

Big Problem To Negroes Still Housing

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Moves into White Blocks Often Bring Headaches

Worldwide attention will be focused on Detroit in the weeks ahead as Detroit plays host to the National conventions of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League.

At both conventions, the role of the Negro in the United States will come up for intensive discussion.

What of the role of the Negro in Detroit? What will the eyes of the world see as they turn toward this city?

For an intensive, factual presentation, the Free Press assigned several members of its staff to do a comprehensive, calm study of the question.

Today's report discusses housing as the No. 1 problem in Detroit's Negro community.

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Negro housing, a primary cause of the 1943 race riots, is Detroit's No. 1 interracial problem today.

Predominantly a ghetto pattern still, it shapes into ghettos the schools, hospitals and churches near which

most non-whites live.

Yet Martin X, a 23-year-old Negro civil service employe born in Paradise Valley, living now in an all-Negro area where he cannot find a house to buy, speaks hopefully.

"I can see my way out," he said.

When he was 11, he saw the rioting, the maiming and killing that centered in Paradise Valley. His mother kept him in, but he watched through the window.

He did not need Wayne State University sociologists, analyzing the riots, to tell him that "Detroit's abominable housing" was a large contributing cause.

"A tremendous accumulation of pressures within the hemmed-in Negro district," the sociologists defined it—"expressed in terms of high rents, bad facilities, and insolent landlords."

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MARTIN REMEMBERS his mother painfully scraping together the high rent for the ramshackle, rat-ridden flat when the landlord came for it and what the man called her when she didn't have it for him on time. He recalls the common outdoor plumbing—a shack over a hole in the city sewer.

Now married, with a child two years old, Martin lives in the top floor of a house a friend owns on Alger, north of the Boulevard. He spends a lot of time looking for a home of his own.

He has \$900 saved for a down-payment, which should be enough for the small older house he seeks, at a price of \$8,900. He can afford the typical monthly payments of \$60-\$65.

Martin X hopes to find a house in the area, between the Boulevard and Highland Park. The streets are elm-shaded. The lawns are green and smooth. He looks forward to

Turn to Page 3, Column 5

2—In 1954 the United States Supreme Court ruled against Detroit for following a "character-of-the-neighborhood" policy and practice of racial segregation and discrimination in public housing projects. The Detroit Housing Commission then opened Jeffries Homes to Negroes as well as whites and enunciated an open policy in its other projects.

To give a rosy report of the results of these two decisions, as far as the Negro is concerned, however, would be misleading. Progress has come inch by inch.

The lifting of the restrictive covenant enabled thousands and thousands of Negroes to buy homes. They began buying the middle-aged hand-me-down houses whites were leaving for the newer developments in the suburbs.

But as the Negroes moved in, the whites fled en masse.

One "psychological barrier" after another—including a wall of masonry erected against non-whites on Pembroke near Wyoming—was crossed. Island after island in the central city became Negro-occupied.

THE RETREAT of the whites gave the Negroes the best of the central city. Their homes range in cost from \$8,000 to \$80,000. Almost uniformly, these non-white home-owners islands are beautifully kept, smooth-lawned, shaded by old trees.

Public housing projects were augmented by Herman Gardens, with 2,106 units, Jeffries with 2,170, and Douglas with 1,006. But still there are not enough public housing units for those non-whites who need them most—the large families. A total of 1913, most of them large families, was on the waiting list at the end of March.

Jeffries Homes, first to open to both races, has become almost all-Negro, due to the need of those applying.

Slum clearance, under an ambitious City Plan, cleared the huge no-man's land known as "Gratiot-Orleans" for redevelopment into Lafayette

Mrs. Rose Petransky, a neighbor who demonstrated against her, was convicted of disturbing the peace, charged court costs of \$25, and put on a year's probation.

The Watkins case spans a significant interval—between 1948, when the restrictive covenant was lifted, to the present, when the Lawn-States Civic Association in the Cherrylawn area is seeking to impose a new "restrictive covenant agreement."

