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## **Integrating the Suburbs: A Park Forest Case Study**

by Joseph Houlihan

### **Introduction**

The production of human living spaces operates largely within the confines of political economy. As such, myriad actors influence the economic and social character of places. And over time, places prove essentially dynamic. This paper considers the influence of political economy on the African American suburban experience during the second half of the twentieth century, focusing specifically on Park Forest, Illinois. To do so, I first offer a study of relevant literature, exploring the manner in which place-based interests influence the different values of space—drawing on the notion of growth machine from *Urban Fortunes* by John Logan and Harvey Molotch, and *Building Suburbia* by Dolores Hayden—and applying this concept to the production of racially segregated space in Chicago. I then discuss historical argument around racially segregated space in the United States, and define a particular notion of integration drawing on *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* by Thomas Sugrue. By incorporating a diversity of primary and secondary documents (transcripts from an Oral History project and an interview with the village mayor, as well as articles and books on Park Forest) I outline my specific case study. First, I describe the village's roots in the postwar building boom, and then consider its story of voluntary integration. To do this, I identify specific actors and tactics influential along the path to integration. My fundamental contention is that unfounded fears surrounding the

perceived negative economic effects of racially integration leads to exploitative real estate practices. With this case study, I demonstrate the manner by which suburbs realize diverse environments through destabilizing the supposed link between race and economics. I conclude by considering the extent to which local actors can challenge dominant paradigms of growth.

### **The Political Economy of Places**

In *Urban Fortunes*, Logan and Molotch address the difficulty of defining places as simple commodities. All places and land exists within a clear system of like commodities, but the value is difficult to quantify. They feature a complex use-value: “Places have a certain preciousness for their users that is not part of the conventional concept of a commodity...The material use of a place cannot be separated from psychological use” (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 20). Beyond shelter, places provide a sentimental value, “Material and psychic rewards thus combine to create a feeling of “community” (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 20). The social and personal identity of land influences value. For many, home represents an enormous sentimental investment. The contemporary suburban moment stems from this desired “communal” aspect of use-value. In *Building Suburbia*, Dolores Hayden describes the American suburb as founded in a triple dream: desire for home, nature, and community.

For the mainstream white family, “suburbia” represented the good life in the latter half of the twentieth century. Shifts in popular discourse fostered the rise of the single-family home and now seemingly ubiquitous tract housing. But the concept of a suburban good life and the use-value informed preciousness of place, similarly rings true in the example of African American

suburbanization. African American suburban enclaves grew with a strong emphasis on community, “These neighborhoods...were home, places where people had bought land, built houses, nurtured families, and created communities” (Wiese, 2005, 68). For many blacks, the allure of suburban life held deep resonances as places away from oppression. This allure was especially potent for African-American families migrated from southern states during the early years of the twentieth century. The value of a “place of one’s own,” proves impossible to quantify, but cannot be removed from the use-value of African American suburban enclaves.

Places simultaneously also find value through exchange value. This is the price at which the commodity is bought and sold. In the case of land, this manifests via rent. According to Logan and Molotch, exchange value is unique owing to geographic inflexibility. The rentier cannot move his property, so he therefore influences the exchange value through a series of networks. “For fictitious commodities like real estate, investment levels are set by anticipated social outcomes... Public decisions crucially influence which parcels will have the highest rents” (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 27). The spread of infrastructure has real effects on the price of homes. Disparities exist, for example, across the lines of school districts. Economic matters are influenced through social interaction, and thus is the origin of the growth machine.

Growth machines are coalitions of place-based actors, working to improve the value of their interests. For example, a neighborhood development group may band together with a developer to petition for tax breaks, or a town could encourage commercial growth as a means of improving property value and collecting tax revenue. Growth machines reflect the manner in which placed based interests actively influence the exchange value of their property. This takes many forms. Universally, elites strain “to use all the resources at their disposal...to make great fortunes out of place” (Logan and Moltoch, 1987, 53). Growth machines are naturally devoid of

subjective rationality, as their chief concern is the improvement of exchange value and the production of profit. As a result, these machines ultimately represent the interests of a few, and cannot be wholly controlled by a single entity (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 96). The interaction among growth machine members is not always conscious or voluntary. Growth for the growth's sake has become a sort of status quo in the U.S, and is thereby often institutionally supported.

