

Witness Moment - Home Appraisals



This is the time when we take a moment to look at structural racism, the system of laws, regulations, algorithms and rules which govern our society, which are invisible to white Americans, but harm African Americans every day.

For most of us middle class Americans, our homes are an important source of wealth, whether we sell them or refinance them to use the equity, or hand them on to our children. But this resource is not available equally to all of us. This is from an article which appeared in the New York Times on Aug 18 2020. I've shortened it for this service:

"During the summer of 2021 Nathan Connolly and his wife, Shani Mott, welcomed an appraiser into their house in Baltimore, hoping to refinance their mortgage.

They believed that their house was worth much more than the \$450,000 that they paid for it in 2017. Home prices had been on the rise nationwide since the pandemic. But, a Maryland appraisal company put the home's value at \$472,000, and in turn, their mortgage lender denied the couple a refinance loan.

Dr. Connolly said he knew why: He, his wife and three children, aged 15, 12 and 9, are Black. According to the complaint, Dr. Connolly, Dr. Mott and their three children were home during the visit, and their house was also filled with family photos, children's drawings of figures with dark skin, a poster for the film "Black Panther" and literature by Black authors.

Several months later, the couple applied for a new loan. This time they underwent a "whitewashing experiment," removing indications of Blackness from their home and replacing them with signifiers that a white family might live there instead. They cleared their bookshelves of works by Black authors. They asked white friends to share family photos and placed those in picture frames around the house; on their walls, they hung art bought at Ikea that showed white people.

"We had to have a conversation with our kids about why we're pulling down all their drawings," Dr. Connolly said. "It's very humiliating to strip yourself of your own home."

On the day of the second appraisal, they left their home and had the white colleague answer the door. The second appraiser provided a \$750,000 estimate.

The difference between the two appraisals is \$278,000. This is the cost of being Black in America. And I don't believe that is the biggest cost. Let me end by repeating this quotation from Dr. Connolly:

"We had to have a conversation with our kids about why we're pulling down all their drawings. It's very humiliating to strip yourself of your own home."

That's how structural racism steals wealth and damages souls.

Source:

Home Appraised with a Black Owner:\$472,000. With a White Owner: \$750,000. Debra Kamin Aug 18, 2022 **New York Times**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/realestate/housing-discrimination-maryland.html>