

# RECOGNIZING SPATIAL SEPARATION RESULTING IN RACIAL SEGREGATION



## CHANGE

By Barry Cassidy

There is a spatial separation of minorities in Chester County. Minorities are not evenly distributed throughout the county. The information in this column is from a National Institute of Health (NIH) study which was

published and later interpreted in a book by Massey and Denton in 1993. I gleaned the information from that book.

The historical record of spatial separation has been practiced over the last century throughout American cities as a way of maintaining value in housing. Maybe because Chester County started with gentlemen farmers, all of the minorities were in the more urban areas. When

farms were preserved for open space, and there was an area of concentrated development so the gentlemen farmer could get his money when he wanted to sell and make Chester County remain to look the same as it always has by maintaining the viewshed.

Today you will find a vast disparity in minority populations in Chester County. Here are statistics from only three of the political subdivisions:

**Willistown:** At the 2010 census, the township was 92.0 percent non-Hispanic White, 2.1 percent Black or African American, 3.6 percent Asian, and 0.8 percent were two or more races.

**Schuylkill Township** was 94.83 percent White, 1.67 percent African American, 0.07 percent Native American, 2.49 percent Asian, 0.03 percent Pacific

Islander, 0.36 percent from other races, and 0.56 percent from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 1.26 percent.

**West Vincent Township** was 97.79 percent White, 0.60 percent African American, 0.13 percent Native American, 0.66 percent Asian, 0.03 percent Pacific Islander, 0.06 percent from other races, and 0.73 percent from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 0.57 percent of the population.

The spatial separations of the races in the 19th century showed that blacks and whites lived side by side as they were scattered around Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago. In the south, another pattern developed with white people on the main streets and black people living in the alleys behind those homes, but for purposes of this column, we will deal with racial, spatial separation in the north. Although 80 percent of black Americans lived in the south in 1870 exploited as sharecroppers, by 1970, 80 percent of black Americans lived in urban areas.

*(Continued on page 52)*

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**CHANGE**

*(Continued from page 51)*

In the 19th century, most of the discrimination was centered around job opportunities and not about housing. During this time, land use was not highly specialized, and socially distinctive neighborhoods were yet to emerge. Densities were low because the building technology had not yet developed to make them structurally sound. There was less ability to garner enough dollars to afford proper housing because there was discrimination in job opportunities. Block ratios for black residences rarely exceeded 30 percent, and there were many harmonious mixed neighborhoods. Many of the professional blacks, physicians, lawyers, and clergy relied on white support for their economic enterprises and political support.

In the period between 1900 and 1940 saw rapid industrialization and the creation of many jobs which happened concurrently with a movement of blacks from the farms to the cities to enable them to take advantage of the newly created jobs. Up to those times, most goods produced were what would be considered today "artisan type" goods, produced in the home or a small shop. Artisans produced garments, foodstuffs, and the like to serve the needs of the local community. After 1900 industrial labor needs were met by an influx of people from the south and eastern Europe. Housing density was increased and clustered near the industrial facilities to provide a workforce.

While southern blacks migrated to fill some of the industrial positions, there were far more immigrants whose origin was from eastern Europe, and during boom times in Europe, when the immigration slowed, the slack was filled by blacks from the south. So black migration had a symbiotic relationship with the European economy.

There was another use for black migrants in the early industrial times as they served as strikebreakers. They were transported by special trains directly to the factories by the capitalist factory owners with little understanding of their role in the labor dispute. As insect infestation and weather conditions changed, the southern plantation owners moved from cotton to foodstuffs resulting in a vast number of workers becoming jobless.

The size of the black population burgeoned in the urban centers during this time. Northern newspapers increasingly ran stories concerning black crime vice and general uncouthness of the black community. Whites became alarmed, and public-school integration was a victim, as white parents increasing did not want their child associating with black youth. Prosperous professional blacks lost their white clientele. By 1920 white racist ideology was pronounced correct through "scientific justification."

Most of the skilled craft unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) excluded blacks until the 1930s. Even the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) adopted a Jim Crow style local unions that received less lucrative contracts and less desirable work assignments and job classifications. (I was a business agent for one of those locals in the '70s)

The increasing black migration sparked race riots New York, Evansville Indiana, Springfield, Illinois, and Chicago, where individual blacks were taken from public transit and beaten, outlying homes of blacks were ransacked or burned. Although the aggressors were white most of the victims and those arrested for rioting were black.

The steady rise of black-white segregation continued in the 1900s. White organizations such as South Side

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Chicago's Hyde Park Improvement and Protective Club, the Woodlawn Society became active. In New York, we saw the creation of the Harlem Property Owners Improvement Corporation and the Brooklyn Gates Avenue Association. These associations employed various tools to maintain racial homogeneity, including zoning restrictions, the closing of rooming houses that supplied cheaper rent and threatening to boycott real estate agents that sold to blacks. The associations formed to withdraw support for businesses that sold to black; they lobbied for public investments in the neighborhood to increase property values, they created funds to buy out black settlers and vacant homes that remained on the market for too long.

The associations created restrictive covenants, which was an agreement by property owners that they would not permit blacks to buy, occupy, or lease their property. Typically, the covenant would last 25 years and have the approval of 75 percent of the property owners. Prior to 1900, these kinds of agreements did not exist. That kind of activity went on until 1948 when it was struck down by the supreme court.

In 1924 the National Association of Realtors adopted a code of ethics stating, "a realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood... members of any race or nationality ... whose presence will be clearly detrimental to property values in the neighborhood." This policy remained in effect until 1950.

In the 1930s, The Homeowner Loan Corporation (HOLC) was the first program to offer long term self-amortizing mortgages with uniform payments. Unfortunately for blacks, it also brought forth the practice of redlining, which was implanted with a four-tier neighborhood quality standard, the lowest was RED.

The HOLC rating procedures systematically undervalued center city neighborhoods that were racially and ethnically mixed. A study by Kenneth Jackson pointed out that the HOLC did not invent the standards of racial worth in real estate but simply bureaucratized them. The agency went as far as to create "Residential Security Maps" that were widely spread to lending institutions.

After the war, the Federal Housing Administration created minimum standards for lot size and separation from existing structures that, for the most part, eliminated mortgages for most inner-city dwellings, rowhomes, and attached dwellings. The 1939 FHA underwriting manual identified people as "inharmoonious racial or nationality groups." It stated if a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties continue shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes".

The housing acts of 1949 and 1954 provided federal funds for "redevelopment" to fund local governments to assemble and demolish slum properties with a requirement that communities provide replacement housing for those affected, which lead to the creation of public housing. Most of the replacement units were high density.

I can go on and on, but I think the point I want to make for people in Chester County. I believe that people living in these white enclaves can show all the outrage that they wish over some guy dying in Minnesota, but it is time to look inward. I call on the white enclaves to take action to make the population of your township or municipality more racially diverse and more spatially integrated.

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