In the example of black suburban life around Chicago, tensions around political economies of place play out through exclusionary land covenants and racially motivated real estate practices. Early on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African American's were often explicitly excluded from various environments. "In suburbs as well as cities, [black] migrant's arrival provoked novel efforts on the part of whites to restrict access to public and private space" (Wiese, 2005, 65). Restrictive land covenants proved a common tool for promoting segregation "By 1914, the realtors had adopted a code of ethics enjoining members from "introducing into a neighborhood... members of any race or nationality... whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values" (Wiese, 2005, 41). African Americans were openly treated as second-class citizens, and suburban developments were unabashedly segregated. For mainstream America, the ideal landscape was a homogenous white landscape. The spatial segregation based in economics comes later. With this manifestation, concern over property values proves the favored trope of fear for reproducing segregated space:

"Among the greatest concerns was that "property values will experience a severe drop" with the arrival of black neighbors. Such was the established opinion of white real estate agents, appraisers, homebuilders, and lenders. Real estate textbooks presented the hypothesis as a fact, and for whites who may had reason to doubt, the dilapidation of city and suburban neighborhoods where many African Americans lived provided apparent proof to cement the link"(Wiese, 2005, 98).

Despite the fallacious link between blacks and lowered property values, real estate agents exploited fears as a means of effectively influencing exchange value. Through “block busting,” real estate agents influenced white homeowners to sell their property at loss citing the integration of block as a harbinger for rapid decline in property value. The agent could then resell the property to black buyers at an inflated price for a significant profit. Such tactics were rampant in neighborhoods of Chicago’s South and West Side at the middle of the twentieth century. An emblematic example of this tension comes in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. When the African-American Younger family moves to Clybourne Avenue in a white neighborhood, they are met with panic and the “Clybourne Park Improvement Association,” encouraging the family to consider a home elsewhere. For “Clybourne Park,” the introduction of African-Americans evokes loss of community and “property standing.” Through manipulation of such fears, real estate interests used social tensions to influence the exchange value of properties in a sort of perverse growth machine.

### **Structuration Theory**

A final theoretical framework that enriches this case study comes from questions of agency within structuration theory. According to Alan Pred, “Social structure is comprised of those generative rules and power relations...that are already built into a specific historical and human geographical situation...The rules and power relations of social structure do not only constrain and enable human agency and practice. They also emerge out of human agency and practice” (Pred, 1984, 3). Park Forest and the Green Power redlining awareness campaign, both feature community actors that actively challenge institutionalized practices. Some of these actors hold

positions of political influence, and can be considered knowledgeable agents, as articulated by Giddens. These are individuals, possessing the “capacity to more or less precisely define the content of a specific project involving others or to supervise administer, coordinate delegate, or otherwise control the component tasks of a particular project involving others” (Pred, 1984, 11). These individuals and groups operate within a situation of social influence, and use this influence to change a certain reality.

### **.On Racial Integration**

In order to engage questions of racial integration, I will first offer a definition of the concept. One effect of the aforementioned inclusion of race within the land market was the production of heavily segregated space. A major concern arises from explicitly racial segregated spaces, most obviously when these are clusters of a traditionally marginalized people. Indeed cities like Chicago and Detroit saw “the confinement of blacks to densely packed, run-down, and overpriced housing” (Sugrue, 1996, 55). Furthermore, shortages in adequate affordable housing led to “serious congestion and overcrowding” and “ill health, delinquency, unrest, distrust, and disunity within the community” (Sugrue, 1996, 55). This is significant, as concentrations of African American’s in degraded and underserved neighborhoods perpetuated and worsened existing social inequalities. “Blacks were poorer than whites and they had to pay more for housing, thus deepening their relative impoverishment. In addition, they were confined to the city’s oldest housing stock, in most need of ongoing maintenance, and rehabilitation” (Sugrue, 1996, 34). It becomes clear that segregated spaces cannot be equal spaces, and that ghettos

inherently inhibit social mobility. Efforts towards racial integration of communities thus grew in the second half of the twentieth century as a response to racially exclusive space.

There has never been one single understanding or project for racial integration of cities and their suburbs. But all aspire towards the creation of diverse communities where races interact on equal footing. Stemming from this vision, questions about socio-economic diversity enter the discussion. To break a cycle of discrimination and ghettoization middle class and lower class African Americans need equal place within healthy community landscapes: “The declining presence of working and middle class blacks ...deprives ghetto neighborhoods of key resources, including structural resources (such as residents with income to sustain neighborhood services) and cultural resources (such as conventional role models for neighborhood children)” (Sugrue, 1996, 107). Such an integration represents the ideal promoted in the 60s Civil Rights movement, and the Open Housing movement. But unfortunately, such diversity is seldom realized. And when cities support projects towards more mixed economic and racial environments, they often take the form of gentrification of black neighborhoods and the introduction of wealthy whites into newly renovated spaces within impoverished communities. That is, it is seldom the introduction of low-income African Americans into wealthy white communities that comes with designs of “mixed income” development.

In the example of integrating the suburbs, and the case study of Park Forest, this paper focuses most specifically on the initial efforts towards open access. In this example, the race barrier dealt first with specifically exclusive racial covenants, before concerns of diverse socio-economic developments were considered.

