



The Next Forty Years of Fair Housing:
Developing an Agenda for Integration in the 21st Century
Conference Highlights
October 7, 2008

Conference Goals

The year 2008 marks 40 years since the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Act protects individual rights and fosters residential integration. This forward-looking conference focused on research, policies, and programs that move beyond anti-discrimination enforcement to examine the other barriers to integration. More than 70 researchers, policymakers, and community leaders from universities, government, and non-profit organizations attended this conference and worked toward an action agenda for the future.

Racial residential segregation persists at very high levels in the Chicago region, and in cities throughout the United States; and it has declined only modestly in the 40 years since the Fair Housing Act was passed. The causes of segregation are many and complex—including the persistence of illegal racial/ethnic discrimination, as well as complicated patterns of racial residential preferences and individual behaviors. Much attention over the last 40 years has rightfully been aimed at enforcement—testing for, and litigating against—illegal discrimination. But, one of the goals of the Act was also to affirmatively further integration. As we move to the next 40 years of fair housing, in addition to continued diligence towards enforcement, there is a need to pay attention to efforts to foster integration. Over the course of this day-long conference, the participants learned about the complexities of these issues, heard research about the patterns that create barriers to integration, and debated policy measures aimed at the larger goal of encouraging integration. What follows is a summary of some of the discussion prompted by the following questions: How have policies worked to perpetuate segregation and what policies could help foster integration? What are the challenges to integration at the individual behavioral level, and what programs are working to overcome those barriers?

This document is arranged thematically, making connections between the presentations shared at the conference. The first theme is public policy and housing integration and the second theme is individual behaviors and integration.

Theme #1: Public Policy and Housing Integration.

The conference included discussion of housing policies at three levels: federal (Tegeler), state (Yarbrough), and local (Puente).

Philip Tegeler, a civil rights attorney with the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, began by observing that federal housing policies must be attentive to the ways in which the patterns, causes, and consequences of segregation in one metropolitan area may be quite different than those in another. Furthermore, that metropolitan housing segregation is at the nexus of structural racism—that is, racial differences in quality of life, health care, education, employment, justice, and the like—are shaped substantially by where one lives.

Tegeler described the three main federal housing programs (Low Income Tax Credit Program; Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly Section 8); and Public Housing), noting that there is no such thing as a segregation-neutral federal housing policy. First, as the largest affordable housing development program in the country, the Low Income Tax Credit Program is the worst offender in terms of promoting segregation. This program steers funds to predominately poor and minority neighborhoods, which means that affordable housing units are built in low-opportunity rather than high-opportunity communities. Second, the Housing Choice Voucher program provides housing vouchers that, in theory, facilitate movement of low income and minority families to high-opportunity areas.¹ But current guidelines make it harder to move to high-opportunity areas, in part because

¹ High opportunity communities provide services that improve the quality of life of their residents, including strong educational institutions, employment choices, quality childcare, affordable housing, access to health care and reliable transportation.

the critical funds that provide housing counseling have been virtually stripped from the program's budgets. Third, public housing has been undergoing substantial redevelopment in many metropolitan areas—but at this point Tegeler estimates a \$30-\$40 billion dollar shortfall in funding for these projects. Where redevelopment has occurred, the question remains whether future public housing projects will simply perpetuate the isolated character of the past and present, or whether new developments will be located so as to provide residents with access to greater opportunities for jobs, education, and generally higher quality of life. Looking ahead, Tegeler observed that the current financial crisis and the housing policies that emerge from it must be viewed through the lens of who will benefit from the influx of federal dollars—and whether its effects will be segregation or integration promoting.

Karen Yarbrough, Illinois State Representative from the 7th District, focused her discussion on her efforts to pass legislation in the state of Illinois that would prohibit a form of discrimination that, while not directly related to race/ethnicity, has a disproportionate impact on people of color, and limits housing choices in a way that promotes segregation. Specifically, she has proposed legislation to prohibit property owners from discriminating against potential tenants solely on the basis of source of income. This means that individuals whose source of income is, for example, child support, SSI, welfare, housing choice vouchers, among others, could not be denied housing on that basis. At present, property owners may discriminate on this basis, contributing to the concentration of individuals whose source of income is, for example, Housing Choice Vouchers, into minority and high-poverty areas. The legislation would provide training for property owners who violate the bill, and would apply only to rentals. Yarbrough's previous attempts to pass this legislation were defeated, with the real estate industry being a principal opponent. She noted that several states (California, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia have some form of ban on source of income discrimination, and she intends to re-introduce this legislation.

