

DIGITAL INEQUITY IN AUSTIN, TEXAS  
UNPACKING THE HISTORY OF INJUSTICE

1928

MASTER PLAN CREATED

The 1928 Master Plan created a "Negro District" which required all Black Austinites to move to East Austin. This plan evolved into the segregation of the Hispanic/Latino community as well (2).



1953

UNDER-REPRESENTATION

In 1953, Austin adopted a model for city council based on "at large" positions, limiting place-based representation (4). In subsequent years "The Gentlemen's Agreement" was adopted. These systems prevented non-White groups from being able to win elections to the City Council.

1964

CIVIL RIGHTS

The Civil Rights Act was the second to the last act that threw out Jim Crow laws. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 dealt a crucial blow to discrimination in the workforce by making it illegal for any business, private or public, to practice discriminatory hiring (and firing) practices (9).

2000s

SOCIAL MEDIA

Modern social media emerges and quickly becomes a means for sharing information, making connections, and news updates. (11). Notably during the 2021 Winter Storm Uri many resources were being shared via social media and people without digital access were at a disadvantage.



FREEDMAN COMMUNITIES

Juneteenth, June 19, 1865 marked Black emancipation from slavery. An 1865 City Council meeting called for extreme policing and punishing of "idle" Black people (1); anti-Black violence was praised. During this time Freedman communities in Austin were established (1).

1865

REDLINING

Public policies like the National Housing Act of 1934, which established and reinforced housing segregation (also known as "redlining"), have contributed to unequal opportunities and have marginalized certain groups of



people (3). The echoes of this policy still influence our cityscapes. With educational funding tied to property taxes, and in extension the value of the housing in a neighborhood, redlining still contributes to the systematic denial of resources to Black and poor neighborhoods.

1934

DE-SEGREGATION OF SCHOOLS

Following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown vs. Board of Education, the AISD Board of Trustees originally adopted a policy of integration (5).



I-35 DIVIDE & TECHNOLIS  
BLUEPRINT

In 1954, construction of I-35 began in Texas. In Austin, this created the "I-35 divide", physically dividing the city. Infrastructural developments were primarily allocated to areas west of I-35, which became predominantly White (6,7).

In 1957, a group of private leaders created vision for Austin becoming a tech hub (8). Several think tanks were held to further this vision.

1954-1957

SILICON HILLS

Austin started as a high-tech hub in the '80s, and was known as "Silicon Hills." The initial tech industries hosted in Austin included semiconductor (AMD, Samsung, Motorola/Freescale/NXP, Applied Materials), enterprise software (IBM, Trilogy, Tivoli, National Instruments) and computer hardware (Dell, IBM, Apple) (10).



1980

DIGITAL INCLUSION PROGRAMS

The Clinton administration began plans for creating programs and infrastructure to address the digital divide. The Bush administration succeed and developed policies counter to that of the Clinton administration and favored free-market solutions (8).

1990s

1995

Incorporated in 1995 by legendary community leaders, Sue Beckwith and Ana Sisnett (1952-2009), Austin Free-Net was the first organization to wire city libraries and put computers in schools and community centers around Austin." (13)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The novel COVID-19 pandemic quickly shifted operations to virtual platforms and closed many public spaces. The pandemic became a public health crisis disproportionately impacting Austin's Black and Brown communities also exacerbates existing economic inequities (12).

2020



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