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An Analysis of the Effects of Racism on
Emory Grove, Maryland

by

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Since the Civil War, Emory Grove, Maryland has been a black community. Until recently, it was a rural settlement occupied by residents whose families had lived in the area for generations. Prior to the erection in 1969 of three public housing projects in Emory Grove the residents lived in substandard housing, with no available plumbing, running water or sewage facilities. This paper will be an effort to show that in spite of governmental [Montgomery County and the State of Maryland] recognition of problems associated with low-income housing, and some actual improvements in the living facilities of Emory Grove residents, the housing policies (including choice of site) and economic factors combine and contrive to isolate the black community's poor from the affluent in the richest county in the country.

The effects of racism in Emory Grove are rooted in history and are obvious today. Although there is some evidence that efforts are being made to ameliorate the situation on the part of both whites and blacks, there is some question as to the extent of their effectiveness. There are many factors to be considered in describing the isolation felt by the Afro-Americans presently living in the Emory Grove area. Among these are included historic, environmental, economic and political influences.

Although the situation had improved in some ways in recent years, the black residents of Emory Grove must still be satisfied with less than their more affluent neighbors. "On the surface there appears to be fantastic gain, but the contrast between white and

black nullifies the progress."²

In order to illustrate the historic influences I will make some comparisons between Emory Grove and its white counterpart Washington Grove, which is located about two miles away, and is almost as old.³ Most of the original residents in Emory Grove were given their land by wealthy land owners after the Civil War.⁴ The topography of Emory Grove is characterized by "steep slopes and flood plains"⁵ and rocky soil which is ill suited to farming. Having no other means of subsistence the residents were consistently poor.

In contrast, the white residents of Washington Grove were wealthy Methodists who lived in Washington and had summer residences on a "200 acre tract ... desirable because of its elevation, natural drainage, springs and abundance of woods."⁶ Washington Grove began as a Methodist Camp Meeting Ground. "On some Sundays Washington Grove Camp Meetings attracted as many as 10,000 people from the surrounding area."⁷ It could be added that none of them were black. Two miles up the road Emory Grove had its own camp meeting ground. Even today the two towns have separate Methodist Churches, and although the Emory Grove Church had its own minister for many years, when Methodist Ministers became scarce, it had to share a minister with the Washington Grove Church. So, the separation has been spiritual as well as physical.

In spite of the proximity of the two towns, a black person has never lived in Washington Grove. ^{Emory Grove} It was, however, a convenient place to find maids--and still is. When in 1917 in Buchanan v. Wiley, the

Supreme Court had "branded state-and city-imposed residential segregation as a violation of the 14th Amendment...increasing reliance was placed upon privately arranged restrictive covenants, which for a time continued to withstand judicial challenge." Washington Grove's Deeds had the following restriction which was to run with the lands. "That for the purpose of sanitation and health, neither the party of the second part or her heirs and assigns shall or will sell, rent, lease or otherwise dispose of said land, or any improvements thereon, to anyone of a race whose death rate is of a higher percentage than that of the white or Caucasian race." This covenant was in effect until 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the enforcement of restrictive covenants. In fact, however, when we bought our house in 1972, this covenant was still on our deed.

Emory Groveites were trapped as many "black Americans were... 16 years after Brown... in the ghettos or if they were more fortunate, on hardscrabble little farms, or in the poorer sections of lesser cities or towns." It was not until 1969 that any effort was made to improve the living conditions in Emory Grove. At that time there were still 3459 county residents living in substandard housing.

In 1969 there were three low income housing projects built in ~~Washington~~ Emory Grove. The choice of site for these projects not only reflects racist thought, but seems to perpetuate the isolation and effects of racism on the residents of these projects.

The Emory Grove housing projects are located in a rural area approximately 2-4 miles from old Gaithersburg. The county studies'

criteria for location of low-income housing are " to face urbanization and to minimize its effects through planning." ¹⁵ Its Neighborhood Absorption Criteria is "... to assure that housing is constructed in neighborhoods which can absorb lower-income families without detriment." ¹⁶ It is then, according to these criteria, logical to build low-income housing where blacks are already living. " The site isolated by distance from all white housing is one approach to avoid community opposition... the site isolated by barriers is the second approach. A third approach to avoidance of community opposition is the site in an area which negroes have already entered..." ¹⁷ All of the above criteria apply to the location of the Emory Grove Projects, the nearest project being almost a mile from the town and separated from Washington Grove by 60 acres of woodland. There was little objection on the part of Washington Grove residents. In fact, few people seemed to notice that anything was happening "out there."

