

# Not in My New York: Exclusionary Thinking and the Housing Crisis

by [Lark Zabel](#)

Across TikTok, young, wealthy influencers are joking about the difficulty of finding places to live in New York City (Diaz). I can't help but think that if people with six-figure salaries aren't able to easily access housing, how will the rest of us make it? Every time I see this kind of video, my heart breaks a little as I picture my future once I'm forced to move out of dorm housing and must possibly pay upwards of \$3,595 per month – the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the East Village, as of June 2023 (Zumper). But as an out-of-state college student, I am not among those who will feel the compounding effects of New York's housing crisis the most.

On January 10, 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul announced her proposal for a statewide strategy that would help address New York's dire housing crisis ("Governor Hochul"). Even if you don't already feel the looming effects of the crisis, it is clear that housing is becoming more inaccessible both city- and statewide. In April 2023, the *New York City True Cost of Living* released a study reporting that 50% of NYC residents – at least four million people – aren't able to afford their basic needs without familial or government help (Kucklick). Additionally, according to the Population Reference Bureau, more than half of New York State renters were cost-burdened in 2020, meaning they spent more than 30% of their income on rent (Martinez). Considering such statistics, it becomes obvious that something fundamental in the housing system is broken.

To address this "once-in-a-generation housing crisis," Governor Hochul's housing plan proposed building 800,000 new homes over the next ten years as well as implementing the New York Housing Compact (NYHC). The NYHC contains multiple strategies to loosen restrictions on development with a focus on transit-oriented development, to create incentives to achieve housing growth, and to implement explicit supports that back New York renters and buyers ("Governor Hochul"). Because suburban counties have been slower to develop housing units than their urban counterparts, the governor included a mandate in her proposed state budget for downstate municipalities – including New York City as well as suburbs served by the MTA – to increase their housing stock by 3% over the next three years or face new zoning approval for multifamily developments (Vielkind). As Governor

Hochul declared, “New York faces a housing crisis that requires bold actions and an all-hands-on-deck approach” (qtd. in “Governor Hochul”).

While many New Yorkers and politicians from both sides of the aisle agree that development is desperately needed to address this dilemma, Hochul’s approach was not universally accepted, particularly in downstate counties that border the city. State Senator Anthony Palumbo, a Long Island Republican, opined that “to paint the entire state with the same broad stroke . . . makes absolutely no sense,” and that while “we need additional housing . . . local control is critical” (qtd. in Brand). Some, like Rockland County Executive Ed Day, contested that while Governor Hochul’s plan “is well-intentioned,” it “is absurd” in its approach, citing a potential violation of the local government’s rights to home rule (qtd. in Brand). Especially among right-leaning politicians, there was a worry that the governor’s new plan would erode local power and damage the character of certain neighborhoods. Some Long Island officials argued that Governor Hochul’s plan would make Long Island a “sixth borough,” spurred by the new proposed housing goals and encouragement of development along MTA lines (Zaveri). In a recent interview with Huntington Supervisor Ed Smyth, the Long Island politician opposed the new plan and noted that “we do want to maintain a suburban way of life out here. People moved to Huntington for that” (qtd. in Vielkind). The ‘broad stroke’ approach to development, it is feared, could diminish property values and bring unwanted changes to the character of municipalities outside the city.

For some, this plan of action is promising. Ruth Anne Visnauskas, commissioner of the state’s housing and community renewal division, highlighted an important point by saying that “We have to have a long-term strategy that we haven’t had before” (qtd. in Zaveri). *New York Times* writer Mara Gay, who has covered many housing changes in New York, also expressed her support of Governor Hochul’s housing proposal in a recent article. She writes, “New Jersey enacted similar basic protections for renters years ago and continues to outpace New York in housing production. These protections are badly needed in New York, where price gouging is common and evictions are on the rise” (Gay, “NIMBYs”). Even if this plan doesn’t provide a perfect solution, it does provide a vision of what progressive policy could do for housing, both on a state and national level.

