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**The Social Construction of a Black Suburban Community: A Case Study of
Runyon Heights, Yonkers, New York, 1912-1994**

by

Bruce D. Haynes

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

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June 21, 1995
Date

Stephen Otis
Chair of Examining Committee

June 29, 1995
Date

James Charlton
Executive Officer

Andrew A. Beveridge
Professor William Kornblum

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

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Adviser: Stephen Steinberg

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The community itself represents a historical anomaly. Overcoming widespread racial discrimination and ghettoization in Yonkers, a group of blacks forged a stable middle-class suburban community outside the confines of the developing working-class and poor ghetto. Our historical analysis indicates that community residents reproduced a racial identity and consciousness in order to maintain their community and defend their material and class interests. In addition, residents used their material and educational advantages in order

to champion the cause of racial equality. The specific residential area provided the locale for the politicization of racial identity, as residents attempted to defend against school gerrymandering, low-income housing, welfare hotels, and industrial and commercial encroachment. Community members sought to negotiate their self-interests along both race and class lines. Our findings suggest that racial identity is largely based in the racialization of residential space. Its existence remains a necessary consequence of the ongoing racial subordination experienced by middle-class black Americans in the nation's suburbs.

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Acknowledgments

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The successful completion of this research project was greatly aided by my dissertation committee, composed of Stephen Steinberg, Chair, Andrew Beveridge, and Bill Kornblum. They provided essential guidance, encouragement, and a challenging intellectual environment. They helped to shape my research and solidify my analysis. Professor Beveridge played roles as both mentor and friend for the duration of the project. His confidence in me was contagious, while his guidance proved indispensable.

Like many academics whose spouses contribute to their work, I owe many thanks to my fiancé Syma Lee Solovitch. She was a patient yet

demanding critic. Editing numerous drafts, she provided a second set of eyes and hands and a fresh non-academic perspective, helping to transform the jargon of sociology and my vague concepts and ideas into coherent prose. She was also a comfort during periods of self-doubt and dissertation depression. My analysis also benefited from numerous conversations with Phil Kasinitz, Juan Battle, and of course my dissertation committee members. I would also like to thank the many librarians who were helpful in securing rare documents and obscure materials. Their expertise was an invaluable resource in reconstructing past events and history. Special thanks to Elaine Massena, Reference Supervisor of the Westchester County Archives, and Jeffrey Williams and Michael Rebic of the Yonkers Planning Bureau, and Mr. Milton Holsts of the RHIA. I would like to thank Dean K. Harrison, Director of the Office of Expanded Educational Opportunity for helping to provide financial support throughout my graduate career. I would also like to acknowledge Geoffrey Marshall, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Pamela Reid, Associate Provost and Dean for Academic Affairs, Matthew Schoengood, Executive Director for Student Services, and the City University of New York, who awarded to me a President's Dissertation Year Fellowship in 1993, offered under the MAGNET Program (Minority Access/Graduate Networking). The award provided crucial funding for field research and interviewing, allowing me freedom from teaching and other assistant research obligations.

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This dissertation represents the culmination of nine years of graduate study, and the end of a long journey. I might never have traveled this road had it not been for the urging of the late Jay Schulman. Not only did he provide financial, intellectual and moral support during the early phases of my graduate career, Dr. Schulman's brand of sociology brought sensitivity and a depth of insight to bear on the problems of social justice and equality. I hope my work holds true to Jay's vision.

This work is dedicated to my parents, Daisy and E. George Haynes Jr. They, like the residents of Runyon Heights whose lives I attempt to capture here, always strove to give to their children the best that the world had to offer.

Preface

On Saturday, September 25, 1993, current and former residents of the Runyon Heights community gathered together to celebrate the Second Nepperhan Reunion Day¹. The festive celebration was hosted at the Runyon Heights Community House. Although the luncheon and ceremony were not scheduled to begin until 2:00 P.M., guests began arriving before noon, eager for a chance to greet old friends and mingle with the people with whom they associate the word "home." The \$20 donation seemed well worth the home-cooked meal and chance to reminisce over common experiences growing up in Nepperhan.

Earlier that week, members of the Runyon Heights Improvement Association (RHIA), a local civic group, had been busy sprucing up the Community House. The Community House, which served as a community meeting place, was a small red brick building comprising a large room with a small stage in the rear. An unfinished basement was downstairs. It contained a small kitchen and a small bar area, as well as assorted trophies of the children who over the years had excelled on the Runyon Heights basketball teams. It was in this small kitchen, no larger than what one might find in many homes, that the meals for the celebration would be prepared.

¹During the first days of the community, beginning just after World War One, the area was known as both Nepperhan and Runyon Heights. As the tract expanded, the Runyon Heights name increasingly was used.

Their efforts had been successful and today the Community House both looked and smelled good. The older members of the community, usually called the "Old-timers" or the "Seniors" were most visible, directing the flow of people, chairs, tables, name-tags, and food. Nevertheless, younger members were busy helping out. Many were the adult children of active members. Most of the board of the RHIA was present.

Some 500 fliers were mailed weeks in advance, including one to every household in Runyon Heights, announcing the community's largest and most publicized event. Old Nepperhanites came from around the nation. Twenty-four individuals came from out of state, including North Carolina, Florida, Delaware, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey. The Community House was filled to capacity. Seventy-five hot lunches were served, all prepared by some of the ladies of Nepperhan and their assistants. In total, close to 200 people attended the ceremony. According to residents, the turnout rivaled the First Nepperhan Community Reunion held in September of 1981.

I was fortunate enough to have been asked by Corinne Grayson Thomas, Chairperson of the Reunion Committee, to speak about my ongoing research in the community. At this stage of my research, my interviews were completed, so I considered any bias I might inject into the research site to be minimal. In addition, this occasion allowed me to test some general points, as well as to confirm or negate any particular details that remained unclear.

Near the end of the luncheon, I delivered my talk. While speaking before both the familiar and unfamiliar faces, I was taken by the interest and excitement they expressed in having their community finally recognized by outsiders. Clearly, they believed their community was truly special. But it was not the first time the community had been singled out. Articles had appeared in the Herald Statesman pointing out the uniqueness of Runyon Heights². Unfortunately, many residents found that the media coverage of the community was often narrow and one-sided. On September 29, 1988, the CBS television news show "48 Hours" presented an edition entitled "Not on My Street." The show, hosted by Dan Rather, covered the 1980 Federal housing discrimination suit in Yonkers³ and featured a segment on Runyon Heights, which focused on the four-foot reserve strip, referred to as a fence or wall, which allegedly divided Nepperhan from Homefield. Residents were disappointed that the community they had struggled to build was reduced to

²See article in The Herald Statesmen: May 29, 1977, page 1, "Runyon Heights Getting the Business"; February 1, 1978, page 1 of Local Section, "Runyon Heights is Achievement Award Winner"; February 1, 1985, "For the Residents of Runyon Heights, There's No Place in the World"; January 24, 1994, page 3 A, "A Salute to a Trooper."

³United States District Court Southern District of New York. United States of America and Yonkers Branch- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, et al. vs Yonkers Board of Education; City of Yonkers; and Yonkers Community Development Agency. Opinion 80 CIV 6761 (LBS).

this physical symbol of racial exclusion. They expressed hope that this time a more complete story would be told of their community⁴.

I was delighted to find my presentation so well received by many of the Old-timers. Residents even expressed a certain satisfaction that the author of this study is black, and that his topic of study was Runyon Height itself. Many wished me luck and asked that a final copy of the completed work be made available for them to read. At times I felt I was among old relatives and friends. Those in attendance seemed particularly interested in the historical documents which my research had uncovered. Nepperhanites were eager to get copies of maps and early issues of the community newsletter which I had brought as visual aids. Their only complaint was that I described the occupations of Nepperhaners in 1925 as mostly porters, cooks, manual laborers, coachmen, and messengers. This received a violent objection from many members of the audience who collectively recalled that the community had once contained a number of postmen. I assured them that my numbers were correct, and suggested that postmen probably became more numerous during the 1940's. That answer seemed to appease most challengers. In fact, information from interviews and historical records indicate that a number of skilled craftsmen,

⁴Residents were angered by a recently published historical account of Blacks in Yonkers. They felt it was filled with inaccuracies and misrepresentations of their community.

Pullman porters, and postmen did indeed reside in the community, most coming between 1926 and 1945.

Throughout the reunion, one got the impression that one was in a small town or village, rather than in a neighborhood. Everyone seemed to know everyone else. If they did not know an individual, they often knew that person's parents, in-laws, cousins, or siblings. Most of those in attendance, both residents or visitors, could claim a long tenure in the community. Some returning and current residents had been married more than fifty years. Only a handful of the newest arrivals to Runyon Heights, those living in the area for less than ten years, attended the festivities.

Local politicians made brief appearances. Ed Fagan, the local council district representative for the 6th District and a Republican, was received more willingly than most other politicians, regardless of affiliation. All in all, a healthy skepticism prevailed.

Before lunch, I watched a crowd gathering in front of the Community House to view a display of pictures that had been assembled by the Community House volunteer staff. There was giggling and pointing, blushing faces, and talk of the Mens Club, the Monte Carloite Debs, The Sportsmen's Lounge, and Leroy Williams Park. Inside, at the festivities, there was much of the same: discussions centered around School Number 1, the coal bin, the 7:13 A.M. Putnam train, the 5:46 P.M. Putnam train, The A&P, The Boy Scouts, The

Mothers Club, the Smith's Store, and the Nepperhan Community Center. The list seemed endless.

Later, when I reviewed my notes, it became clear that the majority of references involved events that had occurred from the late 1920's through the late 1950's. While a diverse representation of the community attended the affair, most of the honored guests were senior citizens. Seven people, including both nonresidents and residents, were honored for their longevity, having reached ninety years of age or more, as well as for their committed service to the community. One of the most senior residents at the festivities, who had been a young man when he first arrived in 1926, was born in 1895. Mr. Norman J. Downs, Sr., considered by many to be the community patriarch, was honored at the ceremony for his tenure and involvement in the area.⁵ The oldest living resident in Nepperhan, Mrs. Gertrude Linton, was unable to attend. She was born in 1893, and built her home in 1935. Many of the Old-timers, now in their seventies, were the children of the original settlers.

The day was filled with the sounds of old friends. "Remember when" was a common phrase. At times, some of the Old-timers seemed childlike when reminiscing over people, places, and special occasions. Strangely enough, I felt a certain connection to many of those I had come to know through interviews, maps, newspaper clippings, census statistics, stories, and

⁵Regretfully, during the preparation of this manuscript, Mr. Norman J. Downs, Sr. passed away in August of 1994.

anecdotes. I began connecting the faces I now saw to the family histories I had previously learned about. I watched the past come to life before me as each person told a new story, filling in the tapestry of Nepperhan. The spirit of the day was captured by one woman who has lived in Nepperhan since 1938: "The old days, they were the happy days, happy days!"

This reunion, of some two hundred Nepperhan residents, past and present, represented a microcosm of the community's entire history, a collective memory of the events, institutions, clubs, associations, and politics that shaped the formation of the only middle-class suburban community in Yonkers. As I mingled among the Nepperhanites throughout the day, I realized that I too had strangely become a part of Nepperhan, a part of the very social tapestry that I was attempting to describe. From that day on, the very stories that I told, the "information" that I offered, would hence become a part of the collective memory of Nepperhan.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vi
Preface	ix
List of Tables	xvii
List of Figures	xx
Chapter One: The Genesis and Development of a Black Suburb: An Overview	1
Chapter Two: Methodological and Theoretical Overview	31
Chapter Three: Origins of Black Suburban Communities in Yonkers	60
Chapter Four: The History of Nepperhan Real Estate Development: "Sell it to the Niggers"	111
Chapter Five: The Effects of Race on Community Formation	145
Chapter Six: Historical Periods of Community Development	196
Chapter Seven: The History of Social Organization in the Nepperhan/Runyon Heights Community	223
Chapter Eight: Race, Class and the Political Organization of Community Self-Interest	275
Conclusion:	306
Appendix A: List of Research Sites	318
Appendix B: Map 1, 1990 Census of Tract 18, Yonkers, New York	319
Appendix C: Map 2, 1990 Census of the City of Yonkers	320
Bibliography:	321

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Demographics of Runyon Heights, 1980-1990	5
Table 3.1	Population of Yonkers, New York, 1870-1920	76
Table 3.2	Population of Yonkers by Race, 1890-1990	77
Table 3.3	Average Weekly Income of Working-Class Households by Street	84
Table 3.4	Race of Heads of Households by Street	87
Table 3.5	Demographics of Runyon Heights, 1980-1990	109
Table 5.1	Occupations of Employed Heads of Households, 1920	160
Table 5.2	Population of Nepperhan by Race and Nativity, 1920-1925	166
Table 5.3	Population of Nepperhan by Nativity, 1925	170
Table 5.4	New York State Census Demographics of Nepperhan, 1925	171
Table 5.5	Occupations of Employed Women 16 Years and Older by Race, 1925	172
Table 5.6	Occupations of Employed Men 16 Years and Older by Race, 1925	173
Table 5.6b	Corresponding Class and Occupational Categories	174
Table 5.7	Population of Persons 16 Years and Older by Race and Gender, 1925	178
Table 5.8	Occupations of Foreign-Born Heads of Households, Nepperhan, 1925	189
Table 6.1	Dedication Dates for Runyon Heights/Nepperhan Streets	201

Table 6.2	Population of Runyon Heights, New York (Census Tract 18) by Race, 1925-1990	211
Table 8.1	Political Party Registration, Election District 6, Ward 10, Yonkers	285
Table 8.2	1956 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	287
Table 8.3	1960 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	287
Table 8.4	1964 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	288
Table 8.5	1968 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	289
Table 8.6	1980 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	289
Table 8.7	1992 Presidential Election, Yonkers, New York	290
Table 8.8	1957 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	299
Table 8.9	1957 Election for Councilman, 10th Ward, Yonkers, New York	299
Table 8.10	1965 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	300
Table 8.11	1965 Election for Councilman, 10th Ward Yonkers, New York	300
Table 8.12	1969 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	300
Table 8.13	1969 Election for Councilman, 10th Ward, Yonkers, New York	301
Table 8.14	1979 Mayoral Elections, Yonkers, New York	301
Table 8.15	1981 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	301
Table 8.16	1981 Election for Councilman, 10th Ward Yonkers, New York	302
Table 8.17	1985 Mayoral Elections, Yonkers, New York	302

Table 8.18	1985 Election for Councilman, 10th Ward Yonkers, New York	302
Table 8.19	1987 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	303
Table 8.20	1987 Council Member, District, Yonkers, New York	303
Table 8.21	1989 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	304
Table 8.22	1989 Council Member, 6th District, Yonkers, New York	304
Table 8.23	1991 Mayoral Election, Yonkers, New York	305
Table 8.24	1991 Council Member, 6th District, Yonkers, New York	305

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Advertisements for Nepperhan, Yonkers, New York, published in the Amsterdam News.	134
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Chapter One

The Genesis and Development of a Black Suburb:

An Overview

This is a study of Runyon Heights, a suburban residential community in the northeast section of Yonkers, New York. The City of Yonkers was first founded as a village in 1855, just north of New York City, along the Hudson River. Runyon Heights, which was originally settled in 1912, was one of the first "black suburbs" in the New York City metropolitan region. While the area represents the only stable community of predominantly middle-class Black-American homeowners in the City of Yonkers, Runyon Heights is more than a historical anomaly. It was a precursor to further suburbanization of the black middle class over recent decades. However, in its inception, Nepperhan, as the area was first called, was actually a working-class suburb. Thus, the community captures the process of suburbanization among working-class, lower-middle-class, and middle-class African-Americans⁶. As such, it invites analysis of the social construction of community identity among black suburban residents. In a sense, the community represents "what might have been" had more Black-Americans had opportunities to secure what, through a series of atypical circumstances, became available to the residents of Runyon Heights: stable employment, good housing, and a decent place to raise their children,

⁶Unless otherwise noted, the terms "Negro," "Black" and "African-American" refer to the same populations in the United States.

insulated to a notable degree from both ongoing white racism and the expanding black ghetto.

