It Takes A Village:

Managed Integration and White Flight in Oak Park, Illinois, 1963-1980

Theodore Schmiedeler
Undergraduate Senior Thesis
Department of History
Columbia University
April 1, 2026

Seminar Advisor: Rhiannon Stephens
Second Reader: Lori Flores
Word Count: 16,999

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

They say it takes a village to raise a child and nurturing this thesis was certainly a collective effort. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Lori Flores whose willingness to take on this project in the fall gave me a needed confidence boost and whose diligence challenged me to extend the scope of my thinking in both methodology and content. I want to thank Professor Rhiannon Stephens for cultivating a rigorous seminar environment, supporting me throughout the process, and, above all, holding me strictly to the word limit. This project is better off for it.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all my professors whose courses have directly or indirectly shaped this project. Thank you to Professor Barbara J. Fields for reformulating my understanding of race and demonstrating the importance of precision in language and thinking. Thank you to Professor Casey Blake for painting the intellectual picture of America during my period of study and for extending a hand when I needed one the most. Thank you to Professor Mark Carnes whose class planted the seeds that eventually grew into this thesis. Thank you to Professor Camille Robcis for pushing my curiosities across the Atlantic. Thank you to my incredible TAs – notably Juliana Torres, Vayne Ong, Lelia Roche, and Kate Reeve – for cultivating fruitful discussions and helping me make sense of an ever-changing university.

A project like this necessitates extensive time in a library and I am lucky to have been supported by excellent librarians and joined by good company near Avery Library Shelf 307b. Thank you to Jenny Davis for helping to frame my research and to Eric C. Glass for supporting my mapping efforts. Thank you to Grace Kaste for her diligent edits and questions that catalyzed important breakthroughs during this process. Thank you to Ale Díaz-Pizarro for her proofreading and for her companionship on the journey through my history degree, and indeed life. Thank you to all my seminar classmates whose suggestions and revisions pushed this project forward.

This project would not be possible without steadfast support from my Oak Park community. Thank you to Rachel Berlinski from the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society for guiding me through the archives with a warm smile during my many visits. Thank you to Frank Lipo and Ken Trainor for directing me towards relevant resources and keeping the history of the village alive. Thank you to Carrie Vacon for helping me access the Oak Park Public Library Special Collections. Thank you to Cathi Knickrehm, Tom Gull, Terry Fahey, and Maggie Harmon for connecting me with interview subjects. Thank you to Mary Pat Haley for connecting me with interview subjects and showing persistent love to me throughout my life. Thank you to Mike Klawitter for being a spark of laughter, shoulder to cry on, and a companion to run with.

Thank you to each of my oral history subjects for participating in this project. I want to extend a special thanks to Mac Robinet for his lengthy and infinitely insightful interview, Clifford Osborn for providing critical details about the Village government's inner-workings, and Lloyd King whose willingness to meet with me after a cold Facebook message to his sister exemplifies the love and generosity by which he lives life.

I would not be the student I am without the unsung efforts of countless teachers whose diligent, selfless commitment to education has taught me much about history and even more about myself. Thank you to Mr. Kenneth Sengstock for setting me down a life-long path of historical inquiry in 7th grade. Thank you to Mrs. Katrina Vainisi for teaching me the importance of striving for justice. Thank you to Mr. Matthew Sparapani for showing me the possibilities of life when lived to a high standard. Thank you to Ms. Annie Hipple for her care and support during the depths of the pandemic. Thank you to Mr. John Hoarty for demonstrating the true meaning of learning for the sake of learning and for giving me a meal to look forward to every time I return home. Woot!

I owe an incredible debt of gratitude to my parents. Thank you for supporting me unconditionally during what has, undoubtedly, been a difficult year. Your love has made this project possible, and I am grateful for the sense of curiosity, the drive to bring out the best in everyone, and the determination to work towards a more just world that you have demonstrated to me throughout my entire life.

Finally, thank you to Oak Park, the real and the abstract. The hours poured into this project would not have been possible without a deep love for and pride in the Village, its past, present, and future. Pride can be a tricky thing. In his book *Achieving Our Country*, Richard Rorty encourages us to have pride in the country we want to create, even if that country only exists in the abstract. To abandon pride is to abandon the project of improvement. It is this spirit of pride, one that cuts so deep as to acknowledge the good and the bad so that shortcomings can be overcome, that drove this project. I hope, in some small way, that this thesis is able to push Oak Park forward.

Abbreviations

CCHR – Citizens Committee for Human Rights

CRC – Community Relations Commission

CRD – Community Relations Department

FHO – Oak Park Fair Housing Ordinance of 1968

HCC – Hawthorne Community Council

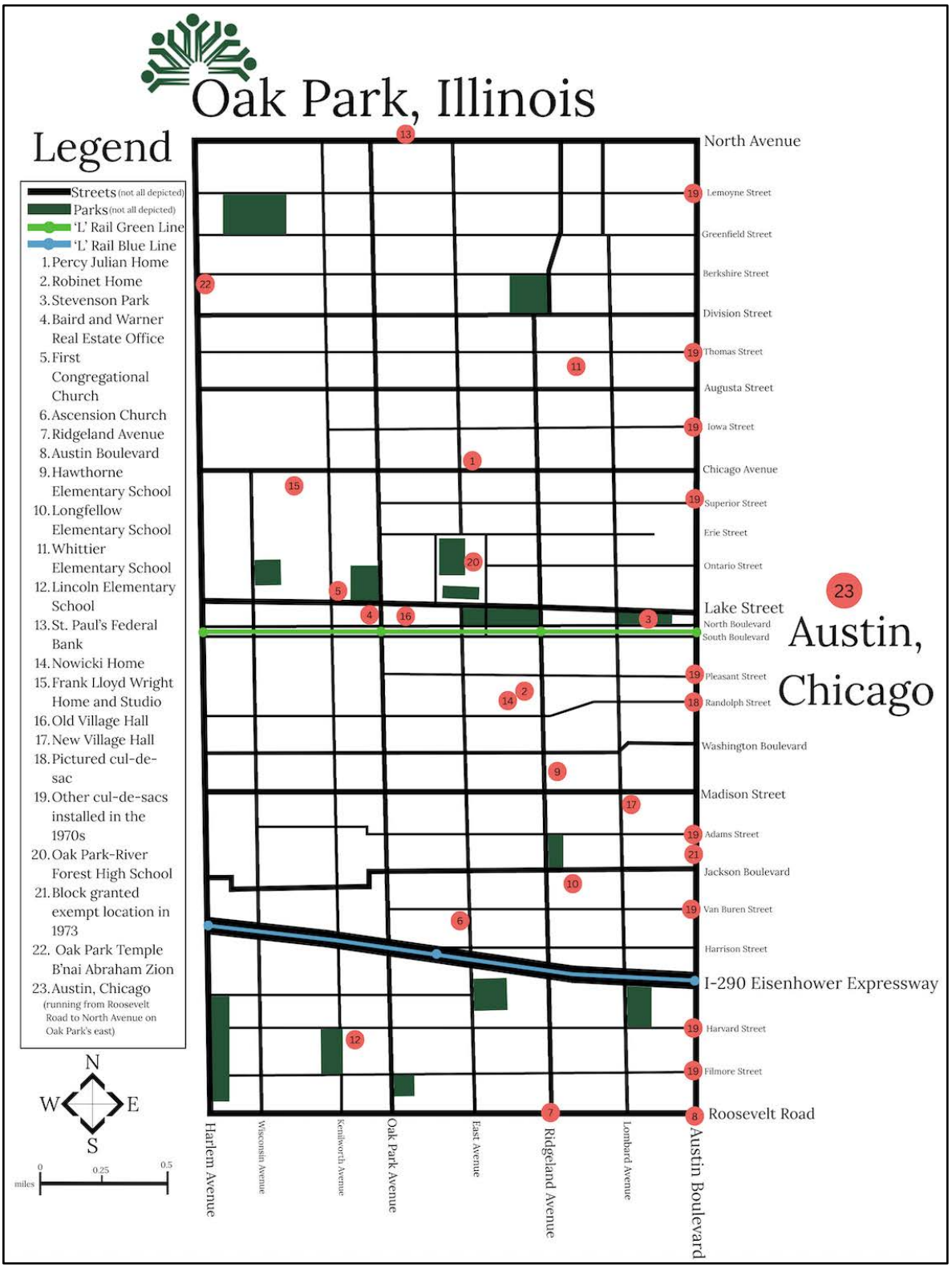
LWV – League of Women Voters

NCCJ – National Council of Christians and Jews

OPHC – Oak Park Housing Center

POC – Project Open Communities

Map of Oak Park, Illinois[1]



[1] Map created by author. Data cross-referenced with OpenStreetMaps.

Introduction

"A surge of Negroes in the western suburbs is expected in the 1970s. The first target of this expansion will be Oak Park."[1] Printed in the June 28, 1968 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, these words followed the release of the Hospital Planning Council for Metropolitan Chicago's annual study. To the public this study meant little; it was largely inaccessible and contained mostly mundane information. What mattered was its interpretation. Straight to the papers ran University of Illinois at Chicago sociologist Pierre DeVise, a boisterous figure who had become known to the Chicagoland public as the soothsayer of demographic shifts. Whether or not he was correct, the words of "Windy City's Socrates" held weight, and his most recent prediction declared that Oak Park, a suburb immediately adjacent to Chicago's west side with a Black population of just 0.1% in 1960, would see its Black population rise to 10% by 1975 then 25% by 1980.[2] "Dr. Gloom" had condemned Oak Park to Chicago's quintessential block-by-block resegregation, one manifestation of the nationwide trend of white flight.[3] The Village took note.

Following the onset of World War II, like other major American cities, Chicago underwent rapid demographic shifts. The small, overcrowded ghetto on the city's south side could no longer confine its booming Black population. Both systemic discrimination and individual, private acts of racism controlled the expansion of Black Chicagoans' urban footprint by limiting which neighborhoods they could easily migrate to, restricting expansion to previously all white, middle and working class neighborhoods on the city's west side.[4] Many of these communities initially erected defense measures to prevent Black Chicagoans from moving

---

[1] Kilian, "City Moves Up in Population in '68 Totals," *Chicago Tribune,* June 28, 1968.

[2] "Pierre deVise" *Chicago Tribune*, May 27, 2004; West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 157; Kilian, "City Moves Up in Population in '68 Totals," *Chicago Tribune,* June 28, 1968.

[3] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 99.

[4] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 16.

in, but as Black residents overcame these measures and settled into west side neighborhoods, white residents moved out, kicking off a loop of white flight and resegregation.[5] This pattern, as deVise points out in his widely read 1966 study *Chicago's Widening Color Gap*, produced a corridor of resegregated communities straight through Chicago, from the gentle waves of Lake Michigan on the city's southeast side to the elm-lined Austin Boulevard at the city's western limit, a border that also marked Oak Park's eastern edge.[6]

Block by block resegregation was not Oak Park's first encounter with questions of racism and integration. In the early 1900s, the village's burgeoning Black community established Mount Carmel Baptist Church in downtown Oak Park with support from its congregants, Black churches in Chicago, and white philanthropists and faith leaders. However, in 1928, a "mysterious" fire inflicted serious property damage on the building, sparking pastor Samuel L. Ford to express in the *Oak Leaves,* the local newspaper, that "our church is not wanted in this community." Less than two years later, Mount Carmel, struggling financially, moved out of Oak Park and took most of its congregation with it.[7] Decades later, in 1950, Dr. Percy Julian, a chemist lauded for his groundbreaking work developing drugs to fight arthritis and rheumatic fever, the 1949 "Chicagoan of the Year," and a Black man, was greeted with not one, but two attempts to bomb his family out of their new home.[8] Oak Park's white population had encountered issues of racism and integration before deVise's forecast.

However, 1968 was fundamentally different from Oak Park's previous encounters with racism. After months of heated debate, the Oak Park Village government passed a landmark

---

[5] Seligman, *Block by Block*, 4.

[6] DeVise, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap*, 87.

[7] During this period, Oak Park had an active chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. See West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 35.

[8] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 19, 43, 44, 64.

local Fair Housing Ordinance just weeks prior to deVise's prediction, guaranteeing the community would be open to Black residents. The suburb had seen weekly civil rights demonstrations in the summer of 1966. Most importantly, by the mid-1960s, Black residents began moving into the village in ways visible to white residents, purchasing homes with the help of white allies.[9] The stakes were higher than Oak Park's previous one-off confrontations with racism. Seeing the fate of neighboring Chicago communities, Oak Parkers understood they were barreling towards an inflection point that would determine the future of the suburb. Which direction would the village turn at this crucial crossroad?

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Historians have worked hard to define American suburbs through examinations of both their physical and metaphysical manifestations. Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontiers* argues that suburban living was both "a planning type and a state of mind," a mutually reinforcing relationship between the built environment and the culture of those who lived there. Distinct from the city, postwar suburbs were defined by their "economic and racial homogeneity," creating havens for those fleeing deteriorating inner cities.[10] Dolores Hayden's *Building Suburbia* and Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias* similarly emphasize uniformity. A disruption to this uniformity could threaten the identity of a suburb. James Wiese extended study of suburbs to Black communities which had previously been overlooked, arguing that Black middle-class residents living in integrating suburbs often tolerated a degree of discrimination and supported defense strategies in order to protect their own interests.[11]

[9] Mac Robinet interview with author.
[10] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 4, 241.
[11] Wiese, "Struggle for the Suburban Dream," 252.

The existing literature establishes a rough trend of white flight and resegregation common across Northeast and Midwestern cities after World War II.[12] Segregated urban ghettos, suffering from issues such as overcrowding, could no longer sustain rising Black populations. Black residents sought housing outside of these ghettos and settled in formerly all white neighborhoods. These white communities, viewing Black in-migration as an existential threat to their way of life and property values, resisted. If Black residents overcame their defense methods and moved into the neighborhood in an amount that surpassed a "tipping point," an indefinable number that varied based on the psychology of individual local residents, then white residents sold homes in rapid succession, spurred on by speculatory real estate agents.[13] These fleeing white residents moved to suburbs far from what they viewed as an expanding ghetto, creating space for more Black residents to arrive. As urban neighborhoods resegregated from almost entirely white to almost entirely Black, an outward transfer of wealth, systemic disinvestment, and redlining, followed.