New York isn’t the only state struggling with the colossal issue of the housing crisis. Across the United States, Americans are struggling like never before. In 2022, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “The Housing Market Is Worse Than You Think,” which details how at the time mortgage rates had reached their highest rate since 2002 and “the typical home buyer in October paid 77 percent more on their loan, per month, than they would have” in 2021 (Chen). As Moody’s Analytics’ chief economist Mark Zandi proclaimed, “This may be the worst time in my living history for the home buyer – it just doesn’t make sense” (qtd. in Chen). Now, in 2023, the housing

market is even more alarming. Currently, we are experiencing a housing supply gap of 1.5 million homes, as estimated by Moody's Analytics (Calanog et al.). Our current crisis is partially attributed to the Great Recession, the United States' last housing crisis circa 2008. Following the crisis, "many homebuilders went out of business, and economists say we didn't build enough for a decade" (Arnold). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already alarming problem of meeting housing demand by causing both a shortfall of homebuilders and pandemic-fueled buying sprees. Interest rates began to rise in 2022, making the construction of homes trickier and deterring people from buying them (Cox). Policies that aim to alleviate the problem for future homeowners and renters have been popping up across the country, yet nothing on its own has seemed to crack this issue.

Though there are doubts about how to fix the housing crisis, the solution to closing the gap should be clear: build more houses. It should come back to the basic economic principles of supply and demand. Shortages, including in housing, occur when there is insufficient supply to meet the demand. If there is more housing than there are people wanting to rent or buy, prices will go down; if there is less housing than people interested, prices will soar. Research in major cities like San Francisco, New York, Boston, and other US metropolitan areas has been consistent in finding that new housing causes prices to become more affordable (Demsas).

But communicating such solutions is not simple, because the housing problem doesn't behave uniformly from coast to coast. In her article "It's Not A Housing Shortage," Carmel Richardson argues that the problem is largely local: "key housing markets have become trendy," which "has the effect of driving up prices in areas that otherwise would never have known such demand." To counter the notion that the United States has a shortage of affordable housing, Richardson offers the example of Tulsa, Oklahoma, as well as the state of Virginia, which are offering incentives and mortgage assistance to lure home buyers to a more reasonable market. In simplifying the housing crisis as one confined to "prime locations," though, Richardson might be distracting from the gravity of the crisis. In her article "Housing Breaks People's Brains," *The Atlantic* staff writer Jerusalem Demsas points out that "shortage denialism" like Richardson's can't stand up to "our personal experiences," which "compel us to recognize that housing scarcity is all around us" (Demsas). In an echo of the TikTok influencers mentioned above, Demsas refers to "viral clips of hundreds of yuppies lining up to tour a single Manhattan apartment." Even if such scenes are concentrated in typically high-demand areas, the housing shortages are still real.

In her article, Demsas links shortage denialism to "supply skepticism," defined in a recent study from the University of California as "a belief that new market-rate housing will cause prices and rents for existing homes to rise" (Nall et al. 10). Indeed, University of California professors have found that many Americans have a "misunderstanding of

housing markets” (4). In two nationwide surveys they found that 30-40% of surveyed Americans display supply skepticism, believing “contrary to basic economic theory and robust empirical evidence” that if new housing were built around them, rent and housing costs would actually rise (6-7). The study found that such “counterfactual” assumptions are specific to housing as, when asked about other markets, respondents “generally gave correct answers to questions about supply shocks” (4). In the same study, researchers note a key finding that “the mass public tends to personalize and moralize economic phenomena.” They cite an evolutionary theory that describes a “human mind that is highly evolved for cooperative behavior in small groups . . . but that has little aptitude for systems-level thinking” (8). Here, people reject housing policy from fear of possible ulterior profit motives that cloud the reality of genuine shortages (8).

New York government officials opposed to Hochul’s housing plan express these fallacies, according to the *New York Times* writer Gay, and more: an overtone of the “racist housing policies . . . which have helped make the region among the most segregated in the United States” (“NIMBYs”). In a hearing concerning the housing proposal in the capital city of Albany on March 1, 2023, State Senator Jack Martins, a Republican from Nassau County, said, “We see it as an attack on our suburban communities,” in response to development plans. Similarly, Republican State Senator Pamela Helming, who represents the Rochester suburbs, cited retention of the character of the community as a reason to oppose the plan (“NIMBYs”). Under the guise of wanting to maintain the ‘character’ of neighborhoods, Gay claims, “New York officials [are] defending zoning laws written to keep Black, Hispanic, Jewish, Asian and other Americans from sharing in the prosperity and opportunity of the country’s suburbs,” thus revealing a layer of hypocrisy in their arguments (“NIMBYs”).

For Gay, the demographics most resistant to Governor Hochul’s plan fall under the umbrella of NIMBY. This is an acronym for Not In My Backyard: a phenomenon and colloquialism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that signifies “persons who object to the siting of something they regard as detrimental or hazardous in their own neighborhood, while by implication raising no such objections to similar developments elsewhere” (“Nimby”).

