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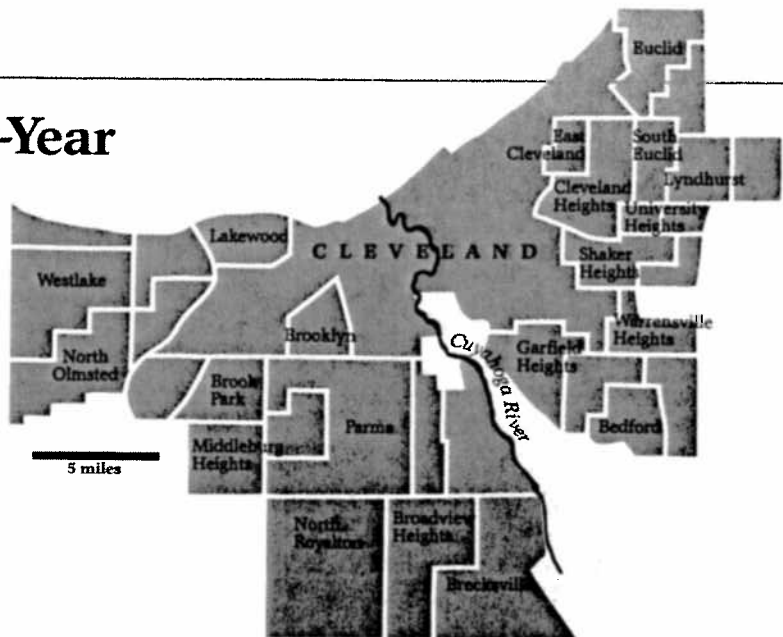
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Suburban Cleveland's 20-Year Integration Struggle

A retrospective look at open-housing efforts in one of the nation's most segregated regions.

By W. Dennis Keating



Black families moving into the Cleveland suburbs are more likely to seek housing in those communities known for their open-housing policies.

Twenty years after the Kerner Commission warned of two societies—one black and one white—and the subsequent passage of the federal fair housing law, Cleveland still has one of the most segregated housing markets in the U.S. On a scale of housing segregation devised by University of Chicago sociologist Douglas Massey, in which a score of 100 represents total segregation, Cleveland rated 87.5 in 1980, compared to 90.8 in 1970. Among Midwestern cities generally, the average score on the segregation index dropped from 87 to 78 in the same period.

While Cleveland was one of the first cities to establish a community relations board to deal with racial problems, it took three decades before the city council finally enacted a controversial fair housing ordinance this year. Meanwhile, most active efforts to encourage racial integration in housing have taken place in the suburbs. The lead agency is the Cuyahoga Plan, a nonprofit regional organization set up in 1974 and funded by the city of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, several suburban cities, and local foundations.

The Cuyahoga Plan estimates that, if black families were randomly dispersed in the suburbs they could afford, all the suburbs in the county would have had a black population of at least 11 percent in 1980. In fact, just under 10 percent of the county's suburban population was black, and most suburbs had a black population of less than two percent. The group's conclusion is that racial discrimination, not economics, largely explains the greater



Cleveland area's segregated housing patterns.

The metropolitan housing market, like that of the city of Cleveland, is split between east and west, with the Cuyahoga River between. Most of the black population lives east of the river. Two eastern suburbs, East Cleveland and Warrensville Heights, went through a rapid racial transition in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were largely re-segregated by 1980. In contrast, two other older eastern suburbs, Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights, have integrated and stayed that way.

Three approaches
Shaker Heights, renowned as one of the na-

tion's first planned suburbs, originally excluded blacks and other minorities through restrictive covenants. There was white resistance even after these covenants were ruled illegal and blacks began to move to Shaker Heights in the 1950s, but neighborhood and civic leaders encouraged integration. Several city ordinances were enacted to outlaw discriminatory housing practices and promote racial diversity. Shaker Heights established its own municipal housing office in 1967 to work with prospective home buyers and renters and cooperative real estate brokers.

Right now, over one-quarter of the Shaker Heights population of 32,000 is black.

While the city is considered affluent, in 1986 it created a Fund for the Future of Shaker Heights, supported by local foundations and designed to encourage residential integration by providing below-market secondary mortgage loans to any home buyer willing to make a move that would promote integration. During its first two years, the fund made 58 loans for down payments, ranging from \$3,000 to \$4,000.