Amanda Seligman, Arnold Hirsch, A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, and David Sugrue detail attempts by white residents in all white neighborhoods to control the expansion of Chicago and Detroit's respective Black or Latino populations, asserting that community control constituted a key element of the process of whether a neighborhood would resegregate. A framework in Sugrue's work particularly relevant to this thesis is the dichotomy of the "defended" versus "undefended" community, established on the basis of a community's ability to prevent Black residents from moving in. The defended community was organized and acted decisively, maintaining control over its demographic changes. The undefended community was

[12] See Hirsch, *Making of the Second Ghetto*; Seligman, *Block by Block*; Sandoval-Strausz, *Barrio America*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood*.

[13] Card et al., *Tipping and the Dynamics of Segregation*, 2.

unorganized, reactionary, and could not effectively prevent Black residents from relocating in numbers above the "tipping point," leading to white flight.[14] These labels, like "segregated" and "integrated," were not static; defended communities could have their defenses overcome, for example. Thus, as Seligman argues, white flight is best viewed as the final step in a long process of community defense which occurs in instances where defenses fail and white people abandon the community.

Oak Park did not undergo wholesale white flight like deVise predicted. The village embraced a strategy of "managed integration," or defense-through-integration, which, unlike other suburbs, opened up the community to Black residents but sought to slow down their entry into the community and spread them across the village. James Wiese describes Oak Park as a "pro-integration" suburb, marking it as distinct from other suburbs that remained homogenous. Camile Zorich argues that while managed integration opened Oak Park, white residents embraced "racial equity in theory but refus[ed] to relinquish control over their environment." In opposition to Wiese, Zorich asserts that Oak Park did engage in community defense and that integration was a key aspect of this defense, not an aberration from it.[15]

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

I argue that Oak Park's managed integration process is best viewed as a strategy of neighborhood defense, not a strategy of integration. Building on Zorich's argument and in contrast to Wiese, I argue that at their core, both Village policy and grassroots organizations by and large fundamentally oriented themselves around preventing white flight, not on welcoming new Black neighbors. Integration was the vehicle by which the Village prevented white flight,

[14] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 236-246.
[15] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 7, 14.

and while some individuals and organizations may have worked towards integration regardless of its effect on defense, such as white straw buyers in the 1960s, the strategy that prevailed centered on preventing white flight. I complicate Sugrue's defended versus undefended community dichotomy by detailing an example of a community that was both defended and integrated, severing the automatic tie between defense and segregation and lack or failure of defense and integration.

Where Oak Park proves unique is the success of its managed integration. Successful integration to Oak Park was tied to the maintenance of rising property values, a slow increase in non-white residents that would eventually level out, and the dispersal of those non-white residents to all parts of the Village to prevent an identifiable non-white part of the community from forming. By 1980, the end of the scope of this thesis, Oak Park had succeeded on all of these fronts, creating a community unique in its position as defended and integrated. Urban neighborhoods in Chicago, like Austin and South Shore, and suburban communities from around the country, like Shaker Heights outside Cleveland and University City outside St. Louis attempted similar strategies to limit, not prevent, Black people moving into the neighborhood, replicating Oak Park's success to various degrees.[16] Oak Park's success was recognized at the time and situated the village as the national mantle bearer for managed integration by the late 1970s, making the village the foremost example of a managed integration community to study during the 1960s and 1970s.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

This thesis draws on hundreds of primary source documents from the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society and Oak Park Public Library, totaling over 1,600 pages, newspaper

[16] Seligman, *Block by Block*, 195; Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood*, 37.

records, and original oral interviews conducted by the author. While the archives are thorough and rich, there are gaps. Most of the archive is composed of voices in support of Oak Park's strategy of managed integration, from community organizations to church groups to the Village government. The archive does not adequately encapsulate the experience of Black Oak Parkers, specifically those living in rental units on the village's east side, despite them being the subject of many of the policies and practices of the period. Women are also underrepresented in the archive, despite their significant work at the ground level.

Thus, oral histories constitute a necessary and vital aspect of this project. I conducted thirteen oral interviews with fifteen interviewees between October 2025 and January 2026, all but one of which were conducted face to face in Oak Park or Chicago. These interviews vivify and fill gaps in the archive. Interview subjects include pioneering Black residents, white residents, Village government officials, local activists, children of significant historical actors, current Oak Parkers with second hand knowledge of the topic, and more. As someone grounded in the community of study, I took care to conduct these interviews in a manner that foregrounded interviewees as narrators of their own stories, providing them with an opportunity to assert their role in the history of their community and to demonstrate that their history is worth telling. My ethical commitments associated with conducting these interviews involve making this history accessible to the Oak Park community. I hope to provide this thesis and approved oral histories to local community repositories, including the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society and Oak Park Public Library, furnish a copy of this thesis to relevant Village committees, including the Oak Park Reparations Task Force, and serialize my research in the local press for popular consumption. These commitments seek to avoid an extractive relationship between myself and the interview subjects.

In Chapter One, I argue that housing and integration became the central issue of local politics by the late 1960s. In Chapter Two, I argue that managed integration's success was predicated on building a consensus among key village stakeholders. In Chapter Three, I argue that the perception of success led to material success, and Oak Park's public relations campaign centered on calming fears about demographic change was crucial in convincing both locals and outsiders that the village was defended and thriving.

Despite Dr. Gloom's predictions, by 1980 Oak Park had a Black population of just 10.8%, far below the predicted 25%.[17] Managed integration had succeeded in maintaining rising property values and preventing rapid demographic shifts. Oak Park's defense-through-integration had beaten deVise. The question persists: why?

[17] *Local Community Fact Book*, 275.

Chapter 1: There's Going To Be Some Now

Ruth: Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.
Mama (*almost idiotically*): Well I guess there's going to be some now.
– Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pg. 93

Entering the 1960s, Oak Park had a firm reputation as a middle and upper-class suburb with a civic-minded character. The village's proximity to Chicago made it an ideal location for professional class families to settle down, providing access to great public schools, spacious lawns, and well-kept parks without forgoing easy access to the city thanks to the Eisenhower Expressway and two "L" train lines.[1] The suburb was almost entirely white, about half Protestant and half Catholic with a small Jewish population.[2] The village contained a varied housing stock, and its population was about evenly split between single-family homes and multi-family buildings, giving middle-class families and lower-middle-class renters the opportunity to join rich professionals in the same public space. Large mansions, like Percy Julian's, dotted the suburb's north side while multi-family apartment buildings lined major arteries running through the village, with middle-class single-family homes filling the space in between.

Distinct from Chicago, Oak Park had a decisive local government. Following a Village Manager model of local governance, voters elected a Board of Trustees who set village policies and hired a Village Manager to implement their vision. This model of "good government" allowed for the efficient implementation of village policy that stepped above the fray of partisanship or machining.[3] In state and national politics, Oak Park was a solidly Republican town throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s.[4] Amidst its conservatism was a sense of "broadminded[ness]" in some Republicans, the presence of a small contingent of justice-oriented

[1] Ken Trainor interview with author; Frank Lipo interview with author.
[2] "Religious shift here is gradual and steady," *Oak Leaves,* January 31, 1968.
[3] Frank Lipo interview with author; Sokol, *Oak Park*, 118.
[4] Ken Trainor interview with author; Lloyd King interview with author.

liberals, and several progressive religious denominations.[5] The village's relative diversity in religions, white ethnicities, housing stock, and political alignment, established the jigsaw of beliefs that constituted the groundwork for managed integration. In this chapter, I argue that as Oak Park understood itself to be next after Chicago's west side to undergo white flight and resegregation, housing and integration became the defining issue of local politics by the late 1960s, setting the groundwork for managed integration in the late 1960s and 1970s.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Oak Park's foundation in addressing racist discrimination during this period predates its confrontation with fair housing. In 1963, the head of the Oak Park Symphony Association prevented a Black violinist from sitting in on a rehearsal. The act of racism exploded into national news, and several members of the orchestra, including the conductor, resigned in protest. This flashpoint, alongside growing city-wide and national swells towards civil rights, led the Village government to found the Community Relations Committee (CRC) just a month later.[6] The CRC was founded for the purpose of "securing the furnishing of equal services to all residents" and to "develop respect and equal rights without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."[7] Its primary role was to recommend policy to the Village Board and serve as the investigatory arm of the government in instances of illegal discrimination.

Despite the newly formed CRC, racism persisted and access to housing remained a systemic barrier to entry for potential Black residents. Without legislation declaring otherwise, realtors could legally refuse service to any potential buyer for any reason, including on the basis

[5] Trainor, *Our Town Oak Park*, 5; Ken Trainor interview with author.
[6] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 75.
[7] Oak Park Board of Trustees, "AN ORDINANCE ENTITLED AN ORDINANCE CREATING AN ADVISORY COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION," March 18, 1963, OPRFHS.

of race. The Oak Park Board of Realtors opposed fair housing as early as the idea was floated in 1964 because they viewed the entry of Black residents into the community as part and parcel with declining property values and the deterioration of the neighborhood in which they lived. In a meeting with the CRC, the Board cited "public relations concerns" when answering a question in the negative about whether the Board would sell to a "reputable and responsible Negro." The Board did concede that integration in some cases "could be accept[ed], and even support[ed]," just not through local legislation.[8] Preventing local fair housing legislation was core to the Board of Realtors operations throughout the 1960s, underscoring the centrality of the issue of integration to their politics.

Discriminatory policies were common throughout Chicago in white neighborhoods defending against Black migration. On top of denial of service, racist laws and extralegal violence confined Chicago's Black population, which had boomed as a result of the Great Migration, to a small "Black Belt," with often horrible living conditions, on the city's south side.[9] Real estate agents and white community groups employed a range of measures to make moving out of this ghetto difficult, even for middle-class Black residents who had the means to do so.[10] The deeds of homes in nearly half of Chicago's white neighborhoods featured restrictive covenants, legally binding agreements that prevented property owners from renting or selling to designated homeseekers or tenants, often Black or Latino, even if the owner of the property wished to do so.[11] If Black Chicagoans did manage to purchase a home, it was often "on contract," a method where a homeseeker, unable to secure a loan from a bank, paid a real estate

[8] Oak Park Community Relations Commission, "MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE OAK PARK BOARD OF REALTORS AND THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION," June 22, 1964, OPRFHS.

[9] Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 22; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 3.

[10] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 25.

[11] Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 80.

agent directly for their home in monthly installments where one missed payment could lead to eviction with no opportunity to recover their equity. By evicting buyers before their purchase was complete, real estate agents retained ownership of the home to sell on contract to the next family.[12] During the 1950s as much as 85% of Black Chicagoans purchased their homes on contract.[13] Contract buying, alongside renting, was subject to the "dual housing market," a phenomenon where prices and rent in neighborhoods accessible to Black Chicagoans ranged anywhere from 15% to 50% higher than similar accommodations for whites because the supply of accessible housing to Black residents was so limited. White communities often turned to violence if Black residents overcame their defense measures. In 1951, a white mob of thousands in Cicero, a suburb directly south of Oak Park, attacked a newly moved-in Black family over the course of two days and the Illinois National Guard was required to subdue the riot.[14] Community defense groups also used nonviolent tactics to defend their neighborhoods, such as holding mass meetings and distributing flyers informing whites how to keep Black residents out.[15] Others worked to slow and control the settlement of Black residents after they had already entered into the community.

White communities also organized to fight predatory real estate agents. Cognizant of the dual housing market, speculatory real estate agents, known as "panic-peddlers," sought to cash in on both a constricted Black housing market and white panic. Panic-peddlers attempted to "block bust," or flip a block from entirely white to entirely Black. By generating fear of a "Black takeover" among white residents, the panic-peddler sought to induce rapid, successive, below market value home sales which could be flipped to Black residents at prices above market value,

[12] Satter, *Family Properties*, 4, 5.
[13] Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 98.
[14] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 29, 75.
[15] Seligman, *Block by Block*, 173.

scoring a handsome profit. Instead of Black residents dispersing throughout Chicagoland according to their unique housing desires, behaviors and practices used by real estate agents involved in the process of white flight confined Black residents to specific neighborhoods that became resegregated and joined the expanding ghetto.

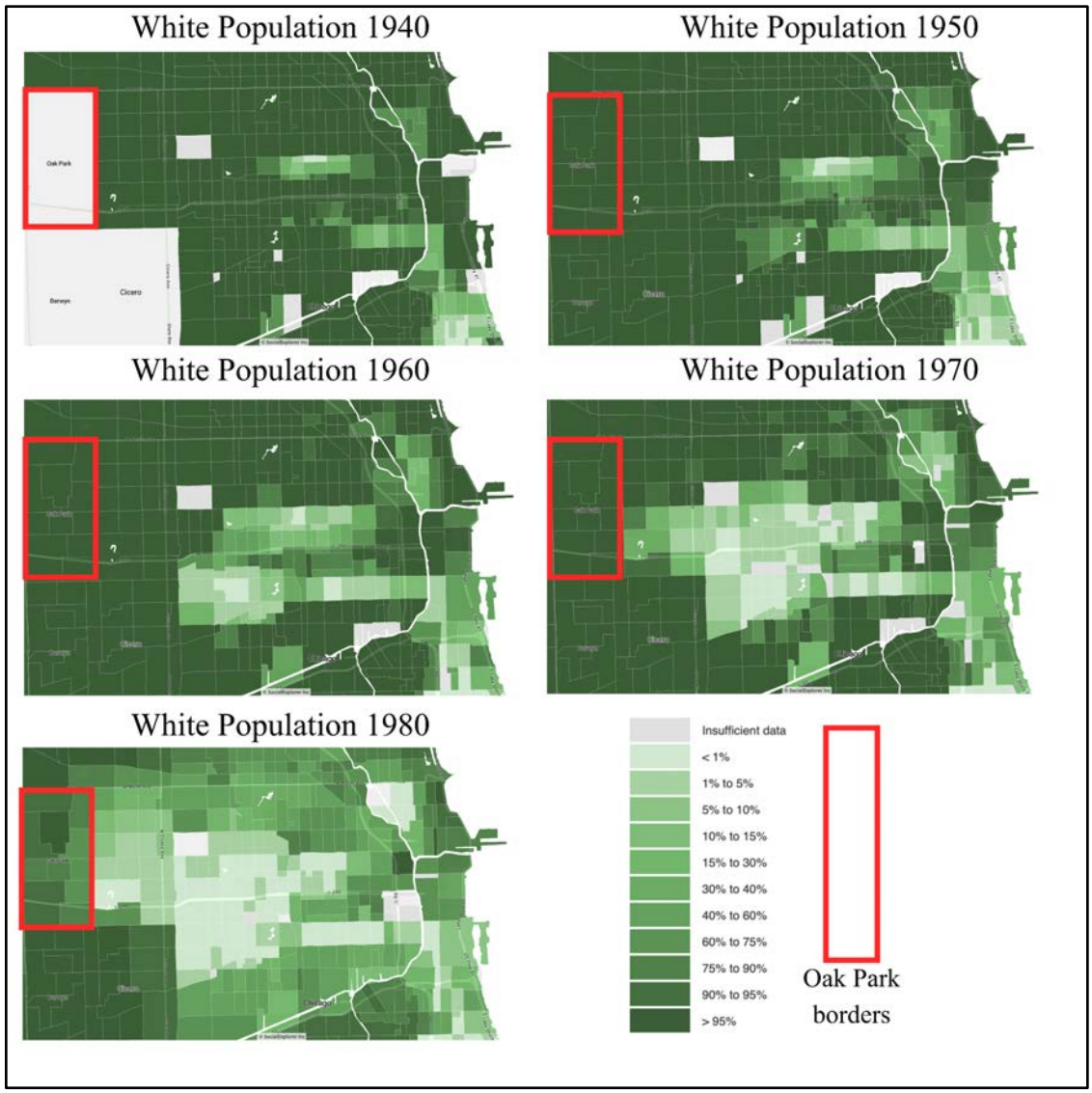


Figure 1. White Population of Chicago, 1940-1980.[16] Darker shading corresponds to a higher white population. Oak Park's borders are outlined in red.