A historical counterpart to NIMBY is redlining: a racist housing policy initiated during the Great Depression. As part of the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) under the National Housing Act of 1934 to promote ownership through federal backing of loans (Little). The FHA, in conjunction with the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), created a system of housing segregation wherein Black Americans’ neighborhoods were outlined in red, giving birth to the name ‘redlining.’ Within this system, neighborhoods and zoning were created based on “risk factor.” These risks included ethnic and racial “infiltration,”

immigrant population, amount of “relief families” (those who use government assistance), and type of housing (i.e. multi-family) (Daugherty and McGann). By these definitions provided by the HOLC and restrictive zoning, it is clear that racism, classism, and xenophobia have been intrinsically tied to American urban planning.

This exclusionary thinking also greatly influenced suburban growth. At that same time, middle-class families were moving just outside the city to single-family plots. This move was almost exclusive to white families, as the FHA prohibited Black families from buying homes in the suburbs during the 1940s, '50s, and '60s (Gross). Because of this restriction, there was no way for Black people to gain access to desirable housing in the first place, let alone own land that would economically benefit them through equity appreciation in the future. In 1968, the Fair Housing Act outlawed racial discrimination in housing, though the framework to continue de facto segregation in the housing market persisted (Gross). Gay points out that due to zoning laws and rising prices without the subsidies that were afforded to white families, Black families were priced out of suburbs. She writes, “Even if a suburb might no longer be allowed to overtly ban Black families, limiting development to large and expensive homes could achieve a similar goal” (Gay, “The Era”). Essentially, Black folks were left without any mechanism to gain access to the exclusive club that is home ownership in the United States.

Property ownership is central to the so-called American dream and its ideal of middle-class prosperity: picture a single-family home with a lawn and white picket fence. Starting in the '40s, this white picket fence became synonymous with the American dream. The iconography has grown in pop culture to act as a visual shorthand for the “good life” and American success (Dolan). But as we inspect who actually has access to the dream of property ownership and the wealth accumulation that comes with it, we see the exclusion of lower-income people and Black and Brown folks. The white picket fence, then, becomes both a literal and metaphorical marker of exclusion. Fences isolate and segregate communities while also acting as a symbolic divide between those who are able to access success in the United States and those who cannot.

Plans that move housing in a new direction of accessibility, like that of Governor Hochul, are integral to breaking down historical racist barriers. Predictably, the governor’s ambitious plan did not find the support it needed from lawmakers. Ellen Davidson, an attorney at The Legal Aid Society of New York, noted in reaction to the failed proposal that “The suburbs have been very clear they don’t want to be forced to do anything. . . . It’s clear the suburban legislators are the big winner” (qtd. in David). Development will always be a thorny issue, as it exposes a tension between the need for housing equity and the rights of property owners. Still, it may be that broad strokes like those proposed by Governor Hochul are the most viable step, because no matter the arguments on either side, a solution to this crisis is desperately needed.



---

## Works Cited

Arnold, Chris, et al. "There's a Massive Housing Shortage across the U.S. Here's How Bad It Is Where You Live." *NPR*, 14 July 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/07/14/1109345201/theres-a-massive-housing-shortage-across-the-u-s-heres-how-bad-it-is-where-you-l>.

"Average Rent in East Village, New York, NY and Cost Information." *Zumper*, 19 May 2023, [www.zumper.com/rent-research/new-york-ny/east-village](http://www.zumper.com/rent-research/new-york-ny/east-village).

Brand, David, and Jon Campbell. "Gov. Hochul's Ambitious Housing Plan Meets Suburban Blockade." *Gothamist*, 30 Jan. 2023, <https://gothamist.com/news/gov-hochuls-ambitious-housing-plan-meets-suburban-blockade>.

Calanog, Victor, et al. "The Outlook for the Housing Market." *Moody's Analytics*, 16 Feb 2023, <https://cre.moodyanalytics.com/insights/research/q42022-the-outlook-for-the-housing-market/>.

Chen, Stefanos. "The Housing Market Is Worse than You Think." *The New York Times*, 4 Nov. 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/realestate/housing-market-interest-rates.html>.

Collins, Terry. "The US housing shortage is 'awful' and will likely get worse with no apparent end in sight." *USA Today*, 26 Oct. 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2022/10/26/housing-market-worsens-mortgage-interest-rates/10588515002/>.

Cox, Jeff. "Federal Reserve Approves First Interest Rate Hike in More than Three Years, Sees Six More Ahead." *CNBC*, 16 Mar. 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/16/federal-reserve-meeting.html>.