The privately owned, public housing projects at this time serve as shelter to a population that falls in the low (\$4200-6300) and moderate (\$6345-8505) income levels. The 292 units, including one, two three and four bedroom apartments are "leased to eligible low-income families who pay ¹⁸ 25% of their adjusted gross income for rent. This means that in an affluent county where the average income ¹⁹ is \$24,000 a year, and the standard of living is high , these black people are on a practical, if not legal, extreme poverty level. The Montgomery County Health Department equates indigency with a family ²⁰ of four whose yearly combined income is under \$6400. "\$12,000 a

year and we can't make it here" was a recent headline in a Montgomery County newspaper.²¹ So the residents of the Emory Grove Projects are isolated from their white neighbors by economics as well as physical distance.

The County Housing Authority has a policy that limits public housing projects to 50 units.²² One of the projects has 50 units, one 55,²³ and the other, the farthest distant from town has 137 units.²³ "...its (Housing Authority) refusal to put more than 50 units in a project prevents an in-flux of low-income families from changing the neighborhood character."²⁴ Even if this were true, the fact that there are three of these projects within a mile and a half of each other represents an impacted area of predominantly low income families living in subsidized housing and the many problems that accompany such an arrangement,²⁵ have had an effect on the neighborhood.

The character of the neighborhood has in fact been changed greatly. It is now more suburban than rural, there are many more black families, and the average income of the area has been reduced. When the first families were moved from their substandard housing into these projects, there was a great deal of community involvement. PAC, the Emory Grove Civic Association, offered tutoring services to residents, as well as petitioning the county for environmental improvements such as water and sewer, and lowering the speed limit on Route 124 to 40 miles per hour.²⁶ Sewage was not forthcoming but the speed limit was reduced. PAC also acted as an advisory unit to the builders of two of the projects. They exist now only as an advisory body to the new Emory Grove project, and few, if any of the original members still

live in the area. Out of the 126 original families who lived in Emory Grove there are 17 left. Mr. Ray said " all the Ph.D. types moved out as soon as other housing opened up in the county."²⁷ This appears to be a county wide phenomenon as "only 270 families known to have previously occupied deficient housing have been rehoused in the 3299 new or reconstructed units."²⁸ Thus, in an effort to improve living conditions for the residents of Emory Grove, the county housing policies have done what many urban renewal programs do;"... though designed to help the poor of both races, result in more harm than good; not only do they dislocate thousands of negroes but in the process of clearing out slum dwellings also destroy many well-integrated neighborhoods."²⁹

An enticing brochure, sent out by the Montgomery County Housing Commission, states that "^{transportation,} recreation, employment, commercial, educational and medical facilities are accessible to or available on site." This belies the obvious to any observer of the Emory Grove environment.

At this time, there is no form of public transportation available to this area. This is generally true throughout the county, but the more affluent white residents have usually two and sometimes three cars. The National Capital Transit Company engaged in a government subsidized experiment in 1970. Six or eight busses were run daily ^{from Emory Grove} to Rockville. The experiment failed for lack of riders. This is not surprising as it would have involved hours on the bus to reach any destination beyond Rockville. Mr. Ray feels that "they preferred to hitch hike or ride with friends." Many people use taxis to get to the market, and this is very expensive.

There is in the offing a proposed Dial-A-Ride System which is to be funded by the county and which is "designed to give commuters a dependable and efficient service during the morning and evening rush hours to local work destinations. ³⁰ The Emory Grove area is out of the zones of operation and is to be serviced by a "spur" fixed route service... operating at one-hour intervals during non-rush hour periods of the day. There are obvious difficulties and inconsistencies here. Emory Grove residents will not be able to call for a ride, as will the white population of the Gaithersburg area. They will have to regulate their lives, should they wish to use the bus, to a schedule which does not supply them transportation when they most need it-- to get to work. ³¹ They face the prospects of losing the service if it is not supported within a three to six month period. Although the results have yet to be seen, this system seems to me to be destined to fail.