By the mid-1960s, the Black Belt's westward thrust had extended through much of Chicago's west side and had arrived in Oak Park's easterly neighbor of Austin. Residents' fears

[16] White, 1940-1980, *Social Explorer*.

increased because demographic change occurred rapidly, with blocks changing from almost all white to almost all Black in a matter of just a few years, as seen in Figure 1. In 1950, West Garfield Park was 99.8% white and just 0.0% Black. By 1970, it was just 2.8% white and 96.9% Black.[17] Rosemarie Nowicki, whose white family was the last to leave their Garfield Park block, remembers that "everybody swore they were not moving, and then you'd get up in the morning, and…families had moved out during the night."[18] Oak Parkers saw the speed and totality by which west side neighborhoods, including neighboring Austin, changed and planned accordingly to avert a similar fate.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

The Board of Realtors blockade of Black residents' ability to buy homes, born out of fear of white flight, made entry for Black families into Oak Park difficult. To circumvent this legalized discrimination, Black buyers had to work through allied white intermediaries, called "straw buyers," who would purchase a home with money deposited into their bank account by the prospective Black resident and then transfer ownership to them. Leo King, a Black man, and Vera King, a white woman, utilized a straw buyer to purchase their home when they moved to Oak Park in 1964 with their family.[19] Lloyd, the couple's son, remembers that his father pretended to be an inspector in order to accompany his wife on a home tour to fool the sellers into showing them the property.[20] Not all families were as lucky. Mac and Harriette Robinet, a Black couple with children, were turned down seven times while attempting to purchase a home through a straw buyer in 1964. Mac put $10,000 in the account of a white friend who took

[17] *Local Community Fact Book*, 71.
[18] Rosemarie and Jack Nowicki interview with author.
[19] Stevens, "Memo to Members of the Commission on Community Relations," January 21, 1964, OPRFHS.
[20] Lloyd King interview with author.

Polaroid photos of the interior of the house and sketched floor plans to show to the Robinets who were unable to tour properties. In a rare instance where the Robinets were allowed to see a house, upon arrival Mac recalls being told, "I'll show you the house, but I know you know I can't sell it to you." The Robinets finally moved to Oak Park in 1965 after local minister Reverend Donald Beisswenger purchased a home for them without telling anyone, including the Robinets, out of fear that the purchase would be rejected. The Robinets moved in sight unseen.[21]

Black residents moving into the village prompted a response from both residents and the local government. Pioneering residents had to move in the middle of the day in the middle of the week in a fast and professional manner to guarantee their safety. Mimeographed "move-in memos" providing biographical information about new Black neighbors were distributed by the Village Manager or CRC to residents on the block.[22] These memos stressed the high education and respectable careers of their new neighbors. One memo emphasized that a Black couple met while studying at Loyola University.[23] Another praised a Black couple's daughter for attending U.C.L.A while emphasizing the parents' love of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Art Institute.[24] Intended to nip rumors before they spread and thus reduce fear among white families on the block, these memos legitimized Black residents' move-ins through appeals to their respectability and class rather than humanity. They created an imbalance of information where white residents knew personal details about their Black neighbors but not the other way around. When the Robinets moved, a white neighbor took issue with this practice and typed her own move-in memo with information about every other person living on the block to give to the Robinets as a welcome gift and a rebuke of the practice. Some of the content in her memo was

[21] Mac Robinet interview with author. Robinet, "I'm A Mother, Not A Pioneer," *Redbook*, 13.
[22] Robinet, "I'm A Mother, Not A Pioneer," *Redbook,* 12, 13.
[23] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 75.
[24] "Move-in Memo," February 13, 1969.

"not so nice." The Robinets experienced an outpouring of neighborliness upon their arrival to the village, greeted by gifts ranging from fire irons to a potted plant to even a piano, babysitting solicitations from local teenagers, and a stream of visitors so constant that their "electric coffeepot was constantly perking."[25] Underlying this welcoming sentiment was overcompensation from well-meaning neighbors for expected prejudice from others.[26] Mac recalls his next-door neighbor asking him over the backyard fence "why we would live some place we weren't wanted" before she moved out just a few months later. Another Oak Parker questioned if the NAACP had paid for his mortgage, an ironic slight given that Mac, physics professor at the University of Illinois Chicago who would later break the color barrier at the prestigious Argonne Laboratories, had enough money in cash to purchase his home outright.[27]

However, the Robinet experience was by no means universal, and threats, vandalism, and property attacks were used as intimidation tactics against both Black residents and their white allies. Lloyd King recalls reading *The Hobbit* as a third grader in his bedroom when just as "they're crossing the Misty Mountains, bam…somebody had thrown a brick up through…my second story window." The Kings also had slurs painted on their garage and a potato shoved up the exhaust pipe of their car in the years immediately following their move in.[28] Ted Wheeler, a member of the 1956 U.S. Olympic track team, moved into Oak Park in 1965 with his wife and three children and had a cross burned on their front yard.[29] While violence and threats towards Black Oak Parkers could prompt a move-out, threats and retribution towards civil rights supporting white Oak Parkers were utilized to scare them into submission. Dick Menges, a white

[25] Mac Robinet interview with author; Robinet, "I'm A Mother, Not A Pioneer," *Redbook,* 13.
[26] Robinet, "I'm A Mother, Not A Pioneer," *Redbook,* 20.
[27] Mac Robinet interview with author.
[28] Lloyd King interview with author.
[29] "Demonstration and Parade to be Continued," *Oak Leaves*, April 7, 1966, OPRFHS.

fair housing advocate, had his life threatened with a rifle due to his participation in civil rights demonstrations.[30] Reverend Donald Beisswenger's landlord evicted his family after Beisswenger facilitated the Robinet move-in. Unable to find a comparable rental home, the Beisswengers scraped together money from their extended family and purchased a house in another part of Oak Park, forcing their children to transfer schools.[31] Both Menges and the elder Beisswengers nonetheless persisted in their civil rights work.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

By the mid-1960s, Oak Park progressive activism centered on housing and integration. In 1966, as Martin Luther King Jr. moved to Chicago to begin his next campaign, the American Friends Service Committee launched Project Open Communities (POC) and began a fair housing campaign in Oak Park, holding meetings in the Robinet living room attended by Black and white Oak Parkers alike.[32] They demanded that realtors show listings without regard to race, religion, or national origin and turn down service with property owners who wished to discriminate in the selling or renting of their property.[33] The group began their work in April 1966 by "testing" local realtors to prove discrimination existed in Oak Park, sending comparable white and Black families to request similar services at the same realty office. An example of a standard test took place on July 23, 1966 and resulted in a housing complaint being filed with the Illinois Department of Registration and Education. At 10:45am, a white man entered the real estate

[30] Robinet, "Open Community Speech," November 17, 2001, OPRFHS.

[31] Mac Robinet interview with author. The Robinets did not learn about the eviction until after Rev. Beisswenger's death because Beisswenger did not want to taint their move-in. Rev. Beisswenger was a life-long advocate for social justice and spent six months in federal prison later in his life for trespassing onto the U.S. Army's School of the Americas Center to protest U.S. military involvement in Latin America.

[32] Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 7; Community Relations Commission, "Saturday Demonstration in Oak Park," OPRFHS; Harriette Robinet, "Open Community Speech," November 17, 2001, OPRFHS.

[33] Project Open Communities, "A prospectus for a non-violent project to achieve open occupancy throughout the Chicago area," OPRFHS.

office of F.C. Pilgrim and Co. and requested to see a two-bedroom apartment for rent, for which he was given an address. Thirty minutes later, a Black woman entered the same real estate office, made the same request, and was "received courteously by a saleswoman…who said she had nothing available in this category." Another thirty minutes later, another white man entered, made the same request, and was given the same address as the first man, proving discrimination.[34] Testing provided POC with powerful ammunition in their fight, but no immediate results.

Figure 2. Civil Rights demonstrations outside of Oak Park's Baird & Warner office. The Liberty Bell in the foreground was constructed in the Robinet home and frequented weekly protests.[35]

Project Open Communities increased public pressure on both local realtors and the Village. They not only saw local realtors as their opponent, but also the Village, who they

[34] Project Open Communities, "Housing Discrimination Complaint," October 1, 1966, OPRFHS.
[35] Trainor, "Our Finest Decade," *Wednesday Journal,* February 4, 2014.

charged with being "responsible for taking whatever steps are necessary to end the discriminatory practices of realtors within the Village."[36] The organization started sending small groups of Black homeseekers to the offices of Baird and Warner, a large Chicago-based realty office, every Saturday to request real estate services. After several weeks of failure, they returned with around 100 clergymen.[37] After that failed, the group began weekly marches from Stevenson Park to Baird and Warner, where they picketed outside.[38] These marches, shown in Figure 2, rallied between 200 and 500 people and took the fight for fair housing out of Village Hall and into the streets, making fair housing a visible issue to residents otherwise uninterested.[39] Aside from heckling from passerbyers, these demonstrations went on without incident and resulted in multiple meetings with members of the Village government, but no Fair Housing Ordinance (FHO).[40] POC ended their weekly demonstrations after Illinois Governor Otto Kerner signed an Executive Order "prohibiting discrimination in housing by real estate brokers and salesmen in Illinois," a relatively toothless order that got challenged in court but provided symbolic victory.[41] POC's visible demonstrations not only pushed fair housing to the forefront of local politics but also forced the Village government to recalibrate their tepid approach.

Project Open Communities was joined on the scene by a wide range of community organizing groups whose work grew to center on issues of housing and integration. The Oak Park Citizens Committee for Human Rights (CCHR) was the village's most important and outspoken civil rights organization. Formed in 1964, the group announced their presence by

---

[36] Project Open Communities, "Letter to Mr. John Donaker, President," June 14, 1966, OPRFHS.
[37] Robinet, "Open Community Speech," November 17, 2001, OPRFHS.
[38] "Demonstration and Parade to be Repeated," *Oak Leaves*, June 9, 1966.
[39] Nester, "Memo regarding Demonstrations for Saturday, June 11th," June 8, 1966, OPRFHS.
[40] Robinet, "Open Community Speech," November 17, 2001, OPRFHS; Nester, "Memo regarding Demonstrations for Saturday, June 11th," June 8, 1966, OPRFHS.
[41] Chicago Area Committee for Open Communities, "Letter to Oak Park and River Forest Communities," July 18, 1966, OPRFHS.

placing a half page ad in the *Oak Leaves*, the village's newspaper of record that commanded an impressive 86% readership in Oak Park, titled "The Right of All People to Live Where They Choose."[42] This brief statement in support of fair housing was accompanied by a list of almost 1,000 signatories publicly endorsing the concept, a show of strength to their anti-fair housing opponents. Throughout the 1960s, the CCHR worked to open the Oak Park housing market to Black buyers by serving as straw buyers, holding educational meetings, lobbying the Village government, and surveying local realtors on their policies, even launching their own testing program in early 1966 before endorsing the better resourced POC.[43]

Oak Park's League of Women Voters (LWV) also began its work on issues of housing and integration. The LWV was a long-standing, influential political organization that worked on a variety of political issues and was a key outlet for Oak Park's civically-minded, educated women.[44] In 1964, the group sent out a questionnaire surveying its members on pressing integration-related questions such as "If a negro family moved into your immediate neighborhood would you personally stay on?" and "Do you consider integrated housing as a normal and wholesome American way of life?" Respondents answered 92% yes to the former and 93.5% yes to the latter, indicating a consensus surrounding integration.[45] The group endorsed a local fair housing ordinance but with exemptions for large apartment buildings and with code updates to raise housing standards.[46] They held workshops and panel discussions on the topic of

[42] "Voters deserve better," *Oak Leave*, January 3, 1968; "THE RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE WHERE THEY CHOOSE," *Oak Leaves*, April 16, 1964.

[43] Brooke, *Legends of Our Time*, 22, 28.

[44] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 47.

[45] "FINDINGS - Oak Park & River Forest League of Women Voters-Human Relations Questionnaire," February 12, 1964, OPRFHS.

[46] "STATEMENT BY THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS BEFORE THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION ON A LOCAL FAIR HOUSING LAW," February 4, 1968, OPRFHS.

integration and, while less active than the dedicated activists of the CCHR, projected important support for fair housing.

Religious organizations also played important roles in the debates around housing and integration, demonstrating that the issue's relevance extended beyond political organizations. The suburb contained several liberal Protestant denominations, notably First Congregational Church, and Catholic Churches with progressive tendencies, such as Ascension Catholic Church, whose pastor Monsignor Fitzgerald was transferred to Oak Park after serving the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago where he received training from community organizer Saul Alinsky.[47] Oak Park's small Jewish population was also active in the fight for fair housing, as many Jews faced similar discrimination to Black residents when moving into the village. The local synagogue was purchased through a straw buyer before it opened in 1957, and realtors attempted to steer new Jewish residents into the northwest quadrant of the village, which contained the synagogue, as late as the 1970s.[48] The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Oak Park also strongly supported integration, calling for "integration without restriction" in a letter to the Village government in 1964.[49] Oak Park's spiritual leaders also combined forces, with the local chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) serving as their popular front. The NCCJ encouraged active participation in village politics for its members and frequently spoke out in support of fair housing, such as in a February 1968 statement signed by

[47] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 66.
[48] Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.
[49] The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Oak Park, "Letter to Village Board," January 2, 1964, OPRFHS.