David, Greg. "How Hochul's Housing Dream Died: Backlash Surged beyond the 'burbs." *The City*, 21 Apr. 2023, [www.thecity.nyc/housing/2023/4/21/23693384/how-hochul-housing-dream-died-suburb-backlash](http://www.thecity.nyc/housing/2023/4/21/23693384/how-hochul-housing-dream-died-suburb-backlash).

Daugherty, Jack, and Shaun McGann. "Federal Lending and Redlining." *On the Line*, edited by Jack Daugherty, Amherst College Press, 2023, <https://ontheline.trincoll.edu/lending.html>.

Demas, Jerusalem. "Housing Breaks People's Brains." *The Atlantic*, 23 Nov. 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/11/us-housing-supply-shortage-crisis-2022/672240/>.

Demopoulos, Alaina. "What Does \$5,000 a Month Get You? The Viral Star Bargaining into New York Apartments." *The Guardian*, 16 Nov. 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/nov/16/caleb-simpson-viral-tiktok-videos-nyc-apartments>.

Diaz, Adriana. "NYC TikTok Influencers Struggle to Rent in the City Despite Six-Figure Incomes." *New York Post*, 5 Dec. 2022, <https://nypost.com/2022/12/05/nyc-tiktok-influencers-are-struggling-to-rent-in-the-city/>.

Dolan, Michael. "How Did the White Picket Fence Become a Symbol of the Suburbs?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, Apr. 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-white-picket-fence-180971635/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20white%20picket%20fence%20is,blend%20into%20the%20American%20setting.%E2%80%9D>.

Gay, Mara. "NIMBYs Threaten a Plan to Build More Suburban Housing." *The New York Times*, 22 Mar. 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/22/opinion/new-york-housing-crisis-kathy-hochul.html>.

—. "The Era of Shutting Others Out of New York's Suburbs Is Ending." *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/21/opinion/housing-new-york-city.html>.

Gross, Terry. "A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America." *NPR*, 3 May 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgotten-history-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america>.

"Governor Hochul Announces Statewide Strategy to Address New York's Housing Crisis and Build 800,000 New Homes." *New York State*, 10 Jan. 2023, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-statewide-strategy-address-new-yorks-housing-crisis-and-build-800000>.

Kucklick, Annie, and Lisa Manzer. "Overlooked & Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in New York City 2023." Center for Women's Welfare at University of Washington School of Social Work, Apr. 2023, [issuu.com/uwnyc/docs/nyctcl2023?fr=sNDgwMjQ2OTU4Ng](https://issuu.com/uwnyc/docs/nyctcl2023?fr=sNDgwMjQ2OTU4Ng).

Little, Becky. "How a New Deal Housing Program Enforced Segregation." *History Channel*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/housing-segregation-new-deal-program>.

Martinez, Matthew, and Mark Mather. "U.S. Housing Cost Burden Declines Among Homeowners but Remains High for Renters." *Population Reference Bureau*, 15 Apr. 2022, <https://www.prb.org/articles/u-s-housing-cost-burden-declines-among-homeowners-but-remains-high-for-renters/>.

Nall, Clayton and Elmendorf, Christopher S. and Oklobdzija, Stan. "Folk Economics and the Persistence of Political Opposition to New Housing." *UCSB Pahl Initiative*, 2022.

"Nimby." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Dec. 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/245895>.

Parrot, Jim, and Mark Zandi. "Overcoming the Nation's Daunting Housing Supply Shortage." *Moody's Analytics*, Mar. 2021, <https://www.moodyanalytics.com/-/media/article/2021/Overcoming-the-Nations-Housing-Supply-Shortage.pdf>.

Richardson, Carmel. "It's Not a Housing Shortage." *The American Conservative*, 23 Sep. 2022, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/its-not-a-housing-shortage/>.

Vielkind, Jimmy. "Kathy Hochul's Plan to Force NYC Suburbs to Approve More Housing Sparks Battle." *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 Mar. 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kathy-hochuls-plan-to-force-nyc-suburbs-to-approve-more-housing-sparks-battle-c40c571f>.

Zabel, Lark, and David (Mac) McCarty. "NYC Housing Crisis." 3 May 2023.

Zaveri, Mihir. "Aggressive New York Housing Plan Borrows Ideas from Other States." *The New York Times*, 14 Feb. 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/14/nyregion/housing-ny-hochul-massachusetts-california.html>.