Sylvia Puente, Director of the Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives at the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies, focused her presentation on municipal housing policies with particular attention to their effects on Latinos. She placed her remarks in context by describing key features of the

metropolitan Chicago Latino population: (1) as of 2006, 20 percent of the Chicago metropolitan area is Latino, making it the largest minority group in the region; (2) projections indicate that the Latino population will continue to grow; (3) as of 2006, more Latinos live in the suburbs than live in the city; and (4) 56 percent of Latinos in the Chicago metropolitan area are homeowners, compared to 78 percent of whites and 43 percent of African Americans.

In light of this context, Puente noted that issues of fair housing are somewhat different for Latinos and African Americans. From the standpoint of the Latino community, she identifies the issue of affordability as paramount. One of her key conclusions is the mismatch between the kinds of housing that are being built (large single-family homes) and the current and projected future demand (small single-family homes). She argues that the lack of affordable housing of the type most in demand, has a particular impact on Latino families, and that it can lead to overcrowding. Thus, overcrowding is not always a choice, but has roots in economic realities, larger family size, and cultural issues. In crafting municipal housing ordinances, she notes that there should be a balance between public safety and individual rights and an emphasis on culturally sensitive education and problem-solving rather than punitive actions. Puente concluded by observing that some practices by municipalities related to housing ordinances, such as selective enforcement (targeting Latino families), midnight raids, biased definitions of what a family is, and solely punitive responses, are problematic.

Organizations' efforts to address policy challenges and housing integration

Representatives from three housing policy and advocacy organizations in the Chicago area provided reflections on their organizations' activities and the challenges they faced.

Sharon Legenza, Director of Housing Action Illinois (HAI), was pleased to participate in a conference focused on tools to achieving integration, and not exclusively on enforcement. HAI focuses attention on affordability issues in general, with the hope that an increase in affordable housing will translate into increases in integration. In addition to providing technical training and assistance (most recently training counselors who assist individuals facing foreclosure), the organization has education, organizing, and advocacy missions.

Among its advocacy tools, it has developed Housingmatters.net, a listserv that individuals can join to receive legislative alerts when important issues related to housing are being discussed by the state lawmakers.

Legenza identified several challenges related to effective policies designed to further housing integration. First, she suggested that it is unclear how the typical practice in recent policies—of using income as a proxy for race—helps or hinders the work. What is the likelihood that increasing affordable housing will translate into greater integration? She noted that shifting the focus to income, allowed us to no longer talk about the very real issues of race and the role of racial prejudice in creating barriers to integration, crippling our integration efforts. Legenza then raised a series of questions to consider in the work for integrated communities.

What is meant by integration? Is our goal “regional averages” or is there some other definition? Without knowing what we are aiming for, she observed, it is difficult to sell it to policymakers and the public. How do we make sure housing policies target funds to high-opportunity (white or high-income) areas to create housing opportunities for low-income people, but also not ignore the very real resource needs of majority-minority and high-poverty areas?

Ruben Feliciano represented the Latino Policy Forum, an organization that seeks to raise awareness and be strategic partners for addressing issues related to the Latino community. Feliciano, like Puente, reminded the audience that housing segregation is not simply a black-white issue, and that any discussion of housing patterns must include the large and growing Latino population in the region. He pointed to several current issues that affect housing and the Latino community, which his organization is working to solve. First, there are the challenges of gentrification. Feliciano reminded us that gentrification is a flawed vehicle to achieve integration; residents often suffer in the process of gentrification. Specifically, in gentrifying communities, can we ensure that in realizing an individual’s desire for integration, we are not in turn displacing poorer residents of color? Second, the Latino Policy Forum is also concerned about the foreclosure crisis, and how it will differentially affect the Latino community. One pressing concern is about how the foreclosures in the Latino community put people on the brink of homelessness and a need to live together to avoid this. Third, he echoed Puente’s discussion

of concerns about the selective and discriminatory enforcement of occupancy rules.

John Petruszak, Vice President of the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance (CAFHA), described CAFHA as an association of non-profits and others, that works to develop and support programs that further fair housing by combating discrimination and promoting diversity. Petruszak focused on a number of CAFHA studies that were a vehicle for providing information and highlighting the fair housing-related challenges facing our region. These reports focus on problems in housing policy and programs. One examined the Federal Housing Authority, and drew attention to the ways in which government programs supported housing discrimination. Another analyzed the Housing Choice Voucher program and found that this program, despite the name, often lacked real housing choices for its recipients. Most recently, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, CAFHA published a report that documented current patterns of discrimination in the six-county region and offered a blueprint for change. Petruszak concluded by noting that public policy addressing housing has failed to adequately address housing integration, as the original act mandated.