Nepperhan thus provides a historical framework for analyzing a number of sociological issues. Of particular significance is the relationship between racial segregation and identity. The geographical boundaries of Runyon Heights contain a population which is relatively homogeneous in terms of both class and race. While a small minority of whites reside within the geographical boundaries (neighborhood) of the area called Runyon Heights, the majority remain outside the community of associations developed among blacks within the area. The Runyon Heights neighborhood, as it is defined by residents using local street boundaries, is approximately 82% black. According to the 1990 census, the area, as defined by census tract boundaries, is 78% black, and contains 1378 persons. However, the census tract unit ignores local community definitions, and includes two census blocks (118 and 123) which contain streets from the neighboring Homefield Community. Excluding these two blocks would make the area 82% black, with a population of only 1,175 persons. However, local community associations and organizations remain primarily black. The community, as defined by these associations, is more racially homogeneous than the census data would suggest. Additionally, Runyon Heights is surrounded by many virtually all-white middle-class residential areas. The area bordering to the north is the Homefield community which is, according to the census, 92% white and only 7% black. Runyon Heights is one of only two

census tracts on the east side of the city with a black population greater than 10%.

By any standard, today the area is predominantly middle-class. In 1990, the median family income in the Runyon community was \$43,500, while the median family income for the entire City of Yonkers was \$43,305. Between 1980 and 1990, Runyon Heights experienced a 38% real gain in family income (see Table 1.1)⁷. The average gain in the City of Yonkers was only 20%. How and why did the middle-class community of Runyon Heights develop where and when it did? What is the historical development of the institutional structures that helped to define a racial community within such specific spatial boundaries? To what extent did race and class organization shape the development of the community, its associations, and its identity?

Runyon Heights is a geographically isolated community (See Map #1, Appendix B). It is bounded on the west and south by two major thoroughfares, and on the east by Sprain Road and a Catholic cemetery. The northern section is bordered by a four-foot wide strip of land adjacent to the Homefield community, which effectively segregated the territory into black and white residential areas. The four-foot reserve strip was created during the mid-1920's, when real estate speculators first subdivided the Homefield estate. Through the years, however, the strip had been willfully maintained through

⁷1980 dollars are converted into 1990 dollars by multiplying 1980 dollars by 1.585.

private ownership by Homefield residents and the local homeowners association. By the 1930's, deed restrictions were made obsolete by zoning laws implemented by the City of Yonkers. Zoning helped to structure the use of suburban land, insuring private residential development in the Runyon area. It is within this ecological context that this study seeks to analyze the impact of race and class on the historical development of the Runyon Heights community and its identity. The central mechanism influencing community identity formation is that private residential space is defined through the intersection of race and class forces. The development of local perceptions of racial identity is structured by institutional and market forces which have consistently recognized African lineage associated with dark skin color as a mark of racial membership. Perceptions of race have been a decisive factor structuring both the mechanisms which recruited residents, and the availability of residential space to those labeled "Black." As a result, the community is labeled as "Black" both by local residents and by those outside the community.

The history of Runyon Heights can be divided into five distinct periods. Each historical period corresponds to changes in both the real estate and employment market conditions affecting local Black-Americans. In addition, each period consists of a distinct cohort, the combination of new younger settlers and the adult children of the preceding generation. Each successive group not only lived within the physical boundaries of the neighborhood, but was also drawn into a network of associations within the community, due in

part to a constellation of factors involving the political dynamics of location (space), race, and class.

Table 1.1: Demographics of Runyon Heights 1980-1990

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>
Total Population.....	1,270	1,378
Total # Families.....	324	352
Total Hispanic.....	26	96
Non-Hispanic Black.....	987	1,085
Non-Hispanic White.....	238	214
Total # Households.....	469	478
Total Units.....	482	491
Renter Occupied Units.....	191	202
Vacant Units.....	13	13
% Units Owner Occupied.....	58%	56%
Incomplete Plumbing.....	9	0
Median Rent.....	\$203	\$475
IN 1990 Dollars.....	\$322	NA
Median Family Income.....	\$19,853	\$43,500
In 1990 Dollars.....	\$31,467	NA

*Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980 and 1990.

The First Wave: 1912-1925

The earliest black suburban pioneers were drawn to the area during the 1910's and early 1920's through active recruitment by a local realtor, as well as by a New York City-based realty agent. They placed advertisements in the Amsterdam News, drawing both American-born blacks, containing a strong Southern contingent, and Caribbean-born blacks to the area. Both groups tended to have first resided in New York's Harlem community, before making the jump further north to Yonkers. The majority of the men were working-class laborers; the majority of the women, domestics. Many of the early residents built and owned their own homes. In addition to black homeowners, a small number of European families, the majority of which were of Italian lineage, also built homes in the area. Many had moved from Arthur Avenue in the Bronx, as well as from other traditionally Italian-American areas in New York. Their homes included large vegetable gardens, typical of many rural communities of the day. Both groups of African and European descendants lived similar, but largely separate, lives. Chickens and goats were as common as lawnmowers are today. Most Italians, as well as other European newcomers, worked as skilled and semiskilled craftsmen in the local industry. Most blacks worked as porters, carpenters, hairdressers, domestics, chauffeurs, coachmen, cooks,

manual laborers and messengers (expressmen), often commuting to work in Harlem, and sometimes Brooklyn.⁸

By the end of the first wave in 1925, almost all new property owners to the area were so called "Coloreds" or "Negroes." While the children of many of these families remained in the community, the majority of children of European descent often left the community and settled in other locations both in and out of the city. Over the decades their numbers have slowly dwindled. This phenomenon is indicative of the wide availability of housing choices for European Americans, who held advantages in the housing market due to their light complexion and "white" racial designation. Their experiences and opportunities are in direct contrast to the limited choices available to people of African descent, who encountered pervasive racial discrimination in the housing market, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious, or national background.

In their book American Apartheid, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton demonstrate that black Americans experienced widespread institutional discrimination by lending institutions, real estate markets, and private property owners, leading to black residential isolation and ghetto formation (Massey and Denton, 1993: 83, 105). Nepperhan was the only area in the expanding suburban periphery of Yonkers where Negroes could readily purchase property. Unlike other areas where Negroes could secure real estate, Nepperhan was the

⁸1925 New York State Census Manuscripts

only location which was physically isolated from the black working-class ghetto on the west side.

Resistance to a "Negro" presence in Yonkers included, but was not limited to, widespread use of restrictive covenants by property owners, racial steering practices by realtors, and the redlining of black residential areas by government and lending institutions. Many properties in Homefield originally carried restrictive covenants on their deeds which barred selling the land to "colored persons." Residents report racial steering practices as well as reluctance by lending institutions to grant home mortgages to black homeseekers in non-black neighborhoods. Housing and Urban Development studies indicate that these techniques have been widely employed to bar blacks from suburban housing even after the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act (Massey and Denton, 1993: 105).

The definitive motivation for striving black residents in Runyon Heights was neither social integration with whites nor, at first, the conscious formation of a black residential community but, rather, access to affordable housing and a decent place to raise their families. Residents reported that it was only after many failed attempts at purchasing property in other suburban areas of Yonkers and Westchester County that most residents came to settle in Runyon Heights.

The Second Wave: 1926- 1945

In the years preceding and following the Depression, a second wave of settlers arrived. Like the original black settlers, the majority of newcomers were young couples with children. Some were already Yonkers residents who had lived on the west side of the city. For them, the move to Nepperhan represented a move to a higher status area. Residents who held semiskilled, skilled and service occupations became middle-class by virtue of becoming property owners. They in essence became small capitalist investors, and their status was publicly recognized by both white and black Yonkerites. Other settlers continued the migration process from the South and the Caribbean. Like their predecessors, they often resided first in Harlem before moving to Westchester. Many of the children of the first generation of African-American settlers entered the workforce during World War II along with this second wave of settlers. At the end of World War II, when the second generation of black men returned to the area, many remained in the community, eventually purchasing homes of their own. Their Italian neighbors did not remain in the community, often moving to other parts of this suburban metropolis. By the time the second wave of black newcomers had settled and begun purchasing homes, a community of associations was already in place, and community boundaries clearly defined. The first black families in Nepperhan had founded civic organizations, clubs, and a church during the first period.

The Third Wave: 1946-1960

During the second half of the 1940's and 1950's, a third wave of settlers came to Runyon Heights. Most of this group tended to settle in the eastern portion of the neighborhood, known as "the Hill." This third wave included young families with school age children, as did the first two waves. However, they differed from earlier settlers in their socioeconomic status. Many had a college education and were the first blacks to work in white-collar jobs as clerks, salesmen, teachers, and nurses. Their socioeconomic characteristics tended to be above those of the children of the original settlers, many of whom had not attended college, and worked as postmen and manual laborers. With respect to their social organization and occupations, this third group approximates the middle class as it was defined by E. Franklin Frazier in his landmark study Black Bourgeoisie (1957). Though by 1930 a black residential suburb had been born in Nepperhan, after 1940 the area became more traditionally middle-class. Increasingly, the locale attracted members of the "new " black middle class who heard of this thriving community through friends and real estate brokers. This group, unlike their predecessors, held managerial and professional occupations during an era where the color line, which had excluded black workers from many industries, was beginning to fade. Meanwhile, black and white real estate investors built ever more costly homes for sale in an expanding and costly real estate market.

The Fourth Wave: 1961-1980

From 1961 to 1980, another wave of settlement hit the area. This fourth wave highlights the continued middle-class gentrification of the area. Like earlier residents, many had their homes built by hired contractors; others purchased homes already built by independent developers, as did many residents from the second and third waves. The majority of the fourth-wave settlers held managerial and professional jobs, though a couple were investor-builders. Most were college educated, and many have earned advanced degrees. This group is comparable to the "new Black middle class," outlined by Bart Landry, who benefited from government enforcement of anti-discrimination policy during the nineteen sixties and seventies (Landry, 1987). However, included in this cohort are also a number of individuals of Latino-Caribbean ancestry, as well as a smattering of families of European descent. These individuals tend to be young professionals of the so-called baby-boom generation. Many experienced a tight housing market, skyrocketing real estate prices, and high interest rates in Yonkers just as they began to start families. These factors made non-black interest in the area increase after the 1970's. According to local realtors, housing prices in Runyon Heights are kept artificially low, due to the race of property owners in the community. Housing in Runyon would sell for more money in a predominantly white community. Ironically, this factor benefited many newcomers in the short-run, who were able to secure housing in the area more cheaply than in many predominantly white areas of

comparable socioeconomic and aesthetic character. In the long run, however, this tendency limits the ability of Runyon Heights children to acquire wealth through the inheritance of family property. Due to the influence of racial biases on the local housing market, an artificial ceiling is placed on the value of property and on one's ability to acquire wealth through its acquisition.

Like the earlier waves, this fourth cohort includes some of the children and grandchildren of earlier Runyon generations. However, unlike earlier generations, this group did not experience community-based education in the local elementary school, School 1. School 1, an integrated school from the time the first blacks moved to Nepperhan, became an all black school as a result of intentional gerrymandering of school district lines by the Yonkers Board of Education after World War Two. As a result of a challenge by local parents and the Yonkers Branch of the NAACP over the underutilization of the School 1 facility, School 1 was closed in 1954. An unforeseen consequence of this act was a weakening of community ties among the fourth cohort of community children.

The Fifth Wave: 1981 - Present

The most recent wave of residents is similar in socioeconomic status to the fourth wave. However, due to rising real estate costs, which characterized Westchester County in the 1980's, these residents are among the most

financially successful members of the community. This group contains a number of Caribbean professionals, from both Latin and West Indian countries.

With the latest wave, the community is infused and renewed with bits of Afro-Caribbean culture. This new infusion seems to have bolstered the cultural awareness of residents, as community members, both young and old, are increasingly exposed to Caribbean cultures. As the newest members of the area, they are also the least likely to be involved in community activities and organizations. A number of factors contribute to this phenomenon. First, community involvement of adults has traditionally occurred both directly and indirectly through their children. The parents of grade-school children were some of the most active participants in the community, since school issues often provided a focal point for political organization. Many in this cohort do not have young children, and so the traditional incentive for community involvement is absent among many parents of this group. Second, the community-based School 1 no longer exists, denying residents the opportunity for a community-based PTA. Third, those who grew up in the community often became active in local clubs and civic associations as varying political issues polarized residents against forces from outside the community. Many of the newer residents have not yet experienced problems serious enough to warrant their active participation. However, community issues like public housing, which are perceived by most residents to threaten the socioeconomic stability of the area, often draw broad community support. Finally, this group is least

likely to be involved in church activities, a traditional source of community involvement.

Mixed among this last wave of homeowners are individuals whose grandparents were the original settlers of the community. As a group, the grandchildren of the original Nepperhaners are less economically stable than the newcomers. While many have experienced upward educational and occupational mobility, others have had difficulty securing steady white-collar work while remaining in the community. A number of the most successful descendants of the original Nepperhaners relocated to other areas outside of Yonkers. One consequence of new employment opportunities in the post sixties era has been that many successful managerial and professional careers require leaving the area. Like other middle-class professional families, a number move for career advancement and opportunity. Many still return to visit family members, while others merely come back to visit old friends on occasions like the community reunion celebration.

Community Identity Formation

The race and class character of the Runyon Heights community was determined by external market forces which made land available to financially secure blacks for the construction of single-family homes. Residents constructed both a racial and class identity as they interacted within the clubs, organizations, schools, and churches they created within the distinct geographic

boundaries of two estates. Weaved throughout these five historical periods is the impact of race and class on the historical development and organization of the Runyon Heights community and its identity. The central mechanism influencing community identity formation is the spatial boundaries of the area as a geo-political manifestation of political class conflict. It is within the context of spatial boundaries that residential patterns of association and organization reflect political class forces, a response to racial subordination and exclusion, and social class forces, a response to the relationship between consumption and production in the marketplace. Since both the work and residence of individuals of African ancestry have been historically conditioned by the imposition of racial criteria, three consequences are significant to this study. The first consequence of these historical relationships is the formation of residential suburban communities that are both economically and racially homogeneous. The second consequence is the formation of a community identity which has both a distinct racial and class character. The third consequence is the construction of a distinct racial identity, incorporated within individuals, and largely embedded within the local sense of community and family history, of which each community member becomes a symbol as well as cultural caretaker. A proactive and positive racial identity is realized and activated within the racialized political environment which shaped the local construction of a common history. While race was used by the market and local government to challenge the material interests of the collective, residents not only reacted, but

also actively participated in building a positive community self image around race while devoting the use of their material advantages to help fight racial oppression in the city of Yonkers. Yet this middle-class community's commitment to solutions for the plight of the working-class ghetto on the west side of the city has been tempered by those very same material interests of the collective. Nonetheless, racial identity was used by Nepperhaners to help encourage community solidarity and defend their class interests. In essence, residents must negotiate both their racial and class interests, both of which are tied together in a dialectically reflexive relationship, and both of which are a part of their sense of self and community.

A common history helped to foster a local community folk culture and give meaning to community life. Older community members are regarded as the official keepers of the history. In a sense, they embody the spirit of the community and are symbols of it. Even local landmarks take on the names of persons significant to the community. For instance, Runyon Avenue is named after Charles Runyon, who was the original owner of the Runyon estate; Moultrie Avenue is named after a local entrepreneur and most renowned Negro in Yonkers in 1920; Boo Wilson Park, located at the corner of Runyon Avenue and Tuckahoe Road, is named after Hudean Wilson, a popular and beloved Athletic Director and local resident who ran the community sports programs during the 1960's and 1970's. Boo Wilson Park was originally named Leroy Williams Memorial Park, in memory of another local resident. Moreover, many

residences still carry the names of family members who previously resided there.

