



A home in Westchester

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When Americans think of the federal government taking on locals to combat racism, they think of Ike sending troops into a Little Rock high school, of JFK sending the National Guard to Ole Miss or LBJ announcing on television the FBI's arrest of Klansmen for killing a Freedom Rider.

Now the Obama administration is arguing that the leafy hamlets of Westchester County are guilty of their own racial discrimination. And the Department of Housing and Urban Development is using all the power it has to bring the locals to heel.

The leverage comes from a 2009 consent decree designed to counter what HUD says is housing discrimination. The decree obligates Westchester to build 750 units of "affordable" housing in high-income, largely white neighborhoods and "market them aggressively" to minorities. The county is doing so, and is even ahead of schedule.

That hasn't satisfied HUD, because it's really after something different: a standard of discrimination based on statistics, not actual demonstrations of people who have been denied housing because of race. It's called "disparate impact."

In other words, what we have here is social engineering. As one of its officials has admitted, HUD wants "to remove zip codes as a factor in the quality of life in America." In other words, anyone has the right to live anywhere — even if he can't afford it. So even though blacks and Hispanics and other racial minorities who can afford Westchester housing prices are as welcome as anyone, HUD sees only racism.

Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino has been fighting this, and losing, for some years. The latest wrinkle was a threat from Justice to hold Astorino in contempt if he did not introduce legislation that would require landlords to accept Section 8 vouchers — public assistance — for rentals.

If Westchester loses, it will have national implications. Because if a concept as arbitrary as disparate impact becomes the measure of discrimination, local authorities everywhere will have no effective defense against bureaucrats in Washington bent on

finding racism to justify imposing their own ideological agendas.

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