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'Not Wanted': Black Applicants Rejected for Trump Housing Speak Out

Litigation sparked by discrimination allegations stretched into the mid-1980s.





— Annette Fortt

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In 1973, New York City school teacher Annette Gandy Fortt was looking for a decent place to live. A listing for an apartment in a building owned by Donald Trump's father, Fred, caught her eye – but she says the super told her there were no units available.

"I was black," Fortt said recently. "I was not wanted."

It wasn't just a gut feeling. After Fortt was turned away from the Queens apartment building twice, the New York City Human Rights Commission sent a white person to the property to apply for an apartment – and the tester was offered the apartment, according to court papers.

The commission took on Fortt's case, and she says a young Donald Trump appeared with a lawyer at a hearing on behalf of the family real estate company, Trump Management.

Her case also became part of a federal racial discrimination lawsuit filed by the Justice Department against Donald and Fred Trump that was resolved with a consent decree two years later in which they agreed to terms aimed at preventing discrimination.



— Annette Gandy Fortt

That lawsuit is the basis of a new video from Hillary Clinton's campaign, released Tuesday. The video, which features a tearful interview with a retired nurse who says she was denied an apartment, notes that while the racial discrimination allegations began when Fred Trump was running the company, they persisted after his son became president of the firm.

Trump denies the company discriminated against blacks.

"There is absolutely no merit to the allegations," his spokeswoman, Hope Hicks, said in an email to NBC News. "This suit was brought as part of a nationwide inquiry against a number of companies, and the matter was ultimately settled without any finding of liability and without any admission of wrongdoing whatsoever."

Clinton has brought up the discrimination case before, saying during a debate last month that Trump started his real-estate career by getting sued for refusing housing to blacks. In response, Trump portrayed the litigation as no big deal and said dispensing with the suit without admitting wrongdoing "was very easy to do."

Court documents, however, show that putting the allegations behind him was tougher than the candidate suggests.

Three years after the consent decree, the Justice Department went back to court to say the Trumps were not complying with the settlement. The claim was not resolved before the decree expired.

Then, in 1982, Trump Management and eight other New York City landlords were hit with a class-action discrimination lawsuit by a housing advocacy group. Two years later, they settled by agreeing to rent one of every four vacant apartments in some neighborhoods to blacks, according to a New York Times account from the time.

The breadth of the allegations doesn't surprise Maxine Brown, who applied for an apartment in a Queens building owned by Fred Trump in 1963.

"I was turned away because of my color," said Brown, 86, whose account was first reported by the New York Times in August.



— Maxine Brown

Brown's application was taken by rental agent Stanley Leibowitz, who said there's no doubt Brown didn't get the apartment because she's black – and no doubt that Donald Trump, then just 17, knew that.

"Mr. Trump and his son Donald came into the office. I asked what I should do with this application because she's calling constantly and his response to me was, 'You know I don't rent to the N-word. Put it in a drawer and forget about it,'" Leibowitz, 89, told NBC News.

"Donald Trump was right alongside his father when I was instructed to do that."



— Stanley Leibowitz

Brown also filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission and was offered an apartment after the hearing; she still lives there. Fortt also took an apartment in a Trump building as a settlement.

"I wasn't interested in suing Trump. I wasn't interested in getting money. What I wanted was a place to live," she said.

Fortt, now 72, has kept the papers from her case for more than 40 years but said she would not have spoken up about her experience if Donald Trump hadn't brushed off the allegations that resurfaced during his presidential run.

"I think it's important that history not be erased," she said.



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