## **Data and Methods**

The information presented in this case study was amassed through research, interview, and archival work. General sources include articles from local newspapers, as well as periodicals published by the Park Forest Historical Society, and books relevant to the nationwide civil rights efforts. I focus primarily upon Park Forest's racial transition during the 1960s, and conclude by considering the subversive role race continues to play in influencing growth interests today. Because of this focus, I draw heavily from the Park Forest Oral History Project conducted in 1980 by the Park Forest Historical Society, and the Park Forest Public Library. This resource proves invaluable as it provides the opinions of specific actors influential in the integration of Park Forest, many of whom are no longer living. Interested in filling in gaps, and answering lingering questions, I contacted the current village mayor, John Ostenburg, for an interview. His testimony crucially frames and enriches many of the specific nuances so often produced by historical research. Besides his current responsibilities, Mr. Ostenburg has been active in Park Forest for the last thirty years. Among other positions, he was a state representative, and local business owner. As such, his experiences provide the testimony with a critical depth and authority. Besides these primary sources, I draw upon *America's Original GI Town*, by Gregory Randall, and the seminal *The Organization Man*, by William Whyte. Through this diversity of sources I seek to present a comprehensive and qualitative account of Park Forest's voluntary integration.

### **Integrating Park Forest: A case study**

The original formation of Park Forest, Illinois emerges from the efforts of several clear tensions and actors. Hayden identifies Park Forest as a quintessential sitcom suburb. It exemplifies the post-war building boom. According to Gregory Randall, “America’s greatest social challenge after the war became the housing of millions of returning veteran’s and their young families. Housing built during World War II “supported the war effort. Being of marginal and temporary quality, it was generally located near war plants and seldom where most people wanted to live after the war” (Randall, 2003, 2). As a perceived response to housing shortages, GI towns were constructed towards the goals of affordable, clean, and spacious housing (Randall, 2003, 6). The most infamous post-war development was Levittown Pennsylvania, which provided a loose interpretation on the aforementioned goals, with shoddy homes and inadequate infrastructure.

Despite commonly held conceptions that the boom, and places like Levittown, marked a speedy response to a housing emergency, “There was no haste at all in the twenty years of lobbying for federal support of private market single family housing development” (Hayden, 2003, 128). The birth of Park Forest is rather founded in the establishment of the current “growth for growth’s sake” paradigm. The most prominent interest in the post-war growth machine boom came from large-scale developers. “Before the war, one-third of all houses were build by their owners. Small contractors, who averaged fewer than five houses a year, built another third. By

the late 1950s, about two-thirds of the new houses in the United States were produced by large builders” (Hayden, 2003, 132). Coupled with subsidies from the FHA, large firms wielded significant influence. As it became lucrative to construct single-family suburban developments, there emerged for the first time a real potential for large-scale, explicitly designed community growth.

Park Forest, conceived in the early 1940s, essentially reflects the interplay between the post-war growth machine and the work of actors concerned with the production of an ideal landscape. The most important individual in the creation of Park Forest was Philip Klutznick. Partnered with the major Chicago developer Nathan Manilow, he formed the firm American Community Builders, and obtained over three thousand acres for a fully planned town thirty miles south of Chicago. As a former official in the Federal Public Housing administration, Klutznick saw the post-war boom as an opportunity to create a modern garden city, replete with “nearby railroad station, sites for industry, a shopping center, and several smaller commercial areas, parks, and schools, and different types of housing, including apartments” (Hayden, 2003, 144). Klutznick abhorred the lack of facilities and amenities provided in Levittown, and imagined a meticulously planned space. The original proposal describes his vision: “the goal is to provide a fully integrated and livable community. The aim is to capture all the advantages of country living in an urban atmosphere within the economic reach of those who will live in the town. In its full realization a harmonious variety of homes will be blended into a simple but artistic abundantly green landscape” (Randall, 2003, 67). ACB drew inspiration from earlier planned suburbs, evoking Riverside, Illinois, in promotional materials.

But while the Park Forest city plan was realized, the idealized garden city did not come to fruition. “Costs were slashed at every turn: houses were moved closer to the streets to save on piping, planting strips were removed, sidewalks were combined with curbs to save on concrete work and installation” (Hayden, 2003, 146). And the town fell similarly short when it came time to provide open and equal access to housing. Despite any intentions, the town’s population was totally white upon its creation

### **The 1950s Integration Efforts**

“According to a July 1960, article from Time Magazine, “Park Forest, a junior-executive suburb 30 miles south of Chicago’s Loop, is as meticulously planned as any postwar community in the nation. Its 31,000 residents live mainly in ranch houses, shop in glossy supermarkets, generally vote Republican, send their children to ultramodern schools. Late last month, into Park Forest moved a new family—Charles Z. (for Zachary) Wilson, 30, an assistant professor of economics at De Paul University, his wife and their three pre-school children. Some of the neighbors dropped in to welcome them, offer assistance, invite Mrs. Wilson to neighborhood coffee klatsches. Ethel Klutznick, wife of Park Forest developer Philip Klutznick, baked a cake with the inscription, “Welcome to the Wilsons to Park Forest. The Klutznicks.” Others kept a dignified if haughty distance, for the Wilsons were the first Negroes to move into Park Forest” (Time, 1960).

