal City* in particular, what are some of the ways that neighborhoods developed after 1898 excluded certain groups?
6. Charlotte’s African American neighborhood of Brooklyn came into being during the years around 1900. Why? In what ways was it a city-within-the-city? How did today’s Government Center come to replace it? Compare black Brooklyn with the white textile-mill district of North Charlotte, today known as NoDa; what similarities do you note? Differences?
7. It is tempting to blame the federal government for an array of problems today. The author does spotlight Washington’s actions – but not until Chapter 9 near the end of the book. What local actions (governmental and non-governmental) propelled the economic and racial sorting out of Charlotte *before* the Feds got involved? How did federal actions during the 1930s – 1960s exacerbate segregation?
8. Scholars often debate whether racial or economic forces play the bigger role in shaping American history. Does *Sorting Out the New South City* come down on one side or the other of that debate? Where do you come down?

9. In today's sorted-out city, it is easy to be a "prisoner of your zip-code," living most of your life among people who are much like you. To what extent is that true in your own life? Are there ways you get outside of that bubble?
10. What did you learn from *Sorting Out the New South City*? What surprised you most? Disturbed you most?

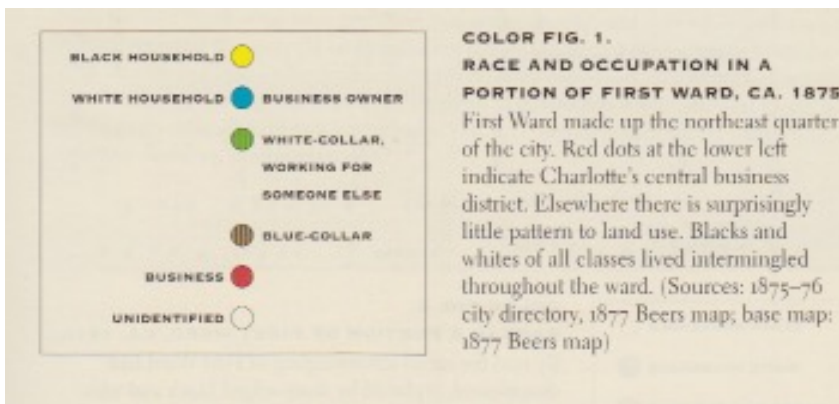
## Delve deeper

Want to follow up on some of the history introduced in *Sorting Out the New South City*?

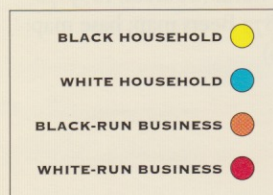
- **Learn more about government actions nationwide that promoted racial segregation.**  
Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Liveright Publishing, 2017).
- **Explore the 1898 White Supremacy Campaign in the only US city to experience an armed coup.**  
David Zucchino, *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* (Grove/Atlantic, 2020).
- **See how Charlotte schools have struggled with the legacies of segregation.**  
Pamela Grundy, *Color and Character: West Charlotte High and the American Struggle Over Educational Equality* (UNC Press, 2017).  
Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (University of South Carolina Press, 2006).
- **Hear what it's like to live in a neighborhood bypassed by economic opportunity.**  
Pam Kelley, *Money Rock: A Family's Story of Cocaine, Race and Ambition in the New South* (The New Press, 2018).
- **Trace how the deepening inequalities of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century South -- as discussed in this book and more -- spurred many African Americans to leave for other parts of the United States.**  
Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Random House, 2010).



(East Trade Street is at left border of map)





