

TO: DR. BLOCK, CHAIRMAN OF HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
FROM: J. H. THORNTON
DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 1969

Attached please find an interesting Wall Street Journal
article Mr. Thorn found for your consideration.

It is felt the subject would be stimulating and worth-
while reading for the members of the Human Relations
Commission.

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Integrating Suburbia

Negro Real Estate Man Eases Black Families Into White Sections

Broker in Kansas City Area Goes Slow to Avoid Panic; But Beginning Was Stormy

How Three Families Fit In

By DENNIS FARNEY

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
FAIRWAY, Kan.—You might call Don Sewing a real estate militant. His business is selling houses—and integrating white suburbia.

The short, stocky Mr. Sewing, 37, is a Negro real estate broker, and his activities here in suburban Kansas City make him a highly unusual one. Most Negro brokers, hemmed in by prejudice and social custom, operate only in Negro neighborhoods or those in transition from white to black. But Mr. Sewing is spearheading a bold effort to integrate the most wealthy and prestigious residential area of metropolitan Kansas City, northeast Johnson County, Kan.

Northeast Johnson County has a population of 200,000, including Fairway and 10 other suburbs. The area's 1968 per-capita income of \$3,918 ranked it fifth among the nation's counties; a pattern of discrimination in housing had long kept it a white preserve.

Then Mr. Sewing shattered this color bar three years ago by moving his own family into all-white Fairway—and he has been busy finding homes for Negro buyers ever since. Those who have observed his efforts say his careful campaign offers a look at how genuine integration can come to white neighborhoods without the turmoil that many whites expect and fear.

A Calculated Dispersal

Two factors make Mr. Sewing's effort especially significant:

—The initiative and the strategy come from Negroes themselves rather than from groups of white open-housing advocates. No one encouraged Mr. Sewing to integrate northeast Johnson County—least of all Johnson County's white real estate brokers, who blocked earlier Negro efforts to buy homes here with a variety of discriminatory practices.

—The strategy itself, a calculated dispersal of Negroes throughout the area, is a big departure from the past tendency for Negroes to cluster together in newly integrated areas, often driving whites away. In practice, the Johnson County effort is a fine balance of aggressiveness and self-restraint—best sensed, perhaps, by listening to Mr. Sewing himself.

"I don't think integration should be a matter of waiting until a neighborhood is 'ready,'" he says. "I think the best kind of education for a person who hasn't had the experience of living in an integrated neighborhood is to integrate it."

Yet Mr. Sewing deliberately has passed up chances to sell additional northeast Johnson County homes to Negroes—and to make a quick profit—by exploiting the fears of his new white neighbors through "blockbusting" tactics. Instead, he's trying to scatter his clients throughout northeast Johnson County in a pattern that will open up the area, yet prevent racial turnover and neighborhood resegregation into black ghettos.

Forestalling White Retreat

Integration attempts often break down when the whites desert the newly integrated area for more distant suburbs. Mr. Sewing's strategy of dispersal is designed to forestall that retreat. "If we (Negro brokers) are able to sell housing to minorities, in a scattered pattern, all over the Kansas City metropolitan area, then there will be no hiding place," he explains. Then most whites will simply stay put and see integration through, he believes.

This approach received a potential boost Jan. 1, when a major part of the new Federal open-housing law took effect. The law bans discrimination in an estimated 11.8 million apartment units and also outlaws discrimination in the sale of new homes by professional builders. (On Jan. 1, 1970, all existing single-family homes will be covered when sold through a broker.) Most people, Mr. Sewing among them, doubt that the law itself will end de-facto desegregation in cities; they are convinced that steady pressure by Negroes will be necessary to do that. But Mr. Sewing says he feels it will "take people off the hook" by giving whites a justification for not discriminating.

But even before the Federal law, Mr. Sewing's strategy was succeeding. There are 22 Negro families in northeast Johnson County today—a fraction of the number that could probably be here had wholesale blockbusting followed Mr. Sewing's move to Fairway. But the Negro families are dispersed through six of the area's 11 municipalities, and many whites believe the area is now prepared to do something it never could have done three years ago—accept additional Negroes almost as a matter of course.

Some Unpleasant Incidents

Of the 22 families, 13 have purchased their homes through Mr. Sewing's agency. The rate of the new Negro arrivals is accelerating, and Mr. Sewing and a second Negro broker already living here plan to open Johnson County offices this spring. Mr. Sewing's present office is in a largely Negro area of Kansas City, Kan.

The initial 22 families haven't entirely escaped unpleasant incidents. But the extent to which the families have become genuinely part of their neighborhoods is often striking.

Consider the experiences of three families:

Thirty-one-year-old Lloyd White, his wife, Vivian, and their four children are the only Negroes in Prairie Village, a pleasant suburb of about 30,500. Gathered with their children around the fireplace in their \$20,000 brick-and-frame home on quiet West 78th Street Terrace, they tell of attending a New Year's Eve party at a neighbor's home down the street. None of the homes in the immediate area has changed hands since the Whites arrived in September 1966, and if any neighbors resented their arrival, says Mrs. White, they were "too cool to show it."

Nine-year-old Lisa, a fourth-grader at nearby Tomahawk School, has been to eight slumber parties this school year, including the

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