While perhaps less remarkable today, the initial integration of Park Forest Illinois went against the dominant trends in suburban living patterns for the late 1950s. According to John Ostenburg, current village mayor of Park Forest, ““In the late 1950s integration was not

something that was widely talked about. Or widely accepted” (Ostenburg, 2010). The story of this integration begins with the work of several community groups. Notably, the Unitarian Church Social Action Committee, the self proclaimed “floating crap game,” the Dinerstein administration and the village’s Human Relations Commission.

The Unitarian Church reflects the general progressive atmosphere of Park Forest during the 1950s; it prided itself in a sense of social activism, and in support of broader civil rights efforts, worked to establish a more diverse congregation. One Harry Teshima chaired the Social Action Committee in the 1950s, which lobbied for diversity in the village and helped plan the eventual road to integration. For the SAC, interest in integrating the village was ideologically informed. Wishing to realize a more diverse congregation, the SAC was the first voice to start publicly expressing concerns about segregation. But while they worked consistently, they were slow in effecting change. According to Jim Saul, an early activist, “Some of the hardest workers for social action were impatient with the SAC because it did a lot of talking and not much acting.”(James Saul OH). As a response to this frustration Teshima began to work independently. The more passionate integrationists from within the Social Action Committee formed a sort of splinter group, jokingly referred to as the “floating crap game.” James Saul, a Park Forest resident since 1953 and member of the Church, organized the “floating crap game” meetings. According to Jim Saul’s contribution to the Oral History Project,

“I gave it that name, which I heard in a movie once... And the nature of this was that in the early days, when we talked about integrating Park Forest, because of the concern of many of us that our children were growing up in a Lilly-white environment...and, they simply were not having an experience that was representative of what our country is. You had to be careful, to whom you talked about that, because there could be economic retributions. And there were constant threats of that and of physical violence” (Saul, 1980).

The group “rotated” homes to avoid persecution. The “crap game” met with realtors and attorneys and began the actual efforts towards bringing African American families to the village. Along with Dinerstein, the SAC, and the Human Relations Commission they discussed the best means of attracting an African American family to Park Forest. Through continued engagement, these groups helped the village welcome African American residents in 1959.

Robert A. Dinerstein, one of the original residents of Park Forest was elected village president in 1955. He actively worked with community groups to begin the integration transition. As chair of The Human Relations Commission, he explicitly denounced racial covenants in suburban development and treated integration as a necessary inevitability. His management through the beginning of integration marked the beginning of a comfortable transition. Dinerstein, like Klutznick, shows that individual actors influence community development. Just as Klutznick utilized his understanding of federal funding to allocate the initial funding necessary for a planned community, Dinerstein worked through coalitions of community members to change the rule of segregation. He demonstrates the extent to which individuals and communities express agency when faced with an unfavorable social structure. Dinerstein, the Human Relations Commission, and the Unitarian church gauged the community and set their personal ideals against the logic that suburban landscape is homogenous landscape.

According to John Ostenburg, “The original residents of Park Forest...were very well educated,” There were “a lot of University of Chicago People, people who worked at Argon[Laboratory], so it was a very progressive community, so it was more welcoming”(Ostenburg, 2010). A vast majority of the community was ready for an integrated environment, yet the Mayor enacted several policies to ensure a smooth integration transition. After the Wilson family had purchased a home in the village, “He and the chief of police actually

went door to door in the community telling people ‘this is going to happen. We want you to respect this decision’ (Ostenburg, 2010).

Dinerstein and the trustees were not zealous activists, but rather compassionate citizens. They saw integration as a function of equality under the law. “The attitude of the trustees was that we would abide by the law. People there were told that if there was any violation of the right of these new residents, that the village police would arrest, the village prosecutor would prosecute, and the village magistrate would sentence. And that was the end of that!” (Saul, 1980). As a result, there were no public demonstrations of opposition to the integration of Park Forest. Ostenburg says there were certain individuals that were not happy about the movement, but they never expressed this discontent openly. By actively integrating the community, Park Forest challenged the dominant paradigm for suburban living in the United States.

### **The Role of Economics in Park Forest’s Integration**

An essential aspect of the early days of integration in Park Forest comes from the socio-economic class of the African Americans in the community. Originally planned as a community for junior executives and well-educated members of the middle class, Park Forest emphasized this identity through integration efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite empathy with civil rights and the Chicago Freedom Movement, the original African-American residents of Park Forest were all well educated members of the middle-class. This reflects conscious effort made by both realtors and the village’s Committee on Human Relations. Such deliberation was clearly influenced by the common tensions over property value. Beyond simple race discrimination, questions of economics and concerns over exchange value again prove instructive in

understanding integration efforts in Northern cities. In Park Forest's Oral History Project, Jim Saul describes an early meeting on integration. "People began jumping up and protesting this [move-in] and one man described graphically how many square miles of Chicago were blighted and lost and that the same thing was going to happen in Park Forest, where he had made the biggest investment of his life"(Saul, 1980). The question of "blighted" land came from a variety of external factors influencing housing conditions, segregating African-Americans into high concentrations within poorly serviced neighborhoods. Yet it becomes clear that the most prevalent concern for Northern whites during integration was a perceived threat towards property values.