Pedestrians are able to avoid the fast moving traffic of Route 124 by using the "temporary asphalt sidewalk" which was built by the county in 1973. ³² When it was proposed that this sidewalk be built, the residents of Washington Grove residing along Route 124 protested having this walk built in their front yards. It is ironic that the sidewalk now ends at the Washington Grove boundary and Emory Groveites now use the safer roads and walkways of Washington Grove to get to the 7-11. This is one instance in which racism has worked to the advantage of our black neighbors. ³³

Those who wish to use the recreation area, which is located on the old Emory Grove Camp Meeting Ground, must walk anywhere from

one half to one mile along this sidewalk, and then cross Route 124 which carries 8418 fast moving cars per day.³⁴ Those who wish to use the Gaithersburg recreation area must find their way about three miles. The obvious result of this is greater alienation and segregation between the black and white population.

Commercial and medical facilities are available in Gaithersburg, but once again distance and the transportation problem prevent them from being really accessible. Many residents buy their groceries at the 7-11 which is at least a mile away, or in old Gaithersburg at the Center Market, which has traditionally served the Emory Grove population. The mark up on food at these small stores is anywhere from 15-50% of the prices at the larger markets.³⁵ The higher price of food at these stores is ^{due to} the convenience and competitive factors, but in any event they sell "...merchandise...at inflated prices to a trapped black clientele."³⁶ So people who are already poor, spend more money just to survive.

" Because of the siting, construction and economy and the nature of the low-to moderate income population, public housing programs soon acquired an image in the big cities, if not the small ones of being primarily black and poverty oriented. The more this image crystallized the more it became a self-fulfilling prophecy."³⁷ In recognition of this problem on March 22, 1974 the Montgomery County Council passed a "housing opportunities act" to declare the necessity of assisting persons who lack sufficient income to afford decent, safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations without overcrowding in obtaining such housing in Montgomery County..."³⁸ Goal number 5 of the County Housing

Policy is " to develop planning and zoning techniques to encourage to
 the production of an economically balanced housing supply."³⁹

Hopefully with enhanced awareness of the problem and, when the sewer moratorium is lifted, the advent of a new Emory Grove project, which will include 280 ~~apart~~ ^{apart} houses and 340 single family dwellings in the moderate to upper income ranges ⁴⁰ the present impact on the Emory Grove area will be modified, at least economically. The new project planners are hoping that it will be as attractive to whites as to blacks. The odds are against this even though there is a great need for moderate income housing throughout the county, because "if the neighborhood is generally regarded throughout its market area as "reserved" for negroes, the most attractive housing may entice ⁴¹ few whites even to come and look". If the desire is to integrate the neighborhood, a certain number of houses should be reserved for members of both races.

Even if the new project is not integrated, it will provide a more stable population as " there must be a preponderance of normal self - supporting families in these projects for the problem families to look up to."⁴² This problem must be approached with great conviction and open minds, because as the situation stands now "...the disparity between the two races is increasing more and more with time...it is an inescapable conclusion that residential segregation with its concomitant of segregated schools and churches, employment and public and recreational facilities is more widespread and more embedded

as a national institution today than it was a century or a half-
century ago." ⁴³

This is definitely happening in the Emory Grove-Washington Grove area. More and more Washington Grove residents are sending their children to private or other public schools in the county, where more time is spent on education and less on discipline. Vandalism has increased and there is increasing fear of black violence, on the part of Washington Grove residents--people are locking their doors and tend to keep their children out of the Washington Grove Park when the "blacks are around". Police prejudice is great. They assume that when there is vandalism or theft, it ~~derives~~ ⁴⁴ from the Emory Grove projects, and much of the time they are right. Obviously, changed housing policies are not the only answer.

I have tried to describe what has happened to people in the Emory Grove area because they were and are black. Hopefully, the future will bring much needed changes in both the physical and social environment of the Afro-American Community in Montgomery County and elsewhere in our Country.

