

HOUSING: MYTH AND REALITY

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In last week's *Campus*, you will recall, we noted that the practical key to desegregation was to be found in integrated housing. No community can ever hope to have integrated churches and schools, save in the most arbitrary and artificial manner, while residential segregation persists. Churches and schools are attended by those who live in the surrounding neighborhoods, who participate in many things together because they live in relative proximity to each other. This is particularly true of suburban America today, and suburban America is the most rapidly growing part of the country. If the churches are sincere in their oft-voiced desire for "an integrated church in an integrated society," then it is time they gave serious consideration to the matter of housing.

Last week we noted, also, that it is precisely at this point that tempers become short and brotherhood becomes little more than a word for most of us. Our home is our castle and we will defend it and our neighborhood by almost any means against intrusion by those different from ourselves. The real opposition to integrated housing, we said, seems to center around three fears: intermarriage, loss of status, and a depreciation of property values. Let us consider these three fears, in reverse order, and see if recent sociological studies can help us sift out the reality from the vast mythology that has become a part of America's folklore of prejudice.

Housing and Property Values

Do housing values depreciate? A number of studies have given similar answers to this question and the answer, simply stated is: when a Negro family of comparable income, intelligence, and cultural attainment moves into a white neighborhood housing values depreciate **only when the owners believe** that this will be the result. Out of their fears and

beliefs emerges a clear pattern of events. Convinced that the new family represents an entering wedge, fearful the other will soon follow, some of the residents begin seeking buyers for their homes. If another Negro family moves in, near panic leads some of the residents to move out and dump their homes on the market. In this situation depreciation does occur and many agencies involved in selling houses respond to such behavior. But this is a situation created almost entirely by the panic of the residents and has very little to do with the cultural, moral or social characteristics of the middle or upper class Negro families who have moved in. In those instances where the residents have held fast, have refused to panic, and have welcomed their new neighbors, property values have generally been affected little, if at all.

Actually, in the case of panic selling, the depreciation is often

only temporary. With the opening of a new area to a minority group that has only too few opportunities to find housing, the very pressure of demand pushes values back up — frequently to a level higher than was true originally in the all white neighborhood. The Commission on Race and Housing, established in 1955 by a grant from the Fund for the Republic, has published a report showing that this has occurred in a number of cities. The churches — and all of us — should note that the entrance of a minority group family into a neighborhood, if the family occupies a socioeconomic position comparable to the residents, has no real effect upon property values unless the residents themselves bring it about.

Housing and Social Status

Though Vance Packard has oversimplified the description of the American people as "status seekers," nonetheless most of us have something of an upward mobile drive. We wish to move up the scale of social status or, having reached a level above where we started, to maintain our place. Among the most important symbols of status is place of residence. To

That many of the potentialities of the Student Council have not been utilized to their fullest advantage in the past has come to have new meaning to me recently. The accomplishments of this past year's council, I feel, have been demonstrative of what this organization can realize here at Ottawa when it is given proper leadership and takes the initiative to tap these latent resources.

The state of transition now confronting our college will demand appropriate action by our representative student government if our college is to meet the new demands placed upon it. To attempt to summarize what I feel will be the greatest

responsibilities facing the council next year is a task too great for a brief statement of this nature. May I only say that in seeking election as a student council representative, I pledge myself both to continuing and enlarging the programs of the present council, as well as thoroughly ascertaining the true significance of new problems facing our campus and acting on them in the best way possible. As a senior, and with my background of campus activities, I feel that I may best represent your interests and those of the school as a member of the student council next year.—Leland Melson. (adv)

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reach a higher level or to consolidate our new position, we desire to live in a residential area freed from any ties with a lower status or prestige. Thus we get the movement, so clearly observable the last two decades, of middle and upper income families from the central city out to nearly homogenous suburban areas. Race is an important element, though not the only one, because it is associated in the minds of most with a stereotyped picture of lower class status. The Negro and other minority groups are seen by many as "natural" inhabitants of the slums. The findings of the National Opinion Research Center indicated that almost seventy per cent of the American people believe the

Negro is being treated fairly.

Prejudice yields only slowly to fact, yet it is important to know the reality and not the myth. What is happening? Negro family income has doubled in a generation, home ownership is increasing even more rapidly; mortgage and banking institutions have officially classed the Negro as a good and dependable credit risk; the percentage of Negro college students is about equal to that of the population in general. All these are indications that an increasing number of Negroes have the same levels of income, the same educational attainments, and the cultural appreciations of middle class white families. Only our blindness

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enables us to hold on to the myth of lower status for these people.

Housing and Intermarriage

Opponents of integrated housing frequently are fearful that if it develops, the inevitable result will be an increase in interracial dating and marriage. If our all white neighborhoods are opened to Americans of Negro, Indian, or Japanese ancestry, is an increase in interracial marriage a live possibility? Probably, to some slight degree, it is. But in such a highly mobile age as ours, marriage partners are no longer found with such frequency in the immediate neighborhood. Young people today find their mates in high school or college, at work, in the church, among those in their recreational group. Certainly the improvement of status will give the non-white young people more of a common ground with their white peers and this is one of the stablest foundations for family life.

We can assume that interracial dating and interracial marriage will gradually increase as the socioeconomic status of minority groups is raised. This will be, however, a slow growth because of strong social disapproval. Race mixture is already a reality; no reputable authority today would talk in terms of a pure race. But an intellectual recognition that racial mixture is not necessari-

ly detrimental, that no pure race exists, that no real moral or religious reasons can be given against interracial marriage — even this intellectual recognition does not always bring emotional acceptance. There seems to be, however, a trend toward a more rational view. Though the whole question is still confused by prejudice, fantasies, and ignorance, the growing demand that people be allowed to demonstrate their true worth, regardless of race, is gaining ground. Then men and women will select marriage partners on the basis of shared values and personal worth. It is not integrated housing that will produce this so much as continued progress in jobs, education, citizenship, and housing.

There will be those who may not like the conclusions we have drawn. We ought to try to understand them and the fears they have. But we would be less than loyal to the integrity of our academic discipline if we did not face honestly the results of research and study, and genuinely seek to separate the myth from the reality. Only so may truth be served, may America fulfill her promise, and may the Church follow her Master.

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