"A lot of the fear that white families have about African American families being in their neighborhood, has less to do with the fact that they have any sense of racial superiority, than as they are worried about the economic impact. And that's something that for along time, I don't think anybody understood. Down south it was different, and that was the difference between the north and the south...It was all based on economics. So it's a different kind of racism" (Ostenburg, 2010).

Logan and Molotch's articulation of space as commodity becomes instructive when considering tension around racial integration in Park Forest. The city was careful to assuage fears about economics during the integration process, thus exposing the faulty construction of race based steering and blockbusting. Through this, socioeconomic diversity was initially sacrificed, but a comfortably integrated environment made later efforts for affordable housing more easily realized.

## **The 1960s and Beyond: Utilizing a Diversity of Tactics**

Conscious of anxieties surrounding lowered property value and the threat of blockbusting, Park Forest engaged in intrusive and ethically questionable tactics over the course of its integration. Suburban blockbusting became a harsh reality in the 1970s. Harvey, Illinois, presents a case of especially rampant and coercive realtor behavior. According to John Ostenburg, “The realtors did block busting. They would bring a family in, then everyone would put their house on the market at a lower price, and then they’d sell. And really in some cases, they would turn these properties over two or three times”(Ostenburg, 2010). As a response to such cases, Park Forest micro-managed integration efforts at a level that now appears ethically suspect. The Human Relations Commission engaged in activities that bordered social engineering. Working with realtors, the village made certain to avoid concentrations of Black families on particular streets. The idea was to “spread out” diversity, as a means of keeping residents from reacting negatively. In worst-case scenarios unfortunately exemplified in other suburban communities, residents would panic at the integration of streets and property would turn over rapidly.

“One thing that happened was that every African American family that moved in, the police kept a record of where they lived. Now this was intended for their own safety and protection... it was not intended in any way to discriminate against people. It was really intended to ensure there were no problems that occurred against them. The other thing that happened...[was that] the Park Forest water department, when families would come in to sign up for water, if they were an African American family they kept a list under the counter where they would write down that family’s name and address.”(Ostenburg, 2010).

The village kept “close tabs” on African American residents over the course of the 1960s and 1970s ensuring a decentralized racial integration. While the Human Relations Committee sought to prevent coercive real estate dealings and achieve a more diverse environment, it becomes

apparent that these tactics infringed upon the privacy rights of residents. The Human Relations Committee worked with realtors to attract black families on a one-by-one basis, and enacted certain spatial parameters for where they could live. Despite the severity of such measures, it is quite possible that they proved directly responsible for Park Forest's conscious and effective integration. This example speaks most centrally to the cultural mores of the time. To combat institutionalized and culturally reinforced racism in real estate, the village took drastic, perhaps even illegal, measures.

### **The Chicago Freedom Movement and Open Housing**

The successful integration of Park Forest continuing through the 1960s was bolstered by a broader network of civil rights activists such as the Chicago Freedom movement, the DREB, and general efforts toward open housing. The Chicago Freedom movement came out of a joint effort by the Southern Christian Leadership Council, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations. The movement worked to end the "slums" of Chicago. In the 1960s, the group targeted institutionalized housing discrimination. The efforts of Dr. King and the Freedom Movement culminated in massive 1966 rallies, and the signing of the Summit Agreement by Chicago's City Hall. "Under the agreement, the Real Estate Board will drop its opposition to a state fair-housing law. The city Human Relations commission will

stiffen enforcement of Chicago's own fair-housing ordinance. The city and county agencies will try to find ways of dispersing Negroes into white areas outside the huge ghettos" (Coburn, 1966, 1). In itself, the Summit Agreement was not considered an absolute victory, but further legislation followed these initial efforts, most notably in the 1968 National Fair Housing Laws. As a result, the Chicago Housing Authority began to issue thousands of rent subsidy vouchers in an attempt to lessen the hyper-concentration of low-income African Americans in resource deprived inner city zones. Another key actor in the movement for open housing across Chicago came in the Dearborn Real Estate Board. "This predominantly black trade organization was formed in response to the exclusionary practices of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which in the forties had no black members" (Berry, 1979, 120). By the 1970s, the DREB had become the principle channel through which black homeseekers would have the information and support for making choices from the total metropolitan housing market. One of their most direct means for facilitating integration came from enlistment in suburban real estate boards. Such efforts met with mixed success across the metropolitan region, but the effects were pronounced in the south suburbs. According to one black broker, the South Suburban's board "had been pleasant, and some board members had 'leaned over backwards' to be nice to her" (Berry, 1979, 141). During the course of this debate Park Forest remained proactive in its efforts toward desegregation, and began to offer open housing opportunities throughout the 1970s. According to the same broker, "Park Forest was another suburb in which she wouldn't work, since she felt that it was pretty much "open," and her interest was in those suburbs that denied blacks entry (Berry, 1979, 141). In 1976 the National Civic League formally acknowledged integration efforts in Park Forest, by declaring the village an All-America City. This is a