57 local clergymen.[50] The NCCJ coordinated closely with other activist groups, including the CCHR, allowing the groups to unite when possible to pressure the Village government.[51]

The aforementioned Oak Park Board of Realtors was the other key interest group in Oak Park's political landscape, although it served as a roadblock to fair housing. The Board of Realtors united local realtors under one umbrella, was well-resourced, and had a near monopoly on housing, which meant that for fair housing to be adopted, the Board must either be confronted or compromised with. There was by no means a consensus on the issue of integration among the Board of Realtors, yet, almost all members opposed a local fair housing ordinance.[52] Some members, such as James Van Doren, explicitly advised clients against selling to Black families, while others were more veiled in their opposition to fair housing.[53] As one of the bodies most affected by a potential fair housing ordinance, the Board of Realtors was necessarily a key player in the fair housing debate.

By the mid-1960s, housing and integration became the central issues of Oak Park local politics. As activist groups like the CCHR, POC, and LWV pushed for integration and the Board of Realtors and other conservative villagers objected to it, Oak Park's government had to chart a path for the village on new terrain defined by the question of fair housing. By 1968, it was clear to all factions involved that an inflection point was approaching.

---

[50] Grant, "Letter to all members of Oak Park-River Forest Chapter of National Conference of Christians and Jews," February 4, 1968, OPRFHS; "Definitive Statement for Clergy Resolution," February 4, 1968, OPRFHS.

[51] Beisswenger, "A Statement to the Board of Trustees, Village of Oak Park," July 5, 1966, OPRFHS; Joyce Beisswenger, the author of this document, was a key spokesperson for the CCHR and the wife of Reverend Donald Beisswenger.

[52] Community Relations Commission, "Report to the Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," February 23, 1968, OPRFHS.

[53] Oak Park-River Forest Committee on Human Rights, "SURVEY INFORMATION SALES," December, 1967, OPRFHS.

Chapter 2: Through The Collective Effort of Our People

Linder (*Putting on his glasses and drawing a form out of the briefcase*): Our association is prepared, through the collective effort of our people, to buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family.
– Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pg. 118

"It seems that two issues face us," stated Oak Park resident Dwight Follett at a Community Relations Commission public hearing in 1968. "First," he continued, "the moral issue of Open Housing and second, and equally serious to me, is the ugly civil war that threatens the unity and integrity of the Community."[1] Follett recognized, like many Oak Parkers, that fair housing was the defining political question of the era. However, unlike others, he identified a fracturing village community to be of equal significance. In this chapter, I argue that as Oak Park sought to prevent white flight, fair housing was addressed through consensus building in order to avoid an "ugly civil war," with managed integration providing both an outlet to defend the community, appeasing realtors and the majority of white residents prone to flight, and an outlet to integrate the community, capturing the ferocious energy of the small but mighty activist scene who were far more organized than opponents of integration.[2]

With Black families already living in Oak Park and a dedicated activist scene working to move in more, it was clear that Oak Park's defense-through-segregation had failed. Nonetheless, village stakeholders still believed that Oak Park could stave off white flight and shifted their approach to defense-through-integration. With this tactic, the Village sought to manage how many Black families moved into the community, where they moved, and the public perception surrounding their movement. Control was key.[3] Through management, the Village believed it could quell the white residents' fears of resegregation, declining home prices, and a so-called

[1] Follett, "STATEMENT OF MR. DWIGHT FOLLETT AT THE BOARD MEETING OF APRIL 22, 1968," April 22, 1968, OPRFHS.
[2] Nester, "Memo to Harris Stevens," June 8, 1966, OPRFHS.
[3] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 7.

infiltration of Black residents into their neighborhood and usher in a slow shift in village demographics without altering its civic-minded, upper-middle-class character.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

To develop consensus around the adoption of a fair housing ordinance, the key piece of legislation sought by housing activists, the CRC began holding meetings with village stakeholders starting in fall 1967. The CCHR and LWV expressed support for a fair housing ordinance; the Board of Realtors expressed opposition. However, the Board of Realtors were not unified in their position. Some realtors were open to statewide legislation. Others argued that there was no need for a local ordinance on account of low demand from Black residents. As "specter of the transition in Austin was evident," the Board held to a defense-through-segregation mindset. The NCCJ, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race all expressed support for a fair housing ordinance during their respective meetings. The CRC also met with organizations from neighboring communities to gain outside perspectives, including the Organization for a Better Austin, a community organization working on managed integration in neighboring Austin, and the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, a city-wide fair housing organization inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.'s work in Chicago.[4]

The Village's consensus strategy attempted to bring key stakeholders into the fold and beat back perceived radical opposition from both the Right and Left which threatened to undermine its careful management. Oak Park had a "whole network of Lefties" in the early 1960s who targeted their activism at Oak Park and the broader Chicagoland area.[5] Vera King, a

[4] Community Relations Commission, "Report to the Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," February 23, 1968, OPRFHS.

[5] Lloyd King interview with author.

Communist Party member, and Leo King, a sympathizer, moved into Oak Park in 1964 in an explicit attempt to break the village's color barrier. In August of 1964, the CRC received a memo from the Village Manager detailing that Reverend Ira Latimer, who had "a substantial FBI file on him" for being "many years a Communist," gave speeches at a meeting of Oak Park residents who were working on moving in another Black family into the neighborhood, noting that the CRC was "watching the area very closely" for further developments.[6] This watchful eye continued to monitor Leftist action in the village; Vera and Leo King's son Lloyd remembers peering through his bedroom window as men wrote down the license plate numbers of cars parked outside the family home when Fred Hampton and the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party held meetings in the family living room.[7] The Oak Park government did more than just monitor, and in 1968 the Oak Park police raided a shop run by Dr. Lenin Pellegrino, another Communist Party member, in search of drugs. After finding none, the police nonetheless shut down the establishment for a "fire violation."[8]

The Village government also strove to monitor and suppress reactionary sentiment against integration. In 1963, shortly after their formation, CRC sent a member to monitor a meeting featuring speeches given against the existence of the Commission itself held by the Young Republican Organization. To the relief of the CRC, its reporting officer concluded that the main speaker had "made a complete fool of himself" and that "this was the consensus of a great majority attending this meeting," alleviating concerns about potential pushback but

[6] Stevens, "Memo to Members of the Community Relations Commission," August 7, 1964, OPRFHS.

[7] Vera King was named after Vera Figner, a leader of the clandestine Russian revolutionary group Narodnaya Volya which assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Vera King's father, a Polish Jew, spent around a year in a Russian prison for fomenting revolution against the Tsar. Later, he and King's mother saw Figner speak in Paris and were so moved that they named their daughter after her. Vera King was a talented doctor and ran the Chicago Black Panther Party Free Clinic in the 1960s and 1970s. Lloyd King interview with author.

[8] Dr. Pellegrino was named after Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin by his father who was also a Communist Party member. "Education Committee Report," *Equality*, December 1968, OPRFHS; Lloyd King interview with author.

nonetheless demonstrating the utility of managing the fringes.[9] In a similar vein, both Chief of Police Fremont Nestor and Village Manager Harris Stevens personally oversaw move-ins of Black families throughout the 1960s. Their physical presence acted as a deterrence to prevent outbursts of violence like the Julian bombings.[10] Chief Nestor arranged meetings with notable disgruntled residents in attempts to conciliate them, including James Van Doren, who expressed outrage that the Civil Rights demonstrations in the summer of 1966 occurred without interference.[11] Monitoring dissent and deterring reactionary outbursts preserved Oak Park's perception as a stable, middle-class community.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

As much as the CRC attempted to beat down radical opposition and fold stakeholders into a consensus, outraged citizens nonetheless organized to defeat a fair housing ordinance. Anti-fair housing advocates circulated a petition to place a referendum on the ballot of the 1968 election posing the question: "Shall the Village of Oak Park pass any ordinance regulating the transfer of property on the basis of race?"[12] Decrying a fair housing ordinance as "FORCED HOUSING!!" that could "BURY OAK PARK??," the Referendum Group, operating on a hunch that a silent majority supported their efforts, sought to kill the legislation through a popular vote, unraveling the patient work of the managed integration activists in one fell swoop.[13] The CRC chairman met with the leader of the Referendum Group in an attempt to defuse the situation but

[9] "Meeting of Young Republican Organization June 11, 1963 - Oak Park Arms Hotel," June 12, 1963, OPRFHS.

[10] Stevens, "Memo to Members of the Commission on Community Relations," January 21, 1964, OPRFHS.

[11] Nester, "Memo to Harris Stevens," June 8, 1966, OPRFHS.

[12] Thorpe, "Letter to President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park Regarding Public Policy Referendum," April 15, 1968, OPRFHS.

[13] Oak Park Referendum Group, "FORCED HOUSING!!," OPRFHS.

was informed the group had no comprehensive plan for addressing integration beyond stonewalling a fair housing ordinance.[14]

Despite attempts at compromise, the Referendum Group could not be deterred through mediation. The Group circulated their petition and garnered 10,156 signatures, surpassing the 9,015 threshold required to get their referendum on the ballot.[15] The CCHR, predicting that the referendum would result in a "no" vote, called on its members to boycott the "clearly unconstitutional and immoral action" in an effort to detract from its legitimacy, cranking up the tension in the village.[16] Meanwhile, the Village government began working behind the scenes to find legal ways to block the referendum, viewing it as a flashpoint of instability that could undermine their defense-through-integration efforts premised upon consensus building. Even though the referendum would be non-binding, the legitimacy of managed integration in Oak Park, a strategy that had yet to work in Chicago, would be undermined if its unpopularity was tangibly expressed through a vote.

The Village Attorney discovered a clever kill switch. If the Village passed a fair housing ordinance before the June election, a second fair housing ordinance would be required to amend the first one. Due to the phrasing of the question, a "no" vote would be rendered ambiguous. It could mean that an individual did not support the first fair housing ordinance, as passed before the referendum, or that an individual did not support a new fair housing ordinance to undo the first one. Thus, if the Village Board could pass an ordinance before the June election, the

[14] Community Relations Commission, "Report to the Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," February 23, 1968, OPRFHS.

[15] "Open housing law opponents ask court to force election," *Oak Leaves*, May 22, 1968; Donald Heine, "5600 persons sign petition," *Oak Leaves*, February 21, 1968.

[16] Hoigard, "FAIR HOUSING LEGISLATION IN OAK PARK WILL NOT," OPRFHS.

question would be "confused and meaningless" and give the village the legitimacy to disqualify the referendum.[17]

In addition to meetings with important village groups, the CRC's consensus-building strategy called for public hearings. The first of these was a five hour session held on February 4, 1968 attended by over 500 residents, 63 of whom spoke in favor of fair housing legislation while 18 spoke against it.[18] Further meetings on March 24 and April 22 produced similar results.[19] Hearings become successively more heated. As fair housing advocates called on the Village to "demonstrate to all our citizens and business community the overriding necessity of justice by all to minority groups, particularly the Negro," anti-fair housing advocates launched threats at Board members and decried the Village for taking away their property rights.[20] Dissenters failed to grasp the defensive nature of managed integration and viewed fair housing as the downfall of Oak Park, with one going so far as to characterize fair housing as a "communist plan" to spread out "the workers" until they were evenly dispersed in time for a "total revolution."[21] Amidst the looming passage of an ordinance, a mob of angry white residents traveled to the home of Village Trustee John Gearen, the Trustee who had proposed the Ordinance and whose position as a realtor lent it legitimacy, and accosted him and his family on their lawn.[22] That "ugly civil war" was bubbling to the surface more ferociously than ever.

With tensions quickly rising, the Village government focused on placating a key actor whose support for their strategy would be crucial: the Board of Realtors. Following the passage

---

[17] Thorpe, "Letter to President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park Regarding Public Policy Referendum," April 15, 1968, OPRFHS.

[18] "Residents jam 'historic' housing hearing," *Oak Leaves*, February 7, 1968; Community Relations Commission, "Report to the Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," February 23, 1968, OPRFHS.

[19] Community Relations Commissions, "REPORT OF PUBLIC HEARING," March 24, 1968, OPRFHS.

[20] Leonard, "Letter to President and Members of the Board," April 22, 1968, OPRFHS; "OPEN HOUSING PASSED," *Oak Leaves*, May 8, 1968.

[21] "Residents jam 'historic' housing hearing," *Oak Leaves*, February 7, 1968.