Footnotes

- 1
In Housing Choices in Montgomery County, housing below standard is used to describe those units found to be in deteriorating and dilapidated condition...these are units in need of one or more major repairs or those which have not been cared for over a period of time and are considered beyond reasonable repair.
- 2
Wilhelm, Sidney M. ,Who Needs the Negro,Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co, Inc., Garden City, New York.1971,p.109
- 3
Washington Grove is celebrating its Centennial this year.
- 4
Interview with Ryder Ray, Project coordinator, Emory Grove, Office of Community Development, Montgomery County.
- 5
Housing Choices, A Housing Policy and Program for Montgomery County Maryland, Montgomery County Office of Community Development, Rockville Maryland, July 1973.,p.24
- 6
McDowell, Patricia, The Story of Washington Grove,Washington Grove, Maryland Telephone Directory, 1969
- 7
Ibid.
- 8
Bardolph, Richard, The Civil Rights Record, Thomas Y Crowell Co., New York, 1970., p.281
- 9
Washington Grove Papers; Deed conveying land from Susie Dowling to Mabel C. Martin, August 1939.
- 10
Hecht, James L., Because It Is Right; Integration in Housing, Little Brown Co.,Boston, 1970, p.52.
- 11
Bardolph, Civil Rights, p. 314
- 12
Housing Choices, Montgomery County, p. 20

13 These include Washington Square, Emory Grove Village, and Amity Square and will henceforth be referred to as the Emory Grove Projects.

14 I emphasize old, because the newer shopping centers and supermarkets are at least three miles from Emory Grove.

15 Housing Choices, Montgomery County, p.49 16 Ibid. p.50

17 Grier, Eunice and George, Privately Developed Interracial Housing, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1960, pp 18-19.

18 Montgomery County, Housing Opportunities Commission Brochure, Silver Spring, 1974.

19 Selected Demographic Characteristics of the Six Health Services Areas of Montgomery County, Source US Census 1970, Health Department, Montgomery County, Maryland 1974.

20 Ibid.

21 Montgomery Journal, Thursday, December 5, 1974, p. B1

22 Fisher, Martha, Affluent Montgomery County, August 1971, p.403

23 Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County Brochure

24 Fisher, Affluent Montgomery County, p.404

25 Interview with Ryder Ray 26 Ibid 27 Op.Cit.

28 Housing Choices, Montgomery County, p.23

29 Wilhelm, Who Needs the Negro, p. 111.

30 Office of Transportation Planning, Proposed Service Design, Gaithersburg Area, Dial-A-Ride System, Montgomery County, Maryland.

31

Ibid.

32

Washington Grove Town Records, Communication from the County to the Washington Grove Planning Commissioner.

33

Ibid

34

State Roads Commission, Bureau of Highway Statistics, Record of Intersection Count, Maryland Route 124 and Railroad Avenue, May, 1974.

35

I know this from experience because I have shopped for emergency supplies from both of these stores.

36

Bardolph, Civil Rights Record, p.314

37

Hartman , Charles W. and Thomas, L. Class, Family and Housing, Transaction, Social Sciences and Modern Society, Nov/Dec 1974 Vol 12, No1)p. 48

38

Montgomery County Council , September Legislative Session, 1973, Bill No 44-73.

39

Housing Choices, Montgomery County

40

Interview with Ryder Ray

41

Grier, Interracial Housing, p.19

42

Hartman, Class, Family and Housing,p.50

43

Wilhelm, Who Needs the Negro,p.112

44

From conversations I have had with County Policemen.

Sources Consulted

1. Bardolph, Richard, The Civil Rights Record, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1970.
2. Brink, William and Harris, L., The Negro Revolution in America, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1964.
3. Fisher, Martha, Affluent Montgomery County, Journal of Housing, August 1971, pp. 403-406.
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4. Papers and Correspondence from the Washington Grove Town Records.
5. Maryland 1970 Social Indicator Series, Vol 111, Income Characteristics, Maryland Department of State Planning, April 1974.
6. Montgomery County, County Council, September Legislative Session, 1973, Bill No. 44-73.
7. Office of Transportation Planning, Proposed Service Design, Gaithersburg Area Dial-A Ride System, Montgomery County , Maryland, 1974.

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