

BEYOND THE GHETTO: A PLAN TO ASSIST NEGRO FAMILIES  
IN OBTAINING SUBURBAN HOUSING

Efforts to promote voluntary integration in suburban areas have been hampered both by the unwillingness of white buyers to sell their homes on an open occupancy basis and by the shortage of Negro homeseekers taking advantage of those listings which have been obtained.

The problem has several dimensions: (1) A wide variety of choices is not available in the suburbs, and homeseekers will continue to be limited in their choices. (2) Negro homeseekers do not know of the existence of such groups as Metropolitan Baltimore Fair Housing and BNI. (3) Many would not wish to take advantage of available listings if they did know about them, either because suburban living is simply not desired or because it is seen as financially or socially impossible (neither of which is necessarily true). (4) Businesses are relocating and building in the suburbs more than in the City, and time travel, commuting costs are becoming prohibitive for many City residents, both skilled and unskilled. (5) Social integration--the ultimate goal--demands housing integration, and it is only by living through the experience that many whites will be able to accept the fact. (6) While there are refuges for fearful whites, they will leave their neighborhoods when a Negro family moves in, but if there are Negro families throughout the metropolitan area, the whites will be forced to resign themselves to metropolitan integration and to accept it, both logically and psychologically.

The assumption basic to this project is that racially integrated neighborhoods are highly desirable. This view is admittedly not shared by everyone, as some spokesmen see the effort as one designed to lure Negro leadership away from the ghetto and diminish growing black power movements. This program is not designed as seduction, but it is recognized that encouraging a scatter pattern of racial integration obviates attempts to establish separatist institutions and a ~~separable~~ viable Negro community. The project is predicated on the belief that Negro Americans are only an "ethnic" group as they have been forced into collective identity by white exclusion. It views as more desirable the recognition of equality on an individual basis, rather than sole reliance on prolonged institutional conflict.

The components of the project are as follows: (1) Securing listings of homes and apartments in all-white neighborhoods which are available on a nondiscriminatory basis; (2) stimulating in Negro families the desire to leave the ghetto and the knowledge that such a move is indeed possible; (3) conveying the technical knowledge of home-buying, FHA procedures, etc., to both buyers and sellers; (4) preparing affected neighborhoods for the entrance of Negro families; (5) assisting Negro families in looking for homes and apartments, filing complaints where necessary, and offering support; and (6) dealing with the results of Negroes moving into a community.

BNI staff, even augmented through government or foundation grants to this project, would not be sufficient to do the total job. It is essential that a plan be developed for the use of volunteers, especially in the areas of securing listings, communicating with Negro families, and assisting homeseekers. The community organization jobs of preparing a community and following through when the Negro family moves should be left to professional workers. Plans must be developed for the recruitment, selection, training, and supervision of volunteer workers, if the project is to succeed.

Contrary to the popular belief that suburbs consist exclusively of expensive homes and luxury apartments, Baltimore's urbanized suburbs offer a range of housing opportunities well within the financial means of many lower-income City Negroes. The median value of homes owned in the City is \$9,000, a value higher than that in two suburban communities and within \$1,500 of three others. Similarly, median gross rent in the City is \$76, higher than two communities and within \$15 of eight others. Some standard real estate guidelines confirm the fact that low-to-moderate income Negro families could afford suburban housing if discrimination did not exist. For example, monthly rent is supposed approximately to equal weekly income. Median rent in the urbanized suburbs is roughly \$85, or the amount which could be paid by a family earning only \$4,100 annually (the median nonwhite income in the City). Purchase of a home is advised only if the price does not exceed  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times the annual family income. Median value of suburban homes is near \$12,000, and could be afforded by families with \$5,000 annual income. These guidelines, though they must be tailored to fit individual cases, strongly suggest that project services could be offered to a broad population of City Negroes, not only to those in the higher income brackets.

There is one serious risk in the entire undertaking. That is, many people in "threatened" neighborhoods see BNI as pushing only for integration. Our goal, as they see it, is to "get a Negro on every block," for its own sake. While this is not the ultimate goal of BNI, it might be argued that the presence of Negro families in many areas would be instrumental in eliminating the power of the real estate industry to control neighborhood integration-resegregation. Thus, a project such as that proposed here could lead to increased suspicion of BNI and might hamper effectiveness in some areas. This risk should be discussed by the Board of Directors, and taken consciously if it is taken at all.

The cost of the project is estimated at \$40,000 yearly, including three additional staff members ( a director, and associates for white and Negro communities) and two secretaries (for routine work and maintaining central listings and records). Considerable funds would be needed for promotional and publicity materials, to attract Negro families and inform them of the project's existence. Proposals are currently being drafted requesting funds from large foundations or from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, under the low-income housing demonstration program.