

National Committee Against
Discrimination in Housing
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Housing
File
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SOME FACTS ON
SEGREGATED HOUSING IN AMERICA

Discrimination and segregation in housing because of race, creed or national origin is basic to the race relations problem in America.

The cities of the United States are essentially communities of neighborhoods. Their populations are served by our social, educational and religious institutions on a neighborhood basis. Thus segregated neighborhoods compel most other forms of segregation--in employment, in education, in churches, in health and welfare services. Harlem's public schools are as segregated as Atlanta's. A church in Chicago's black belt can be interdenominational but never interracial.

Today the American ghetto is the chief cause of racial friction in our land. Most of the reported racial violence in 1952 was rooted in the efforts of minority Americans to escape from ghetto living.

Segregation builds walls that divide our citizens. Children on both sides of the wall develop fears and resentments that last a lifetime. Segregation corrupts the country's richest resource: people. It undermines the social and economic health of our cities. The overcrowding caused by segregated neighborhoods breed blight and slums, spawning crime, juvenile delinquency, poor health and high mortality. From the financial point of view, slums cost more in municipal health, welfare, police and fire services, and because of their dilapidation yield lower taxes to the cities.

City planning cannot be effective within the confines of segregated communities. In some cities needed improvements are not made for fear of disturbing the racial status quo. In others, where slum clearance becomes Negro clearance, for every acre cleared two are scarred by ghetto blight.

Housing discrimination is a major barrier to the development of a total housing program for the nation. As long as close to 25,000,000 minority Americans are limited in the right to buy or rent shelter in accordance with their means, a sound American housing program is impossible of achievement.

The American ghetto is the visible symbol of democracy's failure for all the peoples of the world. It provides fuel for enemy propaganda. It bewilders and frightens friends who look to us for leadership in democratic living. For self interest as well as conscience this contradiction between our country's democratic creed and its practices should be removed.

HOUSING CONDITIONS OF NONWHITES

Negroes and other minority Americans occupy housing that is substantially poorer in quality than housing of other Americans. The 1950 census indicates that the dilapidation of nonwhite housing outside rural areas was five times as high for Negroes as it was for whites, and the proportion of homes lacking piped running water, private flush toilet, bathtub or shower was more than twice as high.

Overcrowding was more than four times as high among nonwhite renting families as for whites. This represented an actual increase of overcrowding during the decade

1940-1950 from 20% to 23% for nonwhites while for whites there was a decrease. The nonwhite population increased at a faster rate than the number of occupied dwelling units (15% against 10%), whereas the reverse was true for whites (14% against 23%).

These figures, which are culled from "Housing of the Nonwhite Population 1940-1950" published by the Housing and Home Finance Agency, would undoubtedly be far more extreme if data for Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were available.

THE NONWHITE HOUSING DOLLAR

The housing dollar in the nonwhite hand does not command as much or as good housing as that same dollar in the white hand. This is an inevitable result of a local housing market differentiated on the basis of race. Thus, nonwhites have been excluded from better housing and newly developed neighborhoods and restricted to the poorer housing largely in crowded, blighted areas. They have received less housing value, less home financing and less favorable home financing terms. At the same time Negroes have more money to pay for decent housing than ever before. In the decade 1940-1950 their average incomes trebled. More than 300,000 Negro families can afford to pay monthly rents of \$70.00 or more. Nevertheless, they are still largely confined to slum or near slum neighborhoods.

INMIGRATION AND SEGREGATION

Minority families are moving to the cities with increasing rapidity. In the period 1940-1950 the urban nonwhite population increased by 3,000,000 of which more than 1,700,000 migrated to cities outside the South. Following are the twelve largest cities of the country with the percentage increase of nonwhites between 1940 and 1950: New York City, 62.4; Chicago, 80.5; Philadelphia, 49.5; Los Angeles, 116.2; Detroit, 101.4; Baltimore, 35.9; Cleveland, 76.1; St. Louis, 41.4; Boston, 68.6; San Francisco, 155.9; Pittsburgh, 32.9; and Milwaukee, 144.7.

At the same time, living space in urban areas is being closed to minority families, both in the center and at the periphery of the cities. New construction is almost completely closed to nonwhites. Of the 9,000,000 new homes built between 1935 and 1950 less than 1% were open to Negroes. No more than 60,000 of the 2,900,000 homes benefitting from FHA insurance during the period 1935-1952 were available to nonwhites, and the majority of these units were built in segregated neighborhoods in the Southeast. Many newly built northern suburbs are as closed to Negroes as the curfew towns of the South. In Long Island William Levitt built a city of 25,000 homes for whites only. He is building another in Levittown, Pennsylvania. These closed cities are typical of communities which are springing up all over the country.