The new covenant has not yet been tested. It would restrict rental or ownership to members of the association in good standing. It would provide enforcement by injunction or other legal process. Whether it is legal, whether it could work, is not yet known.

Northwest neighborhood associations are attempting to organize the improvement association pattern throughout the section.

Nevertheless, the Cherrylawn block white residents have not fled.

THE COMMUNITY Relations Commission summed up "positive community gains" from the painful incident:

"More clearly defined police action, with greater guarantees for the observance of law and order.

"Planned commitment to work for interracial harmony by all three faiths—Protestant, Catholic and Jewish.

"A movement within the Cherrylawn neighborhood itself to bring together those not in sympathy with the demonstrations."

Mrs. Watkins, who said when she came, "All I want is for my neighbors to say 'Good morning' to me," has found some neighbors who say "Good morning." Some have also come to ask Mrs. Watkins, who is a seamstress, to make them slip-covers.

The next article in this series, to appear Tuesday, will continue the discussion of the Negroes' difficulties in finding decent housing in Detroit.



For most there is a home but no place to call their own

Negroes' No. 1 Problem In Detroit Is Still Housing

• Continued from Page One •

keeping the lawn and garden, painting and slicking up the interior. His wife is already making slip covers and draperies against the day when he finds one.

"Sometimes it looks like I'll have to wait till somebody dies before I'll find a house," he said.

Like the slums, this non-white island of homes is bursting at the seams. Martin's only chance may be to buy into one of the all-white blocks adjacent. He is not too anxious to pioneer his way into that kind of trouble.

Yet Martin X said, "My son will have it better."

RICHARD MARKS, executive director of the Mayor's Community Relations Commission, said:

"Despite the evidence of racial restrictions, prejudice, and at times open hostility . . . there has been an equally significant marked improvement in the attitudes which white and Negro citizens hold toward one another."

What has happened since 1943 to make Martin X and Richard Marks hopeful?

Two steps have been taken:

1—the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1948 against restrictive covenants in private housing, opening the home-buying market to Negroes.

Park's glamorous glass middle and upper-middle class apartments, which will be interracially available to those who can afford them.

Many displaced slum-dwellers went into public housing. Many others crowded in with relatives in already crowded slums.

A FEW RANCH-TYPE home developments, mostly segregated, sprang up on the outskirts of the city. The ratio, in the tri-county area, is about 1/10 of one per cent, or one new home for Negroes to 1,000 for whites.

Mortgage money is hard for Negroes to get. The mortgage banker will not lend to the first Negroes moving into a white area. He won't lend much on old property. He blames his reluctance on the prejudices of other people who might withdraw their business from him if he did business with a Negro.

The phrases—that when Negro home-owners move in "property values drop," "neighborhoods decline," "trouble and resentment result"—follow the Negroes as they move past the borders of their crowded islands.

What actually has happened in Detroit?

SELLING PRICES and tax valuations in many cases have increased or held their own in the same proportion as have comparable properties in all-white sections.

A trip through Detroit's many all-Negro residential districts—from lower-middle to upper-middle class homes—disproves the property-decline

cliche. One neighborhood after another shows beautiful upkeep—new porches, new fronts, paint jobs, lawns and landscaping.

Because non-whites have had to pay more, compared to their income, they may prize their homes more highly. Perhaps, as many people say, non-whites—both men and women—are better with their hands.

As ghettos grew, so did interracial neighborhoods. Detroit's Negro population, always more diffused than in other cities, has moved on into scores of neighborhoods that nobody hears about. Nobody heard about them because nothing bad happened.

Where white home-owners did not panic, where new and old residents carefully maintained zoning standards—property values steadied and perhaps even rose a bit.

In these transition neighborhoods there was acceptance and often welcome.

ELSEWHERE—primarily in the northwest section of the city—"incidents" continued. Last year there were 14—seven where incoming Negroes gave up newly-bought homes and fled back where they came from—seven where they stayed.

Mrs. Ethel Watkins, who moved in February to 12356 Cherrylawn, last non-white to weather demonstrations and threats against her, stays on in her home with 24-hour police protection.