

White Flight, the Inner City, the 'Burbs

There were three major migrations by Southern blacks into Northern cities that make up “the Great Migration.” After the Civil War, many former plantation slaves decided that they never wanted to work on a farm again and moved north to work in factories or as merchants. During both WWI and WWII, a large number of jobs to fund the war effort opened up in those cities and created economic pulls that sparked the other two migrations. After each of these migrations, there was a backlash by city fathers against these newcomers, and many efforts were made to segregate them from the existing white population. The WWII migration was so large however, that many real estate developers developed themselves a new strategy. They began to build planned communities on the outskirts of these major cities—Los Angeles, Oakland, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, etc.—with housing and shopping developments to meet the needs of their clientele. “Covenant” restrictions in real estate—which were legal then—allowed realtors to deny residence to people who were seen as undesirable. Soon, many of the businesses those people worked at relocated to these outskirts of the urban space so that desirable employees wouldn’t have to commute so far. The phenomenon of whites fleeing the city centers to move to these housing developments was eventually given the name “white flight.” The spaces on the outskirts of the urban environment were given the name “sub-urban” spaces, and the city centers that they left and where job and housing prospects soon became bleak were given the name “inner cities.” If you were raised in the suburbs, it’s most likely because someone in your family at some time moved there to get away from black people. And yes, this is the case even if you are black. As both political and economic power shifted to the suburbs, many upwardly mobile blacks did not want to live in these deteriorating urban centers either and moved to the suburbs once covenant restrictions were outlawed. And it worked. In seven years substitute teaching in East and South LA—formerly majority-white neighborhoods—I taught exactly zero American white kids. Ze. Ro. The only phenotypically white children I ever taught in all those years were sons and daughters of Eastern European immigrants.

One of the ways real estate developers got white people to move out of the city centers and into their new picket-fenced paradises was to terrify them with the prospect of their children having sex with black children. For most of American history, racial miscegenation was taught as something to avoid because “pure” races were better than “mixed” ones. There was no real scientific proof for this, but most people bought into it anyway because it sounded scientific. There are dozens of cases of city residents being telephoned or flyers being spread that warned people that if their children’s schools were integrated, “amalgamation” of the races was inevitable. Tanner Colby wrote a great book called *Some of My Best Friends Are Black* that details some of these marketing strategies. These developers also made up a concept called “property values” and told people that theirs would go down once black people moved into their neighborhoods. There was no evidence to prove this, but people bought into it because real estate developers were professional housing people so they figured they would know. At any rate, school integration debates were ALWAYS fueled by fears of racial miscegenation. This despite the fact that children are generally much more interested in “playing” than miscegenating with each other or whatever because, you know, *THEY’RE KIDS*. Still, people could not abide by the idea that their children—who hadn’t been adequately conditioned by ideas of racial supremacy—would not have the

hatred in their hearts yet to keep them from forming emotional bonds with children of other colors. And they were right, because children have a very difficult time understanding the concept of race. But this is mostly because the concept of race is poorly formulated. Kids, as it turns out, are more logical in this respect than grown-ups, and more clearly see the weaknesses in the argument. We live in a culture, however, that is taught to value adult logic and experience, and to devalue the “naivete” of young people. And so sometimes we shoot each other instead. Luckily though, a great deal of the time we don’t, which is better.