

# Builder of Negro Homes Product of War Times

The housing situation in Detroit is not a single problem. The grave situation which the city faces is made up of many problems, and this series of articles is designed to set these forth clearly and factually. No attempt will be made to draw final conclusions.

In an effort to provide light without heat the Free Press presents the whole picture so that Detroiters may consider it in its entirety.

BY JAMES M. HASWELL

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The war and the housing shortage have produced one new thing in Detroit—a species of speculative builder who specializes in building homes for Negroes.

Under the normal operation of the segregation system, Negroes

rarely buy new construction. Their opportunities are limited to buying up old residence areas in the wake of departing white occupants.

The war has brought rationed housing, however, and under rationed housing a portion of new construction has been allocated to Negro occupancy.



Haswell

**THE FHA HAS** made special efforts to forward this process. It has encouraged builders to canvass neighborhoods to seek out possible sites for Negro construction, with the result that several thousand such sites have been uncovered.

Raymond M. Foley, FHA administrator, reports that financing for private construction for

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Negroes has been found, and that a number of builders have been and are engaged

in home construction. There has even been created a Negro construction company, which is making a modest beginning with a hopeful eye on the postwar market.

**THE ANNOUNCED** determination of the National Housing Agency to see that public housing is supplied low-income groups if private enterprise will not supply it is a challenge that builders and real-estate developers everywhere take seriously.

A recent survey of the potential Negro market for newly built homes has caused many to change their minds about Negroes as financial risks. The survey covered 41 cities, and consisted of 9,200 interviews with Negroes living in congested, blighted areas.

It found 39 per cent of them paying \$50 to \$60 a month rent, 16.1 per cent living in furnished rooms at \$12.50 to \$18 a week for three rooms, 7.9 per cent paying

more than \$60 a month, 15.3 per cent between \$35 and \$50, 21.7 having shelter rent under \$35 a month.

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**FORTY-THREE** per cent would like to buy new houses, preferably in a good Negro neighborhood.

Sixty-five per cent of these families had savings or War Bonds of more than \$1,000, 22 per cent owned War Bonds or savings of more than \$500, 13 per cent had less than \$500 in assets.

A majority owned automobiles and radios, 36 per cent owned mechanical refrigerators, 21 per cent had fairly new furniture, 18 per cent would purchase additional furniture, 61 per cent had small installments to pay on furniture.

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**THE DESIRED** average price for a home was under \$6,000. Only 11 per cent wanted more than two bedrooms. More important requirements were to be close to churches, schools, transportation, markets and shops, theaters, bowling alleys, social centers and to be close to work.

The average family of five had a 1939 income of \$113 a month and 1944 income of \$445.

Only 39 per cent expected brick or masonry-constructed houses.

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**THE EXPERIENCE** with the Brewster and Parkside public housing developments in Detroit contributes to the new readiness to build for Negroes.

Charles F. Edgecomb, director of the Detroit Housing Commission, says that Negroes in the Brewster homes care for the property as well or better than do the white tenants of the Parkside homes, judging by the repairs that become necessary.

Inability of Negroes in the past to find financing for construction contributed greatly to the shantytown appearance of such settlements as sprang up at Eight Mile and Wyoming, Foley says.

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**NEGROES PAID** extremely high prices for the land, but found when they came to build that no one was interested in financing them.

So the first settlers copied the tactics of white homemakers. They built garages and small temporary houses. The depression froze the process of improvement.

Since Federal-aided loans for home improvement have become available, Foley says, and since Federally insured loans for construction have been open to them, the district is building up rapidly.