Racial Identity Formation

Discrimination based upon skin color, so-called Negro features, and known African ancestry, together with the denial of African history and the historical contributions of people of African descent have been central forces structuring the availability of housing and jobs along the "the color line," as it was frequently called in the South. While color is a major indicator of racial-group membership, it is the creation and linking together of distinct social histories through racial segregation that has generated the necessity for the organization of community around "race" or dark skin. In Runyon Heights, cultural and class differences were minimized as a result of community building along racial lines. "Black" racial communities in America are structured by imposed conceptions of primordial racial divisions, racial homogeneity, and racial inferiority. Racial subjugation necessitates the organization of community and politics around "black" skin in American society. Racial identity is an active and creative response to racial oppression. Those who experience similar adversity and find themselves located in the same or similar social space will soon develop a group identity. Racial identity in American society is rooted in the racialization of social, political, and economic spheres.

The creation, formalization and maintenance of racial categories by the U.S. Census significantly contributes to the social and political mythology of race and racial purity. Collas (1994) maintains that the policing of official racial and ethnic definitions by the Census Bureau maintains racial boundaries which preserve the racial state (Collas, 1994: 5). By 1920, government bodies, led by the U.S. Census and the Supreme Court, classified anyone with any known African ancestry as "Negro" (Davis, 1991: 8-12, 46). Likewise, fear of being tainted by any amount of African lineage, along with increased northern migration around World War II, led to widespread discrimination by so-called whites against persons with any known African ancestry. As American society increasingly adopted what anthropologists call the "hypo-descent" rule (Nelson, 1986: 319; Davis, 1991: 113-116), what some have referred to as "the one drop rule" (Davis, 1991:5), and what the courts call the "traceable amount" rule (Dominguez, 1986: 26-36) regarding the offspring of Africans and Europeans, persons of so-called "mixed race" parentage were relegated to the "Negro" or "black" subordinate category and treated as such by social and political institutions by 1920. Both Jim Crow segregation and de facto segregation implicitly acknowledged the "one drop rule."

Persons with any visible "Negroid" traits or those with any known African ancestry were increasingly viewed and viewed themselves as one group. They all experienced similar discrimination in employment and housing markets after the Supreme Court gave sanction to both Jim Crow segregation and the "one

drop rule" in its *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537) ruling in 1896 (Davis, 1991: 8). This phenomenon tended to minimize both color and cultural differences within the developing black community (Davis, 1991:58; Green and Wilson, 1992: 118-123). Likewise, the court's decision tended to usher in a new wave of exclusionary practices towards Negroes in restaurants, theaters, public facilities and many educational institutions (Allen, 1964: 28). In Runyon Heights, cultural, religious, national, and complexion differences were de-emphasized in order to foster community cohesion. Foreign-born West Indians and native-born Southerners all identified with one another in their common condition, racial subordination. The children of West Indian parents would soon identify themselves as Negro and not West Indian, and still later Black.

By the time Nepperhan was founded, Jim Crow segregation, which embraced the "one drop rule," tended to polarize African and European descendants into only two racial groups. As the Harlem Renaissance developed, so did a sense of peoplehood between those with visible "Negroid" characteristics and those with any publicly known African ancestry. People of many shades, physical characteristics, and cultural backgrounds saw themselves as constituting a new people. Many of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance would have been officially classified as Mulatto in an earlier era, and would probably have participated in the elite Mulatto societies of the South, like the Bon Ton Society of Washington, D.C. Individuals of mixed European and African lineage adopted the one drop rule, as it was increasingly enforced

politically by an array of government agencies. They became active participants in forging a new "Negro" culture and identity during the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance rejected the "racial purity" approach of the Garvey Movement, which would have relegated many notable Negro leaders, including W.E.B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, A. Philip Randolph and Walter White to a "mulatto" category, while laying the basis for a mulatto identity. While the mixed ancestry of the majority of American Negroes precluded their acceptance of concepts of Negro purity, nevertheless, the pan-Africanist Garvey movement contributed to the development of strong racial pride and to a new sense of peoplehood, as exemplified in Harlem during the 1920's. Philip Kasinitz describes the reputation of Harlem during the 1920's, and the influence of the Garvey movement on its identity. He writes that Harlem was viewed as a "black metropolis where the various strains of the race would be united" (Kasinitz, 1992: 43). The new Negro identity and culture which blossomed during the Harlem Renaissance made reference to the new "brown Negro." The term was widespread in the literature and art of the Renaissance, the 1930's and 1940's (Davis, 1991: 59). In fact, W.E.B. Dubois used the terms "colored," "Negro," and "black" in his 1899 landmark study entitled The Philadelphia Negro (1973), foreshadowing future shifts in racial identity and black consciousness. The new Negro identity which developed included those with any traceable amount of Negro ancestry. This is not to negate the historical fact that many so-called mulattoes owned Negro slaves in Louisiana

and South Carolina prior to the Civil War, struggling to carve out an intermediate racial status between Negro and White. During the same period, other mulattoes organized against slavery and fought for the Union. As the most educated were also segregated within Negro communities after emancipation, many like Frederick Douglass participated in the building of the first free Negro communities.

The term "colored," which had originally referred to all non-whites, including Negroes, Japanese, Chinese, and "civilized Indians," was increasingly applied to denote "light-skinned," "mixed blood" or "Mulatto" persons. The term was adopted by the new Negro group to refer to all with known African ancestry, regardless of skin color or varying mixtures of European and African lineage (Davis, 1991: 6). Only in rare situations did the advantages of light skin outweigh the bigotry of a rigid color line. In Louisiana and in parts of South Carolina and Virginia, mixed race persons established patterns of intermarriage between families and isolated themselves from the darker complexioned Negro masses. In the northeast, by the nineteen thirties, the terms "colored" and "Negro" were used interchangeably to refer to anyone with one drop of African blood. In northern industrial suburban communities, those who could not or did not wish to "pass" as "white" accepted the polarized definition, and the "Negro" or "colored" label.

During this period, references to the "colored" man were widespread in the black media. Black weeklies such as *The Amsterdam News*, and *The New*

York Age used both the "colored" and "Negro" labels regularly, much in the same way the Jim Crow southern legislators did. "Colored Only" restrictions certainly signified "Negro" to most white Americans both North and South. Use of the terms "brown" and "colored" was a recognition and acceptance by both so-called "pure Negroes" (unmixed Africans) and "Mulattoes" of the "one drop rule" in defining who was truly "Negro" in Jim Crow America.

The Garveyite emphasis on dark skin as a mark of racial pride was not generally accepted in Negro America until the political and social revolution of the Black Power Movement during the 1960's. Political and cultural mobilization brought about a change in Negro consciousness, which was reflected by a new racial label, "black." The new black consciousness emphasized both African origins and dark skin as positive symbols of group solidarity. Many of the ideas of the Garvey movement were filtered through the cultural revolution of the Soul and Black Power movements of the 1960's, and have reemerged in the Afrocentric (Africentric) movement of the last decade. Both movements emphasized the cultural and even biological uniqueness and superiority of people of African descent, while stressing a historical link with African culture. Embedded within these conceptions of black identity is a widespread acceptance of the one drop rule. In Runyon Heights, only families who could trace their roots to Virginia and West Virginia indicated any European lineage in their families. While such lineage was a prominent feature of status in earlier eras, particularly among the southern mulatto classes, local residents

today tend to acknowledge only Native American, Latin, or foreign-born black ancestry, if any non-black identity is invoked or recognized.

Unlike the Black Power movement, which had its roots in urban working-class populations, the Afrocentric movement is a predominantly middle-class movement. It has generated a new name for Blacks which minimizes an explicitly racial conception, while stressing African (ethnic) ancestry. The new term, "African-American," has become dominant in both black and mainstream academic circles as well as the media. However, working-class and poor blacks have largely resisted adoption of the term. It is possible that the term itself embodies a hyphenated "American" identity. While "American" suggests inclusion within the American mainstream, the new term holds little meaning for those blacks feeling most excluded and distanced from mainstream America precisely because of their skin color. For the middle class, the term represents an attempt at negotiating the very meaning of the racial category by redefining the group identity, by claiming both African and American roots. The term substitutes a socio-historical conception for a biological conception, yet continues to connote biological permanence. The underlying biological assertion within racial categories is unavoidably reproduced in the new term. In the minds of most Americans, "white" and "African-American" are still mutually exclusive categories. Interestingly, Runyon Heights residents overwhelmingly use the term "black" when referring to their community, suggesting that identity for them has been constructed explicitly around a conception of racial unity.

However, given the term's wide usage in public discourse, it may indeed become the preferred identity label.

Ironically, the political-cultural movements of Black Americans during the 1960's and 1990's were predicated upon their adoption of the "one drop rule." Predictably, issues revolving around skin color and black authenticity continue to plague Americans, both "black" and "white." Thus, not only are racial boundaries maintained externally by the political and economic spheres, but internally by the individuals whose lives are shaped by the consequences of categorization. Cross-racial marriages are looked upon with skepticism by many in the black middle class. This skepticism arises not from beliefs concerning the supposed inferiority and superiority of racial groups, but because of a general feeling of distrust towards whites. Collas (1994) refers to this phenomenon as "the unofficial policing of racial boundaries." In essence, racial membership is partially determined by internal group dynamics, which dictate those behavioral, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics which indicate racial authenticity (Collas, 1994: 5). Yet the construction of these internal dynamics takes place within the racially and economically segregated residential community. Thus, being authentically black in Runyon Heights is qualitatively different from being black in the largely working-class black community of Southwest Yonkers, and is qualitatively different from being black in a West Virginian suburb. The fundamental distinction lies in the confluence of class and race in the physical space in which the community becomes located.

While residents may have a local conception of race which is tied to their community and economic status, this local conception reinforces and recognizes the politicization and denigration of dark skin color regardless of socioeconomic position. The frustration of the black middle class lies in the inescapable reality of racial subordination which permeates every aspect of community life. Thus, "all Blacks" constitute a part of their sense of peoplehood, and their conception of race and racial oppression transcends class boundaries. Gamson (1994) and Fein (1977) define the we/they characteristic of group inclusion and exclusion. They argue that within the "we" group, social obligations are awarded to members, and individuals can be held responsible to the group for their actions. They call this set of group obligations a "universe of obligation" (Gamson, 1994: 3). In Runyon Heights, the construction of a shared peoplehood and set of mutual obligations takes place along racial dimensions precisely because of black exclusion from the universe of obligation of white Americans. Thus, among those experiencing racial discrimination, a racial universe of obligation is constructed. While this universe transcends class lines, the black middle class nonetheless maintains distinct material interests which are largely grounded in their local community. In the long run, challenging racial inequality increases middle class opportunities for employment, housing and education and benefits their material interests. Many Nepperhaners believe that their fate is tied to the fate of the racially subordinated working-class and poor ghetto on the west side. Many blacks in Nepperhan feel a duty to "give back"

to the larger black community, and pursue issues of racial justice in the broader society. A number of Runyon Heights residents have pursued education and social service careers aimed at racial uplift. These responses come from both a moral sense of obligation to less materially fortunate blacks, and from the real material advantages gained for the middle class by such a struggle. This is evidenced by the instrumental role of the NAACP and local residents in challenging employment, housing and school discrimination in Yonkers since the 1950's, and in defending the class interests of the Runyon collective. Identification with the working class and poor black community of Yonkers is also reinforced by the fact that a number of Runyon Heights residents were once themselves west side residents, and several have family members who have remained in the west side community.

The "Negro," or "colored" identity of the Harlem Renaissance, the new "Black" identity of the post 1960's, and the new African-American identity of the 1990's are political and social identities born, in part, from historical struggles for political and community formation. "The Black Community" in general and black communities in particular have been shaped by specific political and social conceptualizations of what constitutes a "Negro" racial group and who should be included within that group, as well as by the political, economic, and social consequences of inclusion within the group. While the conception of the "Negro" formulated in the 1920's did incorporate those of so called "mixed-race" ancestry, issues of skin color are still central to conceptions

of black political identity, largely because wide acceptance of the "one drop rule" by much of American society has not changed since the Civil War. Nonetheless, the possession of European physical features by "blacks," including straight hair, thin lips, and light skin, gives cause to those with darker skin to bring into question the racial identity of those lighter members. Light-skinned blacks are often derogatorily referred to as "high yellow" and their racial allegiance is often called into question. This phenomenon has come about, on the one hand, because of the acceptance among blacks of the one drop rule. Without such a rule, the racial membership of Mulattoes would not be of concern to so-called pure Africans. On the other hand, because of the recognition among blacks of the social and economic advantages associated with "white" skin, color consciousness remains a community concern. In short, the one drop rule and color consciousness intersect to create conflicting preferences for black authenticity and white status.

Although the Negro Renaissance was in full swing in Harlem, those who were able sought out homes away from the congestion of the increasingly cosmopolitan New York and expanding Harlem ghetto. Many people sought land in Westchester, only to be turned away by realtors, who would not sell land to known Negroes, regardless of their physical appearance or cultural background. (No research has investigated how many people may have acquired property through "passing.") De facto segregation in the North proved to be nearly as effective at excluding blacks (those with any known African ancestry)

as Jim Crow segregation was in the South. Only those willing to abandon all ties to family and community could "pass" under these circumstances.

In essence, the "color line" is the manifestation of racist ideology embodied in the "one drop rule," which propagates the basis for both political nationalism and racial solidarity. Residents in Nepperhan found it necessary to affirm a positive racial self; color, religious, national, regional, social class and cultural differences, which would have weakened community solidarity and political power, were minimized. Through the organization of community institutions and clubs, community solidarity and racial identity were reinvented. The result is that the evolving community identity is intimately tied to both the racial and class composition of the specific location.

How race is defined in American society has significant consequences for the creation of a racially homogeneous Runyon Heights community. For the local residents, the physical space is imbued with a class and racial character. In the minds of both residents and outsiders, the community is defined by those characteristics. Outsiders see it as a black middle-class community; residents see themselves as a black middle-class community.

The neighborhood of Runyon Heights has, in many respects, been determined by the same market forces that transformed other rural areas into suburban landscapes during the early part of the twentieth century. Like other middle-class suburban homeowners, residents are mostly concerned about good schools, safe clean streets, and maintaining their middle-class suburban lifestyle

and its corresponding material advantages. However, racial subordination creates unique problems for the African-American middle class in Yonkers. Residents have had to fight political and social forces that have threatened to transform the area into a ghetto. Thus, Runyon residents have fought against school gerrymandering, employment and housing discrimination, as well as attempts by city government to solve the need for public housing by repeatedly targeting the area for low-income housing projects. Paradoxically, these political forces have tended to promote both class solidarity and racial pride as residents seek political power and a sense of community. Strong community ties tend to promote a positive local sense of racial identity while insulating residents from much of the racism of the surrounding area. However, their middle-class way of life necessitates maintaining a degree of physical and social distance from the black masses who dominate the west side of the city. They are left in the awkward position of negotiating the politics of race and class, relying on both for constructing community solidarity and identity.

Runyon Heights represents a model for working- and middle-class mobility, reflecting the significance of stable employment on the development and maintenance of a stable community. The community also illustrates the importance of racial solidarity in providing a safe and supportive milieu for African-American families. At the same time, the community draws attention to the role of racial solidarity in combating racial subordination both politically and psychologically. However, Runyon Heights also affords the opportunity to

observe the tensions derived from the black middle class' embodiment of both the political class interests of their race and the social class interests of their economic position.

From the forces of racial and class segregation sprang the ecological basis for community development. To what extent did "community" provide insulation from white bigotry, as well as ecological and social distance from the black masses of the ghetto? Rather than abandoning racial identity for a bourgeois identity, "race" for these residents provided a basis for community mobilization and identity. There is a process of ongoing negotiation between the racial antagonisms they experience with white mainstream society, and the class antagonisms they experience with the black working class.

Chapter Two

Methodological and Theoretical Overview

Research Design

This community study is based upon two principal sources of data. Ethnographic information was gathered through field research, using the observer-as-participant model (Gold, 1969: 30-39). Residents, selected through a snowball sample, describe their personal, family and community histories in in-depth interviews. Lofland and Lofland (1995) have called this technique "intensive interviewing," while it is generally referred to as "unstructured interviewing." By any name, its aim is to elicit rich, detailed oral descriptions, allowing for the qualitative reconstruction of the past. The second source of information is historical records, including census documents, local newspapers, deed records, land records, and voter registration and election records. These data permit the reconstruction of the local community history within a more objective structural framework.