Theme #2: Individual Behaviors and Housing Integration.

One of the goals of this conference was to explore how the attitudes and behaviors of homeseekers can help or hinder the creation of integrated neighborhoods. Three of the panelists presented research findings related to three main topics: racial preferences and prejudice, racial “blind spots” in knowledge about communities, and social class-related dynamics. Each pointed to barriers to neighborhood integration, but also pointed to possible opportunities for dismantling segregation. Three executive directors from Chicago-area organizations shared their experiences working to overcome these barriers.

Camille Charles, University of Pennsylvania, began by situating people’s attitudes about living in integrated neighborhoods in the context of racial attitudes more generally. She pointed to the persistence of negative racial stereotypes (noting that all groups hold negative stereotypes of each other), differences in beliefs about why inequality exists (whites tend to fault the groups themselves and to deny the persistence of discrimination, while racial minorities view systemic and structural causes as pervasive), a tendency to prefer continued social

distance from other racial groups, and the general sense that American society is a zero-sum game, so that racial groups constitute a possible threat and a source of competition to one's own racial group.

Using data from a Los Angeles survey of whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos, Charles reported that whites were the only group to construct as their "ideal" neighborhood, one where their own group was more than 50 percent. But interestingly—and reflecting a possible opportunity—respondents of all races and ethnicities identified as their ideal, neighborhoods that were far more diverse than those in which they actually live. But all groups are not considered equally desirable neighbors. Specifically, African Americans are the group most likely to be excluded entirely from a respondent's ideal neighborhood: 20 percent of whites drew an ideal neighborhood that did not include a single African American resident. African Americans, for their part, are the most interested in integration; but whites, Asians, and Latinos are all least likely to include African Americans in their ideal neighborhood.

Charles also found that racial residential preferences are not so much a function of class (a desire to stay away from poor people in general) or ethnocentrism (a desire to be around one's own group), but rather, they are—especially for whites—a function of racial prejudice against other groups. In addition, among racial/ethnic minorities, she found that perceiving whites as "tending to discriminate" decreases the level of integration in their preferred neighborhood. However, there is an exception to many of these patterns—immigrants hold a very different preference structure compared to native-born Americans. And whereas new immigrants prefer less integration in large part because of issues of adaptation to a new country rather than to negative racial attitudes (though they hold these negative attitudes, they do not predict whether one will want to live in an integrated neighborhood), once immigrants have been in the United States for at least five years, there appears to be an internalization of negative racial attitudes. At this point, the negative racial attitudes begin to function much as they do for the native-born population: as an important factor in reducing interest in integration.

In conclusion, Charles suggested that strategies that get communities working together to create stably integrated neighborhoods are important. Additionally, aggressive public relations campaigns—focused on the value added by diversity and the desirable characteristics of integrated

neighborhoods—may be useful. Affirmative marketing that signals to people of color that overwhelmingly white communities would welcome them as new residents are also clearly important. She concluded by pointing out that white attitudes shifted only after the passage of major civil rights legislation; so enforcing policies and making it clear that discrimination is not permissible may go a long way toward changing some of the negative attitudes that shape these preferences.

Maria Krysan, University of Illinois at Chicago, built on Charles' discussion of the way in which attitudes are a barrier to integration by directing attention to another dimension: "racial blind spots." This is the idea that residential choices that are either integration- or segregation-promoting may be in part a reflection of racial differences in knowledge about various kinds of communities. Specifically, if people know nothing about a community then it is difficult (though not impossible) to move into it. And if whites, blacks, and Latinos know about different kinds of communities—and if that knowledge is shaped by the racial composition of the community—then these blind spots may contribute to segregation-promoting housing choices.

Reporting on data from the 2004-2005 Chicago Area Study, Krysan highlighted the following patterns. For the most part, whites, blacks, and Latinos all tend to know more about communities in which their co-ethnics live. But African Americans and Latinos, relative to whites, know about a broader range of different kinds of communities—racially mixed and racially segregated alike. For African Americans and Latinos, the few blind spots are communities that are both predominately white and geographically distant from the city, thus creating a barrier to the possible integration of communities like this. But there are plenty of predominately white communities about which African Americans do not have blind spots relative to whites; as such, there are clearly other barriers—perhaps discrimination or perhaps "negative" knowledge about how African Americans are treated in these communities.

For their part, whites are far less likely than Latinos or African Americans to know about heavily African American communities. But what is troubling, from the standpoint of encouraging integration, is that whites' blind spots also include communities that are racially mixed (either with Latinos or African Americans)—even those where whites are in the majority. To remain stably integrated, of course, communities like this must have housing

demand from all racial/ethnic groups. The study shows whites have a blind spot for these kinds of communities.