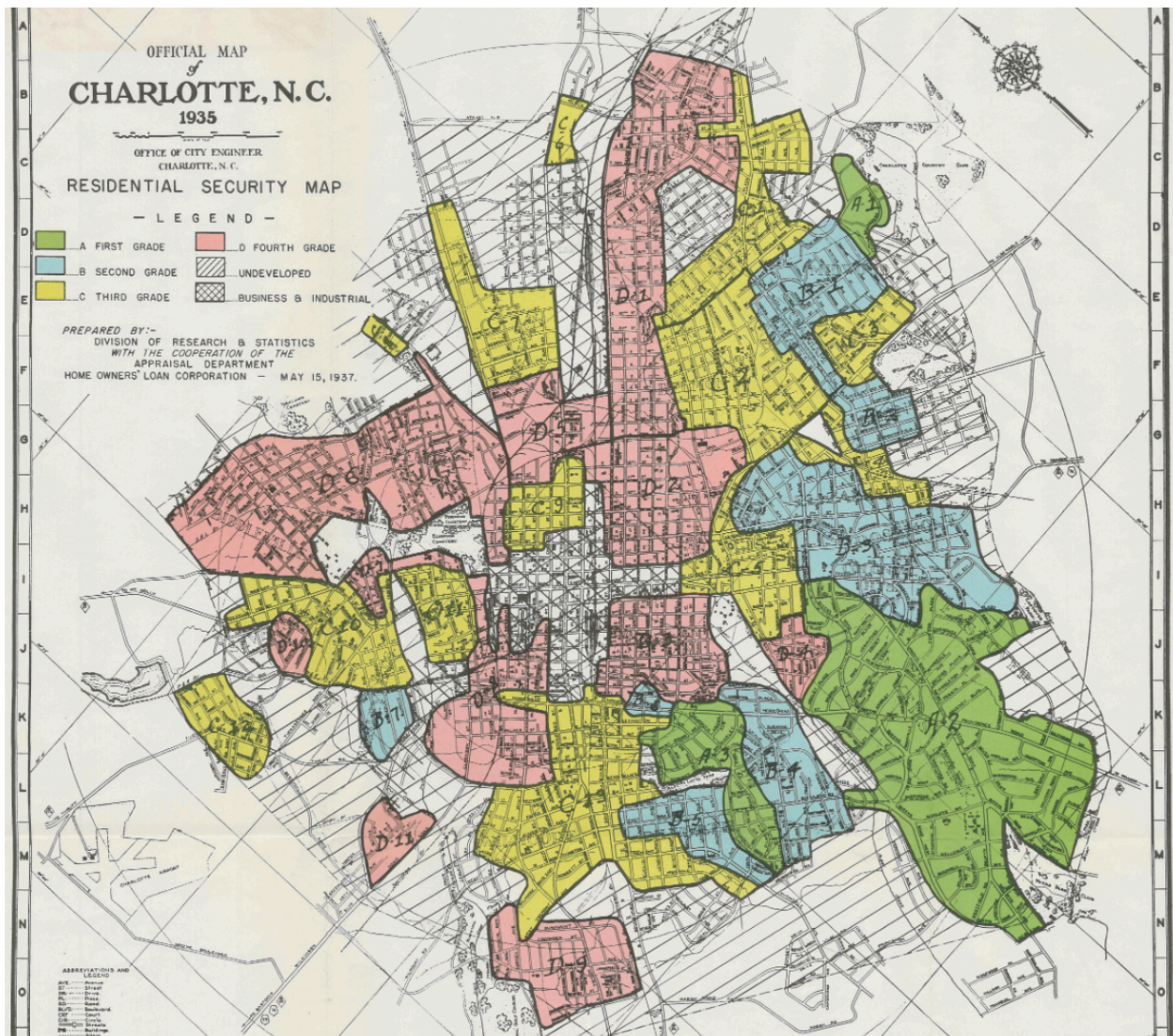


**COLOR FIG. 2.**

**RACE IN A PORTION OF FIRST WARD, CA. 1910**

By 1910 the racial intermingling of First Ward had disappeared, replaced by sharp-edged black and white districts. (Sources: 1910 city directory street list, 1911 Sanborn Insurance Map; Base map: 1911 Sanborn Insurance Map)





