

Purchasing or owning a home is considered to be the key to an intricate part of the American Dream, that would be to one day own a house in neighborhood both of which you are proud of. But, over the last 100 years this has not been the case for many people due to discrimination based on ideas such as race, sex or even whether you have kids or not. Well, that is what the Fair Housing Act is trying to abolish through laws against redlining and steering.

For my parents, the American Dream came true in 1991. I can't express how happy I am that it did. Since I was born, in 2001, I have lived in the same house, where I learned to shoot a basketball, throw a football, and shoot a bow. These memories mean more to me than anything I could not imagine what life would be like if I did not have this home, this space. For many kids their childhood reality looks much different. Due to discrimination, they can't have these experiences because they are busy moving from rental house to rental house. The Fair Housing Act provides the stability these kids need most and helps them create these memories that are what make a childhood a childhood. You wouldn't want these kids to look back and remember moving around all the time or never being able to do the things other kids could do... would you? Children that move around a lot don't always have a chance to make friends because by the time that he or she starts to make friends, their parents are already looking for a different place of residence.

People say that the future is always going to be better, but how can this be the case when discrimination is such a problem still. When Martin Luther King Jr. was alive fighting for equal rights, he probably never thought that this would be the outcome. Now we have come a very long way since having different bathrooms due to racial inequality. But how can realtors or insurance agents live with themselves knowing that they are potentially taking a child's childhood away from them by saying "you can't buy this house due to the color of your skin"? How can people think this is fair? What makes them better than the buyer? How are they any different? Discrimination can also come through familial status to, realtors use steering or showing other places to a family because neighbors don't want children running around and playing outside. Well, newsflash neighbors, you could have kids someday too so what's your plan if that happens? On the insurance agents side of things, many times they will say unless "you own a home in this specific area we will not insure you". Now this process, called redlining, has now been made illegal. Just because someone has a disability or is a single parent and can't afford to live in an affluent neighborhood, it does not mean they can't pay their insurance bill or be contacted if need be. So what gives insurance companies the right to decide what people or families are better than others?

Last year alone there were 8,368 reports of discrimination while looking for a house. This number reflects just the claims that were reported. If we were to add the acts of discrimination that weren't reported to those that were, assuming that only half the people filed complaints, there could have been over 17,000 cases in 2014! In 2010 there were over 10,000 cases reported 48% of which were disability related and another 34% race related. We can see through these statistics that we are making progress, but is it fast enough? Everyday individuals and families are turned down because they have a disability or because they have 'too many kids'. But the numbers are shrinking which means that the Fair Housing Act is making a difference. Kids all around are growing up with an actual childhood. I'm not saying that the only way a child can be happy is if they have a actual home, but it sure makes childhood a lot more simple, stable, and safe. When a child has a house that he or she can call home, without having to worry about whether they will be there a month from now, it takes a load off their shoulders. I had a friend that all through his childhood he had to worry about his home and whether his mom had enough money or not to stay where they were. I helped out as much as I could but I just couldn't do enough and he had to move away. This happened for personal reasons but I could not imagine if his mom was denied an apartment or house due to the fact that she was a single mom with two children.

Before we were told about this essay competition we were asked the question, "What does the Fair Housing Act mean to you?". At first, all I could think of was the basics: happy families and a fair chance. But throughout my time writing this paper, I realized that it's so much more than that. The Fair Housing Act is about giving children a chance to not have to worry about where they were going to live in a month or whether they were going to get a home or no because of their race or if they didn't have two parents in the home. Neither children nor adults should have to worry about these things. I know that my life would be completely different if I did not have a definitive home, that safe space I call my own. I am very grateful to have everything that I have and I realize now that many people aren't as fortunate. I guess my answer to "What does the Fair Housing Act mean to you?" is simple really... The Fair Housing Act means giving every child in every family an equal fighting chance to be happy, healthy and own their own home.