Krysan concluded that this study of racial blind spots suggests that affirmative marketing—educating residents about the variety of housing options available—is an important, but by no means the only, step in the goal for integrated communities.

Karyn Lacy, University of Michigan, drew attention to a sub-group of African Americans: the middle class. She drew on qualitative interviews that explored the impact of race in housing searches and asked the following general question: To what extent does a middle-class status protect blacks from discrimination in the housing market? First, she found that middle-class blacks tended to downplay racism as a factor. But, importantly, the participants reported making special efforts to signal their middle-class status whenever dealing with the real estate industry. This was necessary, they explained, because real estate agents and the like would draw inappropriate conclusions, based on the assumption that they were “poor black people.” One participant talked about how she was treated by a real estate agent when she appeared at an open house in jeans and casual clothes; thus not effectively signaling her middle-class status. In another example, Lacy spoke of her own experience posing as a homebuyer and approaching a real estate office. She recounted that the real estate agent was friendly and provided advice; but was at the same time steering her to a different neighborhood than she expressed interest in—one where there were “old” homes. She was repeatedly told she couldn’t afford the new homes she indicated she was interested in; this, despite the fact that the agent had not asked her for her price range and knew nothing about her resources.

From this incident, Lacy points out how discrimination can be subtle and difficult to detect—even when it’s happening to you. Her central conclusions were that: (1) middle-class blacks understand that discrimination exists, but many do not feel that their housing options are limited by it; (2) class position provides the middle-class blacks she talked to with resources to counter housing discrimination; (3) but, importantly, regardless of having the class-based resources to counter discrimination, it nevertheless makes for a frustrating and problematic situation: blacks have to work much harder than whites to get a home they really want. Thus, the housing choices of the black middle class may in fact be constrained, in light of the increased

difficulties and hassles they experience in their search for homes.

Organizational approaches to these barriers

Rob Breymaier, Executive Director of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center (OPRHC), described the center’s mission to “achieve meaningful and lasting racial diversity throughout Oak Park, Berwyn, and the region.” Oak Park’s success at creating and maintaining integration is an example of a successful, open, and inclusive community in both reality and perception, and the OPRHC is frequently cited as a model organization for achieving this. The OPRHC achieves its goals by providing direct services to encourage a diverse community. The approach is multi-faceted, with the following key components: (1) a direct service that encourages individual renters to make affirmative moves through a free apartment rental service, which counsels individuals, dispels myths/stereotypes about racially diverse areas within Oak Park, and escorts individuals to housing options; (2) work with the local property owners and managers to ensure that they follow fair housing practices but also provide technical expertise (how to increase the marketability of their units; how to select tenants; how to manage buildings that are diverse) and; (3) public relations work to ensure the OPRHC’s visibility in the community, and to continually remind its leadership and citizenry that maintaining a stably integrated community requires continued work, since housing is a dynamic process.

Breymaier identified the following challenges faced by the OPRHC in its work. Consistent with the results reported by Charles and Krysan, he experiences, on almost a daily basis, the reluctance of whites, Asians, and Latinos to live near African Americans. There is a public perception that integration has been achieved, and so organizations like the OPRHC might be unnecessary. Working in a diverse community surrounded by segregated communities creates challenges that would be ameliorated if there were more truly diverse communities. The surrounding segregation influences perceptions within diverse communities that work against their efforts.

Justin Massa, Executive Director of MoveSmart.org, began his presentation lauding the OPRHC, but observing that given funding constraints and realities, it is unlikely that the center, although considered by many to be the gold standard, could

be replicated on the scale needed to address the problem. In the absence of that standard, what can we do about overcoming the kinds of problems identified by Charles' and Krysan's research? How can we promote integration in a way that is perhaps not as effective, but nevertheless more practical?

Massa noted that integration is not the top neighborhood characteristic that homeseekers think about when looking for a place to live—rather it is good schools, short commuting time, proximity to families and friends, and an assortment of other community characteristics. Technological innovations now mean that there is plenty of information about communities and neighborhoods that individual homeseekers could use to find their ideal community. But this information is scattered throughout dozens of websites, making it exceedingly difficult for everyday users to access. This was true both of individual homeseekers and also of housing counselors who, working with Housing Voucher clients, for example, did not have access to comprehensive information that they could share with clients about how their lives would be different—and presumably better—in a community that met their needs.