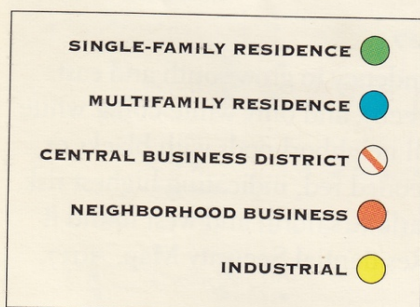
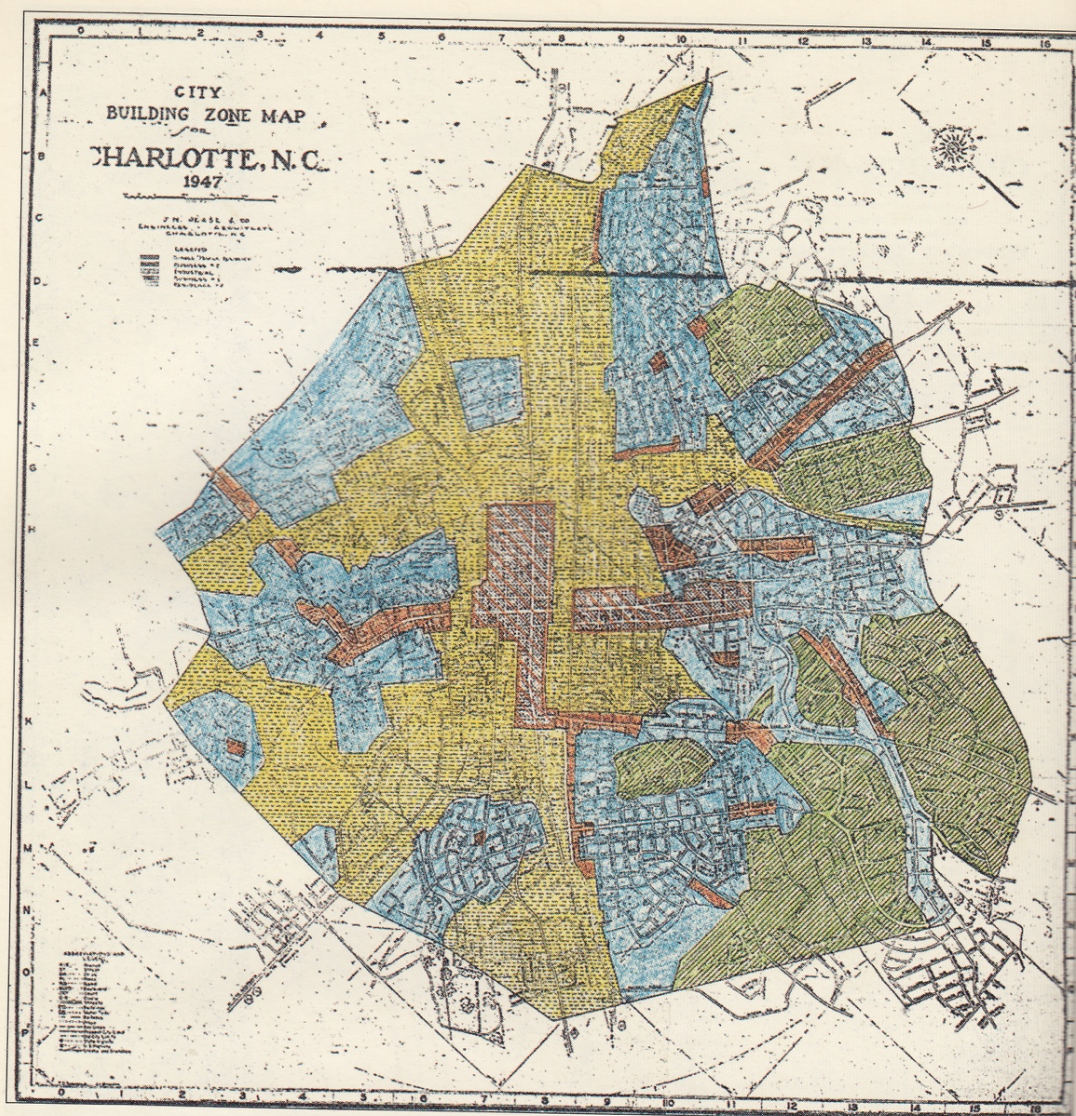
To access the map and background materials on-line:

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/35.218/-80.912&city=charlotte-nc&area=C2>

**COLOR FIG. 3. FEDERAL HOLC REDLINING, 1937**

The HOLC's credit-risk maps reinforced Charlotte's tendency to grow south and east. Only the wealthiest areas were given the best rating (green), and only white-collar white districts received the second-best designation (blue). All neighborhoods with blacks or large numbers of blue-collar renters, in contrast, were coded red, indicating highest risk. This "redlining" meant that after 1937, residents at Charlotte's north and west found it increasingly difficult to obtain house loans. (HOLC "Residential Security Map," 1937, National Archives, Washington, D.C.)





**COLOR FIG. 4.**

**BUILDING ZONE MAP OF CHARLOTTE, 1947**

Charlotte's 1947 zoning map further reinforced the tendency for the well-to-do to locate in the southeast. Despite the fact that at least one white-collar area existed off West Trade Street (Wesley Heights), only eastside neighborhoods were protected by single-family zoning. Many African American areas, most notably Brooklyn on the east side, were zoned industrial to encourage developers to buy existing homes and demolish them for other development. (*Charlotte News*, January 25, 1947 [color added to enhance clarity])