

# Segregation Practices Spread Poverty

## Abolition of Restrictive Housing Pacts Advocated

*This is another in a series of articles by members of the mayor's interim survey committee on human relations, discussing Denver minority problems as brought out in their recent report. W. Miller Barbour is executive secretary of the Urban League of Denver, a Community Chest agency.*

By W. MILLER BARBOUR.

**H**OUSING is one of the nation's most critical domestic problems, and Denver has high priority among cities with acute housing shortages. This situation affects all groups, majority and minority alike. Our committee, although fully aware of the total problem of housing, nevertheless, because of its assignment, confined itself to the plight of the minorities — Negroes, Spanish-Americans, Japanese and Jews.



Barbour.

These groups face not only the usual problems of postwar housing, but also those tangible and intangible barriers erected or tolerated by special interest groups and many individual members of the community. Restrictive covenants in property deeds, "gentlemen's" agreements among realtors, and the restrictive practices of home owner and neighborhood associations limit the mobility of our minority groups.

**T**HE COMMITTEE in its report recognizes the desirability of keeping up neighborhood standards and of maintaining property values. At the same time we recognize that this desire is

present among minority people as well as among the Anglo-majority group. The harm lies in the common fallacy that attempts to identify neighborhood deterioration with the mere presence of a minority family.

Statements made to committee interviewers show some typical attitudes: "We wouldn't want to have Mexican kids running around the place." "I tell Jews not to buy out there because it would not be good for their children. You know what I mean." "We do not allow Negroes or Jews." "It is best to keep these minorities isolated to their own districts." "Colored folks would rather live with their own people anyway."

This is obviously faulty thinking, but facts and reality are apt to lose out against cultural conditioning and habit patterns formed by irrational fears and false ideas about racial, religious and nationality groups.

The facts are these: Where minority families have been allowed to move into decent neighborhoods, no one could tell the difference between white and Negro homes. In the public housing projects, where minority and majority families live, property and housekeeping standards are far above the citywide average. At least a fourth of Denver's "white" homes are substandard. Lowered property standards cannot be associated with any one group; they are the result of poverty and overcrowding.

Segregation has caused poverty and overcrowding in minority areas, but they could be greatly reduced if minorities had the same job opportunities, the same living space and the same freedom to move as other people. The actions of some and the inaction and complacency of others in our community are creating slums and "ghettos" in Denver.

**I**N THE areas along the Platte river, from 60 to 90 per cent of the housing is considered substandard. Conditions here are so bad that much of the area has been marked for condemnation under the city's housing code. Yet 90 per cent (or 13,000) of Denver's Negroes; 75 per cent (or 24,000) of its Spanish-Americans, and many of its Japanese are penned into this area, where much of the property has been ruled unfit for human beings. Here sewage, sanitation and recreational facilities are the poorest in the city, and here infant mortality and juvenile delinquency are the highest. Apart from the moral wrong involved, Denver taxpayers should be anxious to wipe out these expensive breeding grounds of crime and disease. The solution can be summed up in a few words: "More freedom and space for minorities. Don't fence them in."

In public housing, the situation has interesting paradoxes. In the low rent projects, Negroes can live only in the Platte Valley Homes. Yet in the veteran's projects, minorities, including Negroes and Anglos, live side by side. Under a single administration, one policy says it can't be done; another asserts that it can.

So much for the "negative" side. The "positive" side includes some of the steps recommended by the Committee to help improve conditions.

In private housing, restrictive covenants should be abolished. Long-range education program should be launched to abolish other restrictive practices.

In public housing, discrimination and segregation should be stopped. Eligibility for housing should be based on need alone, as specified by the Federal Housing Act. The City should undertake more slum clearance, and consider some form of rent-option housing for people now in substandard dwellings.

**Friday: Our Social Agencies.**