

Housing: The Practical Key to Desegregation

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Deeply imbedded in the minds of most of us is the staunch belief that a man's house is his castle. His home represents his sanctuary in which he finds solace and seclusion; it is the guarantee of his privacy. It protects and enshrines those earthly values he holds most dear. No uninvited guest may legally force an entrance and even the guardians of the law must come armed with a legal warrant to be admitted. Perhaps more than anywhere in a democratic structure, it is around the home that individual rights are strongest.

Yet, at the same time, the pressures of conformity operate with some of their greatest stringency in the neighborhood setting. Foolish and daring is he who seeks to erect a glass vision of modernity in the midst of Old English Cottage architecture. The sound from his television set had better not disturb his neighbor's sleep night after night, nor can he transform his back yard into a miniature barnyard if he is surrounded by middle class respectability. If he should violate any of the many standards that operate in his neighborhood, be they racial, architectural, moral or aesthetic, he may soon wish he had the real protection of a castle—the moat and the drawbridge. For if he differs significantly, if he be judged objectionable, he must be prepared to withstand the siege of subtle and not so subtle attacks that come his way.

And perhaps "castle" is an appropriate concept to use in describing the reactions of people today in their opposition to racial integration in housing. Those entrenched in the neighborhood are almost feudal in their assertion of rights and in their defense against any and all who are "different." To anyone who tries to reach a clear perspective, it becomes increasingly obvious that a profound change in the pattern of segregated housing is basic to a real solution for our problems of segregation.

(The Non-Segregated Community)

The churches for years have spoken of "a non-segregated church in a non-segregated society" without clearly facing the fact that the foundation for much of our segregation is to be found in housing patterns. With only a very few exceptions, most churches that have significantly large interracial memberships are artificial constructs. They are not community churches, but draw members from many communities and are, all too often, self-consciously interracial. Even were the Supreme Court's decision about integration completely accepted, only a relatively small proportion of all students would be attending interracial schools. The possibilities for establishing and maintaining significant and lasting friendships across

racial lines are rather remote for most of us. Churches, schools, and friendships—when these fulfill their possibilities—are centered in the community where we live and feel accepted. We worship with the families who live around us, whose children walk to school with ours, and in whose homes we enjoy occasional evenings of good fellowship. The importance of community life, once fading from the American scene in the impersonality of urban living, is regaining health and strength in a mushrooming Suburbia. A changed community life, perhaps, but a real one.

More Than A Good Will

It ought to be readily apparent that even with the best will in the world neither an integrated church nor an integrated school can be maintained in a segregated community save by the most arbitrary and obviously artificial expedients. But, unfortunately, it is often at this point that good will begins to dissipate and tempers begin to boil. There seem to be few matters wherein the limits of tolerance are reached so quickly, perhaps because of a desire to have a neighborhood which guarantees that each home is "secure." And the very strength of the convictions a man holds about his rights becomes a means that denies to another the same opportunity for happiness and peace and security. The familiar arguments are assembled and turned with what is felt to be a devastating logic upon those who waver. It matters little that these arguments are in error, or at best only partially true. The home owners, non-church members and church members alike, believe them; this becomes the faith they live by and the home is indeed the castle to be defended with the sense of comfort and righteousness this convenient faith offers.

A Real Paradox

Here we face a real paradox: these efforts to maintain "security" prove, in the long run, to undermine and destroy security. The owner sells and moves in a continuing quest after a vanishing illusion. Real security is achieved only as we learn the strength that lies in diversity. No longer must we depend on the show of force, the barred gate, the raised drawbridge. We need no sword of prejudice to hack down the intruder at the door. Security is real because the community has become just that — a community that is founded not on uniformity but upon unity, upon the kind of pluralism that is the keystone of security.

But the fears persist, the

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prejudice remains, and the arguments are repeated with no loss of fervency. And perhaps the deepest and most persistent fear in relation to interracial housing center about intermarriage, loss of social status, and financial loss through depreciation of property values. These fears are largely irrational and in the concluding part of this article (to be printed in next week's **Campus**) we will turn the light of sociological investigation upon these three fears in order to determine how much is reality and how much is myth.
