

# Coming of Age in Birmingham

## Birmingham-Bloomfield Committee on Open Occupancy statement

Fifth Estate Collective

1966

Shoppers in Downtown Birmingham found themselves window shopping for open occupancy on Saturday, February 26.

The Birmingham-Bloomfield Committee on Open Occupancy distributed 10,000 leaflets encouraging a re-examination of fair housing in that area. The pamphlet is reprinted below.

### **An Appeal to our Community:**

Where do you stand?

We started the Birmingham-Bloomfield Committee on Open Occupancy because there is a problem. This nation is making great strides in correcting historical and unconstitutional injustices with regard to fair housing. Our community lags far behind.

IS THIS OUR FAULT? Yes, because we have failed to express ourselves. We believe groups such as the realtors and builders are setting our climate and doing our thinking for us. We feel this is wrong and want to make sure that our community corrects now an impossible situation. We have information that such groups are actively inhibiting the showing and sale of homes to minority families.

WE ARE NOT ALONE. At the start we were a very small group, but we believed that many in the community felt as we did, and our first general meeting at the Birmingham Unitarian Church surprised even the optimists among us when some 250 people favorable to open occupancy turned out. We knew from previous experience that this number actually represented much broader based community support.

A PLAN OF ACTION was called for. Four proposals were then submitted in December, 1965, to the Birmingham Board of Realtors:

1. To show homes openly to Negro families.
2. To show courtesies or make a business agreement with Negro realtors to enable their clients to look at homes in the area.
3. To implement action to have five Negro families move into the area by September.
4. To pass a resolution or statement of policy that they did favor open occupancy.

The realtors responded by falling back on the statement of the National Association of Real Estate Boards and the Michigan Real Estate Association, that they neither promote nor inhibit open occupancy. They vowed to remain neutral and dismissed the proposals with "nothing came of it." But something definitely did come of it.

THE COMMUNITY IS NOW AWAKENING. The local news media have been giving excellent coverage. We would be foolish to claim that all subsequent reaction has been favorable, but the response has been heartwarming. There have been editorials, columns and numerous letters to the editors, both pro and con. This issue is real, it needed to be brought into the open. Now the essential dialogue has begun.

WHY FIVE FAMILIES? While all four proposals were unpalatable to the realtors, the public reaction was most sensitive to Proposal No. 3, to have five Negro families join our community by September 1, 1966.

We are not proposing to coerce a sale to Negroes by unwilling homeowners. Our basic aim is to enable Negro families who desire homes in this area to purchase them from willing sellers. Then, why five families? There's nothing magical about the number "5." Take any number you like, as evidence of progress and good faith. Even if the realtors and residents were receptive tomorrow, because of the socio-economic barriers, the percentage of minority families moving into our community would not be significant.

THIS BRINGS US UP TO RIGHT NOW! Only recently a Negro family eager and able to buy a \$40,000 home in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area was disappointed and frustrated by a local realtor.

THE REALTOR SAYS HE IS "NEUTRAL," and says that you, the homeowner, discriminate in the sale of homes. Is this true? Have you been consulted?

Governor George Romney, our neighbor, says, "The right to buy and sell property cannot truly be enjoyed by anyone unless it is equally enjoyed by everyone. I heartily endorse the effort of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Committee on Open Occupancy to place our communities firmly on record in support of equal housing opportunity for all."

The clergy of our area have repeatedly explained the moral imperative. Responsible Negro families will continue to aspire to fine homes in fine communities with good schooling.

YOU CAN HELP effect an orderly process of fair and open occupancy. You can contact the realtors to voice your support of our aims. You can notify the committee of the availability to Negroes of homes in our area. From time to time we will promote actions aimed at broadening community support for open occupancy. Please help!

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #5, March 6-20, 1966

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