Deplorable slums are often concentrated in the center of American cities. Included among them are areas occupied predominantly by nonwhite families. These are frequently chosen for federally assisted slum clearance projects, although they are often not the only parts of the city ripe for clearance. By March 31, 1953, data concerning the characteristics of 92 project areas approved by the Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment were available. 64.6% of all the families scheduled for displacement were nonwhite. While a little more than half of the displaced minority families appear to be eligible on an income basis for public housing, family composition, stability factors, and the recent drastic cuts in federal appropriations for public housing will prevent many of them from achieving public housing occupancy. Very few of the ineligible displaced minority families will have enough means to occupy the new privately constructed redevelopment housing even where nondiscrimination laws exist. Thus, most displaced minority families will

find their only habitation in existing ghettos or so-called "transition areas." 53% of these areas are being redeveloped for residential purposes. At least nine which have racially mixed occupancy at the present time will be redeveloped on a segregated basis. At least three--the Medical Center project in Birmingham; the St. Louis Memorial Plaza project and the Waverly Place project in Baltimore--constitute straight Negro clearance. Several others involve space swapping.

Finally, our new defense cities are developing on a segregated basis. Housing for critical defense areas is programmed separately for whites and nonwhites. Less than 6% of the 97,215 units programmed as of February, 1953 are for nonwhite occupancy and no more than 1.5% of those constructed have been made available to nonwhite families.

Failure to provide housing for minority families in this instance has grave impact on employment patterns since without housing facilities, nonwhite workers are frequently not available for employment. In other instances defense industries use the housing shortage as an excuse for discrimination.

THE CHALLENGE CAN BE MET

As bad as the picture is, there are growing signs that people all over the country are ready to work for elimination of the American ghetto. The press, magazines, radio and television are giving the subject increasing attention. LIFE Magazine for October 27, 1952 featured a story of a mixed neighborhood calling it "the new kind of melting pot, where in addition to immigrant meeting American, Negro meets white." RED BOOK for September, 1952 calls segregation in housing the number one race relations problem for America. The April, 1953 issue of HOUSE AND HOME, a Luce publication, ran a feature story on the big untapped market for housing among nonwhites. Within the last two years there have been several national network programs on the subject and local radio and television stations have begun to devote increasing time to segregation in housing. Organizations are producing quantities of educational material on the subject. The National Committee alone has distributed more than 200,000 pieces of literature.

On the local level government agencies have increasingly passed laws, ordinances or resolutions relating to discrimination in public and publicly assisted housing. There are now more than thirty pieces of legislation on the books.

The most important single fact in this picture is that thousands of American families are living harmoniously in interracial neighborhoods all over the country. These communities exist in such unlikely places as Houston, Texas and Washington, D. C. Integrated public housing has gone way beyond the experimental stage. Twenty-seven thousand Negro families are living in completely integrated projects. It is significant also that whereas in 1942 there were only 21 integrated Federal public housing projects, in 1953 there were 268. Finally, pioneer builders have erected private housing developments which are successfully operating on a mixed basis. Queensview in Long Island, Flamingo Courts in Philadelphia and Stuyvesant Town in New York City are proving that middle class interracial communities are practical and profitable.

Researchers and reporters are using this evidence to prove that property values are not affected by the mixture of races; that violence is not the inevitable result of attempts to democratize housing; that crime, low health rates and a host of other anti-social activities flow from slums rather than the people who live in them.

Even the banks and real estate boards are showing some signs of interest. In June, 1949, a National Association of Real Estate Boards news release urged that local boards "undertake to provide better housing for Negro families." In December, 1949, the Mortgage Banker announced, "It is the policy of the Mortgage Bankers Association to make loans available to all people without distinction as to race, color or creed within the limitation of sound lending practices." In January, 1951, NAREB released its revised Code of Ethics eliminating the reference to "race or nationality" from Article 34 which had formerly stated: "A realtor should not be instrumental in introducing into any neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood." A prominent official of New York City's largest Savings Bank has expressed the feeling that on the basis of his bank's salutary experience with financing interracial housing developments, such developments may well be the answer to the complicated relocation problem for redevelopment projects.

These changes in attitude have been reflected in recent government activity. The Federal National Mortgage Association recently allocated 17,000,000 dollars for cooperative housing available to nonwhites. The Federal Housing Administration has doubled its racial relations staff, and is scheduling conferences with representatives of mortgage interests to see whether more credit can be made available to minority families. Although still vastly inadequate, this is a radical change from FHA's former opposition to insuring mortgages for Negro home buyers.

The country is ready for a change.

*The most recent publications are Values in Transition Areas: Some New Concepts, by Belden Morgan, in THE REVIEW of the Society of Residential Appraisers, March 1952; Effects of Nonwhite Purchases on Market Prices of Residences, by Luigi M. Laurenti, in THE APPRAISAL JOURNAL, July 1952; Non White Housing, in HOUSE AND HOME, April 1953.

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