[22] John Gearen Jr. interview with author.

of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the Village received the push necessary to compel the Board of Realtors to buy into their plan. The Act prohibited housing discrimination as practiced in Oak Park, shifting realtors' incentives towards negotiating a local ordinance with favorable terms rather than stonewalling the passage of an ordinance in its entirety. In a letter to the Village Trustees sent just five days after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Board of Realtors expressed support for a fair housing ordinance on the grounds that "Oak Park citizens may have the privilege of dealing locally with their local officials on matters of alleged violations and be spared expense and difficulties which they would incur if required to deal with Federal officials." Finally willing to work with the Village, the Board of Realtors sent revisions of the draft ordinance to the Village Board, advocating for the inclusion of enforcement methods for "non-resident brokers when dealing with local property" so that the Ordinance would hold both local and non-local realtors to the same standard. Because it sought to protect the interests of the local Board of Realtors and accomplished the Village's goal of encumbering panic-peddlers trying to break into Oak Park, the revision was adopted into the draft.[23]

Factoring in feedback from its extensive consensus campaign, the Village Board drafted a fair housing ordinance to be voted on after a final public hearing on May 6, 1968. Above all, the Ordinance guaranteed "all persons living or desiring to live in the village a fair opportunity to purchase, lease, rent, or occupy housing regardless of race, color, religion, or national origin." The CRC became the designated body to receive and investigate discrimination complaints and was tasked with attempting to mediate between realtor and homeseeker before opening an official investigation in hopes that matters could be resolved informally through conversation instead of adjudication. Importantly for the real estate community, the Village required all

[23] Groenke, "Letter to Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," April 13, 1968, OPRFHS.

brokers to obtain a local real estate license requiring the broker to "read and intend to comply with" the Ordinance, binding firms based outside of Oak Park but doing business within the community to the same conditions as those based in Oak Park. Additionally, while the Civil Rights Act of 1968 exempted single-family homes "sold or rented by an owner," thereby allowing discrimination to continue if a broker was cut out of the deal, the Oak Park Ordinance did not. Closing this loophole served the interests of all members of the Village's consensus, as it blocked avenues of potential discrimination in the interests of activists and removed the incentive for racist homeowners to cut brokers out of their sales, a win for realtors who would not lose business.[24]

Despite these changes, tension permeated this final meeting. Raucous crowds jeered against the Trustees for supporting fair housing. An angry resident threatened the life of Village President John Donaker and police had to warn participants that they would be thrown out lest they settle down.[25] John Gearen Jr., son of Trustee John Gearen, remembers the meeting got "as close as I remember to seeing it break out into violence."[26] At the end of the meeting, Village Trustees passed the Fair Housing Ordinance by a vote of 5-2, with "yes" voting Trustees understanding that they were likely to lose their seats as a result of their vote.[27]

The Village did not simply open up Oak Park's housing market with this Ordinance; it asserted that managed integration was to be its new defense strategy. The FHO included an "exempt locations" clause which stated that the CRC could exempt specific locations or buildings from obeying the Ordinance's non-discriminatory statutes. If an individual felt an area was becoming *too* integrated, they could submit an alternative plan of integration to the Village

[24] "FAIR HOUSING ORDINANCE," May 6, 1968, OPRFHS.
[25] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 115.
[26] John Gearen Jr. interview with author.
[27] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 115.

for approval. The CRC could then grant “exempt location” status based on a variety of factors including the "concentration of racial groups in adjoining or surrounding areas,” which would void the rest of the Ordinance and guarantee that the Village would not prosecute instances of discrimination.[28] One speaker with apprehensions about the Fair Housing Ordinance wrote a letter to the CRC expressing support for exempt location clause, citing it as a “constructive effort to Americanize Oak Park,” underscoring how the clause was seen as a way to preserve the existing character of the village and bring in support from those apprehensive to integration.[29]

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

The first test of the longevity of managed integration came during the 1969 election. Three political parties ran for office in the 1969 local elections, including two parties which opposed fair housing and aimed to undo the gains of the FHO if elected.[30] Despite the passage of the FHO, discriminatory practices continued, particularly in the rental market.[31] Oak Park’s adoption of a managed integration strategy was by no means certain. The Village Manager Association, the party that held power during the previous term and passed the FHO, won the election in sweeping fashion, sending an entire slate of Trustees who supported fair housing to Village Hall. If the 1969 election is to be seen as the realization of the canceled referendum on fair housing, opponents of integration were delivered a decisive blow. The challenge for the new Board would be to implement managed integration on a village-wide level, moving out of electoral victories and outlier cases of pioneering Black families and into a comprehensive, scalable plan that would not succumb to the same shortcomings as Chicago.

---

[28] “FAIR HOUSING ORDINANCE,” May 6, 1968, OPRFHS.
[29] “Letter to Community Relations Commission,” OPRFHS.
[30] Clifford Osborn interview with author.
[31] Brooke, *Legends of Our Time*, 70; Harris Stevens, “Letter to President and Board of Trustees,” July 24, 1968, OPRFHS.

The newly elected Board of Trustees immediately got to work implementing their vision. They established the Community Relations Department (CRD) to become the enforcement body of the FHO, freeing up the CRC to continue their work in other capacities.[32] The Village government's first area of focus became Oak Park's east side, the area between Ridgeland Avenue on the west and the Chicago-Oak Park border of Austin Boulevard on the east.[33] With the FHO established, Austin Boulevard's apartment buildings, often the most affordable in the village, became theoretically open to Black renters. Fearing a new wave of move-ins from Black residents living in Austin, every bank except the local St. Paul's Federal Bank redlined east Oak Park, making it difficult for new residents to move into the village while stirring fear of neighborhood change among existing residents as redlining was considered a forerunner to white flight.[34]

The challenges of the years immediately following the passage of the FHO are encapsulated by the case of Diana Carpenter. In 1970, Carpenter, a white woman, attempted to move into an apartment she had rented with her Black husband. After arranging the rental over the phone, Carpenter and her husband arrived at the offices of Baird and Warner. Upon seeing the couple, the staff panicked and claimed to have misplaced their keys and paperwork before ordering the couple to return at a later time. In response, Carpenter got in contact with local activists who threatened to sue. Upon receiving legal notice, "all of the sudden, they were ready to rent the apartment," and the Carpenters were successfully able to move. A couple years later,

---

[32] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 125.

[33] Rosemarie and Jack Nowicki interview with author; Clifford Osborn interview with author; Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.

[34] John Gearen Jr. interview with author; Diana Carpenter interview with author; Rothstein, *The Color of Law* 97. Joe Scully, the owner of St. Paul's Federal Bank, was close friends with John Gearen, the Trustee who proposed the Fair Housing Ordinance. Scully ensured St. Paul's kept loaning to east Oak Park as a way to support Oak Park's fair housing movement.

the couple decided to move from the apartment into a house in east Oak Park and were only able to secure a mortgage through St. Paul's Federal Bank.[35]

The Village government took action to fortify east Oak Park against white flight, the perceived weakest point in their defenses. They continued their tried-and-tested methods of on-the-ground communication, sending the police chief to meet personally with neighbors of newly moved-in Black residents, encouraging them that "this is not the end of the world." The Village held private meetings with specific realtors, where they encouraged realtors to buy into their strategy. Village Trustee Clifford Osborn recalls that only a few realtors pushed against the grain in these meetings, and the resistant ones were convinced to work with the system by appeals to community defense.[36] The Village also turned to legislative action. Aimed at staving off early signs of white flight, the Village passed an amendment to the Fair Housing Ordinance in August 1972 that outlawed redlining, although it was difficult to enforce. The new Ordinance also required all real estate agents and landlords to file a report with the CRD containing the address and race of each new occupant, providing them with valuable data to track the village's demographics down to the address.[37]

Most significantly, the Board outlawed the display of "For Sale" signs outside of homes and rental units. "For Sale" signs were a visible indicator that residents were leaving and increased fear among residents that blockbusting and eventually white flight were to come.[38] Aside from encouraging move-outs, an abundance of "For Sale" signs made selling homes difficult for realtors. One Chicago realtor explained, "When a prospective buyer comes to look at

---

[35] Diana Carpenter interview with author.

[36] Clifford Osborn interview with author.

[37] "ORDINANCE ADOPTING CHAPTER 24-½ OF THE CODE OF THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK RELATING TO FAIR HOUSING," August 7, 1972, OPRFHS.

[38] "MINUTES OF THE ADJOURNED MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES," February 21, 1972, OPRFHS.

the home and sees signs on five or ten other homes in the block, he gets scared and starts wondering what's wrong with the area." Having witnessed first-hand the power of "For Sale" signs, west Chicago community defense groups like Organization for a Better Austin lobbied to adopt a ban, and Oak Park followed their lead in 1972 hoping to get ahead of Austin's troubles.[39] With their focus squarely on preventing white flight, these two Ordinances demonstrated the centrality of defense in the Village's managed integration plan.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Grassroots efforts at the hyperlocal level assisted new legislation. The Hawthorne Community Council (HCC) formed in 1973 on Oak Park's southeast side by stay-at-home mothers who noticed children lingering on the playground after school, a sign that working families did not have access to daycare facilities. The group partnered with a local orphanage to provide childcare and then expanded its services into supporting tenants being taken advantage of by their landlords.[40] HCC members surveyed apartment buildings for mismanagement and discrimination and brought their concerns to the Village government. If public pressure did not fix issues, the group brought bad landlords to court. They also hosted a public event where individuals could transfer their accounts to St. Paul's Federal Bank to support the bank for their anti-redlining efforts and make mortgages in east Oak Park accessible to potential residents.[41] A similar group, the Harrison Street Neighborhood Association was founded shortly after the HCC and serviced a different part of the village.[42]

[39] Seligman, *Block by Block*, 204.
[40] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 130, 131.
[41] Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.
[42] Sokol, *Oak Park*, 138.

Village-wide grassroots organizations complemented legislation and hyperlocal groups. In the 1960s, the CCHR provided this boots-on-the-ground support, but by 1971 the group had "more than achieved each major objective" relating to integration and began winding down its efforts. Around the same time, CCHR member Bobbie Raymond began building the most important grassroots organization of the 1970s: the Oak Park Housing Center (OPHC). The OPHC was founded by a group of CCHR members in 1972 and served as a central hub for individuals looking to move into Oak Park. Prospective residents could go to the OPHC, receive a list of recommendations for available units within their price range through a counseling process, be escorted to the location of the unit for a tour, and get connected with the realtor or landlord. Additionally, the OPHC, which was staffed almost entirely by a dedicated group of Oak Park women, ran community education programs and provided legal aid to victims of discrimination.[43]

Figure 3. Volunteers busy at work inside the Oak Park Housing Center office. Spatial maps of Oak Park, opposed to floorplans or interior photos, are of central importance. Courtesy of Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

[43] Brooke, *Legends of Our Time*, 94.

Central to the OPHC's operations was its philosophy of dispersal, a strategy that aimed to spread out non-white residents across the entire village. In order to prevent any area of Oak Park from becoming "racially identifiable," a perceived forerunner to white flight, the OPHC encouraged its clients to "look places that you might not ordinarily look" for housing.[44] In the counseling process, Black clients received a list of suggested addresses in west Oak Park while white Oak Parkers received a list that included locations in east Oak Park, adjacent to Austin.[45] The OPHC was clear about its defensive nature, writing that its "primary goal" was the "creation of a stable, integrated community" by "responding to the need for an organization that would counteract the block-by-block pattern of racial change already experienced in areas such as Austin."[46] Further, while the OPHC served homebuyers, its primary focus was rental units, allowing the Center to defend what was seen as the weakest section of the village due to rentals' high turnover rate.[47] The Village explicitly supported dispersal as a tactic and the Trustees unanimously adopted a statement in 1973, just a year after the OPHC's opening, claiming, "A free and open community – equal and diverse – can only be achieved through dispersal: a mixture of racial and ethnic groups throughout the village."[48] By 1976, the Village government even sent tax dollars to bolster the Center's budget because of the OPHC's efficacy in achieving their shared goal.[49] However, dispersal was criticized by some for being discriminatory on the grounds that it denied Black residents the right to move into "sensitive areas."[50] In response, village activists argued that dispersal was carried out through counseling, which was an optional service not a law. Bobbie Raymond, the OPHC's founder and Director, explained that "people

[44] Diana Carpenter interview with author.
[45] "Where We Stand," *From The Center,* OPRFHS.
[46] "Oak Park Housing Center Report," May 1973, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.
[47] "Oak Park Housing Center – A Positive Plan for the Future," February 20, 1972, OPRFHS.
[48] "Maintaining Diversity in Oak Park," April 9, 1973, OPRFHS.
[49] "Oak Park Housing Center 1976-77 Annual Report," OPPLSC.
[50] Nickow, "Reid attacks housing foes," *Oak Leaves*, March 14, 1979.

can go through the market and live anywhere they want" if they were unhappy with their counseling experience.[51] Despite some bad press, dispersal continued unimpeded through the 1970s.

Year	Client Type	White	Black	Oriental/ Yellow	Interracial	Other	Total
May 1, 1972 - April 30, 1973	Total number of clients	737 (72%)	250 (24%)	20 (2%)	11 (1%)	X	1021
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	230 (86%)	29 (11%)	6 (2%)	1 (0.3%)	X	266
1973-1974	Total number of clients	1524 (70%)	566 (26%)	42 (2%)	25 (1%)	X	2157
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	450 (89%)	50 (9%)	5 (1%)	3 (1%)	X	508
1974-1975	Total number of clients	2,439 (69%)	970 (28%)	79 (2%)	38 (1%)	X	3526
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	860 (87%)	96 (10%)	20 (2%)	13 (1%)	X	989
1975-1976	Total number of clients	2638 (61%)	1502 (35%)	95 (2%)	65 (1%)	37 (1%)	4337
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	900 (83%)	133 (12%)	32* (3%)	19* (2%)	6* (1%)	1090*
1976-1977	Total number of clients	3284 (60%)	1915 (35%)	51 (1%)	69 (1%)	142 (3%)	5461
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	1005 (79%)	214 (17%)	10 (1%)	21 (2%)	30 (2%)	1280
1977-1978	Total number of clients	3174 (53%)	2527 (42%)	66 (1%)	64 (1%)	140 (2%)	5970
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	1005 (75%)	279 (21%)	15 (1%)	17 (1%)	28 (2%)	1344
1978-1979	Total number of clients	2898 (46%)	3062 (49%)	59 (1%)	46 (1%)	179 (3%)	6244
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	851 (70%)	278 (23%)	19 (2%)	12 (1%)	32 (3%)	1192
1979-1980	Total number of clients	2761 (45%)	3119 (50%)	55 (1%)	58 (1%)	201 (3%)	6194
	Number of clients who moved to Oak Park	897 (71%)	298 (24%)	14 (1%)	17 (1%)	39 (3%)	1265

*Original numbers listed in the report are derived from arithmetic errors. The correct data are listed. The error totals are 96, 61, 37, and 1227 respectively.

Figure 4. Oak Park Housing Center Data 1972-1980. Compiled from Oak Park Housing Center Annual Reports 1972-73- 1979-80.

[51] Merridew, "Oak Park's racial mix laid to discrimination," *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1975.

While the OPHC was decried by critics as a radical mechanism to facilitate a "black takeover" of Oak Park, the Center played a crucial role in defending against white flight and its clientele data shows that white individuals were the greatest beneficiaries of its services.[52] The OPHC did not successfully move all its clients into Oak Park, as many dropped out of the process or moved elsewhere in Chicagoland. Figure 4 shows the OPHC's compiled move-in data from 1972-1980 broken down by race. The OPHC serviced more white clients than Black clients for the first six years of its existence and maintained a strong white client base throughout the 1970s. Additionally, throughout the 1970s the OPHC successfully moved white clients into Oak Park at a higher rate than non-white clients. For example, in 1972, white clients made up 72% of the OPHC's client base but 86% of its successful Oak Park moves, while Black clients made up 24% of its client base but only 11% of its successful Oak Park moves. This discrepancy would persist every year throughout the decade, even as the percentage of white clients dropped. In 1979-80, white clients consisted of just 45% of the OPHC's client base but 71% of its successful Oak Park move-ins. On the contrary, the Center's 50% Black clientele constituted just 24% of its successful move-ins. While difficult to isolate a singular variable to ascertain the exact cause of this phenomenon, the data establishes a clear pattern of disproportionate white move-ins, underscoring the OPHC's role in community defense.