Two key informants have been invaluable in granting access to local political and social organizations and to a number of residents. The first is Jeffrey Williams. He is a twenty-eight-year-old City of Yonkers employee, born and raised in the community, and one of the youngest members on the board of the Runyon Heights Improvement Association (RHIA), which is the main organizational body in the community. The second informant is Milton Holsts, also a longtime resident of Nepperhan. Mr. Holsts, or "Milty" as many of his

peers call him, has lived in the community since 1926, when he and his parents first moved there. A former president of the RHIA, Mr. Holsts is currently its Action Chairperson. He is considered by most residents to be a central community figure in his role as association advocate. In fact, some residents and city officials who were interviewed referred to Mr. Holsts as "the Mayor" of Runyon Heights. The process of becoming acquainted with community members took on very personal dynamics. For example, I was introduced to many residents in their own homes, being escorted and introduced personally by Mr. Holsts. Introductions to residents by my two key informants were invaluable to this study. Without their help, access to residents would have proved trying. New political candidates to the area often need this same personal introduction to residents in order to make their campaigns viable.

In addition to the two key informants, residents themselves became informants and provided contacts that were indispensable to this investigation. In-depth interviews constitute the primary data source, allowing for the reconstruction of individual family histories, as well as community social and political organizational history. Special emphasis has been placed on the forces of race and class, and their role in transforming this isolated suburban settlement into a thriving middle-class suburban community.

Residents' personal and family histories are supplemented with interviews with community leaders and city officials. Interviews are reconstructed along with the historical data. Combining these sources allows for an analysis of the

forces prompting local community change, as well as an assessment of how these demographic changes have influenced the organization of community. Community issues that fostered the formation of civic and political mobilization will be explored. One example is the development of zoning regulations that helped restrict the class and racial composition of the community (Davidoff and Brooks, 1976: 146). Community publications and records allow for an assessment of the community's involvement with, and response to, these changes.

The methods cited are supplemented by field observations that included visits to the local establishments and institutions, attendance at community association meetings, and participation in and observation of community life. At times it has been necessary to negotiate conflicting interests in protecting individual identities while maintaining historical accuracy. To ensure confidentiality, names of individual subjects are omitted, although authentic family names are used in an effort to be true to the historical record. In addition, any information that would allow for the reconstruction of specific individual identities has been altered. Every effort has been made to protect the people of Runyon Heights from any negative consequences that may arise from their participation in this study. While I recognize that the very act of making this private community public may indeed bring negative unintended consequences, it is my hope that the contribution which the people of this

community have made to the study of people of African descent in the Americas will outweigh any negative results.

Runyon Heights affords an opportunity to look at the relationship between class and race in one American suburban community. This study will explore the conditions that made the anomalous community of Runyon Heights possible, while exploring the consequences of community formation for its residents. Why does this particular area contain the only distinctive black middle-class community in the City of Yonkers? To what extent did racial and class subordination and discrimination shape the development of the community? How and why did Runyon Heights develop where and when it did? What is the historical development of institutional structures that helped to define the community within local geographic boundaries? How do residents negotiate the conflicting forces of race and class in their environment?

Theoretical Perspective

Studies of "Negroes" in general and the "black" middle class in particular have been marred by a major theoretical problem. Less than adequate attention is paid to the social construction of racial classifications (Williams, 1990). Consequently, race categorization as a structural condition influencing the formation of community identity is accepted as a given, and rarely analyzed as a social process. The racial homogeneity of communities is treated as natural and self-explanatory. Race is treated as an a priori concept. Rather than

exploring the construction of racial antagonisms, social scientists use race as an explanatory concept in analysis, an approach which serves to legitimate racial categorization, while demonstrating its natural character. Although studies of residential segregation generally presuppose that racial homogeneity in communities is not natural, quantitative investigations focus solely on the structural dynamics of discrimination. Since an objective scientific basis for racial designation is conspicuously absent, researchers are left using individual self designation as a proxy for establishing racial groups. Even the U.S. Census recognizes the social basis of race, and now requires that respondents self-designate their racial classification, abandoning the notion of scientific objectivity. Absent in sociological analysis is any inquiry into the effect of racially-based segregation on community formation, and its subsequent effect upon the establishment of a "black" racial identity. Thus investigations of the so-called black middle class, while acknowledging the lack of a natural or biological basis for racial classification, have nonetheless proceeded under the assumption that the racial homogeneity of communities and its consequences for racial identity require no explanation. Race is thus transformed from a historically specific to a historically universal category for sociological analysis. We are left with studies of the "black" middle class that treat race categories as universal and organic, while attempting to describe in largely psychological terms the attitudes and behaviors of a presumably homogeneous people.

If race is neither a natural nor universal category, and is not supported by contemporary genetic evidence (Dominguez, 1986: XV, 54; Omi & Winant, 1986: 60), what is the basis for racial divisions and consequently racial identity in society? Our contention is that racial identity is determined by the continued structural significance of race classification. In effect, racial identity is created within the context of social interaction that takes place within communities structurally organized by the racial state and racially stratified capitalist economy (Omi and Winant 1986; Williams 1990; Cox 1948). What is essential is not merely placing groups in their historical context, but deciphering the processes which supply the appearances of continuity and homogeneity to people who are neither continuous nor homogeneous (Williams, 1990: 8).

The racial composition of Runyon Heights is self-evidently black. Indeed, residents refer to the area as "a middle-class black community." However, this has not always been the case. By 1940, many of the second-generation Italian-American residents had moved away, leaving few original land owners behind. Increasingly, only "Negroes" moved to the community, and the community's identity became "Negro." Race and skin pigmentation grew in significance to the character of the community as well as to its social and political organizations. What is significant is that neither the racial homogeneity of the area, nor the significance of race for the developing community identity were natural phenomena. These individuals came together, not so much because of shared culture, or even primordial sentiments, but because of the common

experience of racial oppression and subordination. Objectively, the community contains individuals both American-born and foreign-born, those with pale skin, thin lips and straight hair and those with dark skin, thick lips and curly hair, those born in cities and those born on farms. There are Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and Agnostics. One respondent, a dark-skinned Dominican man, tells of his experiences as a black Dominican high school student during the 1960's. He details how his skin color was used to determine his inclusion within a black community and his exclusion from the white community, as well as from Dominican culture. Structured interactions led to his developing a black identity specifically tailored to his environment. At first the respondent lived in another part of the city in a racially mixed working-class area, yet his friendships were channeled towards black American children, and away from the many white and few Dominican children in the area. The racial climate of both the school environment and residence influenced his racial identity and his sense of racial solidarity.

My experiences were unique. You see me? You see what? Black . . . until I open my mouth . . . I started hanging out with some of the cliques (black) and they discovered that I could speak Spanish, I became the butt of some jokes. I got ridiculed . . . so it wasn't cool for me to let people know. Somehow it just didn't fit for people, so I created a shell . . . My whole identity was to be black, and loving every minute of it. I had no crisis.

After high school, the respondent's first full-time job with the Youth Services Agency was defined, created, and structured around issues of race.

Although different from the black-only jobs of porter and janitor of the 20's and 30's, the new positions existed in an equally racially-segmented labor market.

In 1971-72 I landed a job with Youth Services Agency as a para-professional. Basically they were programs of containment. Youth Services Agency provided counseling, rap sessions, etcetera, etcetera . . . Containing people. They put their own people [whites] in the positions there, the directorships, and above the director was the real puppeteer who happens to be white.

After getting married in the seventies, the respondent chose to move his family to Runyon Heights. Today, he is an active community member, visibly indistinguishable from other black residents.

Literature Review

Studies of African-American communities have tended to focus on those who live in poverty. Many studies adopted the ethnographic approach to communities. Most have utilized the ecological method of the Chicago School, which tends to treat race as a natural category. While most studies recognized the socially constructed basis of racial categorization, they failed to explore the conditions which structured the formation of racial communities. Instead of exploring the material conditions of racial antagonisms, attention focused upon the social consequences of racial prejudice. In the 1960's, Kenneth Clarke's Dark Ghetto (1965) and Gilbert Osofsky's Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto (1963) were two later studies that benefited from the scholarship of Robert Park and the Chicago school, and are more clearly community studies than

studies of a racial group. Rather than merely compiling demographic characteristics of the Negro population in general, these studies focus upon the social networks and institutions that link residents to one another. Like most sociologists, these scholars offer but superficial analyses of class relations in contemporary industrial and post-industrial capitalism. The vast majority favored the Weberian-influenced analytical approach over a more conflict-oriented framework. More recently, A Place on the Corner (1976) by Elijah Anderson, follows in the community studies tradition established by the Chicago School. Similar in substance to Elliott Liebow's Tally's Corner (1966), Anderson focuses upon the social networks, values, and lifestyles of working-class and poor men who associate at a bar and liquor store on Chicago's south side. Contemporary studies of African-American communities continue to focus on the working class and poor, as does Bruce Williams' Black Workers in an Industrial Suburb (1987), and Peter Kunkel and Sara Sue Kennard's Spout Spring: A Black Community (1971).

In addition to paying little attention to the organization of industrial capital, these works do not explore the structural conditions which breathe life into racial classifications. These scholars never seem to question the conditions under which racial sentiments are created and maintained. Prior to the post World War II studies of primarily urban Negro communities, research on Negro life focused upon the Jim Crow south. These works were the first to indicate that Negro existence was tied to a system of subordinate relationships. Deep

South (1941) by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner, more than any other study of an African-American community, begins to explore the phenomenon of racial categorization. Their approach was to label the racial status order a "caste" system. While "caste" captures social dimensions of the hierarchical order, the term fails to explore the historical development and interdependent relationship between race and class in America. Like Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town (1949), the focus of caste analysis is on the system of social etiquette, sentiments, and attitudes of the Jim Crow South, particularly those which maintain sexual taboos regarding "race mixing." However, even when applied to the South, "caste" negates the historical relationship between groups categorized by race and industrial capitalism, while drawing attention only to the beliefs used to justify social segregation, subordination and super-ordination. Yet social subordination is directly dependent upon economic and political subordination, which is structured around the notion of race, and maintained through segregation in modern industrial capitalist society. Dollard neglects the most significant dimensions of racial subordination.

Gunnar Myrdal, in his book An American Dilemma (1944), also argues that racial divisions constitute a caste system for Negroes in the United States. However, Oliver Cox points out that a caste is a status entity within a society, in which members of each caste holds his position to be sacred. (Cox, 1948: 519). If Indian society is used as a model for caste relationships, then Cox is

correct in asserting that social relations between African-Americans and European-Americans, or relations between socially defined whites and blacks, are not sacred nor stable. Cox argues that a gross error is made when caste is substituted for race. In trying to avoid the biological implications of the term "race," Myrdal consistently defines caste biologically in terms of skin color (Cox, 1948: 519). Contemporary scholars have also substituted race with two other closely related terms. The first term is ethnicity which was first adopted by the assimilationist school, and later by Glazier and Moynihan and others. This school equates racial groups with ethnic groups, ignoring the historical experiences of Europeans, who were defined as "white" by the prevailing political order. The historical experience of benefitting from white privilege made the European experience, regardless of class position, qualitatively different from the experiences of racial groups. Non-whites were socially, politically, economically, and morally defined not by their culture, but by their biological characteristics.

Hylan Lewis' Blackways of Kent (1955) begins to explore the relationship between economic subordination and racial subordination, yet the analysis ultimately parallels Dollard's. Lewis focuses upon the Negro way of life, viewing it as a subsystem of a larger social system. Negro subculture was seen as a function of white customs and values (Lewis, 1955: 28). The analysis, while recognizing the social construction of group membership, still fails to highlight the political and economic dimensions of racial subordination, and

instead emphasizes the black/white social relationship as constituting a kind of hierarchical cultural system. Nonetheless, Lewis' analysis indicates the dialectical relationship between racial categories. Lewis writes:

This white culture restricts Negro life, while at the same time complementing it in such a way as to make possible its continued existence; the white culture gives a kind of enforced unity to Negro culture, while at the same time disrupting and making for low morale (Lewis, 1955: 29).

While acknowledging that the Negro school is a product of the racial division of labor, and that the government and law are symbols to the Kent community of white dominance and control, this analysis turns completely inward to focus on the folkways which permitted survival within this environment (Lewis, 1955: 55, 177). More attention needs to be paid to the political and economic conditions which fostered racial unity and the development of a distinctly Negro culture in America. Racial identity must be viewed within the historical context in which it develops. Blackways of Kent (1955) was the first study of a black American community to examine racial relations as more than merely a system of etiquette structured to regulate sexual contact between so-called castes.

Studies of black America have neglected the suburbanization of the middle class, and ignored the relationship between community, institutional development, race, and class. Drake and Cayton's Black Metropolis (1962), along with Kenneth Clarke's Dark Ghetto (1965), and Gilbert Osofsky's Harlem:

The Making of a Ghetto (1963) are the first studies to truly examine the relationship between individual and local institutions. Although Drake and Cayton mention the middle class, their main focus is on Chicago as an urban community. However, even within Osofsky's Harlem, one can make a strong argument for the existence of a distinctly middle-class community, both spatially and socially. While the majority of community studies have not focused upon the African-American middle class, what is completely absent from the literature is any specific analysis of this group within a community context.

The most recent significant work on the black middle class is Living With Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience (1994), written by sociologist Joe R. Feagin, and educator Melvin P. Sikes. Sikes and Feagin interviewed 209 middle-class African-Americans from across the nation, and presented convincing testimony to the "continuing significance of racism" in the lives of middle-class Black Americans. The central analysis concerns the psychological reactions, mechanisms and strategies employed by middle-class African-Americans in negotiating the daily assaults of racial discrimination. While the analysis utilizes a cross-section of individuals from many parts of the country, the authors recognize the significance of "community" for structuring the context of racial identity formation and group membership.

A second proposition gleaned from the interviews is that experiences with serious discrimination not only are very painful and stressful in the immediate situation and aftermath but also have a cumulative impact on particular individuals, their families, and their communities . . . Experiences with discrimination are

stored not only in individual memories but also in family stories and group recollections (Feagin and Sikes, 1994: 16).

According to the authors, community shapes these group recollections.

Feagin and Sikes write: "In ethnic and racial struggles across the globe one sees the central role of collective memory in the maintenance and development of group pride and community solidarity (Feagin and Sikes, 1994: 348)." The authors go on to say that respondents often used the "we" that indicated a broad racial consciousness and solidarity.

In Runyon Heights, the community folklore is characterized by a racial consciousness. The folklore includes tales of the community's founding, stories of community accomplishments, and sagas of community battles. The development of a "we" conception of group membership in Runyon Heights was intricately tied to a sense of community consciousness founded upon local stories. Both race and class served as a framework for organizing the individual life experiences of residents, as these forces were brought together in the process of community formation.

Historically, the literature on the black middle class is similar to the literature on black America in general. Frazier's Black Bourgeoisie (1962), Kronos' The Black Middle Class (1971), and Landry's The New Black Middle Class (1987) all focus upon the psychological adjustment and lifestyles of the black middle class. Like Feagin and Sikes, these works treat the black middle class outside the context of community. In addition, all four studies pay

insufficient attention to issues of class conflict and racial formation. Both Landry's and Kronus' analysis are concerned specifically with the social types to be found in the black middle class. Lifestyle and psychological attitudes towards whites are major focal points of their work. Their means of defining the middle class emphasize consumer consumption patterns (lifestyles) over their position within the industrial order. Both authors pick up where E. Franklin Frazier left off in Black Bourgeoisie (1962). Unlike Frazier, who maintained that this class was abandoning its role of leadership in the development of black nationalism, Kronus argues that while racial pride has grown, so has the social and psychological distance between the middle-class and working-class masses (Kronus, 1971; 141). Kronus suggests that, together, class and race place conflicting demands upon individuals. Kronus, however, fails to specify the structural determinants of the conflict. Kronus attributes class differences to the unequal distribution of economic resources rather than to the ownership and control of economic resources, while ignoring the dimension of racial formation and recreation. As Richard Williams points out, the structural approach is content with asserting that race and ethnicity are social constructs while failing to take the point to its logical conclusion: that ethnic and racial distinctions and signifiers are themselves subjective and arbitrary (Williams, 1990: 8). Thus, the existence of racial communities and racial identity in places like Runyon Heights cannot be understood in purely ecological terms. We must unravel the

dynamics between racialization, residential segregation, and community identity formation.

