



# Opening Acts

*A Publication of the Fair Housing Justice Center Inc.*

## Lawsuit Against Real Estate Broker and Bronx Housing Cooperatives Alleges Race Discrimination

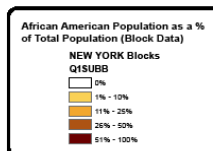
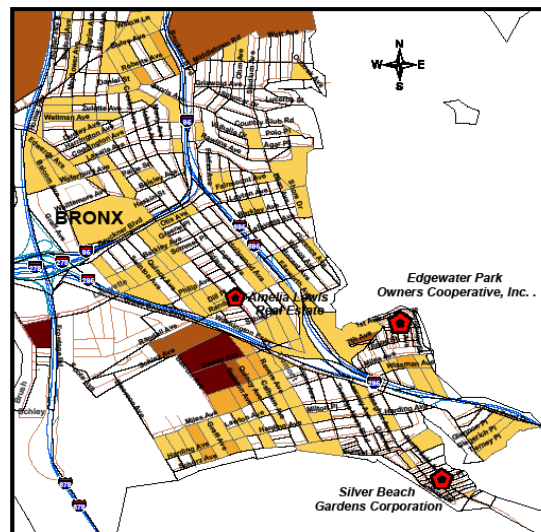
On February 4, 2010, the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) filed a federal race discrimination lawsuit against a real estate broker, Amelia Lewis, and two housing cooperatives, Silver Beach Gardens Corporation and Edgewater Park Owners Cooperative, Inc., located in the Throgs Neck area of the Bronx, New York. The suit alleges that both housing cooperatives utilize a policy requiring buyers to have three (3) letters of reference from existing shareholders to purchase a house in the co-ops. The suit also alleges that, while African Americans own 35% of all owner-occupied housing units in the Bronx, less than 1% of the more than 1100 homes in Silver Beach Gardens and Edgewater Park are owned by African Americans.

In 2009, the FHJC conducted a testing investigation into the sales practices of Amelia Lewis, who has allegedly sold homes in the two co-ops for 45 years. FHJC sent a white couple and a comparably qualified African American couple to Ms. Lewis' real estate office to inquire about purchasing a home in the co-ops. The complaint alleges that Ms. Lewis told the white testers about available co-op homes in both Silver Beach Gardens and Edgewater Park, arranged for white testers to view homes for sale in their price range, and encouraged them to purchase a home in these neighborhoods. According to the complaint, when the white couple told Ms. Lewis that they did not know anyone currently residing in the co-op neighborhoods, the broker told them not to worry because the seller could provide one reference letter, even without meeting the white couple, and the broker would assist them to obtain the remaining required letters from other shareholders.

When Ms. Lewis met with the African American tester couple, she refused to show them any available co-ops in either Edgewater Park or Silver Beach Gardens. The complaint alleges that Ms. Lewis told the African American couple that they would not be happy living in the co-ops because the people there are "prejudiced" and "it's like Archie Bunker territory." The complaint further alleges that Ms. Lewis told the African American couple that it would be impossible for them to obtain the three required reference

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Location of Amelia Lewis Real Estate, Edgewater Park Co-op & Silver Beach Gardens Co-op in the Bronx, NY



Data Source: 2000 Census

### *Bronx Co-op Case Continued:*

letters since they did not know any current co-op shareholder and she did not offer to assist them. Instead, Ms. Lewis steered the African American couple to a single family home that was in disrepair and above their price range located outside of the co-ops in a more racially diverse neighborhood in the Bronx, according to the complaint.

The federal lawsuit seeks an injunction to stop the discrimination, relief to prevent future discriminatory acts, recovery of compensatory and punitive damages, and reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. The plaintiffs, FHJC and two African American testers, are represented by the law firm of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff and Abady LLP.