prestigious award presented to communities whose citizens band together around a specific challenge and are successful in their efforts.

### **Realizing a Successful Integration**

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the village became more racially and economically integrated. The original population of Park Forest was a fairly homogenous group, “well educated and relatively white-collar; the 14.7 median years of schooling meant college graduates and PHDs, professors, and salesmen, purchasing agents, managers, technicians”(Harkins, 1989, 8). And through the course of 1960s integration efforts the recruited African-American residents similarly reflected this model with the understanding that by targeting specifically middle-class and well-educated African-American families the village established trust among residents, which, in turn, eventually allowed for a fuller integration. The village’s African American population grew from 2.27 percent in 1970 to 12.2 percent in 1980, “Between 1970 and 1973 alone, the village’s African American population increased from about two to seven percent” (Harkins, 1989). Along with increased racial diversity, the village became more economically mixed. In 1979, Park Forest’s median family income was greater than that of Illinois, as it had been since 1949, but median incomes changed from fifty percent to ten percent greater than the state average (Harkins, 1989, 16).

According to the American Community Survey, Park Forest’s population today is about 25,000, and fifty five percent of the village is African American (ACS, 2006). The community remains well educated, with over 85% of the population having completed high school or higher

levels of schooling. The high numbers of rental units, and subsidized housing units today is also significant. According to John Ostenburg, “Today we have a lot of single-family rental, and a lot of it is subsidized. We have our own housing authority, so that we have more control over absentee landlords than some of the other communities do” (Ostenburg, 2010). In 2010 approximately one-third of the housing property in Park Forest is rental. Following the initial integration, Park Forest began providing significantly higher quantities of affordable housing. By “recruiting” middle-class black families first, and later providing more affordable housing opportunities, the village realized the sort of integration that counters ghettoization. This was not just a “brain drain” of black elites; Park Forest came to represent an environment of suburban housing stock and community oriented services across color and class lines.

When attempting to get a quantitative picture of the village’s current degree of integration, the Lewis Mumford Center provides especially revealing statistics. When considering the extent to which different races are distributed across the village, measured by an index of dissimilarity. The Index of Dissimilarity measures whether or not different groups are distributed across metropolitan areas to the same extent. “A high value indicates that the two groups tend to live in different tracts. D ranges from 0 to 100. A value of 60 (or above) is considered very high. It means that 60% (or more) of the members of one group would need to move to a different tract in order for the two groups to be equally distributed. Values of 40 or 50 are usually considered a moderate level of segregation, and values of 30 or below are considered to be fairly low” (Mumford Center, 2010). In the case of Park Forest the measure of Whites living with Blacks are 25.6, Whites with Hispanics 7.8, Blacks with Whites 25.6, and Black with Hispanic 22.4(Mumford Center, 2010). In a measure of the level of “Isolation” from other races, with 100% as totally isolated within one’s member racial group and zero as totally separated

from that group, Park Forest shows numbers around 50% for African Americans and whites. It therefore becomes apparent that the village today is not just integrated in name, but rather in a far reaching manner that can be quantifiably expressed.

Ostenburg attributes the community's success to several different important factors. He cites the educated populace as an important factor in the village's success. While originally fiscally conservative, the village of Park Forest has always been home to a high number of educators and progressive people. Interracial marriage was widely accepted in the community long before it was on a wider national level (Ostenburg, 2010). Secondly, as a fully planned community, Park Forest had no historical precedents for exclusionary race politics. Despite original lending discrimination, influenced by national FHA policy, Park Forest had no severe structures of racism built into its charter. For this reason, racial integration did not go against an established exclusionary culture. Furthermore, as the town was young, there were no historical "traditions" or ideal landscapes that could covertly act as barriers to diversity. The town instead was built as a planned egalitarian community for young American families. "Another thing that made a difference was that there was very little exclusionary housing. Whereas in other communities, you have the poor neighborhood and the rich neighborhood and everybody in between...we didn't have that in Park Forest... But there was not that great pocket of wealth and pocket of poverty" (Ostenburg, 2010) While racial integration in Park Forest was the result of hard work by several knowledgeable actors, certain unique aspects of the community made such an integration possible.