Race, Class, Community and Identity

The exclusionary basis of racial classifications is clearly indicated by the history of laws which designated any person with any African descendants as "Negro," while limiting inclusion into the so-called white group. A 1970 Louisiana State law quantified racial designations in favor of limiting "white" membership, maintaining that the possession of one-thirty-second percent of "Negro blood" made a person "Negro" (Omi and Winant, 1986: 57). In essence, "Negro blood" was and still is treated by the U.S. political system as a contaminant to "white blood." One must ask oneself why one 1/32% percent of "Caucasian blood" does not accordingly make a person Caucasian? At the same time, this case makes clear the purported biological permanence of the "Negro race." Once one is tainted with Negro blood, one must always be Negro; moreover, all future offspring, regardless of physical features, will also be Negro. Under these suppositions, racial segregation is not only natural but essential for social order. Unlike the Europeans, whose differences were relegated to culture, the Africans' difference, which denies cultural distinction among them, was a permanent discrimination rooted in biology. The racial category of 'black' developed during the period of racial slavery. Africans, whose identities were "Ibo, Yoruba, Fulani, etc. were rendered black by an

ideology of exploitation based on racial logic - the establishment and maintenance of a 'color line'" (Omi & Winant, 1986: 64).

E. Franklin Frazier challenges the biological conception of race by positing a conception of race which is based upon political culture and racial nationalism. In Black Bourgeoisie, Frazier maintains that the traditional bases for black culture and identity, namely the folk traditions of the South, were abandoned for the class-determined culture of conspicuous consumption. The precarious position of the Negro middle class, due to exclusion from central economic institutions, coupled with the lack of a cultural tradition, leaves the black bourgeoisie with a deep-seated inferiority complex. The result is a preoccupation with social life as an escape from their subordinate status (Frazier 1962: 28). This class is said to be on a flight from reality to "a world of make believe," where members overemphasize black accomplishments, and live beyond their means in a desperate groping for higher status. The political consequence of this psychological crisis is that they abandon their historic role as nationalist leaders in a process of social transformation for the black masses.

Since the world of make believe cannot insulate the black bourgeoisie completely from the world of reality, the members of this class exhibit considerable confusion and conflict in their personalities. Their emotional and mental conflicts arise partly from their constant striving for status within the Negro world, as well as in the estimation of whites. Moreover, they have accepted unconditionally the values of the white bourgeois world: its morals and its canons of respectability, its standards of beauty and consumption . . . Since they do not truly identify themselves with Negroes, the hollowness of the black bourgeoisie's pretended

'racial pride' is revealed in the value which it places upon white or light complexion. Because of their social isolation and lack of cultural tradition, the members of the black bourgeoisie in the United States seem to be in a process of becoming NOBODY. (Frazier 1962: 28)

The central inconsistency in Frazier's analysis of this class, which he claims is without identity and culture, is his treatment of the relationship between class, culture, race, and identity. Runyon Heights residents have maintained a distinctly "black" identity. In fact, this concept is central to the community's self-identification. The recognition of Black racial subordination allows for the formation of a local conception of race that transcends class and even regional divisions and recognizes the working-class and poor as a part of the same racial universe of obligation. However, the material culture of the black middle class is overwhelmingly a culture of middle-class consumption. They maintain a symbolic "racial culture" that can only be described as a constellation of "ethnic, national and regional characteristics," including northern, southern, Caribbean, and recently African traditions. This non-material culture takes the form, primarily, of food, clothing, and artistic expression. Their race consciousness is strong, but so is their desire to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. These two forces intersect in the lives of Nepperhaners. Maintenance of their middle-class status is ironically predicated, not upon the abandonment of a racial consciousness, but on maintaining an

active sense of racial solidarity while also maintaining social distance from the working class and poor.

Frazier's treatment of class recognizes an objective class stratification as well as the subjective status stratification related to perceived class position. However, his conception of class is not dialectical or even conflict-oriented. Stratification merely "is." This allows him to overlook the strained relationship between the working and middle classes. Secondly, implicit in this static Weberian conception of class is the false assumption that the folk culture of the black South constitutes a "racial culture" and forms the basis for race identity. This is only half the story. This folk culture is also a class culture. It has developed in association with, but in opposition to a bourgeoisie culture of consumption. It is a culture imbued with race identity and racially defined symbols, but is principally a working-class culture of opposition. "Not only does the opposition include, in a Marxist sense, political class conflict, but it also includes cultural conflict over the meaning of race (Omi and Winant 1986: 66). While bourgeois culture has been imbued historically with symbols glorifying "whiteness," bourgeois culture is not white bourgeois culture, as claimed by Frazier, but a set of values inherent in an economic and political system founded upon racially-based economic and political subordination. Thus, from the very origins of capitalism in the United States, race and class have constituted a dialectical relationship for identity formation for African-Americans.

The treatment of black folk culture as static and somehow primordial to the race must be abandoned for a dynamic concept of culture. The black middle class sought to redefine race in the political and cultural revolution of the 1960's and again in the 1990's (Omi and Winant, 1986: 93; Kronus, 1971: 141). Most of the residents of African origin in the community have adopted the term "Black" for their racial self-identity. This is a term which was fashioned from the political challenges to Jim Crow segregation of the 1950's and '60's. A number of residents participated in national demonstrations, the March on Washington, and in the Freedom Rides in the South. During this period, Negro was discarded for a more powerful and self-determined concept, "Black." However, the definition of "black," a concept which fosters national sentiment across class lines, is continually negotiated with class. This phenomenon suggests that a commitment to, and affinity for the black working class continues to exist, contrary to Frazier's predictions. However, as Kronus points out, the relationship is one of conflict, not moral abandonment.

This new suburbanized bourgeois culture has not simply abandoned the rural black folk culture, but has sought to redefine it within the context of post-industrial, urbanized, class dynamics. Rather than being in a process of becoming "nobody," the black bourgeoisie struggles to maintain its economic position, while holding on to and redefining the culture of the black masses. The African-American working class provides a significant resource for middle-class racial identity and their opposition to the established racial order. The

middle class ultimately struggles within an economic order which values conspicuous consumption. Consequently, their adoption of working-class cultural forms leads to a de-legitimization of those very forms. As these cultural forms are purchased and consumed, and the middle class adopts the styles of opposition, the forms become a reflection of middle-class status rather than challenges to economic and political structures of domination. Thus, a love/hate relationship exists between the two classes. Middle-class blacks seek validation of their racial consciousness while they strive to keep a healthy distance from those who carry less material status. Runyon Heights, an American suburb, affords an opportunity to look at the relationship between class and race, as these forces are negotiated in the lives of community residents.

Since both the work and residence of African-Americans in Yonkers have been historically conditioned by the imposition of racial criteria, two consequences are significant. The first consequence of these relationships is the formation of residential suburban communities that are segregated in terms of both class and race. The second consequence is the construction of a racial identity among people of African descent, which is largely embedded in the local sense of community history. As Waters (1990) points out, there is no quasi-biological or legal constraints governing the choice of ancestry or identity for white Americans (Waters, 1990: 18). They can either identify with an ethnic ancestry, or they can blend into the wider society and call themselves American. The salient boundaries among European-Americans are ethnic and

religious, not racial. However, between Europeans and non-Europeans, the emphasis shifts to race (Waters, 1990: 105). African descendants are highly socially constrained to identify themselves exclusively in racial terms as "blacks," while their label is the vehicle for their claim to fellowship with a national community of "blacks."

The central mechanism influencing community identity formation is the manifestation of political class conflict within local spatial boundaries. Racial criteria were fundamental to the creation and maintenance of these boundaries. It is within this context that patterns of association and organization reflect political class forces, a response to racial subordination and exclusion, and social class forces, a response to the relationship between consumption and production in the marketplace. Residents in the area were racially excluded from many better paying industrial jobs, while they also experienced a restricted consumer housing market. Limited financial resources and limited housing combined to make both property ownership and the inheritance of wealth across generations extremely difficult for the black working and middle classes in Nepperhan. However, these same conditions also fostered community racial solidarity for residents as they sought to defend their material interests.

The neighborhood of Runyon Heights has been largely determined by the same market forces that transformed other rural areas into suburban landscapes during the early part of the twentieth century. However, its uniqueness lies in its history of stability and the multiple generations of families who have come

and laid roots there. Unlike many other enclaves of black homeowners which existed only temporarily, and often became ghettos, Runyon Heights has survived and even prospered because of the level of community solidarity and political involvement its residents have achieved. There has been an attempt at stabilizing their class position while building community through racial solidarity.

Race, Class, and Community Formation

Five phenomena link the dimensions of race and class to the historical development of Runyon Heights, transforming the area into a community imbued with both a class and race character and consciousness: hypo-descent, zoning, school gerrymandering, the four-foot reserve strip, and low-income housing. First, race was linked to the community by the social category "Negro," which was recreated and maintained by both government and private institutions. After the Civil War, government and social bodies in the United States increasingly adopted a "hypo-descent rule," which designated all persons with any African ancestry as "Negro" (Davis, 1991: 5). Hypo-descent, and the subsequent formation of a specific "Negro" identity, was enforced by the creation of racially homogeneous communities through Jim Crow segregation, de facto segregation, and the construction of racial categories by the U. S. Census. The racial ideology underlying this taxonomy justified racial discrimination in housing and employment in Yonkers, while creating the basis

for group solidarity. Second, class was linked to the formation and organization of community through zoning. During the 1920's, the City of Yonkers instituted a system of zoning ordinances modeled after other large American municipalities. The area that was soon to become Runyon Heights was zoned for both residential and industrial use; precedent for land use had already been established in the district by the existence of both private homeowners and the Putnam railroad, which cut through the center of the area. The presence of a nearby industrial spur connected to the Putnam Railroad, a passenger station in Nepperhan, as well as the early designation of the land bordering the railroad for commercial and industrial use, all combined to disrupt aspects of the suburban landscape. The factors connected to the railroad account for the availability of the Runyon land to Negroes, again adding a racial dimension to the locale. Zoning, however, regulated land usage to residential housing in the remainder of the area, thus insuring its middle-class character. After the late 1950's, the local civic association in Runyon Heights increasingly used zoning as a means of regulating businesses along Runyon Avenue.

The third phenomenon which marked the community's historical development, infusing it with a racial character, was the gerrymandering of local school district lines. This occurred twice, to two different generations of Nepperhan children. First in 1928, Nepperhan students were denied the right to attend the newly constructed Roosevelt High School, located a half mile away on Tuckahoe Road. The plan was reconsidered when the Nepperhan

mothers complained. After the Depression, school lines were again gerrymandered. According to numerous respondents, as well as official court testimony during the 1980 Yonkers housing suit, school districts were changed in 1938, leading to the isolation of Runyon Heights children in School District 1. Redistricting led to an underutilization of the School 1 facility, and the consolidation of grade classes. Parents petitioned the Board of Education to expand the School 1 attendance zone. The Board of Education's response was to close the school (80 CIV. 6761,1985:273). This decision would create unforeseen consequences for the community.

The fourth event which marked the historical development of Runyon Heights was the creation of a physical and symbolic boundary segregating the community from the neighboring Homefield community. Homefield controlled a four-foot wide strip of land that ran along the border of the two communities. The "four-foot reserve strip" was created in 1924 by the Homeland Company, the developer who first subdivided the estate that was to become Homefield.⁹ Soon after, the strip was purchased by a local resident who lived on Storey Lane, just one block from Runyon Heights. In 1947, the land was again purchased, however this time by the Homefield Association, which was the local civic alliance. This effectively prevented the construction of roads after World War II, which would have linked the two populations, according to the

⁹See map #267 filed with the Westchester County Bureau of Land Records.

City Planning Bureau. Racial categories were the criteria for the construction of community boundaries. Combined with the effects of zoning, the boundary reinforced the Runyon Heights community along both race and class lines.

While the local folklore recounted by many residents made reference to a wall or fence which allegedly sat along the reserve strip dividing the two communities, only a chicken wire fence ever existed along the strip. However, after World War II, many individual Homefield property owners who built homes bordering the strip did, in fact, erect high fences, which shielded the view of their homes from their Runyon Heights neighbors. While high fences are usual in Homefield, they are unusual in Runyon Heights. However, many Runyon Heights residents have perceived both the existence of the four-foot reserve strip and the construction of private fences by Homefield residents as symbolic of the racial intolerance present in much of the Homefield community. Many Nepperhaners will mention the "fence" or "strip" whenever the Homefield community is brought up in conversation. Even during the interviews, the vast majority of respondents mentioned either the fence or the strip. One longtime resident reported:

When I was a kid, they used to separate Runyon Heights from Homefield. They used to have a chicken wire fence up there . . . The white people used to come through our neighborhood to take the short cut. We never had no problem, never had no problem. But you know a lot of people blew it up. A lot of people blows things up. Somebody had mentioned to a reporter about a chicken wire fence and all of a sudden the newspaper reporters started harping about the chicken wire fence and all of that stuff. I said, yeah, it's always been there . . . It just rotted away, it just rotted

away. And because, you had a lot of people walking through there, and taking a short cut. The school kids used to come past there and take the short cut.

For this respondent, it was not the chicken wire fence that symbolized segregation practices but, rather, the existence of the reserve strip which resulted in dead-end streets in Runyon Heights. During a number of interviews, these streets were singled out. Ironically, Nepperhaners see the dead ends as blessings in disguise. Today, with the increase in vehicular traffic, community members are thankful that the streets in Runyon Heights do not provide access to other areas. In fact, access to Runyon Heights from Tuckahoe Road has virtually ended, as the efforts of the RHIA over the last 15 years have succeeded in blocking entry from the main thoroughfare. As a result of the dead ends, community streets are quiet and secluded, allowing community children to play in local streets with little fear. What was once a symbol of racial exclusion and rejection has increasingly become a symbol of community self-preservation.

The fifth phenomenon, attempts by local government to place low-income housing in the area, illustrates how the race and class interests of local residents are in ongoing negotiation. In 1956, local government attempted to place low-income housing in the area. Runyon Heights fought alongside the predominantly white middle-class Homefield community to defeat the proposal. Although many Yonkers NAACP leaders have been residents of Runyon Heights,

the civil rights organization has consistently supported low-income housing in Yonkers.

Deed restrictions and, later, zoning regulations restricted the economic status of new residents, while school district lines and the reserve strip created a homogeneous racial community. The locality was permeated by the forces of both race and class. This politically defined geography now constituted a "natural area" bounded on one side by race, through real estate steering practices and "natural" geographic borders, and on the other side by zoning ordinances that placed restrictions upon land use, directly limiting the ability of the poor and marginally working class to afford suburban property. "Under 'normal' conditions, state institutions have effectively routinized the enforcement and organization of the prevailing racial order" (Omi and Winant 1986: 79). We see this phenomenon occurring as the city instituted zoning policies, as well as when the school board shifted school district lines, effectively isolating Runyon Heights children from white neighborhoods and white children. In addition to segregating racially-defined groups into specific neighborhoods, state institutions also helped to strengthen a racially-defined group identity through racial labeling and political exclusion (Omi and Winant 1986; 82). Likewise, attempts at placing low-income housing in the area galvanized residents along both class and racial dimensions. The community responded to these assaults by the active creation of racial solidarity. Rather

than declining in significance, residents used race to organize for the collective defense of their economic status.

The political, economic, and social subordination of racial groups encourages race-based community organization and political mobilization among local residents. These political communities (collective representations) may be organized around local territory, as with the case of the Runyon Heights Improvement Association, around a more general concept of "racial uplift," as in the case of the NAACP, or around local issues, as was the case for the mothers who fought against the inferior education imposed upon their children. In Runyon Heights, community-based political and social organizations emerged to challenge the existing racial order while also attempting to uphold the existing class order. Thus, the true social transformative potential of the black middle class is mediated by their very real material interests. This is the essential paradox embodied in the black suburban community. A brief look at the early development of Westchester County, and specifically the City of Yonkers, will provide a context for understanding the geo-political development of the neighborhood and its transformation and evolution into a black suburban residential community.