Figure 4 displays the stark, Black-and-white framework of race that the OPHC and other village groups were operating within at the time. Aside from "black" and "white," Figure 4 shows that the OPHC tracked the migration of residents of Asian-American ancestry, labelled "Oriental" in 1972 and "Yellow" afterwards, but did not discourage move-ins in the same manner as Black residents. This group constituted roughly 1-2% of the OPHC's clientele and a

[52] "Where We Stand," *From The Center*, OPRFHS.

similar 1-2% of successful Oak Park move-ins throughout the decade. In 1964 a few Japanese-American families even managed to move into the village before the FHO and without straw buyers.[53] The same cannot be said for people with Latino ancestry. In 1964, after a Mexican-American family was shown a home by a local realtor, residents of the block called an emergency meeting, which ultimately discouraged the sale.[54] Despite this sentiment, the OPHC had created no category to track Mexican-Americans or other Latino residents in the 1970s, suggesting that monitoring their dispersal did not fit into the OPHC's predominantly Black-and-white framework. Whether because Latino residents were moving in numbers deemed too small to monitor or because they were able to pass as white, they did constitute a portion of move-ins during the 1970s, even if the data writes their ancestry out of the record. Figure 4's "interracial" label is essentially meaningless as the OPHC fails to clarify what a couple's ancestry would be in order to be labeled as such.

The OPHC aligned with the consensus-building tactic taken by the village in its approach to convincing, not fighting, the real estate community. The OPHC acted as a central hub for potential residents, so local realtors and landlords could capitalize on a steady stream of potential clients by offering up their addresses to the OPHC. Instead of running extensive publicity campaigns or publishing scattershot ads in various newspapers, realtors and landlords could have the OPHC do most of their publicity for free, something especially important after the 1972 "For Sale" sign ban took away one of their most effective marketing tactics.[55] The OPHC configured itself in a way whereby its potential foes – local realtors – were incentivized to work with rather than against it. Because breaking into the Oak Park market without working with the OPHC

[53] "Community Relations Commission Minutes," March 23, 1964, OPRFHS.
[54] Stevens, "Letter to Members of the Community Relations Commission," July 26, 1963, OPRFHS.
[55] "Oak Park Housing Center - a not-for-profit corporation," March 10, 1973, OPPLSC.

became difficult, the Center was also able to hinder panic-peddling from out-of-town realtors, something supported by local realtors and the Village government. The Village, OPHC, and real estate community's alignment is encapsulated by a program distributed at the premiere of a film commissioned by the OPHC which documented the experiences of Oak Parkers working on managed integration.[56] The program credits the OPHC with commissioning the film in cooperation with the Village government and is filled with advertisements from local realtors and banks lauding the film and soliciting their services.[57] The collaboration between the OPHC, the Village, and realtors in the 1970s could not be further from the tense battles between fair housing advocates and realtors of the 1960s, underscoring the centrality of the consensus building for Oak Park's defense-through-integration.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

In addition to housing, the village viewed schooling through a lens of dispersal, demonstrating the degree to which integration reached into all facets of local politics and village life. In the 1960s, Oak Park's public schooling system included ten K-8 schools that drew its students from their immediate surrounding areas, collectively feeding into Oak Park-River Forest High School. During this period, the village attempted to disperse Black students across the district in a piecemeal fashion, requesting individual parents like the Robinets to send their children to as many as three different public schools to prevent a "racially identified" school from forming.[58] Recognizing that this fragmentary strategy was not sufficiently dispersing non-white students across village schools, in 1973, District 97, the body which administered Oak Park's public schools, released a policy statement on "racial balance" in the district that

[56] Loeb, *As Time Goes By...Oak Park, Illinois*, 1974.
[57] "As Time Goes By: Oak Park, Illinois Program," OPRFHS.
[58] Mac Robinet interview with author.

acknowledged the "important influence" schools had on the housing market. That year, Hawthorne and Longfellow, two east Oak Park schools that drew students from areas directly adjacent to Austin, had Black populations of 18.3% and 12.7% respectively, while Whittier and Lincoln, on the village's north and west sides, had Black populations of just 4.2% each. District 97 declared that the demographics of elementary schools should reflect those of the "district as a whole," not their surrounding area, and launched a school reorganization process to achieve this, emphasizing that "educational excellence and residential stability…[were] interdependent."[59] In 1976, the school board unanimously approved a plan to designate two of the village's ten elementary schools as middle schools and redraw the service areas of the remaining eight to accommodate dispersal goals.[60] After reorganization, Oak Park had eight public elementary schools that fed into two public middle schools that fed into one public high school. Problems related to discrimination and social segregation persisted in public schools despite the overhaul, underscoring the idea that the plan's primary focus was on dispersal in service of community defense, not creating a welcoming, integrated classroom.[61]

If the goal of Oak Park's managed integration was to defend the community against white flight and declining property values, evidence suggested it was succeeding. In 1976, a study examining the resale prices of 116 homes sold between 1971-1975 indicated an average increase in value of 16.5%. St. Paul's Federal Bank reportedly gave $18 million in mortgages throughout the village and only foreclosed on one home. Listings of available units also declined; the Board of Realtors reported just 670 listings in 1975, down from 1,112 in 1972. One east Oak Park home sold for $23,000 after being purchased for just $16,500 less than two years prior.[62] Realtors

[59] "Statement of Elementary Schools Board of Education," June 2, 1973, OPRFHS.
[60] "Leadership from Oak Park, Evanston," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 29, 1976.
[61] Dorothy Reid interview with author; Lloyd King interview with author.
[62] Jedlicka, "As Oak Park integrates, real estate stays stable," *Chicago Daily News*, March 5, 1976.

believed in managed integration so much that they adhered to a voluntary ban on "For Sale" signs after the official village ban was ruled unconstitutional in 1976 in a case involving Willingboro, New Jersey.[63] While dissent existed at every step along the way, by shifting incentive structures and planning in advance, Oak Park was able to align key actors in their support of managed integration policies and create a defense strategy born out of consensus, not contention, among the powerbrokers of the Village. By the late 1970s, realtors, activists, and Village government alike came to see that against all existing convention their managed integration strategy had produced a stable, defended community.

[63] Ken Trainor interview with author.

Chapter 3: Brick By Brick

Walter: And we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it for us brick by brick.
– Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Managing the material reality of integration was one important half of Oak Park's successful defense; convincing residents in the village and the broader Chicagoland area that the village was stable and desirable was the other. Both the Village government and grassroots organizations used public relations and psychological tactics to defend the community, aiming to prove to itself and the rest of the city that defense-through-integration was possible.

Both the Village government and grassroots organizations understood that curating the village's media perception was key. The Village government hired a public relations firm to handle some of this publicity; however, the OPHC took the lead on presenting a positive image of Oak Park to the press.[1] In its founding document, the OPHC presented its programs in numbered order, with "Promote Oak Park" through publicity campaigns listed first, above its core function of assisting prospective residents which was listed at number two.[2] Further, of its proposed first-year budget, the OPHC was set to spend $7,000 of its $14,500 office budget on publications and newspaper advertisements to promote the village, including 10,000 brochures to "attract families to the community."[3] Branding itself as "The People Place" featuring the "best of urban and suburban living," these pamphlets foregrounded the stability and desirability of the neighborhood by highlighting Oak Park's architectural beauty, citizen participation in the community, strong schools, and easy access to Chicago. The pamphlets showed pictures of Black children and white children sharing space on the playground and in the classroom a few pages

[1] Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.
[2] "Oak Park Housing Center – A Positive Plan for the Future," February 20, 1972, OPPLSC.
[3] "Oak Park Housing Center - a not-for-profit corporation," March 10, 1973, OPPLSC.

after an equally diverse group of adults is pictured at a dinner party, demonstrating to prospective residents that integration was part of the village's identity.[4]

After a successful first year, the OPHC's dynamic media campaign ventured beyond print media and the organization commissioned a documentary film dramatizing the village's integration process.[5] Titled "As Time Goes By: Oak Park, Illinois," the film was initially 25 minutes long but grew into a 78 minute production directed by the chair of the Columbia College Motion Picture Department, who visited Oak Park over the course of a year to film residents. The film premiered to a packed theater of 1,700 people at the high school before making its way across Chicagoland, Illinois, the United States, and even the world, playing at film festivals and on T.V. stations from Chicago to California to Florence, Italy.[6] The OPHC was also active in the local press; a typical year featured "many articles" in Chicago and Oak Park newspapers along with radio and television appearances to promote the village.[7] A dynamic media approach, a core function of the OPHC, was important to project stability to residents and lure potential buyers to the village.

Furthermore, the OPHC curated its pool of potential residents by targeting its expansive publicity campaign at a white, liberal, professional-class demographic. In this vein, the OPHC sent 9,000 of its 10,000 first-year brochures to "universities, hospitals, and other places of employment in Chicago."[8] The OPHC also placed newspaper advertisements in the local papers of predominantly white, middle, and upper-class Chicago neighborhoods of Lincoln Park, Irving Park, North Center, Sheridan Park, and Lakeview in hopes of luring potential residents to the

[4] "Oak Park: the people place," OPPLSC.
[5] Loeb, *As Time Goes By...Oak Park, Illinois*, 1974.
[6] "New H.C. Opens," *From The Center*, OPPLSC.
[7] "Oak Park Housing Center 1973-74 Annual Report," OPPLSC.
[8] "Oak Park Housing Center Report," May 1973, OPPLSC.

village. When crafting these ads, the OPHC adjusted its messaging to appeal to its intended audience. An advertisement in the April 1973 edition of the nationally-circulating, feminist-oriented *Ms.* magazine instructed inquiries to be directed to "Ms." Bobbie Raymond, a departure from references in other advertisements to "Mrs." Bobbie Raymond. "FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT WASN'T WRONG" read an advertisement placed in six issues of *The New Republic*, a progressive and intellectually-oriented magazine whose readers would have appreciated the significance of Wright's legacy. These ads were effective at garnering interest. The OPHC received more than 2,833 written responses to these advertisements between 1973 and 1979, with 596 coming in the fiscal year of 1976-77 alone.[9] This advertisement campaign notably did not extend to local papers in Chicago's predominantly Black and Latino communities on the west and south sides, underscoring the fact that the OPHC sought to replace fleeing fearful white residents with new, open-minded white residents to secure its defenses.[10]

One white family attracted to Oak Park was Rosemarie and Jack Nowicki, who moved to the village in 1967. Rosemarie's family had initially lived in Garfield Park on Chicago's west side and was the last white family to leave their resegregating block. After selling their house far below market value, the family moved to the south side where Rosemarie's mother entered the workforce. Shortly after the move, Rosemarie married Jack and the couple moved to Oak Park in search of a stable community with more room, settling in right across the street from the Robinets with whom they became friends. The Nowickis, committed Roman Catholics, were deeply involved with Ascension Church, which served Oak Park's south and southeast sides, areas near Austin and prone to demographic turnover. Although the "Catholics tend to be more conservative," they supported the efforts undertaken by local activists and the village to

[9] "Oak Park Housing Center Annual Report," 1973-1979, OPPLSC.
[10] "Oak Park Housing Center Advertising 1972-73," OPRFHS.

implement managed integration. Ascension provided what Rosemarie described as the "stronghold of Oak Park," a base of tight-knit Catholics who did not want to leave their church community as Black residents moved in.[11] Unlike Protestants and Jews whose congregations could sell their buildings, recover their equity, and move elsewhere, Catholic churches are property of the diocese which they serve, meaning that if Catholics moved, they could not bring their churches with them.[12] Thus, Catholics undertook vigorous efforts to defend their communities on account of these high stakes, either through violence as in Chicago's white ethnic neighborhoods or managed integration as in Oak Park.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Alongside its outward publicity which brought in new community members, the Village launched a series of community initiatives which had the effect of demonstrating to Oak Parkers themselves that their community was stable. In 1973, the Village launched "A Day In Our Village," a yearly festival celebrating and educating residents about their community. Held in parks across the village, this event attracted residents with food, live music, and opportunities for community organizations, businesses, churches, and other groups to distribute information and sell items, allowing the Village to showcase itself and build confidence in the vitality of the community.[13] Further, the Oak Park Farmers' Market, founded in 1976, established a "focal point" of community for residents on Saturday mornings. Providing not only fresh food, live music, and beloved donuts, the Farmers' Market became another visual indicator that residents were building community institutions in Oak Park, not leaving the village.[14] As local branch

[11] Rosemarie and Jack Nowicki interview with author.
[12] McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 19.
[13] Peggy Sinko interview with author.
[14] Sokol, *Oak Park*, 148, 146. The Farmers' Market was born out of Oak Park's activist milieu. Marge Gockel, one of the two founders of the Farmers' Market, served as a straw buyer for Black families before the

locations of Chicago chain stores began to move out of Oak Park's downtown business district in the early 1970s, Oak Park opened a new mall in 1974 hoping to revitalize the local economy and turn the village into a shopping destination for nearby neighborhoods, with the understanding that "to achieve balanced racial integration depends on having a sound and viable local economy."[15]

Figure 5. A cul-de-sac built at Austin Boulevard and Randolph Street designed to eliminate through-traffic between Austin and Oak Park. Courtesy of Mike Schmiedeler.

The Village government worked hard to communicate specifically to its east side residents that it was not abandoning them. In 1975, the Village opened a new Village Hall on Oak Park's east side to replace a decaying structure on the village's west side. The Village Board

passage of the FHO. Mackinnon, "Galen Gockel, One of OP's 'Greatest Generation,' Dies," *Wednesday Journal*, January 23, 2024; Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.

