

2B) Housing Discrimination- The Issues Become Clear

Negroes Facing Test In Suburbs Major Shift From the City Poses Housing Question - Progress is Noted

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One of the major, although quieter, phases in the battle for racial equality, in housing appears to be shaping up in the New York suburbs. There are indications the contest will grow in intensity and possibly bitterness for many years. However, there are many hopeful signs. On September 1, New York State's new law against discrimination in housing goes into effect.

In 1950, the non-white population of the New York suburban area was 5.3 percent of the total; in 1960, it was 6.8 percent. There were nearly 250,000 more Negroes in the suburban area in 1960 than in 1950. The total now is approximately 550,000. With favorable economic conditions, the increase may be expected to continue. Already portents have begun to appear. There has been some panic selling by white property owners in at least two communities, Freeport, L.I., and Teaneck, N.J.

The Negro housing problem in the suburbs, as in the city, has two general aspects. One is the problem of the lower income, with fewer advantages. This group's housing aspirations may not be high, but it nevertheless requires accommodations that meet reasonable standards of health and safety and are not grossly overpriced. The other problem is that of the upper-income Negroes, the skilled or professional worker whose income and other attributes impel him to seek the same kind of accommodations that a white person of similar situation would desire.

The lower-income suburban Negroes - employed as domestics and laborers - live mostly in the older Negro communities where housing is overcrowded and, many times, substandard. These are usually the first areas to be considered for urban renewal projects. This poses the problem of finding housing for the relocation of the Negroes to be evicted. For the upper-income Negro, the problem is that homes in desirable areas have been closed to him. Without heroic effort and more than a bit of luck, he has been obliged to live in the Negro quarter or on the fringes of it.

For both groups, the problems have been intensified by the dramatic growth in the suburban Negro population during the last ten years. The growth has been of two kinds; a migration for the most part directly from the south to join friends and relatives who had found employment in the Northern suburbs, and a movement outward from New York and other cities of the region by Negroes of middle or upper income. Numerically, the first group has been by far the larger, but the second has been substantial.

There was such a problem in the northeast section of Freeport, L.I. Middle and upper-income Negro families had been moving in there before World War II, but their number did not become considerable until the middle Nineteen Fifties. At this point, real estate operators began a strong campaign of "block busting" or inducing scare selling. The seriousness of the problem aroused community leaders. . . . They organized a Community Relations Council. Pamphlets were distributed assuring the neighborhood that the presence of Negro neighbors would not lower property values. Meetings were held. New white families were encouraged to move into houses offered for sale.

Leaders in the move for integrated housing in the suburbs are frequently persons with strong religious ties. In Huntington, L.I., such a group formed the Huntington Township Committee on Human Relations. It collected 1,000 pledges from local residents that they would welcome Negro neighbors. The effort was inspired not only because Huntington's population of lower-income Negroes had grown greatly, but because the town had wished to engage a high school music teacher of exceptional qualifications. But he was a Negro and Huntington discovered to its chagrin that no suitable housing accommodations were available to him.

Questions:

- 1- According to this article, what major change is taking place in New York City suburbs?
- 2- How are conditions different for lower income and upper income African American families?
- 3- In your opinion, does this article present a hopeful or pessimistic view of the future? Explain your answer.