## **Political Economy and Race Today**

While explicit racial covenants no longer promote racially segregated space in the south suburbs of Chicago, tensions around political economies of space are still informed by race and thereby influence the growth of these places. Two clear examples of racially informed growth come in discriminatory redlining by major retailers and the production of exclusionary idyllic landscapes on the rural fringe.

While white flight receives attention and study, redlining by retailers is more difficult to identify and describe. This report understands redlining as the discriminatory logic that informs the discrimination by retailers against areas with high concentrations of minority residents. Redlining shows big box stores purposefully avoiding communities of color, despite socio-economic factors. Such appear obvious in the case of Chicago's south suburbs, "For years, neighborhoods on the south side didn't see any development. What did you see? Store front churches, taverns liquor stores, you didn't see any grocery stores" (Ostenburg, 2010). Although such a lack of retail appears racially informed, there are numerous spurious factors that could commonly influence this dearth of business.

The older suburbs and neighborhoods of Chicago's South Side are home to low-income people. This is a now historically marginalized zone. But in the case of the far south suburbs, and specifically Park Forest's neighbor Matteson, Illinois, the reality becomes different. "Matteson was ideal as the south suburban community to focus on, because it was at a traffic intersection that if you physically picked it up and located it elsewhere in the western suburbs, in the northern suburbs... it would have been thriving with commercial activity."(Ostenburg, 2010) The village is located on several major commercial corridors, and has had a large shopping mall for years.

“The Village of Matteson is a community of approximately 15,000 in population occupying an area of approximately 10 sq. miles. The community is situated within the southwest corner of Cook County...Interstate 57 bisects the community and provides a direct northwest thoroughfare to Kankakee to the south and downtown Chicago to the north (ICMA, 2004). The village is, by all accounts, geographically well suited for investment, and has a well-developed pre-existing infrastructure. But during the 1980s and 1990s, in the face of an increasingly racially mixed place, businesses began locating elsewhere. “Matteson, along with the diverse communities of the Southland, suffered tremendous economic losses resulting from the closure of large and small retail centers relocating to homogeneous communities north and west... Further aggravating the economic distress, new retailers shunned the region, eliminating the opportunity for new economic starts to revive the communities’ economic base” (ICMA, 2004). As a result to this outflow of capital, the city began to woo large retailers to no avail. “When you looked at this ideal location of traffic, and property that was there... and that owners of the property that wanted to attract these businesses, and yet no one would respond to the requests... There were incentives being offered by the community, all of these kinds of things with no response. Well, what conclusion can you draw?”(Ostenburg, 2010) In 1999, the village began considering the mission of restoring economic viability to the main commercial corridor. But traditional economic development techniques were falling through. “The administration soon realized that the goal to restore high-end retail back to our community was constrained by the perception of our community... Conducting over 12 scientifically designed focus group studies, evidence was documented to support our hypothesis that new “Class A” retail was not coming to the Village of Matteson and many of our neighboring South Town Communities due to the process of economic redlining”(ICMA, 2004).

To combat this tension, Matteson launched a five-step process to reestablish economic potential: 1) Reorganization of Administrative Capacity to Address Economic Development, 2) Letter Writing Campaign, 3) Kinco/Kmart/Lincoln Mall Redevelopment Plan, 4) Promoting Sales above Corporate Projections, and 5) Regional Green Power Rally Day. This plan represented conscious community efforts to challenge the manner in which unconscious racial discrimination affects the growth machine.

“I was at an economic development seminar and someone said to me... the folks that sit in New York with major chains and figure out where they’re going to locate stores... look at a series of segments of information. One is simply location... Secondly, they look at the cost of investing in that location, versus the probable return... We were told, “White people don’t want to go into black neighborhoods [to shop], black people will go into white neighborhoods, so if you locate in the white neighborhoods you get the best of both worlds. If you locate in the black community you only get the black consumer.” It’s all motivated by business formulas” (Ostenburg, 2010).

Matteson achieved success in its campaign against redlining, largely in the same way Park Forest was able to effectively integrate during the 1960s, through disassociating negative economic perceptions from racial identities. The community rallied behind the efforts,” The September 6, 2003 Green Power rally hosted hundreds of citizens from across the region... To date, Borders Books and Music is reporting a 170% increase above its initial sales projections with Sportmart more than doubling its sales projections and Linens n’ Things exceeding its competing stores in a homogenous western community by over three times” (ICMA, 2004). Matteson was able to expose the racial motivations behind movement of retailers owing to its ideal locale and commercial space, but it’s “Green Power” campaign represented years of work of and many thousands of dollars. The same effort would be unnecessary elsewhere, and impossible in places like Park Forest. The Matteson example is important as it invalidates racial prejudices, but is not an easily replicated model. A daunting conclusion from the study exposes the extent to which

spatial inequalities are further exacerbated by unconscious social biases. Operating in a context that emphasizes development with discrete cities and towns as actors, instead of a more regionally focused approach, stratifies economic and social divides across these regions. Considering Matteson's letter writing, the most effective means of combating racially motivated growth machines appear to come by challenging all growth decisions, and voicing questions about the ethics of development choices.

