

REPORT OF SURVEY OF 28 NEGRO FAMILIES LIVING IN PREDOMINANTLY
WHITE NEIGHBORHOODS IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK (MAY-JUNE, 1960)

I Of the 28 families interviewed all but one or two had had dealings with the John T. Nothnagle Company, and they were unanimous in their dissatisfaction with Nothnagle service. The same was true, to a slightly lesser degree, of the Fred B. Kravetz Company. It should not be concluded from the above that these two realtors are basically anti-Negro or are staffed with agents who are committed to a strict segregationist policy in selling homes. There were incidents reported of Nothnagle and Kravetz employees, especially part-time salespeople, manifesting a real effort to locate Negro families in desirable homes. Such efforts invariably petered out at the first indication that there might be opposition or resentment on the part of the white families in the area. It is apparent that these two realtors have no especial allegiance to any particular morality in the matter of integrating neighborhoods in the city other than to the course most likely to realize a monetary profit. They are firmly committed to a policy most likely to incur and retain the good will of the general Rochester house-buying public, the bulk of which is white -- ergo, their tendency toward evasiveness, duplicity and subterfuge designed to dissuade Negro families from penetrating any farther into the whitelands than a "safe" fringe area. Neither the Nothnagle nor Kravetz organization should be considered by a Negro desiring to move into a neighborhood where there is the possibility of controversy.

II Other realtors to be avoided for essentially the same reasons are: Lawrence Woodland, Slade & Suter, Al deFay, Timely Realty, Flower City Realty, Abel Realty, Normand Associates (who are also builders) and Browncroft Realty. Others were mentioned unfavorably but with no conclusive evidence that they adhere to a policy of containing Negro families in prescribed Negro areas. One of the above, Al deFay, is a blatant speculator engaged in the delightful business of blockbusting. One of his part-time agents, one Booker T. Williams, has been very successful in the Nellis Park-Magnolia Street area, stampeding five white families out of their homes in the past two years by exploiting the property devaluation myth and selling each of those homes to Negro buyers.

III Realtors who were reported to have worked smoothly and successfully with Negro buyers desiring to move into a predominantly white area are: Wills Realty (Mr. Brewer), Bernard Klein, Ruth Golden and Barry Realty. (Note: Slade & Suter have handled some purchases for Negroes, but in all three cases the neighborhood had already been at least tokenly integrated) There are two real estate saleswomen who have worked tirelessly in an effort to effect a genuine pattern of integration in housing. They are Doris Price of Timely Realty and Cornelia Verstratten (formerly with Kravetz; present whereabouts unknown). According to all reports (12) both of these women are willing and anxious to work with Negro families who want to break out of a ghetto. Naturally, because of their employers, these women have had to work "underground", so to speak,

and I was urged by all my sources of information not to make public the activities of Mrs. Price and Mrs. Verstratten in order not to endanger their positions.

IV Several of the 28 families interviewed (10) had gone, at one time or another, to the Rochester Real Estate Board for referral to a licensed, reliable realtor. The practice of the Real Estate Board in such cases is to refer the potential Negro buyer either to three Negro realtors or to two Negro Realtors and one of the monster companies such as Nothnagle or Kravetz. It would appear from this, at least during the period 1957-59, that the Real Estate Board of Rochester is making no effort to bring about integration in housing in the city, but is tending to hamper the process. The Board has since stated that they are anxious to help Negroes buy homes of their own choice, but in light of the recent experience of Peter Tolliver, who was referred by the Board to three Negro realtors, that pledge would appear to be a hollow one.

V In the matter of financing, borrowing, mortgaging, et cetera, most of the interviewees seemed reticent and unwilling to discuss their financial dealings in connection with the purchase of their homes. There were reports of successful negotiations with Columbia Savings & Loan Association, Rochester Savings Bank, Lincoln Rochester Trust Company and Security Trust Company. There were also reports of failures in dealing with these same banks. No clear-cut pattern of discrimination can justly be attributed to any of the above-mentioned banks. Most of the people interviewed felt very strongly, however, that the requirements for a Negro to obtain a loan or establish a high credit rating are much stiffer than for a white person.

VI The reaction of a white neighborhood to a newly-arrived Negro family seems to depend on several factors. One is the general economic status of the neighborhood. There is a clear pattern of increased tension and "incidents" as you descend the economic ladder. For example, in the Brighton, Irondequoit and Henrietta areas there seemed to be very little hostility and numerous welcoming gestures extended toward the Negro family, while within the city limits, and especially on the fringes of the fringes, the attitude on the part of the whites has been one of resentful watching and waiting accompanied by anonymous telephone calls and ineffectual petitions.

VII Nine of the Negro families interviewed bought their homes through white dummy buyers. In each case the repercussions seemed severer than one would reasonably expect had the dummy buyer not been used. Naturally, had the Negro been able to purchase the home himself he wouldn't have resorted to such a means, but the whites in the neighborhood seldom stop to realize this -- they are angry and resentful at having been duped, and react accordingly.

VIII The standard procedure in a white neighborhood upon

learning that a Negro family is about to move in is for one or two of the more inspired reactionaries ("I'm not prejudiced myself, but I've got to think of my property value.") to call a protest meeting, whereat a few harsh things may be said but nothing concrete is done (with the possible exception of a telephone call to the realtor involved in an effort to pressure him or her). There is generally a petition circulated stating opposition to the Negro family on strictly economic grounds; never racial. Such petitions come back with less than half of the signatures originally sought, and of those obtained a substantial amount are half-hearted about the whole thing. In most cases opposition to the moving in of a Negro family is stirred up by a very small minority of bigots -- most white residents have no stomach for a campaign of active opposition, regardless of how they may feel.

IX Of the 28 Negro homeowners, four reported that a white neighbor had moved out as a direct result of the Negro moving in. In three instances the vacated house was sold to a person who cared not a whit what the color of his neighbor's skin was. In the other case the deserted home was bought by another Negro. There have been incidents (anonymous phone calls, anonymous notes left in mailboxes, attitudes of hostility, etc.) but in the great majority of cases the Negro family is fully integrated into the neighborhood after a short period of cautious wait-and-see, during which time the white residents establish (sometimes to their surprise) that the new neighbor does not dump garbage on the lawn, does not host parties that run to four o'clock in the morning, and generally keeps his property as neat as, if not neater than, anyone else in the area. There was a single report, on Milbank Street, of opposition reaching a point (threatening letters, obscene words painted on the house, broken windows, et al) where it was necessary to call in the F.B.I. Conversely, there were four or five instances of, say, a young, progressive Negro housewife getting roped into so many community projects by her eager white neighbors that she found herself without sufficient time to do the things she really wanted to do.

X Almost all of the Negro families living in otherwise white neighborhoods have children. There have been only rare (3) and isolated instances where a neighboring white parent has forbidden his child, or children, to play with the Negro children -- in each of the three cases there are many other white children in the neighborhood whom the Negro children play with. And who wants to romp with the son of a bigot anyway?

Respectfully submitted, (7/17/60)

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