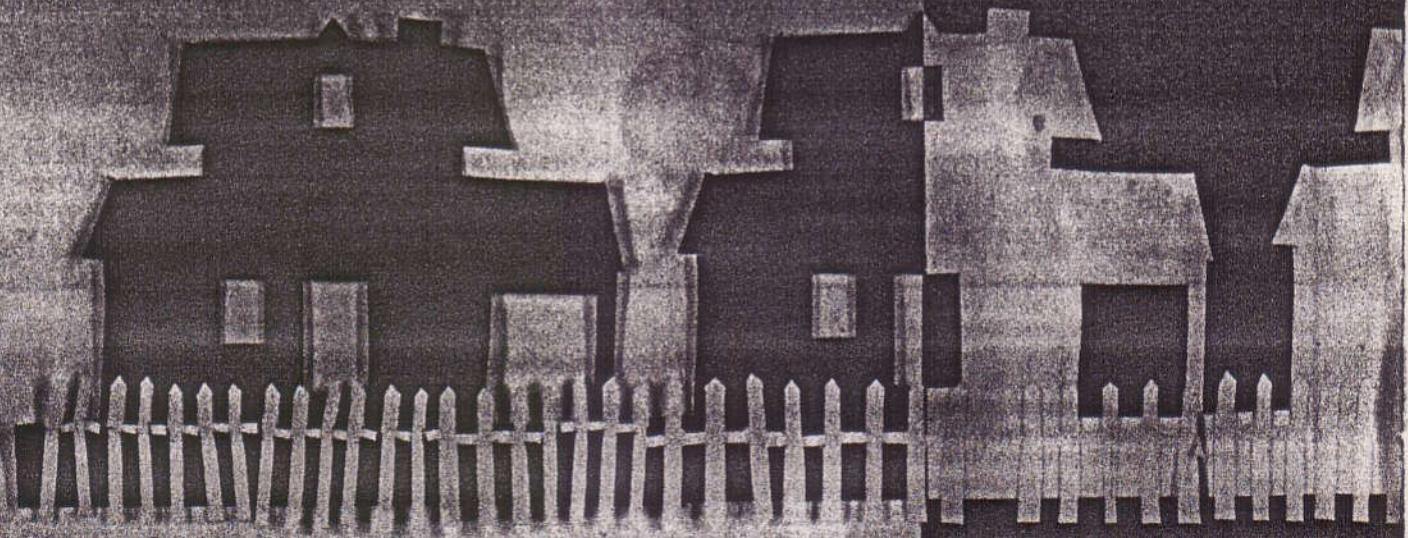


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Black and White Neighbors

A few white families have moved into the old near north side of Tulsa to create newly integrated neighborhoods. Could we be following a nationwide trend? Can the stigma be overcome?

By Cathy Milam



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u-*ulsa, the tush-hog town.*
Greenwood, the battlin' ground.

Porters on the old day coaches used to mark the train's stop in Tulsa with that cry.

Just what those overlords of the rail-lines meant by a "tush-hog town" has been lost to posterity, but the "battling ground" phrase referred to the devastating race riot of 1921.

Even the railroads recognized that during the 1920s and '30s — Tulsa and Greenwood were "separate, distinct communities.

But, beginning in the early '50s, the close-knit community that was Greenwood began its gradual decline. And the unseen barrier that separated "white town" from "black town" dissolved.

Areas that had been among the first developed in the city became Tulsa's first integrated neighborhoods.

Today those pioneer neighborhoods are predominantly black. In some areas, there are only a handful of white residents.

The pattern is a common one for U.S. cities: the older, near-downtown neighborhoods often become the homes for the minority community.

But what will happen to Brady Heights, Irving Heights, Owen Park and the other near-north and northwest areas during the '80s? In hundreds of American cities the trend is reversing. Areas that were once abandoned by whites in favor of the suburbs are witnessing an influx of young, white, middle-class couples.

High commuting costs, soaring housing prices in outlying districts and a renewed interest in renovation of older homes have drawn young white couples into predominantly black areas in cities as diverse as Cincinnati, Cleveland, Atlanta, Louisville, Ky., and San Francisco.

And, although statistics do not indicate that the trend is going full steam in Tulsa, there are many observers who think it may happen here.

A couple of areas in near-north Tulsa do show a rise in the percentage of white residents, although Jerry Goodman, a sociologist/demographer for the Indian Nation's Council of Governments, says the figures don't necessarily mean that whites are moving in by significant numbers.

"Because those areas show a drop in the total population, the percentages could mean that blacks are simply leaving at a faster rate than are whites," Goodman said.

Homeowners Sam and Linda Hampton, however, say they are not the only young, middle-class white couples moving back into the area. They were drawn to their north Denver house first by the price of the home.

"But the biggest plus is the feel of the neighborhood," Mrs. Hampton said. "I've never liked new homes. I call them sterile. The older houses have a roominess, a style, sort of a feel about them."

Hampton said when they bought the home, "It was a real mess. The house had been rented out for several years, and the tenants had trashed out everything."

Currently, the Hamptons have three rooms of the 2,300 square-foot house restored and have glowing plans for the future.

And how do they feel about living in an area where they are racial minorities (their area, by the 1980 census is about 66 percent black)?

"We love it," said Hampton. "Our neighborhood is friendly. People look out for one another."

What the Hamptons say seems to indicate some prejudice and misconceptions about the north side of Tulsa. It is a sad fact that there are thousands of Tulsans who have never visited north Tulsa, except who trips to Tulsa International Airport.

And many north Tulsans, black and white, testify to the existence of a deep-seated prejudice against the area.

Residential developers say it is difficult to get financial backing for northside ventures; northside community action groups have protested that the area is slighted in medical care, street improvements, police protection and political clout.

But the heritage of the city is rooted deeply in the near-north area.

"The Mayo family started out here, as did the Vandevors and the Patterson family of Patterson Steel," said David Breed.

Breed, currently director of the Western Neighbors agency, is former managing editor of the Oklahoma Eagle newspaper and is a north Tulsa resident. He also is a seeker of historical facts about the area.

During the first years of the 1900s, many pioneer Tulsans started out in small homes in the Brady Heights area, just north of downtown, according to Breed.

The Brady Heights area got its name from Tate Brady, a pioneer Tulsa developer/entrepreneur who was a powerful political force in the state's early years. He was the state's first Democratic national committeeman, and he built Cain's Ballroom and the now-extinct Brady Hotel.

As those families prospered, they left the small homes to build mansions in newer additions, such as Riverview or Maple Ridge south of downtown, or on Reservoir Hill, north of Brady Heights.

Then the unthinkable happened: the riot of 1921. The bloody riot — the causes of which are still vague today — was a great blow to Tulsa's black community, and a terrible blot on the city's history.

Thirty-six square blocks of Greenwood's prosperous business and residential district were burned to the ground, people were hurt and lives were lost. And there was a new tension in the city's race relations, a tension that caused some of the prospering families to choose the southern home sites over northside sites.

The black businessmen were told by the

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