MoveSmart.org will provide a wealth of information, via a single website. Its features will include an intuitive interface, data that are easy to read and understand, and statistics reported in a meaningful way. Rather than reporting, for example, a poverty rate for a community, the poverty rate will be described as “average” or “below average” for the region. The community features will include neighborhood amenities, neighborhood opportunities (affordable housing options, community-based organizations, social service organizations), and quality of life indicators. Homeseekers first answer a series of demographic questions and other preferences about community features and amenities that they most want—as well as what they can “live with.” The user will then receive a list of “matches,” sorted from highest to lowest, and include information about whether the move would add to the diversity of the community.

Massa concluded that enforcement of fair housing is only half of the equation; tackling the problem of segregation requires innovative, cost-effective, and sustainable solutions. Until housing seekers are empowered with information, they will continue to make poor choices. The mission of MoveSmart.org is to provide that information.

Executive Director John Petruszak of the South Suburban Housing Center (SSHC) said the center serves more than 100 communities in the south suburbs and has operated for 32 years with a mission to promote stable integration by operating fair housing enforcement and housing counseling services. The experiences of the SSHC are an example of the dynamic nature of housing, the need to maintain constant vigilance, and the complex and ever-changing challenges to integrated communities. Even after decades of working to enforce fair housing and eliminate housing discrimination, the SSHC received 250 complaints in the most recent year's data, and 85 percent of those were based on race. The challenges the south suburbs are facing include white flight and a high concentration of predatory lending and foreclosures. In the current financial crisis, the south suburbs have been particularly hard hit, accounting for the highest rate of foreclosures in the region. Petruszak observed that there is a tremendous need for both homeownership and mortgage counseling services and that the most effective organizations providing this are experiencing funding cuts. In addition, given the concentration of sub-prime mortgage products in this area, there is a strong need for counseling programs.

Recommendations

One of the most exciting sessions during the conference was the opportunity for the participants—activists, academics, and policymakers—to strategize together about the future agendas for policymakers, researchers, and grassroots organizations.

Participants discussed priorities for each group and made the following recommendations:

For Policymakers

- Enforce fair housing laws with sanctions that are behavior specific, and that extend to home owners, landlords, and developers.
- Expand the budget for enforcement and affirmative furthering of fair housing.
- Educate their constituents (and themselves) about fair housing compliance.
- Create policy solutions that address the negative educational and occupational disparities resulting from housing segregation.

For Researchers

Studies should be conducted that answer the following research questions:

- What do “real” people (not housing audit testers) experience when they look for housing? And how do the networks used in this process shape patterns of integration or segregation?
- What are the benefits and liabilities of integration?
- What has to happen so that communities are accessible to all kinds of people? What are the barriers to housing experienced by different groups (e.g., the disabled, poor, minorities, etc.)?
- How does housing mix (rentals, single family homes, condominiums, etc.) influence patterns of integration and segregation?
- What does it mean to have choice in housing?

For Grassroots Organizations

Grassroots organizations should:

- Create an educational campaign—in collaboration with places of worship and schools—to inform different groups of people (i.e., disabled, low-income, people of color, and minorities) of their rights and the benefits of integrated communities.
- Sponsor public hearings to allow all kinds of people to tell their stories.
- Develop outreach and education strategies for real estate agencies, lending and insurance institutions, planners, and developers to discuss the impact of their actions and practices in communities.

Conclusion

On December 9, the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity released a report, *The Future of Fair Housing* (www.nationalfairhousing.org/Portals/33/reports/Future_of_Fair_Housing.PDF) which outlines the findings of its investigation of the state of fair housing.

During a series of hearings throughout the nation, the Commission determined that “despite strong legislation, past and ongoing discriminatory practices

in the nation’s housing and lending markets continue to produce levels of residential segregation that result in significant disparities between minority and non-minority households in access to good jobs, quality education, homeownership attainment and asset accumulation.”

The report calls for strong fair housing enforcement—an important component in the work that must be done to create integrated high-opportunity communities. Equal to the need for enforcement is the need for us to continue to deal with the attitudes and behaviors that influence the creation of segregated communities and identify ways to break down these patterns and processes so that one of the visions of the original Fair Housing Act—integrated communities—can be realized.

To continue the work and conversation begun at the conference, the organizers created a website, [IntegrationAgenda.org](http://www.integrationagenda.org) (<http://www.integrationagenda.org>). It is organized into four sections: Learn—re-live the conference through videos, slideshows, and extensive notes; Participate—pledge to support the Integration Agenda and you’ll become an editor of one of three working documents focused on public policy, grassroots organizations, and research; Advance—help make stable diversity real by endorsing the campaign and advocating on behalf of policies that promote integration; and Blog—stay up to date on the latest news and developments on building stable, diverse neighborhoods.