[15] "A Community Plan for Racial Integration," May 6, 1974, OPRFHS.

selected this location to deliberately display to east Oak Park that, in the words of Village Trustee Clifford Osborn, "you're not being written off; you're not part of our past."[16] Additionally, the Village responded to concerns about growing crime, which was listed as the top concern in a 1974 survey of the village.[17] The Oak Park police department jumped from 94 officers in 1972 to 195 by 1976. Officers spent 65% of their workday on patrol and the Village Manager explained that "these officers are not on preventive patrol as much as they are providing visible reassurance to Oak Park residents," something particularly important to east side residents.[18] The Village also installed a series of cul-de-sacs, shown in Figure 5, along Austin Boulevard, which limit through-traffic between Oak Park and Austin to major crossroads.[19] While the official reason for their installation was to increase parking, these physical obstructions made accessing Oak Park and its amenities more difficult for Austin residents.[20] "To Austin blacks," Austin resident Ron Lawless said, "the Oak Park cul-de-sacs were like the Berlin Wall. 'Do not cross' was the message."[21] Fortifying east Oak Park was crucial to convincing Oak Parkers that their village would not undergo white flight.

The Village considered legislation to solidify some of its psychological campaigns. In 1973, the Village considered adopting a quota amendment to the Fair Housing Ordinance that would prohibit the rent or sale of property to Black people in areas where they already constituted 30% of the population.[22] The quota was proposed in response Black renters moving into pockets of east Oak Park in substantial numbers, the exact pattern of movement the Village

---

[16] Clifford Osborn interview with author.

[17] Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council, "The Oak Park Delphi Process: Summary Description and Findings," 1974, OPRFHS.

[18] Zorich, "Black vs. White?," 207, 208.

[19] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 128. See front matter map for location of every cul-de-sac installed on Austin Boulevard during this period.

[20] Sokol, *Oak Park*, 135.

[21] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 128.

[22] Brown, "30 percent racial quota proposed," *Oak Leaves*, December 19, 1973.

was trying to prevent through dispersal. Villagers were split on the issue; across two public hearings in January of 1974, 25 individuals spoke in favor of the quota, 17 spoke against it, and 9 held no opinion. Speaking in favor of the amendment as a practical means to achieve stable integration, one attendee stated that the amendment "represents a realistic affirmative action" that could lead to Oak Park being "fairly integrated." In response, another attendee stated, "I did not come to Oak Park to see polite racism. It's obscene to call the Proposed Ordinance affirmative action." Another put their criticism succinctly, stating, "The wording in the Proposed Ordinance is racist."[23] Interestingly, the aforementioned Leo King spoke in favor of the quota, saying he preferred a "30% quota as opposed to 100% quota in Cicero and Berwyn."[24] This statement is indicative of an expectation that managed integration placed on Oak Park's Black residents, whereby, in order to live in an integrated community with excellent schools and high quality services, they were forced to accept a degree of discrimination not because they wanted to but because the alternative was much worse. After much debate within Oak Park and media attention from beyond, the CRC voted 8-7 against recommending the quota to the Board and the decision was made to table the amendment.[25] Even though it never passed, the proposal of and public debate around a quota demonstrates that managed integration's central focus was on defending against white flight and that integration was supported only insofar as it worked in service of this defense.

Even though the quota never materialized, the Village addressed so-called trouble areas with other measures. In 1973, the Village invoked the exempt location clause of the 1968 Fair

[23] "Community Relations Commission Meeting," January 17, 1974.

[24] Ronnow, "Memo to Community Relations Commission," January 25, 1974, OPRFHS.

[25] Brown, "Relations unit rejects quota 8 to 7," *Oak Leaves*, February 6, 1974; Brown, "Trustees delay on quotas," *Oak Leaves*, March 6, 1974.

Housing Ordinance in an east-central Oak Park block bordering Austin.[26] After a landlord began circulating a petition to request the exemption, which garnered the support of 70% of the block, the CRD approved the request by a 6-4 vote. This designation ensured that the Village would not prosecute realtors and landlords for discriminatory real estate practices on the designated block. It cast Oak Park into uncharted waters. While the Village guaranteed that it would not prosecute discrimination, there were no protections for landlords or realtors against cases brought at the state or federal level. While no discrimination charges arose from this, it nonetheless sent a message to both Oak Park residents and those in surrounding neighborhoods that the Village would exhaust all opportunities possible to defend the neighborhood.[27]

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

The Village's public relations campaign had an arm that was national in scope. The National Civic League named Oak Park, one of ten communities selected from a pool of around 500, an All-American City in 1976. The OPHC and Oak Park Mall were cited as the village's strengths.[28] Oak Park found praise in nationally circulating media outlets, including from the Wall Street Journal, which ran a full-page article titled "How Oak Park Staved Off Blight," and from CBS which aired a half hour piece on Oak Park to its national audience.[29] Oak Park's All-American status communicated to doubters that managed integration was an expression of American values, not an aberration from them, lending credence to the legitimacy of its strategy.

During this period, Oak Park also worked to turn itself into a tourist destination to build confidence in the future of the community. The village contains the largest concentration of

[26] Brown, "Block files for exempt location," *Oak Leaves*, October 24, 1973.
[27] Brown, "First exempt location granted," *Oak Leaves*, November 6, 1973.
[28] "Oak Park Housing Center 1975-76 Annual Report," OPPLSC.
[29] "Oak Park Housing Center 1976-77 Annual Report," OPPLSC.

buildings designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the world, including the famous Home and Studio, providing the village with invaluable ammunition to build a local tourism scene. In 1974, the Village formed the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, purchased the Home and Studio from its private owner, restored it, and began hosting interior tours of the Home and Studio and walking tours of the surrounding neighborhood, drawing in tourists from around the world.[30] One local resident wrote that, on account of the restored Home and Studio, "It seems like every Sunday morning…there's some Japanese fellow looking at me through a Nikon."[31] The emphasis on Wright also significantly increased property values for the over 20 privately owned Oak Park homes designed by the architect. Frank Lipo recalled meeting a woman in Wheaton, Illinois in 1989 who had moved out of her Frank Lloyd Wright home in the early 1970s because "the neighborhood was kind of changing" but came to lament the decision because "now they are worth so much."[32] Efforts to turn Oak Park into a destination were not just limited to Wright, and actions like the establishment of the Oak Park Festival Theatre in 1975, which performed Shakespeare plays in the park, the 1970 restoration of the Oak Park Conservatory, one of Chicagoland's only suburban conservatories, and the Village's 1973 ending of its status as a dry community, all sought to attract tourists and their money, further projecting stability to Oak Park residents.[33]

Going beyond public relations, Oak Park developed community programs to combat fear of neighborhood change. In 1973, the First Tuesday, a local women's activist group, proposed a plan for an Equity Assurance Program to the Village Board.[34] The program was an Oak Park

---

[30] Sokol, *Oak Park*, 151.
[31] Klein, "How Oak Park Staved Off Blight," *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1976.
[32] Frank Lipo interview with author.
[33] Sokol, *Oak Park*, 156; McCarey, "A Legendary Oak Park Resident (and Friends) Save the Conservatory," *Wednesday Journal*, September 9, 2014; "Oak Park ends dry spell, relaxes rule to allow bar," *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 2005.
[34] "Report of Community Relations Commission on Public Hearings," August 3, 1973.

original and did not build off existing strategy from elsewhere in the country. Homeowners paid a small fee to opt into the program and the Village appraised their home. If they later sold the home for less than 80% the appraisal, the Village pledged to cover the difference, removing the incentive to sell early before home prices dropped in anticipation of white flight. Adopted in 1977, the program had just 113 residents enrolled by 1980, only ten homeowners ever renewed their participation, and no claim was ever fulfilled.[35] Although this relatively small number of Oak Parkers participated in the program, its existence played an important psychological role in preventing flight because if it seemed like property values were going to decline, residents could sign up for the program at any time and have what was often their largest asset protected from an anticipated decline in value.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Managed integration also worked to encourage social cohesion. The Village developed block-specific organizations, called Hundred Clubs, to cultivate community at a grassroots level. These clubs provided an avenue by which anyone interested in matters as mundane as traffic or as contentious as housing could take action on their block and worked to rein in rumors that could whip up fear among residents.[36] Hundred Clubs were encouraged to organize block parties, street-wide social gatherings that shut down car traffic for the day to encourage children to play and adults to come together for drinks and meals. These socials were an "essential antidote to white flight" by providing opportunities for neighbors to come together through low-stakes social interaction, breaking down fear of the unknown while building a lively tradition that

[35] Grand, "Equity assurance now reality," *Oak Leaves*, November 21, 1977; "Community Relations Commission Minutes," January 16, 1980, OPRFHS; West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 116.

[36] "Hundred Club Pamphlet," OPRFHS.

children looked forward to every year.[37] One weekend in September 1973 saw applications for 18 such block parties, a testament to their popularity.[38]

In addition to community building, Hundred Clubs established the New Neighbor Program to welcome potential residents to the village. Volunteers acted as ambassadors for the Village and welcomed guests into their home to discuss their experience living in Oak Park and to provide Village literature to potential residents all on notice of "approximately thirty minutes." On top of showing off the community to newcomers and making current Oak Parkers feel invested in the success of the village, the program allowed the Village government to control the narrative about Oak Park's managed integration by only selecting volunteers for this program who would "share their enthusiasm" with prospective residents to demonstrate that Oak Park was stable and desirable.[39]

Despite these efforts, social and economic integration lagged far behind the village's successful geographical integration, emphasizing managed integration's focus on preventing white flight. By dispersing its Black population, Oak Park's managed integration made it difficult for distinctly Black community spaces to form. Black residents were often isolated on their blocks, faced a degree of scorn or antagonism from unwelcoming neighbors, and had few support systems in the village. Dorothy Reid, daughter of pioneering resident and long-time CRC member Sherlynn Reid, remembered, "there is no central meeting ground for African Americans in Oak Park."[40] Christian Harris, an Oak Park business owner and former member of the Oak Park Library Board, remarked that Oak Park still lacks long-standing Black businesses and non-

[37] Ken Trainor interview with author.
[38] Ronnow, "Letter to Village Trustees," September 7, 1973, OPRFHS.
[39] The New Neighbor Committee, "Letter to Oak Park Hundred Clubs Steering Committee," OPRFHS.
[40] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 137.

profits, demonstrating its lack of commitment to integrate the wealth of the community.[41] Dispersal also prevented a Black church from forming or moving into the village, something the community lacked since the Mount Carmel Baptist Church closed its doors following its "mysterious" fire in 1928.[42] Social rifts persisted in schools as the high school lunch room failed to meaningfully integrate.[43] Dorothy Reid said, "There is more assimilation than integration that happens here at the expense of black community ties."[44] Managed integration was being hailed as a success in the media because it succeeded in its primary goal: the prevention of white flight. Social and economic integration, secondary aspects of managed integration, were not considered as much when examining the question of success.

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

By 1977, Oak Park positioned itself as the leading community nationwide undertaking managed integration initiatives. White flight and resegregation swept across cities in the Midwest and Northeast, creating conditions similar to Oak Park's in communities across the country and Oak Park was by no means the only community in the United States that attempted, to varying degrees of dedication and success, managed integration. In Chicagoland, Park Forest and Evanston launched similar programs, and across the country, communities from Teaneck, New Jersey to Southfield, Michigan attempted managed integration in response to their specific conditions.[45] The Oak Park Housing Center even modeled itself after similar organizations already established in Shaker Heights, Ohio and University City, Missouri.[46]

---

[41] Christian Harris interview with author.
[42] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 43.
[43] Lloyd King interview with author.
[44] West et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 138.
[45] "Exchange Congress Program," 1986, OPPLSC.
[46] "Oak Park Housing Center – A Positive Plan for the Future," February 20, 1972, OPPLSC.

However, in 1977, Oak Park became the mantle bearer of managed integration when it launched the Oak Park Exchange Congress, a conference held in the village bringing together communities engaged in the process of defending against white flight through integration.[47] Demonstrating Oak Park's "crusading spirit," the Village sought to turn itself into the national head of managed integration and invited communities from Trotwood, Ohio, to Little Rock, Arkansas, to Covington, Kentucky to visit the village and discuss integration strategies.[48] The Exchange Congress featured workshops, discussions, and lectures dealing with "practical techniques" to achieve integration, bringing together delegates "from communities who have met, or who still face, challenges similar to theirs" in an attempt to "turn the national spotlight" upon communities like Oak Park. Village families hosted out-of-town guests in their homes for two nights, providing them with a warm welcome, breakfast, and car transport to and from the Exchange Congress every day.[49] After a successful Exchange Congress in 1977, Oak Park hosted again in 1978 and 1980 and Shaker Heights, Ohio hosted in 1979. Each successive Exchange Congress welcomed around 70 communities to the host town and the Exchange Congress continued into the 1980s and 1990s with host locations flipping between Oak Park and a non-Oak Park location.[50] The Exchange Congress created a national network of similar communities who could share resources and strategies to address the specific conditions of managed integration, with Oak Park, the most successful model, firmly positioned at the head.

Oak Park's defense-through-integration used a psychological strategy to calm the fears of white residents who were susceptible to fleeing as the suburb integrated. Combining a media

---

[47] "Oak Park prepares to swap its idea at Exchange Congress," *Oak Leaves*, October 5, 1977.

[48] "Racial Diversity in Oak Park: A Community Commitment," October 1980, OPRFHS; Grand, "People make conference work," *Oak Leaves*, October 5, 1977.

[49] "Exchange Congress Program," 1977, OPRFHS.

[50] "Racial Diversity in Oak Park: A Community Commitment," October 1980, OPRFHS; Sandra and David Sokol interview with author.

campaign with community building initiatives, Oak Park was able to project an image to itself and the country that it was only becoming a better place to live, casting off doubts about an inevitable decline on account of integration. This created a self-fulfilling prophecy where the image of stability led to stability and the projection of successful defense led to Oak Park becoming positioned as a national leader in managed integration by the end of the 1970s.

Conclusion

"Oak Park exists because it's a community people escaped to, and therefore there is a place people escaped from."[1] Spoken by Oak Parker Christian Harris, these words encapsulate the version of Oak Park the Village sought to project through its managed integration: a stable and thriving community that was certainly *not* Austin or the west side. By 1980, the question of community defense and integration were no longer on the absolute forefront of Oak Park local politics. Oak Park had succeeded where other communities had failed. The village had prevented Chicago's block-by-block resegregation pattern, maintained high property values, and reorganized itself into a defended and integrated community through an extensive campaign undertaken by hundreds of dedicated residents. Even the village's old foe Pierre deVise recognized their dedicated efforts and was forced to walk back his doomsday prediction.[2] Oak Park became a place people "escaped to" by embracing a plan focused on consensus building among key village actors and a public relations campaign that communicated the village's best days were still ahead, ensuring it was not a place to be "escaped from."