Chapter Three

Origins of Black Suburban Communities in Yonkers

Between 1840 and 1910, the City of Yonkers was a working-class industrial suburb. Local waterways provided power and transportation for industrial growth, while railroads also carried people and freight south to New York City. While the black population remained small and largely working-class throughout this period, black workers in Yonkers were segregated in the housing and labor markets. The Negro population was segregated in the older industrial area of downtown Yonkers, near the site of what is today called Getty Square¹⁰ (see Map 2, Appendix C). Those who could find work locally often held the most undesirable jobs in industry as foundry workers.

A small working-class black population had been present in the city even before slavery had officially ended in New York State in July of 1827 (Allen, 1964: 47). During the industrial period, an even smaller group of middle-class blacks developed. They tended to purchase homes and live in or adjacent to the larger Negro population in the older commercial and industrial area in downtown Yonkers. Still, even with the success of individuals like F.J. Moultrie, the most prominent Negro businessman of the period, by the late nineteenth century, working-class Negroes' experiences in the city remained qualitatively different from those of European immigrants. They had been segregated in the oldest

¹⁰ Older residents sometimes refer to the area as Chicken Island because of the chicken market that once served residents.

housing, and were relegated to the service sector and marginal jobs in the local industrial economy.

During this period of unprecedented industrial growth in Yonkers, the small black middle class also encountered limited employment and housing options. According to residents and historical records¹¹, there were no black nurses, policemen, firemen, bankers, industrial foremen or managers until after 1920 (Esannason and Bagwell, 1993: 30). Like discrimination in employment, residential discrimination was an assumed part of the local landscape, even for the most prosperous. Home ownership was highly valued by many working- and middle-class black families, as it was by other upwardly mobile Americans. However, those blacks who managed to purchase homes would often find housing available only in areas already inhabited by Negroes. Many would later find that their investments had become engulfed by an expanding population of low-wage and poor black workers.

After 1910, large estates outside the central city were subdivided by realtors and converted to working- and middle-class residential areas. Even though the black population of Yonkers remained small, racial discrimination in

¹¹ 1920 U.S. Census Manuscripts and the 1925 New York State Census Manuscripts show no listing of these occupations for black workers. The first Policeman was Thomas Brooks who was appointed in 1925. The first firemen was Curtis G. Giddings who was appointed in 1942. At this time, Yonkers still had only two police officers. (See article The Herald Statesman, February 18, 1942, "Curtis Giddings To Become Yonkers' First Negro Fireman." The 1940's also saw the first nurse to work in Yonkers General Hospital. Manuscripts, Bogart (1898)

real estate was widespread. The only area available to black homeseekers in the expanding eastside real estate market was the area then known as Nepperhan. As a result, Nepperhan evolved into the only stable middle-class community in the city.

This chapter explores the origins of industrial development in Yonkers, and the role of both race and class in shaping residential space and employment for the black working and middle classes. Residential segregation and occupational ghettoization laid the foundation for the rise of the only stable middle-class black community in Yonkers.

Birth of the Working-Class Industrial Suburb

The industrial development of Westchester County was made possible by advances in urban transportation in the 1840's. At first the expansion of laborers out of the central cities to suburban areas like Yonkers was limited. East-coast American cities developed primarily along waterways. Yonkers' advantage was that it was situated on the banks of the Hudson River and bordered the northwestern end of New York City. This made Yonkers uniquely situated to take advantage of the industrial and transportational advances of the nineteenth century. To the north, Yonkers was bordered by the village of Hastings-on-Hudson and the Town of Greenburg, and on the east by the Bronx River. The city encompasses more than 18 square miles.

By the 1840's, regular ferry service carried passengers and freight between New York and Yonkers, aiding the expansion of industry and population. However, river travel by steam boat was slow and costly, limiting use to the most wealthy commuters. Cheaper more efficient transportation would be a prerequisite to working- and middle-class residential expansion away from the waterways and "downtown" industries which had developed during the nineteenth century.

As the population of Yonkers grew, two distinct groups of newcomers arrived: wealthier industrialists began purchasing vast stretches of farm land in the hopes of building country estates outside of the central village; working-class skilled and unskilled immigrant laborers from southern and eastern Europe found work in local industry. The vast majority of workers lived in the downtown areas of Yonkers. Commuting to New York for work was reserved for only the most well-to-do citizens. Even for them, commuting was a time-consuming affair on the water, so many used their estates as "country" houses only during the summer months. Others, who maintained their place of business in the city could afford either horse-drawn railway or private coach service from the rural countryside to downtown Yonkers.

The railroads ushered in a period of industrial development along the train routes beginning in the 1840's. The railroad suburb was born by the 1860's (Goldston, 1970: 30). As industry developed along the rail roots, by the turn of the century, the industrial suburb had emerged (Zukin, 1991: 138).

Suburban areas like Westchester County expanded rapidly. Farming had been the main occupation in Yonkers as oats, wheat, hay, peaches, apples, potatoes, walnuts, pickles, chestnuts, and corn were shipped to NYC along the Hudson (Johnson et al, 1962: 19). With the expansion of the railroad, the village evolved into more than a mere extension of New York City as industry took advantage of the available resources. Manufacturing developed and real estate came into the market. Much of the manufacturing occurred along the Nepperhan River. The river was originally called Neperah or Nippirau (written Nippiorha in the British Royal Charter) by the Nappeckamack Native American Village originally located there. Nepperhan translates as "rapid flowing water." Later, the river was renamed De Zaag Kill, by the Dutch, which translates as "the Saw Creek;" the English translation became "the Saw Mill" (Allison, 1984: 14-15, 128). Today the river is known by both the Saw Mill and Nepperhan names. With the expansion of the railroads and industry came population growth and urbanization. By time the Village of Yonkers was incorporated in 1855, the population had swelled to 7,554 persons (Allison, 1984: 149-150). A mere seventeen years later, the village was incorporated as a third-class city with a population of 18,189. Yonkers, with its population approaching 79,000,¹² was finally designated a second-class city in 1908 (Johnson et al,

¹²1910 U.S. Census lists 79,803 persons, a 66% increase over the previous decade.

1962: 26 & 43). The City's second-class charter coincided with its development as a streetcar suburb.

The railways facilitated residential expansion and independence from the Hudson River Ferry for transportation north and south. Grand Central Station opened in NYC in 1871; Penn Station opened in 1910 (Jackson, 1985: 94). Three separate railroads traversed Yonkers, and connected it to northern Westchester and New York City. The New York and Harlem Railroad (New York Central Harlem Division) was running by 1844, touching Yonkers' eastern boundary (Jackson, 1985: 20). The Hudson River Railroad (Metro North Hudson Division) began its route along the western edge in 1849 (Allison, 1984: 156 - 160). The New York & Boston Railroad was founded in 1869.

After a series of mergers and acquisitions in the 1870's and 1880's the New York & Boston Railroad was incorporated into The Division of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company (Barlow, 1980: 2). It began operation in 1881 (Allison, 1984: 392). The single track line cut directly through the area known today as Runyon Heights. Nepperhan, as the area was called by the first settlers, received its name from the Putnam railway station located near the Tuckahoe Road bridge, which passes over the Putnam line just east of Runyon Avenue. The line originally carried passengers as well as freight from Brewster New York, proceeding south past businesses along Saw Mill River Road (SMRR) and Nepperhan Avenue in Yonkers, moving through the

Nepperhan community, winding through Van Cortlandt Park, and continuing on to upper-Manhattan.

A number of communities developed along the railroad's fourteen and one half miles (14.5) route. Railroad Consultant Phil Pepe reported that a personal relationship existed between passengers along the line and the railroad. This was true for the Nepperhan community as well. Children used to jump on the back of the train, as it cut through Nepperhan residents' backyards, on their way south to Getty Square. Parents noted the passing of the day by the schedule of the "Put," as the train was fondly called. Railroad Historian and author Dan Gallo recounted that passenger service was discontinued on May 28, 1958; freight service continued to decline throughout the nineteen sixties and seventies, until the line was finally discontinued. The 5:47 left New York August 16, 1982, making the final trip to Brewster. Since that time, the County of Westchester has purchased the railroad right of way from Conrail, preserving the land as a hiking and bicycle path. The 175 acres of land were acquired for a reported 2.1 Million Dollars.

Where the Nepperhan Station once stood the Otto Brehm Company stands today. At that time, however, the surrounding landscape was farmland and woods. The railroad brought industrial expansion, but commuting was still too costly for the average worker. While railway expansion promoted industrial development, it was the advancements in local transportation that immediately impacted the residential development that was to take place in the region.

In 1866, Yonkers' first horse-drawn railway tracks were removed in order to widen Broadway. In 1886, the Yonkers Railroad Company was granted a franchise to lay horse-drawn railroad tracks in the city. It operated in the downtown area and was quickly replaced by electric cars by 1893. In 1896, the original Yonkers Railroad Company was consolidated with two other lines, and tracks were extended out to Tuckahoe Road, close to the Runyon property. Tracks were also laid down along Broadway from Yonkers to Kingsbridge (Allison, 1984: 228-392). With the new electric trolley, travel speed was increased to fourteen miles per hour, four times the rate of the horse-drawn systems (Jackson, 1985: 115). This allowed for workers to live farther from the center of town without increasing commuting time to work. With the coming of the elevated #1 subway train on Broadway and 242nd Street in Kingsbridge, which connected with the Yonkers trolley from Getty Square¹³, a relatively inexpensive commute to New York had been established.

Nepperhaners were among the original suburban commuters from Yonkers to New York City. Experiencing widespread discrimination in local industry, many residents took advantage of the new commuter access to New York. Commuting by trolley and subway to work in Harlem and even Brooklyn was common place in Nepperhan until the 1950's.

¹³The Getty Square area is a known landmark in Yonkers. It is actually the intersection of five streets in the downtown section of the city. The five streets are: Palisades Ave.; both North and South Broadway; Main Street; and New Main Street.

The railroads symbolized a period in Westchester characterized by industrial development, production, and urbanization. The trolley symbolized a period of industrial production, along with working- and lower-middle-class suburban residential growth. The trolley system in Yonkers later became a part of the Third Avenue Railway Company, the last survivor of consolidations, bankruptcies, and competition in Westchester County¹⁴.

Residential development outside of the "downtown" areas of major American cities has generally been described as suburbanization. Yonkers was one of the first American cities labeled suburban by the turn of the century. W.E. Baxter noted Yonkers' growth as early as 1855 (Jackson, 1985: 36). This process of suburban development has been characterized by, among other things, the movement of working- and middle-class persons from central cities to the rural periphery. Although the suburbanization process in America is generally recognized as beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century as industrialists purchased estates (Zukin, 1991: 138), sociological interest really expanded after World War II, when the planned suburb became a national phenomenon. Works such as Gans' The Levittowners (1967) and Berger's Working Class Suburb (1968) along with Bruce William's Black Workers in an Industrial Suburb (1987) are among the classic studies of post World War II suburban residential areas. With the exception of William's examination, the

¹⁴The Herald Statesman, June 22, 1970, page 15; "Yonkers' Trolley Car on Show at Museum."

vast majority of studies fail to document the experiences of African-Americans in America's suburbs. Though black suburbanites represent only a small fraction of suburban residents, most sociologists have completely dismissed their presence in predominantly white working- and middle-class suburban areas, while ignoring communities like Runyon Heights, which have had a long history of both working- and middle-class settlement. Meanwhile, black suburbanization continued to expand between 1980 and 1990. Even Williams' (1987) study of industrial workers places its focus on the work environment and pays little attention to black suburban community development.

Historically, the term "suburban" has not been applied to persons of color, particularly African-Americans, until Karl Taeuber pointed to the phenomenon in 1965 (Taeuber and Taeuber, 1965: 60). The theme was later picked up by William Wilson and Bart Landry, who both recognized the suburbanization of the African-American middle class in the 1980's (Wilson, 1987; Landry, 1987). For the most part, African-Americans have been viewed by most social scientists as either a rural or an urban population. Since World War Two black migration to northern cities, most research has focused on urbanization, and the subsequent ghettoization of the working class and poor. The suburbanization of the working- and middle-class African-American has proceeded virtually unnoticed. This movement to the suburbs has not approached, in neither number nor constitution, that of Americans of European descent. Most black Americans do indeed live in cities. Nonetheless, black

suburbanization continues to rise. The African-American population steadily increased from 4.9% of the suburban population in 1970 to 6.1% in 1980 (Landry, 1987:180). In fact, black suburbanization increased by 40% between 1980 and 1990 (Beveridge and D'Amico, 1994). While the exodus of middle-class African-Americans from central cities is recognized by both Landry (1987) and Wilson (1987), little attention has been paid to the communities, forged by African-Americans, outside the constraints of urban poverty. How and why did this middle-class suburb come to exist?

One unique feature of Runyon Heights is that it represents an early struggle for a suburban community by a group of stable working- and middle-class African-Americans, who fled the congestion of New York City long before the urban crises of the post 1960's. The opportunities available to successful Nepperhan families did not, however, exist for most Black Americans. Not only was access to stable employment which paid a living wage possible for Nepperhaners, but land was uniquely available to them for home building. Of primary importance was that the Runyon land was located outside of the increasingly overcrowded, poor, and racially segregated downtown district.

Interest in the experiences of African-Americans increased among sociologists during the late 1960's and 1970's. In part this reflects an increase in the number of black sociologists after 1960, as well as black migration to central cities across America. Additionally, the subsequent urban ghettoization

of large numbers of black Americans sparked a preoccupation with the social consequences, rather than causes, of urban poverty.

Studies which claimed to represent American society at large, generally excluded African-Americans. In sociological studies of suburbanization, blacks received the same segregated and marginalized treatment that they had received in most suburban residential areas. When "middle America" was discussed or analyzed, African-American experiences and voices were conspicuously absent. Their lives were characterized by studies of urban ghettos. One simple reason is that those suburban communities chosen for study were themselves racially isolated. Any explanation for the racial homogeneity of white suburban areas was excluded from subsequent analyses. Racial segregation was treated as a natural or ecological phenomenon requiring no further explanation. Consequently, social scientists have simply replicated the national mind-set in their research, seeing fit to ignore the presence of persons deemed racially non-white. Meanwhile, the reality of American suburbanization since the turn of the century was predicated upon the widespread segregation of black Americans from white residential areas.

Levittown (1967) epitomizes the racially biased descriptions of America's suburbs, typical of suburban community studies. While it is true that Levittown developers excluded black clients, the work itself barely mentions the overwhelming presence of racial subordination in the community's very inception and existence. The conspicuous absence of black Americans in the

sociological literature on American suburbs leaves one with the impression that only "white" Americans participated in suburban expansion and settlement, and that blacks were either too economically poor, too politically weak, or simply not motivated to make the transition with the rest of America. Thus African-Americans were even excluded from discussions of what it means to be American, as the suburbs increasingly symbolized American prosperity and so-called middle-class "mainstream" life.

Researchers have tended to treat black ghettoization in northern cities as a phenomenon equally devastating to all African-Americans. In describing the early twentieth-century working-class residential suburb, Jackson (1985) and Zunz (1982) concur that the majority of African-Americans, regardless of income or status, did not escape the confines of the developing ghetto. Although a minority managed to create small settlements outside the ghetto, their fate was sealed as segregation practices insured that skin color was the central criterion determining housing availability. According to Zunz, ". . . evading the ghetto may have awarded a different status to a few Blacks - not on the basis of occupation but of residence - for only a short time, because many of these isolated spots of independent black settlements were rapidly joined by an ever growing ghetto" (Zunz, 1982; 398). Dubois prophesied resistance to a Negro suburban presence in his study The Philadelphia Negro (1973):

To a race socially ostracized, it means far more to move to remote parts a city, than to those who will in any part of the city easily form congenial acquaintances and new ties. The Negro who ventures away from the masses of his people and their organized life, finds himself alone, shunned and taunted, stared at and made uncomfortable; he can make few new friends, for his neighbors however well-disposed would shrink to add a Negro to their list of acquaintances. Thus he remains far from friends and the concentrated social life of the church, and feels in all its bitterness what it means to be a social outcast. Consequently emigration from the ward has gone in groups and centered itself about some church, and individual initiative is thus checked. At the same time color prejudice makes it difficult for groups to find suitable places to move to-- one Negro family would be tolerated where six would be objected to; thus we have here a very decisive hindrance to emigration to the suburbs (Dubois, 1973: 297).