During the 1990s, when the South Suburbs of Chicago became more widely integrated, rural fringe communities to the southwest grew in size and exclusivity. Many point to such growth as perceived paths of "white flight," (Chicago to South Suburbs, South Suburbs to rural fringe) and although the growth of these communities is not exclusively racial motivated, their preservation of an idyllic rural aesthetic creates exclusive space. Exchange value expressed via rents and lot-sizes remains the most prevalent segregating force in suburban Chicago today. On the rural fringes of these suburbs, such segregation plays out in the context of a specific aesthetic. Through the rigid maintenance of an "idyllic rural" landscape, towns discourage any significant integration. Large brick homes, with large lots are inherently connected with an idealized notion of recreation and lifestyle. In a study of Bedford, New York, James and Nancy Duncan describe the manner in which exclusionary spaces are unconsciously encouraged by a particular built form,

"Questions about aesthetic appreciation are generally seen as personal, spontaneous, and non-ideological—a matter of personal taste that happens to be shared by like-minded, similarly educated members of ones community...They tend to naturalize their privilege, having no reason or desire to trace the far-reaching, unintended consequences and complex conditions of their privilege"(Duncan and Duncan, 2006).

Similar concerns with "historic" aesthetics discourage racial integration in the southwestern rural fringe suburbs of Chicago. As the suburbs extended into formerly rural areas, "sleepy towns" were suddenly met with an influx of people. This influx brought a gentrification of the formerly

rural space. Towns, such as New Lenox, Illinois, were favored for their “traditional” feeling, according to John Ostenburg, “You’d almost think of New Lenox at that time as like a New England Community. Just from the way it was laid out, from the way people’s attitudes were.... It was all white” (Ostenburg, 2010). It is of little consequence whether this segregation was conscious. What becomes apparent is that it was perpetuated by an exclusionary aesthetic, visible in the actual environment.

In the early 1980s, New Lenox was de facto integrated through the introduction of large-scale housing developments. And this was not an uncontested experience. The large housing developers provided a certain amount of necessary affordable housing, and therefore opened the community to a very small level of economic diversity. “It’s really interesting because today communities bend over backwards to attract developers...Back in those days it was just the opposite” (Ostenburg, 2010). The community would force developers to invest in projects, and eventually give in to offers. So when affordable housing units were developed, it was with hesitancy. “A lot of that change that came about, was kind of like forced change...They would try to hold things down, putting these restrictions in...Another thing was requiring a lot size....Well if a lot is a certain size, you’ve got to build a home of a certain size, and if you build a home of that size, who can afford to have that house?”(Ostenburg, 2010). Despite outcry against developments, the town could not resist “open access,” but the exclusionary landscape continues to maintain a largely white environment to this day.

## **Conclusions**

When considering the role of race in suburban development several things become apparent. Although the establishment of exclusive racial covenants appears to treat an open race-based discrimination, their true tension most often dealt with economics. The prevailing concern among homeowners has always emphasized property value. More than an inability to live beside other races, people feared the influence of racial diversity on their personal livelihoods. And such tensions remain today. Despite general advances in race relations and the many victories of the civil rights movement, redlining by retailers and the production of exclusive exurban idylls continue in Chicago's south suburbs. The example of Park Forest now becomes most instructive when considering the intricacies of racially informed spatial discrimination. In order to effectively integrate the village, in spite of the dominant social norms, Park Forest disassociated race and economics. Through severing the link between lower property values and African-Americans, the village resisted the coercive scare tactics playing out elsewhere. The same conclusion emerges in cases of redlining and covert discrimination by major retailers. When there is no economic justification for the neglect of specific communities, as in the case of Matteson Illinois, retailers can destabilize race biases by locating in African American communities. Although it took intrusive, and manipulative policies, Park Forest was able to establish a real diversity, economic and racial, by first squashing economic prejudices.

Park Forest also importantly speaks to the role of specific community actors and individuals in the negotiation of suburban growth. It becomes clear that all the dominant trends in growth are not inevitable or logical, but are rather inherently alterable. While place-based interests seem to always favor growth, the face of that growth is influenced by social factors. In the case of Park Forest, agents were crucial in the creation and subsequent integration. Through the conscious efforts of knowledgeable actors like Harry Teshima, Jim Saul, Robert Dinerstein,

the Unitarian Church's Social Action Committee, and the Park Forest Human Relations Commission, the nationally supported paradigm of segregated growth was rejected. In Matteson, similar community efforts allowed the Green Power Coalition to launch a letter writing campaign, exposing the fallacy of economic redlining. Park Forest crucially demonstrates the unconscious malignance of the status quo, and describes the manner in which community actors can resist normalcy and establish new suburban environments.

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