While successful in creating a geographically integrated community, the foundational elements of managed integration – monitoring, dispersal, and slowing down entry – imposed a racist double standard on Black residents. These elements are best viewed as part of the umbrella community defense, not liberation-oriented integration. The concept of community defense implies that something undesirable must be defended against. Managed integration, like other community defense strategies, identified this undesirable element to be a Black population that crossed the "tipping point." Only Black residents, not Croatians, Catholics, Communists, Cubs

[1] Christian Harris interview with author.
[2] Jones, "Oak Park just wasn't ready for white flight," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 29, 1973.

fans, coffee-drinkers, nor any other socially constructed category had their entry into the village slowed down, tracked, and dispersed. Oak Parkers accepted this racist framework and strove to find a workable solution within it. Perhaps they believed they had no other choice. Regardless of the reasons, racist double standards based on ancestry constituted an undeniable element to managed integration.

Managed integration was seen as a strategy on the forefront of progressivism. Where other communities put up walls, Oak Park took them down. Where others fled, Oak Park's white stakeholders, for the most part, undertook a considerable risk by staying and attempting to implement a workable solution. However, the fact that Oak Park's powerbrokers adopted a strategy with an inherent degree of racism reveals a prevailing, nationwide racist sentiment towards Black Americans during this time period. Instead of placing the onus of integration on white people to remain and accept their new Black neighbors, managed integration placed the burden of stability on Black people, whose presence, not white racism, was seen as the cause of white flight. If the progressive edges of acceptable policy necessitates some degree of double standards imposed on Black residents, racist ideology has a pervasive grip on that society. Oak Park's example illuminates this fact for the United States.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources

"A Community Plan for Racial Integration," May 6, 1974, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 7, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"As Time Goes By: Oak Park, Illinois Program," Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 22, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Civil Rights Act of 1968," April 11, 1968, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-343/pdf/COMPS-343.pdf.

"Community Relations Commission Meeting," January 17, 1974, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 12, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Community Relations Commission Minutes," January 16, 1980, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 12, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Community Relations Commission Minutes," March 23, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 12, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Definitive Statement for Clergy Resolution," February 4, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 24, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Education Committee Report," Equality, December 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 21, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Exchange Congress Program," 1977, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 11, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Exchange Congress Program," 1986, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"FAIR HOUSING ORDINANCE," May 6, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 3, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"FINDINGS - Oak Park & River Forest League of Women Voters-Human Relations Questionnaire," February 12, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 30, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Hundred Club Pamphlet," Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 19, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Letter to Community Relations Commission," Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Maintaining Diversity in Oak Park," April 9, 1973, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 5, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Meeting of Young Republican Organization June 11, 1963 - Oak Park Arms Hotel," June 12, 1963, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Move-in Memo," February 13, 1969, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"New H.C. Opens," From The Center, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center - a not-for-profit corporation," March 10, 1973, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center – A Positive Plan for the Future," February 20, 1972, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1972-1973 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1973-1974 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1974-1975 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1975-1976 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1976-1977 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1977-1978 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1978-1979 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center 1979-1980 Annual Report," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 1, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park Housing Center Report," May 1973, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"Oak Park: the people place," Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 3, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

"ORDINANCE ADOPTING CHAPTER 24-½ OF THE CODE OF THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK RELATING TO FAIR HOUSING," August 7, 1972, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 3, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Racial Diversity in Oak Park: A Community Commitment," October 1980, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 8, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Report of Community Relations Commission on Public Hearings," August 3, 1973, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"STATEMENT BY THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS BEFORE THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION ON A LOCAL FAIR HOUSING LAW," February 4, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 23, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

"Where We Stand," From The Center, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 2, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

Chicago Area Committee for Open Communities, "Letter to Oak Park and River Forest Communities," July 18, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 21, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Community Relations Commission, "Report to the Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," February 23, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Community Relations Commission, "Saturday Demonstration in Oak Park," Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Community Relations Commissions, "REPORT OF PUBLIC HEARING," March 24, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

deVise, Pierre, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap*. Report, Interuniversity Social Research Committee, 1967.

Follett, Dwight, "STATEMENT OF MR. DWIGHT FOLLETT AT THE BOARD MEETING OF APRIL 22, 1968," April 22, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 20, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Grant, W. Brewer, "Letter to all members of Oak Park-River Forest Chapter of National Conference of Christians and Jews," February 4, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 24, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Groenke, Theodore, "Letter to Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," April 13, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 28, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, "Letter to Trustees of the Village of Oak Park," April 16, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 28, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Hoigard, Doors, "FAIR HOUSING LEGISLATION IN OAK PARK WILL NOT," Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 25, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Leonard, William C., "Letter to President and Members of the Board," April 22, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 20, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Local Community Fact Book: Chicago Metropolitan Area: Based on the 1970 and 1980 Censuses. Chicago Review Press, 1984.

Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council, "The Oak Park Delphi Process: Summary Description and Findings," 1974, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 6, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Momenthy, Frederick A., "Sermon in Dialogue: The Housing Center," April 23, 1972, Open Housing Movement Collection, Folder 5, Oak Park Public Library Special Collections.

Nester, F. P., "Memo to Harris Stevens," June 8, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, "Memo regarding Demonstrations for Saturday, June 11th," June 8, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Oak Park Board of Trustees, “AN ORDINANCE ENTITLED AN ORDINANCE CREATING AN ADVISORY COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION," March 18, 1963, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 11, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Oak Park Community Relations Commission, “MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE OAK PARK BOARD OF REALTORS AND THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION,” June 22, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 98, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Oak Park Referendum Group, “FORCED HOUSING!!,” Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 25, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Oak Park-River Forest Committee on Human Rights, “SURVEY INFORMATION SALES,” December, 1967, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 13, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Project Open Communities, “A prospectus for a non-violent project to achieve open occupancy throughout the Chicago area,” Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 21, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Housing Discrimination Complaint,” October 1, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 14, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Letter to Mr. John Donaker, President,” June 14, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Robinet, Harriette, “Open Community Speech,” November 17, 2001, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 27, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Ronnow, Kris, “Letter to Village Trustees,” September 7, 1973, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 19, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Memo to Community Relations Commission,” January 25, 1974, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 16, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Stevens, Harris, “Letter to Members of the Community Relations Commission,” August 31, 1965, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Letter to President and Board of Trustees,” July 24, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Memo to Members of the Commission on Community Relations,” January 21, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

——, “Memo to Members of the Community Relations Commission,” August 7, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

The New Neighbor Committee, “Letter to Oak Park Hundred Clubs Steering Committee,” Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 19, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Oak Park, “Letter to Village Board,” January 2, 1964, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 24, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Thorpe, Arthur, “Letter to President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park Regarding Public Policy Referendum,” April 15, 1968, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 25, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Van Doren, James D., “Forced Housing for Oak Park?,” June 10, 1966, Shelf 30, Box 1, Folder 15, Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society.

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

“Demonstration and Parade to be Continued,” *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, April 7, 1966.

“Here’s capsule history,” *The Oak Park-River Forest World*, Oak Park, January 25, 1976.

“Leadership from Oak Park, Evanston,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Chicago, January 29, 1976.

"Oak Park ends dry spell, relaxes rule to allow bar," *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, September 28, 2005.

"Oak Park prepares to swap its idea at Exchange Congress," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, October 5, 1977.

"Open housing law opponents ask court to force election," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, May 22, 1968.

"OPEN HOUSING PASSED," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, May 8, 1968.

"Pierre deVise." *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, May 27, 2004. https://www.chicagotribune.com/2004/05/27/pierre-devise-2/.

"Religious shift here is gradual and steady," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, January 31, 1968.

"Residents jam 'historic' housing hearing," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, February 7, 1968.

"THE RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE WHERE THEY CHOOSE," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, April 16, 1964.

"Villagers tackle 'apartment blight,'" *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, October 17, 1973.

"Voters deserve better," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, January 3, 1968.

Brown, Sharon, "30 percent racial quota proposed," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, December 19, 1973.

——, "Block files for exempt location," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, October 24, 1973.

——, "First exempt location granted," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, November 6, 1973.

——, "Relations unit rejects quota 8 to 7," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, February 6, 1974.

——, "Trustees delay on quotas," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, March 6, 1974.

Deuchler, Doug, "Mall in Good Time," *Wednesday Journal*, Oak Park, December 20, 2005. https://www.oakpark.com/2005/12/20/mall-in-good-time/.

Grand, Joyce, "Equity assurance now reality," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, November 21, 1977.

——, "People make conference work," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, October 5, 1977.

Heine, Donald, "5600 persons sign petition," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, February 21, 1968.

Jedlicka, Albert, "As Oak Park integrates, real estate stays stable," *Chicago Daily News*, Chicago, March 5, 1976.

Jones, Tom, "Oak Park just wasn't ready for white flight," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Chicago, July 29, 1973.

Kilian, Michael. "City Moves up in Population in '68 Totals." *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, June 28, 1968.

Klein, Frederick C., "How Oak Park Staved Off Blight," *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1976.

Mackinnon, Jessica. "Galen Gockel, One of OP's 'Greatest Generation,' Dies." *Wednesday Journal*, January 23, 2024. https://www.oakpark.com/2024/01/23/galen-gockel-one-of-ops-greatest-generation-dies/.

McCarey, Deb, "A Legendary Oak Park Resident (and Friends) Save the Conservatory," *Wednesday Journal*, Oak Park, September 9, 2014. https://www.oakpark.com/2014/09/09/a-legendary-oak-park-resident-and-friends-save-the-conservatory/.

Merridew, Alan, "Oak Park's racial mix laid to discrimination," *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, November 13, 1975.

Nickow, Marcia, "Reid attacks housing foes," *Oak Leaves*, Oak Park, March 14, 1979.

Robinet, Harriette. "I'm A Mother, Not A Pioneer." *Redbook*, Chicago, February 1968.

Trainor, Ken. "Our Finest Decade." *Wednesday Journal*, Oak Park, February 4, 2014. https://www.oakpark.com/2014/02/04/our-finest-decade/.

Films

Anthony Loeb, *As Time Goes By...Oak Park, Illinois*, Oak Park Housing Center, 1974. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ssYD7brq_0.

Oral Histories

Christian Harris interview with author, conducted over Zoom, October 7, 2025.

Ken Trainor interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, November 1, 2025.

Mac Robinet interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, November 3, 2025.

Rosemarie & Jack Nowicki interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, November 3, 2025.

John Gearen Jr. interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, November 4, 2025.

Frank Lipo interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, November 4, 2025.

Lloyd King interview with author conducted, in Chicago, December 22, 2025.

David & Sandra Sokol interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, December 23, 2025.

Diana Carpenter interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, December 23, 2025.

Nick Brunick interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, December 29, 2025.

Clifford Osborn interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, December 30, 2025.

Peggy Sinko interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, January 9, 2026.

Dorothy Reid interview with author, conducted in Oak Park, January 15, 2026.

Secondary Sources

Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Berry, Brian Joe Lobley. *The Open Housing Question: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1966-1976*. Ballinger Pub. Co, 1979.

Boustan, Leah Platt. *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets*. NBER Series on Long-Term Factors in Economic Development. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Brooke, Lee. *Legends of Our Time: Chronology of the Oak Park/River Forest Citizens Committee for Human Rights.* Oak Park, Ill., 1996.

Goodwin, Carole. *The Oak Park Strategy: Community Control of Racial Change*. University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Hansberry, Lorraine, and Robert Nemiroff. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. Pantheon Books, 2003.

Hirsch, Arnold R.. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago*, 1940-1960. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1985.

McGreevy, John T. *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Ralph, James. *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Harvard University Press, 1993.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

Sandoval-Strausz, A. K. *Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants Saved the American City*. Basic Books, Hachette Book Group, 2019.

Satter, Beryl. *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*. Metropolitan Books, 2009.

Seligman, Amanda I. *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Sokol, David M. *Oak Park: The Evolution of a Village*. History Press, 2011.

——, *Oak Park, Illinois: Continuity and Change*. Arcadia, 2000.

Suarez, Ray. *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration, 1966-1999*. Free Press, 1999.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

Teaford, Jon C. *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post-Urban America*. Columbia University Press, 2006.

Trainor, Ken. *Our Town Oak Park: Walk with Me, in Search of True Community*. Streetlight Books, 2023.

West, Stan, Peggy Tuck Sinko, Frank Lipo, and Yves Hughes. *Suburban Promised Land: The Emerging Black Community in Oak Park, Illinois, 1880-1980*. Soweto Press: Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, 2009.

Wiese, James Andrew. "Struggle for the Suburban Dream: African American Suburbanization since 1916." PhD. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1993.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Random House, 2010.

Woldoff, Rachael. *White Flight/Black Flight: The Dynamics of Racial Change in an American Neighborhood*. Cornell University Press, 2011.

Zorich, Camille. “Black vs. White? Reexamining Residential Transition in the Chicago Metropolitan Area: Oak Park, 1960–1979 - ProQuest.” PhD. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005. Accessed September 9, 2025. https://www.proquest.com/docview/305412442?%20Theses&accountid=10226&parentSessionId=O9RLmX1qmi2wKoUHTzxJtnXW1IICo7MPEgto%2FIr8wmI%3D&parentSessionId=iAzXS9pxMZqYRwQmNI945v3I4zSKr7TvAaJ1d%2F01JIA%3D&pq-origsite=summon&sourcetype=Dissertations%20.

Mapping Resources

OpenStreetMap contributors, OpenStreetMap Foundation: Cambridge, UK. Retrieved February 22, 2026. https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=16/41.86855/-87.79247.

White, 1940. Social Explorer, (based on data from Digitally transcribed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Edited, verified by Michael Haines. Compiled, edited, verified and additional data entered by Social Explorer.; accessed 13 February 2026 at 13:14:33 GMT-5).

White, 1950. Social Explorer, (based on data from Digitally transcribed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Edited, verified by Michael Haines. Compiled, edited, verified and additional data entered by Social Explorer.; accessed 13 February 2026 at 13:14:09 GMT-5).

White, 1960. Social Explorer, (based on data from Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data tabulated by DUALabs.; accessed 13 February 2026 at 13:13:45 GMT-5).

White, 1970. Social Explorer, (based on data from Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data tabulated by DUALabs.; accessed 13 February 2026 at 13:13:14 GMT-5).

White, 1980. Social Explorer, (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau; accessed 13 February 2026 at 13:11:36 GMT-5).