The stable black working and middle classes of Yonkers did indeed seek better housing in areas outside of the old Getty Square area. However, most black homeowner settlements in Yonkers, such as those on Culver Street, Jefferson Street, Warburton Avenue and Cottage Place, were later engulfed by an expanding ghetto. Only Runyon Heights residents managed to secure an isolated niche and negotiate with the political, economic and social forces that threatened their economic accomplishments. Their physical isolation from the westside working-class area meant they were shielded from entrapment in an expanding black ghetto like other home-owning settlements. The Nepperhan area was the only residential space in Yonkers that provided a foundation for a stable middle-class community of black homeowners. Yet their segregated existence also laid the foundation for the development of community

organization and a positive racial identity, rooted in their ongoing struggle to defend their collective material interests.

Industrial Expansion and the Walking City

Before the 1840's, Yonkers was principally a farming town. Jackson (1985) illustrates how the steam ferry, omnibus, horse car, commuter railroad, and later the cable car transformed the landscape of American cities in the nineteenth century (Jackson, 1985: 20). Yonkers was no different. But up until the 1890's, only the wealthy could afford the luxury of "country living" outside the downtown Yonkers area. As the railroads developed, so did the professional and business classes' dependence upon the railroad for commuting to New York City for work. Increasingly, they began commuting to New York via the railroad. However, laborers who worked in the developing industries had to live in the city where they were employed since railroad commutation was too costly for the average worker. Working-class neighborhoods developed within walking distance to industry. By the late 1800's, the cost was five dollars monthly for the commute from Yonkers to New York, (Johnson et al, 1962: 20) nearly half the average worker's weekly wages. The burden of commuting was especially heavy for the small minority of black Americans who lived in Yonkers, and who worked in the least skilled, lowest paying jobs as foundry workers, coachmen, domestics, servants, and cooks (Bogart, 1898: 290). According to the 1925 New York State census, the original Runyon

Heights residents also worked in similar occupations, although a number of individuals had "good jobs" as chauffeurs, carpenters, and Pullman porters. They held in essence the most stable, and consequently the most prestigious working-class jobs in the community. As a result, they were considered "middle-class" in terms of social status by the larger African-American community, although their economic position was predominantly working and lower middle class.

Industrial expansion after the 1850's transformed the ethnic composition of the city. Population growth set the stage for the expansion of the nineteenth-century walking city into the countryside. Many Irish immigrants came and found work on the Croton Aqueduct, and many Scottish, Slavic, English, and Ukrainian immigrants located work in the Alexander Smith Carpet Factory (Weigold, 1984: 77). Smith himself was of Scottish descent (Johnson et al, 1962: 26). By 1880, the city had approximately 19,000 persons. It had expanded from a village of 900 acres to a city of seventeen and one-half square miles (Allison, 1984: 169-227). After 1890, thousands came from Eastern Europe in search of work as America was becoming increasingly urban. Between 1880 and 1920, the Yonkers population expanded dramatically, growing by more than 500% (see Table 2.1). However, throughout the period, the black population remained small. Out of 32,033 persons only 533 persons were designated "colored" according to the 1890 U.S. Census. This broad but

ambiguous category included "persons of Negro descent, Chinese, Japanese, and civilized Indians" (Allison, 1984: 266-267).

TABLE 3.1:
Population of Yonkers, NY : 1870- 1920*

YEAR	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE
1870	18,318	NA
1880	18,892	3%
1890	32,033	70%
1896	40,000	25%
1900	47,931	20%
1910	79,803	67%
1920	100,176	26%

*Source: U.S. Census, 1920, Table 3
Population of Incorporated Places

The black population in Yonkers remained relatively small for the latter half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Although the population grew by more than 300% between 1890 and 1920, African-Americans still accounted for only 1.9% of the 100,176 city residents in 1920. Growing steadily, but at a rate only slightly higher than the city at large, blacks represented less than 5% of Yonkers residents as late as 1960 (see Table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2: Population of Yonkers by Race, 1890-1990

Source U.S. Census.

Pop. Year	Total Population	Total Black Population	Black Percent of Total
1890	32,033	533	1.7%
1920	100,176	1940	1.9%
1930	134,646	*(NA)	--
1940	142,598	4,108	2.9%
1950	152,798	4,955	3.2%
1960	190,634	7,663	4.1%
1970	204,298	12,627	6.2%
1980	195,351	20,583	11.0%
1990	188,082	26,465	14.0%

Both white out-migration and non-white in-migration altered the racial landscape of Yonkers after 1970. While the overall population declined, non-whites made up an increasingly larger percentage. Yonkers had 185,232 whites in 1970, but only 143,878 in 1990, losing nearly 20,000 whites per decade. During the 1980's, the black population of Yonkers expanded dramatically, reaching 14% of the city's 188,082 inhabitants by 1990.

Meanwhile, increases in the hispanic population surpassed the black population during the same period. Hispanics in Yonkers grew from a small 4% in 1970 to 16% in 1990. In total, the combined black and Hispanic population of Yonkers grew from 10% in 1970 to 30% in 1990. This shift resulted from both an increase in the number of non-white residents, and a decrease in the number of white residents.

Industrial Employment and "Negro Jobs"

By the 1890's Yonkers boasted of a diverse industrial infrastructure and a much diversified working population. Dozens of industries sprung up, and by the turn of the century, major employers included Otis Elevator (1854), Waring Hat Manufacturing Company (1879), Alexander Smith Carpet Factory (1865), and Habirshaw Cable & Wire Company (1886). In 1928, Habirshaw consolidated with Phelps Dodge Copper Products Corporation, taking on the latter's name. Other major industries included sugar refineries, rubber companies, breweries, silk, plow, chemical, and wool factories (Johnson et al., 1962: 26-37). However, informants indicated that Otis Elevator and Habirshaw were the only two large factories to employ African-Americans in any number before World War II. One woman who has lived in the community for seventy years reported: "Alexander Smith, period- didn't hire blacks, period." Later she said, "Yonkers just wasn't hiring black people, so you had to work in New York." Her comments were typical of the sample of residents interviewed.

The near complete economic exclusion of the Negro worker, justified by belief in Negro inferiority and innate difference, was intertwined with segregation practices within the housing market. The joint effect of housing and occupation segregation was a structuring of racial group membership along residential and community dimensions. After the Civil War, white workers organized along racial lines to exclude non-white workers, culminating in the Exclusion Law passed by Congress in 1882 (Omi and Winant, 1986: 65). Racial exclusivity of the "good" jobs was a high priority of white workers in Yonkers.

The local labor market in Yonkers proved representative of employment opportunities for Negroes across the nation. The American labor union movement itself was, at first, predicated upon the exclusion of Negro, and other non-white workers. W.E.B. Dubois, in his landmark study of Philadelphia, cited both the hiring practices of business owners and unions as major factors contributing to the exclusion of Negroes from industrial and skilled occupations around the turn of the century (Dubois, 1973: 323-333). Prior to unification of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1955, AFL unions in construction, skilled metal trades, and railroads routinely segregated and marginalized black workers across America in Jim Crow locals (Raskin, 1986: 16). In 1920, AFL membership topped four million workers. At the same time, some national unions totally excluded black workers, writing "color bars" into their constitutions (Galenson,

1986: 44-50) The left-leaning CIO, founded in the 1930's for mass production workers, included black workers from its very beginnings. CIO liberalism occurred, in part, because of the significant numbers of black workers present in mass production industries prior to the union's formation (Raskin, 1986 16; Galenson, 1986: 57) The AFL, which organized skilled workers in 1886, regularly excluded Blacks until 1936, when the AFL chartered the all-black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, headed by A. Philip Randolph (Galenson, 1986: 44-57).

While not one major union has had a black president since the founding of the labor movement in the 1880's, a number of black vice presidents appeared after World War II. A. Philip Randolph and Willard Townsend became vice presidents following the AFL/CIO merger (Raskin, 1986: 16) Racial exclusion and Jim Crow segregation were fundamental aspects of the American labor union movement prior to World War One. It was not until June 1941 that Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, the first legislation guaranteeing non-discrimination of workers in defense industries and government, regardless of "race, creed, color or national origin." This act was a result of a threat to march on Washington by A. Philip Randolph and other black leaders. Later that year, Roosevelt passed Executive Order 9001, which barred discrimination in the awarding of defense contracts (Ringer, 1983: 344-345).

African-Americans were discriminated against in employment and real estate, based upon so-called racial criteria. In northern cities this resulted in the

segregation of the vast majority into ghettos. Ghettos are, in fact, the result and manifestation of racially-based discrimination in housing and employment. Douglas Massey's "American Apartheid" argument maintains that today's ghettos are a result of an increase in minority poverty within racially segregated cities (Massey, 1990: 329). Thus residential segregation, caused by discrimination in the housing market, along with increased poverty, caused by discrimination in the labor market, both interact to form a concentration of poverty and race. The racial ghetto is a result of combined housing and employment discrimination.

The fight to maintain the middle-class character of the Runyon Heights community has taken place within an environment permeated by the dynamics of race and class. After the 1950's, working-class blacks and Latinos increasingly populated lower Westchester County. Industrial jobs for the new minority population were scarce. Since public housing was built only in minority areas, many black homeowners increasingly found themselves living in expanding ghetto districts. During the same period, corporate office relocations converted central and northern Westchester into affluent commercial suburbs (Zukin, 1991: 145). Except for the small enclave in Nepperhan, the black population in Yonkers has been largely excluded from suburban prosperity.

Any real attempts to integrate Yonkers' industry, even by the more liberal Otis Elevator, were not made until the 1970's, when government-backed affirmative action came to the city (Zukin, 1991: 148). Unfortunately, this

change provided little benefit to black workers, since the overall number of manufacturing jobs have declined significantly over the last three decades, beginning with the closing of Alexander Smith Carpets in 1954. Otis Elevator, which still employed 1,300 local residents in 1968, was purchased by United Technologies in 1975, just when affirmative action was beginning to effect black worker's access to managerial positions in the company. Only 375 workers were employed when the plant closed in 1982. Neither union workers nor the city government was notified before the shutdown. By 1988, the largest employers in Yonkers were the Yonkers School District (with 2,484 employees) and the City of Yonkers itself (with 2,000 employees). Yonkers exported much of its labor force to service-sector jobs in other areas of the county (Zukin, 1991: 154). This has been particularly true for black labor in Yonkers.

Some of the city's most famous industries have been leading practitioners of employment discrimination against black workers. In 1920, Yonkers boasted more than one hundred mills and factories (Halliburton, 1987: 25). The Alexander Smith's and Sons Carpet Company was the largest industry in turn-of-the-century Yonkers. Smith employed more than 6,500 people by 1909. This represented nearly one-third of the city's working population, most of whom lived in Yonkers (Weigold, 1984: 77). Ernest Bogart's study of turn-of-the-century working-class Yonkers, entitled The Housing of the Working Class in Yonkers, identifies five streets where the majority of black workers resided

in 1896. Interestingly, none of the residents on James or John Streets, where black workers made up approximately 90% of the heads of households, were employed in carpet manufacturing, according to Bogart's survey. The same holds true for hat manufacturing, Yonkers' second largest industry. No African-American workers were employed in hat manufacturing on either street. The small percentage (14%) of resident workers on Elm Street and Palisade Avenue who were employed in carpet manufacturing is well below the citywide average of 33%. Only foundry work was available to black workers in these and other Yonkers industries. Black workers experienced broad exclusion from the most stable and lucrative jobs in the local economy.

Having been relegated to traditional "Negro" occupations characterized by low pay and heavy labor, African-American workers were banned from employment in skilled jobs which offered opportunities for advancement. The expanding industrial economy of nineteenth-century Yonkers had largely excluded African-American workers. Of 102 employed adults living on James and John streets in 1898, 62 (61%) worked as housekeepers or domestics. This figure represents, on these two streets alone, 10% of the city's "Negroes."

Bogart's analysis fails to provide gender breakdowns, but these data would suggest a high proportion of women in the work force. His statistics clearly indicate the working Negro's dependence upon traditionally Negro work in the service sector of the local economy. Access to industrial work was limited to the dirtiest and most menial jobs "which no one else wanted" (Weigold, 1984:

67). Consequently, many worked in traditionally Negro jobs as domestics, porters, expressmen, and coachmen. By the late nineteenth century, black Americans in Yonkers were segregated in the labor market.

In addition to the segregated labor market, the black male and female worker had access only to the oldest housing stock of the city, which was centralized in the downtown Getty Square area. Their lower earnings potential translated directly to their inability to afford better housing. Again, utilizing Bogart's data, an economic picture can be conjectured to determine the affordability of housing to the African-American working class of Yonkers. Table 3.3 shows the marginal incomes of working-class African-Americans who lived on five streets in the downtown vicinity.

TABLE 3.3
Average Weekly Income of Working Class Households By Street:
 Source, Bogart (1898)

STREET	JAMES	JOHN	ELM	PALISADE	All
Income	\$8.73	missing	\$11.12	\$12.51	\$13.27
% Negro Head of Household	89%	91%	29%	8%	12%

Those streets where black heads of households were most highly concentrated also housed workers who received the lowest average weekly wages among the city's working class. This demonstrates the direct economic impact of Negro worker industrial exclusion on Negro housing opportunities, while also demonstrating the inverse relationship between residential segregation and concentrations of black poverty. The blacker the street, the poorer the average worker. More was at stake than simply the social prestige of Negro jobs. Black workers suffered a concrete economic disadvantage. This situation holds strong implications for the accumulation of family wealth, and for the mobility of black workers into the middle class. It comes as no surprise that the discrimination experienced by the working class in employment and housing would be strongly relevant for the discrimination middle-class blacks experienced in the suburban periphery.

Residential Settlement

Like other American cities at the end of the nineteenth century, the small so-called "Negro" population in Yonkers was concentrated in the older immigrant working-class neighborhoods of the walking city. Representing only 1.6% of its inhabitants, nearly half the "Negro" population lived on one of five streets identified by Bogart. These streets are now at the heart of the black ghetto in Yonkers. Bogart's study sheds light on the residential segregation patterns that were developing in the city at the turn of the century (Bogart,

1898: 287). These residential patterns set the stage for the process of black ghettoization in the City of Yonkers after World War Two.

Table 3.4 shows that the small Negro population was clustered in the oldest area of the west side of the city. This racial clustering was a result of deliberate discrimination which was a function of both class and race. Studies of segregation patterns maintain that racial discrimination is the primary factor determining patterns of residential segregation in cities as well as in the suburbs (Taeuber, 1975; Massey, 1990; Alba and Logan, 1993; Massey and Denton, 1993). Undoubtedly, segregated housing and neighborhoods, combined with exclusion from better paying industrial work, fostered an inhospitable racial climate. In fact, residential racial segregation fails to diminish with black socioeconomic advancement or suburbanization (Massey and Denton, 1988; Alba and Logan, 1993). Runyon Height represents an obvious example of both residential segregation and economic mobility. These two factors contributed to the development of an internal dynamic of group cohesion based on skin color and race, the source of their social as well as economic marginalization. Thus people often willingly moved to the Nepperhan area because there they could have access to Negro social institutions and community networks; they could live their lives without their having to justify their very presence either racially or materially, while they experienced widespread discrimination in the housing market, thus insuring the development of this racially and economically homogeneous community in the suburbs of Westchester County.