Neighboring Cleveland Heights (pop. 56,000) has a similar history. Racial transition began in the early 1970s, and in 1972, concerned residents, civic groups, and churches formed the Heights Community Congress. In 1976, the group persuaded the city to adopt comprehensive fair housing

Heights, Shaker Heights, and neighboring University Heights, along with their school boards, in 1984 formed the East Suburban Council for Open Communities (ESCOC). Its purpose is to attract prospective black home buyers and renters to Hillcrest, the six suburbs to the north of the three ESCOC cities.

ESCOC has received financial support from local foundations and has worked with sympathetic neighborhood groups and real estate brokers. Its voluntary regional approach has brought many blacks to Hillcrest despite such obstacles as the attempted firebombing of a black family's house in Lyndhurst in 1983.

Proposals to institute metropolitan government in Cleveland have failed. Efforts to persuade the suburbs to enter into cooperative agreements with the metropolitan housing authority to decentralize public housing also have mostly failed. The regional planning agency has no regional fair-share plan for subsidized housing.

In this vacuum, the Metropolitan Strategy Group, an umbrella organization for open housing advocates, has emerged as the major force for fair housing in the Cleveland area. Its president, Charles Bromley, also serves as president of National Neighbors, the major national organization promoting interracial housing.

The strategy group's most notable success was the creation of a Pro-Integrative Bonus Program by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency. This set-aside program, set up in 1985, allowed fair housing agencies to offer below-market mortgages to eligible first-time home buyers willing to move into neighborhoods in Cuyahoga County in which their race was underrepresented. Some \$6 million was allocated, and 68 home buyers used the subsidies. However, the state finance agency discontinued the program earlier this year.

Some progress

The situation is not totally bleak. In Parma, because the city successfully appealed the appointment of a special master to oversee implementation of the 1980 federal court order, efforts by fair housing and oversight committees did not begin until 1983. Since then, the city has received community development funding from HUD, part of which has paid for programs mandated by the court order.

Parma set up its own public housing agency and has attracted minority tenants with Section 8 vouchers. The city's first subsidized housing project, a 60-unit Section 8 apartment building, was finished in 1987.

And this year, a long-delayed advertising program was launched to attract minority home buyers. The administration of newly elected mayor, Michael Ries, has been supportive of fair housing, as evidenced by the passage in June of a municipal fair housing ordinance.

On the other side of the coin, the Cuyahoga Plan's audits have confirmed that racial discrimination still affects the choices of blacks seeking to buy and rent Cleveland suburbs. In 1986 and 1987, surveyed more than 400 home buyers who had bought houses in 12 Cleveland suburbs in 1985. The study found that racial patterns were not the primary reason for the move. These buyers chose their neighborhoods for conventional reasons—rents, wanting to own, for example.

Most of the people surveyed had been living in greater Cleveland, and about 40 percent bought a house in the suburb where they already lived. Those who preferred live in a racially integrated neighborhood were more likely to choose Cleveland Heights or Shaker Heights, and they were more likely to contact those cities' housing agencies for help in locating a house. Almost all black buyers favored racial integrated neighborhoods. In contrast, the highest rate of preference for living in white neighborhoods was found among Parma home buyers, while in Hillcrest, attitudes were less polar.

The range of white support for open housing went from 50 percent in Parma to 85 percent in Cleveland Heights. The results suggest that suburbs with well-known fair housing policies will attract whites who favor such policies. However, the case of Parma suggests that court-ordered mandatory fair housing policies do not necessarily change local opinions about open housing.

This survey and others indicate that while a majority of whites are much more tolerant of blacks than was true two decades ago, most whites do not seek to move into racially integrated neighborhoods. In addition, mere enforcement of existing fair housing laws has not significantly changed basic patterns of housing segregation, even while white support for integration has risen.

Much more wide-ranging housing programs, including mortgage subsidies, are essential. But they must be universal if they exist in only a few suburbs, as in the Cleveland area, most suburbs are likely to remain segregated.

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Cleveland Plan Dealer

policies similar to those of Shaker Heights. Presently, approximately 28 percent of Cleveland Heights is black.

On the west side of the river is Parma (pop. 92,000), Cleveland's largest suburb, which is 99 percent white. In 1973, Parma was sued by the U.S. Department of Justice and, after trial, found guilty in 1980 of violating federal fair housing laws. It has since been subject to a remedial court order.

In the absence of racial transition or litigation, most other Cleveland suburbs have simply avoided fair housing programs. As a result, fearing that it would be difficult to maintain integration in only a few suburban communities, Cleveland