

Integration: One Way To Avoid Busing

Busing schoolchildren across racial boundaries is now a standard weapon in the desegregationists' meager arsenal. But for all the rhetoric it has inspired on both sides, busing does not challenge traditional patterns of neighborhood segregation. In fact, as fair-housing partisans have observed, by accepting such neighborhood divisions as fixed features on the social landscape, busing programs tend to ratify segregationist custom.

What are the viable alternatives to busing? Authorities in Shaker Heights, Ohio, have come up with one that seems to be working. Some time ago they decided to concentrate not on busing but on integrating neighborhoods. Integrated neighborhoods would mean, of course, integrated neighborhood elementary schools.

A decade ago, Shaker Heights, an attractive, affluent suburb of Cleveland, was almost entirely white. Today, 15 per cent of the 36,000 residents and about 25 per cent of the public school population are black. A large segment of the community has been and is Jewish.

Unlike many other communities that have experienced racial strife in their

integration efforts, Shaker Heights has had relatively little bitterness or disruption — probably because the transformation has been carefully shaped and encouraged by community leaders. The town may be the only one in America that spends a sizable sum — \$100,000 each year — to promote racial integration within its neighborhoods.

An unusual aspect of the program is that the Board of Education contributes \$35,000 of the total sum; the remaining \$65,000 comes from the City Council. The money goes toward support of the town's official fair-housing enterprise, known as the Shaker Communities Office.

The reasoning for the Board of Education's participation was explained recently by John H. Lawson, Superintendent of Schools:

"We want quality education, and that includes preparing children for life in a multiracial society. You can't do that until your schools are integrated, and you can't integrate the schools until you've integrated the housing."

Much of the money goes to the Shaker Communities' staff — one full-time executive and 12 part-time "coordinators." The agency is essentially a placement operation: The staff helps to locate black families in homes in predominantly white neighborhoods, and white families in neighborhoods that would otherwise be heavily, perhaps totally, black. Most residents of Shaker Heights, both white and black, think this latter function is crucial.

Many black families from Cleveland began moving into sections of Shaker Heights bordering the city in the mid-1960's. In one neighborhood,

for example, the number of house sales to black families climbed from 13 one year to 65 three years later. It soon became obvious that if no one interfered, several large sections of Shaker Heights would be entirely black within a decade.

"Let's face it," Mayor Paul Jones told the citizenry at the time, "integration is here to stay. We had better deal with it properly."

So the community integration program was begun. The town banned the use of "for sale" signs on houses, hoping thereby to quell activities among blockbusting realtors and panic among white residents. Various neighborhood associations were organized to work on the problem. And in 1967 the town officially made its first appropriation toward the continuing stabilization effort.

The "natural," or neighborhood, integration is reflected, of course, in the trend toward a more equitable racial mix in the schools. Only in Moreland, where the neighborhood population is mostly black, has the school board felt compelled to fall back on a busing plan — which is voluntary — to achieve the objective.

Not everyone in Shaker Heights is hooked on integration, but the opposition has been weak and unorganized. For instance, the opposition has not prevented integrationists on the City Council and the Board of Education from being re-elected regularly by thumping majorities.

Some parents complain, however, that the schools display greater zeal for integration than for education. To which School Superintendent Lawson replies: "We've been accused of lowering our standards. That just isn't

true. Before we started integrating, only 80 per cent of our graduates went on to college; now it's 90 per cent. And last year we had more National Merit Scholarship finalists than any other public high school in the nation."

What little real resentment the housing program has drawn seems to have come mainly from real estate agents who feel that Shaker Communities is robbing them of their rightful commissions. "Basically," Armin Guggenheim, a realtor, said recently of the agency and its staff, "they are a publicly subsidized agency in competition with private business. They are also non-licensed. I think they will soon go out of business."

Lucille Anderson, the program's director, replies: "We try to bring friendly brokers into the picture, and of course we don't take commissions ourselves. But I realize it's a delicate matter."

A more serious criticism, perhaps, comes from blacks who think Shaker Communities concentrates too much on stabilization efforts in neighborhoods like Moreland and too little on integrating neighborhoods that remain overwhelmingly white. Mrs. Anderson agrees. "The trouble is," she says, "those houses cost more than most black families can afford. The real solution is to get other suburbs to open up." (Prices in Shaker Heights range from \$17,000 to \$120,000; the more expensive the housing, the whiter the neighborhood.)

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Pupils at a school in Shaker Heights, Ohio, where the stress is on neighborhood integration rather than busing to achieve racial mix. James Hatch