TABLE 3.4: Race of Heads of Households By Street*

<u>STREET</u>	<u>COLORED</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>%COLORED</u>
James	24	27	89%
John	10	11	91%
Elm	4	14	29%
Palisade	15	182	8%
Vineyard	1	173	.6%
School	3	86	4%

*Source: Bogart (1898)

The two forces of racial discrimination and economic subordination are historically interdependent. Evidently, the ability to afford as well as to have access to better housing are two key interdependent dynamics in the creation of residential segregation by both race and class. These two external factors interacted with a third internal dynamic of group cohesion defined by and through the processes of racial subordination and exclusion. Thus, the limits and boundaries of the group were defined discrimination based upon racial criteria.

Due to the limited resources of local record keeping agencies, the New York State Census manuscript data for Yonkers for 1895 was unavailable anywhere in the county. However, based on Bogart's detailed street census, and a rough estimate of the existing African-American population based on the 1890 Federal Census, we can estimate the size of the African-American population covered in Bogart's study. By combining a table of the total persons

by street with a table of the nationality of the heads of households by street, and multiplying the percent of colored heads of households by the number of persons residing on that street, we can get a rough estimate of the total number covered in his survey (Bogart, 1898: 287 and 299) (See Table 3.4).

Bogart's study captures an estimated 251 colored persons out of a total population of 533, or close to half of the "colored" population of Yonkers. The makings of a segregated city were already evident by the late 1890's, inasmuch as African-American residents were segregated on particular streets in the old downtown area, while being simultaneously excluded from higher paying industrial work. This link between residential segregation and occupational segregation has been noted in other northeastern industrial cities (Hershberg et al., 1979).

From Industrial to Residential Suburb

At the turn of the century, Yonkers was the quintessential industrial suburb, segregated residentially and occupationally by race. But advances in transportation soon allowed for the development of the streetcar suburb. Electrification of the trolley lowered the fare to only 5 cents. Cheap, quick transportation allowed for the transformation of rural lands into residential neighborhoods, altering the landscape of twentieth-century America. Later, these advances were spurred on by the development of a national highway system, which laid the basis for expansion of automobile use by consumers, as

well as the utilization of trucking by industrial and business enterprises. Congress passed the Federal Highway Act of 1916, which moved government toward a policy favoring the automobile over other forms of transportation (Jackson, 1985: 191). The construction of a massive highway system throughout the nation paved the way for post World War II suburban expansion, structured around the automobile; the modern residential suburb had been born.

Not only was Yonkers a suburb of New York City, but the undeveloped lands outside of the "downtown" area constituted a suburb of the city of Yonkers. The area known as Runyon Heights can therefore be classified as a residential area situated in the industrial suburb of the City of Yonkers. Thus, although turn-of-the-century Yonkerites who lived downtown should be considered suburban in relationship to New York City, the environment in which they lived actually suggests a smaller version of any northeastern manufacturing city, complete with tenements, poverty, crime, congestion, and a sizable working class employed in local industry. Residential development of the rural areas outside the old walking city was a second phase of suburban transformation, spearheaded by the expansion of the electric trolley system.

Through nineteenth and twentieth-century industrial and post-industrial Yonkers, the African-American population remained small. They were clustered in the downtown areas and were largely excluded from the developing industry, having been relegated to traditional "Negro" jobs as porters, cooks, coachmen, domestics, foundrymen and expressmen. The new twentieth-century residential

suburb embraced and even augmented the segregative policies of its more industrial forerunner. Real estate was to increasingly embody race distinctions. As stable working-class and middle-class families sought out undeveloped suburban land, blacks found availability restricted by racially based restrictive covenants and customs.

Marginal Black Middle-Class Enclaves

At the turn of the century, the small African-American petty bourgeoisie was relegated in or next to the downtown "Negro" area as well. Like the majority of the black working population, they had access only to work in non-manufacturing sectors of the economy. A number of prominent African-American families in Yonkers today can still trace their origins in the city back to the area Bogart identifies. However, Americans of African descent did not stay in the expanding ghetto by choice. A number of distinct black middle-class enclaves sprang up in the 1920's and 30's, but their autonomy was short-lived. Most were not really communities, but isolated streets not far from the working-class area near "the Square.". Today, what remains of the original housing stock, not destroyed by urban renewal during the 1960's and 1970's, is a part of an expanding working-class ghetto.

Using occupation as a measure of economic class, those who lived in these locations held predominantly working-class occupations. However, while most workers had stable non-industrial working-class jobs, according to

respondents residents of those areas were perceived by outsiders, and perceived themselves as having middle-class status and respectability. They were often considered middle-class in terms of social status because they held the most prestigious jobs that Negroes could obtain and often pooled family resources in order to become homeowners. Home ownership represented a symbolic and material transition from the working to middle class.

Four areas of Yonkers were distinguished by informants for having a reputation of black middle-class home ownership. One settlement was on Culver Street, and another on Cottage Place. A third was on Jefferson Street, and the last was in Nepperhan. These first three areas were stretches of stable working-class and lower middle-class housing. Many in the area became homeowners after first renting from European-American (white) owners. The Culver Street site was the property of The Colored Cooperatives of America, a collaboration of colored businessmen headed by F.J. Moultrie, a local caterer and recognizably the most prominent African American in Yonkers in the early part of the century (Allison, 1984; 430)¹⁵. However, the formation of a distinct neighborhood was stymied in all three locations by the close proximity of those territories to the expanding working-class and poor populations on the west side of town, as well as by the destruction of many African American homeowners by the Depression and by Urban renewal relocation programs. After 1960, the

¹⁵See also New York City Public Library, The Schomburg Collection; microfilm #scmicro R-3700, entitled 28 Miscellaneous Schomburg Titles.

concentration of public housing in the Southwest area solidified that territory's racial and class character. Once a haven to striving homeowners, Cottage Place was selected as the first location for low-income public housing. The fate of the Jefferson and Culver Street settlements was solidified by the continued expansion of the Southwest ghetto as projects continued to be built in the area throughout the 1970's. If the trend of black economic marginalization and residential segregation continues, census tract 7, which adjoins the Southwest district, will have a similar fate as these early homeownership areas. Only Runyon Heights, a neighborhood located in the suburban area to the east, managed to escape being engulfed by an expanding black ghetto. The development and maintenance of the Runyon community was due to its geographic isolation, its developing racial and class character, and the concerted efforts on the part of residents to defend their way of life.

Surviving Against the Odds

The last decade has witnessed the first decline in the city's total population this century. This factor compounds the effect of the continued growth of the black population in the city. Breaking a fairly consistent pattern in the relationship between African-American population growth and growth for the entire city over the last eighty years, blacks came to represent more than 14% of the total population between 1980 and 1990. The Hispanic population grew even more quickly, growing to comprise another 16% of the city. Like the

Negroes of an earlier era, the majority of the new non-whites can find residence only on the west side of the city, now referred to as Southwest Yonkers. They have inherited the oldest housing stock located near the commercial core of the city, while remaining largely excluded from a declining industrial work force.

Southwest Yonkers is widely held by city residents to be Yonkers' black ghetto. Indeed, the region includes the original working-class settlement identified by Bogart. The area also includes the deteriorating downtown district known as Getty Square, as well as those nearby middle-class enclaves in which Negroes first ventured. Today it is home to the majority of Yonkers' 26,000 black residents. Some non-black city residents derogatorily refer to the area as "Ghetto Square," though one would rarely hear this term used in racially mixed company.

The Southwest area has drawn recent attention, due to a Federal school and housing desegregation suit in which the Yonkers Board of Education, the City of Yonkers, and the Yonkers Community Development Agency were found guilty of racial discrimination in housing and schools¹⁶. Between 1940 and 1980, 6,644 of the city's 6,800 units (98%) of low and moderate-income housing were built in southwest Yonkers (Sheingold, 1993: 5A). The opinion of the court makes clear its findings that the concentration of low-income

¹⁶United States of America and Yonkers Branch- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, etal.vs Yonkers Board of Education; City of Yonkers; and Yonkers Community Development Agency. Opinion 80 CIV 6761 (LBS).

housing in the already predominantly African-American areas of the city was created with the intent to isolate the black population. The court also noted that the only exception to this pattern of black ghettoization in Yonkers is the community of Runyon Heights:

According to the 1980 census figures, Southwest Yonkers accounts for 37.5% of the City's total population, but contains 80.7% of the City's minority population . . . In contrast, only two of the thirty-two census tracts outside of the Southwest have a minority population greater than 6%. One is census tract 7, whose 28.6% minority population is clustered in the southern end of the tract, where it abuts Southwest Yonkers and along the Hudson Division Railroad on the western edge of the tract. The second is census tract 18 in East Yonkers, which contains Runyon Heights, a longstanding enclave of black home owners, and the site of Hall Court, the only subsidized housing project for families that is located outside Southwest Yonkers (Opinion 80 CIV. 6761 (LBS); 3-4).

Later in the text, the court again noted the significance of the placement of the Hall Court housing project in Runyon Heights in 1956, given the context of a small stable minority population in Yonkers. In addition, the court recognized the fact that Runyon Heights was the only neighborhood available to blacks on the east side. Historically, the community's responses to attempts at ghettoization, such as the placement of public housing there, as well as to industrial expansion, such as commercial development along Runyon Avenue, have directly contributed to community political mobilization and solidarity. The community struggled to avoid the fate of Southwest Yonkers and its neighboring territories, battling political forces which sought to concentrate poor minority populations in areas already containing blacks. The community

managed to negotiate a 48-unit project, rather than the 335-unit project originally proposed for the area.

Foundations for Institutional Development

As the Yonkers Negro population slowly expanded in Yonkers, so did the number of Negro churches. As would be expected, all but one were located in the Southwest region, near the expanding black ghetto community. In response to the inhospitable racial climate most European-based (white) churches exhibited towards blacks in northern cities, the mid- to late 1800's saw a proliferation of northern black church organizations. The Yonkers experience was no exception. Black/white spiritual relations can best be characterized as tolerant by Jim Crow standards. Consequently, it was not uncommon for racially segregated congregations to belong to the same church. Services, however, were held separately. Negroes usually were permitted use of the basement for their religious services. As soon as they were financially able, most black congregations separated from the dominant church, establishing their own organization.

Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, later renamed Institutional A.M.E. Zion Church, was the first Negro church to be organized in Yonkers, in 1871. Their first church was dedicated in 1885 and was situated on New Main Street. In 1923 the church relocated to its current site off North Broadway near the present Cottage Place Gardens Apartments public housing

site. Messiah Baptist Church was organized in 1882. Their church was dedicated in 1888 at the site of the old Leighton Academy Building which had been donated by James B. Colgate of the Colgate family (Allison, 1984: 291). Colgate was then a member of the Warburton Avenue Baptist Church, which was a temporary home to the all-black congregation. It should be noted that both Messiah and Institutional held their first meetings in Townsend Hall at 50 North Broadway. Soon after, in 1892, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church was founded in a storefront on Palisade Avenue and New School Street, also located near the Square. It relocated to Elm Street, where it remained until 1932. After moving to School Street in 1932, and again moving in 1950 to the site of the Women's Christian Temperance Union Building at 57-59 North Broadway, the church finally came to settle at the site of the Nepperhan Baptist Church on Nepperhan Avenue in 1971. The first three churches to exist at the turn of the century were concentrated on or near the same streets that contained the majority of the African-American population.

In the early part of the twentieth century, two new churches were founded. First in 1911, Bethany Evangelical Lutheran was founded, it too eventually relocating to Cottage Place. Residents in the newly created Runyon Heights area, then called Nepperhan, also founded a church. Like the churches on the west side, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was created to provide counsel and a place of prayer for local residents of color. Rather than serving the larger African-American community, Metropolitan

received its congregation almost exclusively from the residents in Nepperhan. Founded in the late teens by an assembly of the original local residents who had formed a prayer group, the church was dedicated at its current site on Belknap Avenue in 1928.

The last established black church to be founded in Yonkers was the Community Baptist Church which was dedicated in 1945. Since that time numerous "store front" churches have sprung up in Yonkers' black communities. They catered to the predominantly working-class and poor populations of southern migrants who came to the city after 1960. One such church even developed in the old Nepperhan area. In fact, The Kings Highway Apostolic Church has been one of the most successful new churches in Yonkers since the growth of the black population after 1960. The congregation has recently renovated their house of worship on Kenmore Street.

Birth of the Black Residential Suburb

By 1925, the economic character of Westchester was quickly shifting from one of industrial production to suburban consumption. Prosperity came to Yonkers, as it did for the entire country in the 1920's. Radios were an integral part of many homes in Nepperhan and traffic jams became a common feature of the city (Johnson, 1962: 49). Indeed, in post 1940's Nepperhan, many African-American families owned automobiles. Many Italian-American families

in Nepperhan, many of whom walked to work, did not own a family car until after the war.

In order to accommodate America's new-found source of transportation, an extensive system of highways was erected, beginning in the early 1920's; this also helped to usher in a new era of consumption and suburbanization. Parkways were designed to capture the bucolic feel of suburban landscapes. Many were designed to follow along river routes, winding through the hilly terrain of the lower Hudson Valley. The first roadway built exclusively for cars was the Bronx River Parkway¹⁷. It was completed in 1923. Soon to follow, the Hutchinson River Parkway was completed in 1928, and the Saw Mill River Parkway in 1929. All three parkways increased automobile access south to New York and north into upper Westchester. The Cross County Parkway, dedicated in 1931, supplied access from east and west across the city. The New York State Thruway and the Sprain Brook Parkway, both highways expanding access north even farther, would follow as the popularity of the automobile continued.

The early Nepperhan residents took full advantage of the mobility offered by transportation developments in the twentieth century. From the outset, many Runyon workers commuted to New York City for employment, often working in Harlem. They were in fact among the first working-class suburban

¹⁷See the Herald Statesman, June 5, 1995; "Group Drives for Parkway Preservation," by Robert Derocher, page 1A.

commuters to New York. Although the Putnam Railroad whistled through Nepperhan regularly, making a stop near Tuckahoe Road, its high cost made its use limited by most commuter residents during the early years. At first they commuted by trolley, connecting with the New York subway system in the Bronx. This route would continue even after buses replaced the trolley system. After salaries increased and train fares declined, some took the Putnam line, which passed through the center of the community. Most, however, remember making the commute to New York City by trolley; others recalled their parents making the trolley connection to New York. The entire trip cost only fifteen cents. They took the #6 trolley from Tuckahoe Road, on the southern border of Nepperhan, to downtown Yonkers. At Getty Square, they transferred to the Broadway trolley and headed south a few blocks into the Bronx, where they took the #1 Broadway subway to Manhattan. In use since the turn of the century, the #1 subway is actually one of the few surviving elevated lines in the City of New York. In 1952, buses replaced the trolley in Yonkers, while still maintaining many of the old trolley routes. The subway continues to be used, as a means of commuting to New York, by many of Yonkers' working and lower middle classes. This basic commuting pattern of Nepperhan workers has remained relatively unchanged up until today, though many began relying upon the automobile after World War II.

By World War Two, the automobile had gained in popularity, rivaling other forms of commutation. In fact, the first highways were designed as

scenic tour routes, where suburbanites would take family drives on weekend afternoons. The popularity of public transportation dwindled with the rise of the suburban detached household. The last trolley system to operate in the county was the Yonkers trolley, which was dismantled in November of 1952¹⁸. The death of the trolley foreshadowed the decline in manufacturing which would hit Yonkers in 1954. Increased dependence on the automobile symbolized the dawn of a new era in Westchester, characterized by corporate office expansion, deindustrialization, and middle-class suburbanization in Yonkers and Westchester County. The purchasing of a house, car, and domestic equipment integrated suburbanites into a national culture of mass production and consumption (Zukin 1991: 140).

Runyon Heights was ultimately surrounded by the new burgeoning highway and parkway systems which dotted the Westchester landscape. The Saw Mill River Parkway, which connects to northern Westchester and New York City, passes just west of the community; the New York State Thruway (87), which also provided transit north and south, passes just to the east. The Sprain Brook Parkway passes less than a mile, also to the east. By the 1960's what were once long parks intended for automobile sight seeing in the lower Hudson Valley became a valued commodity of a suburban life dependent upon the auto. Runyon Heights is uniquely situated along Tuckahoe Road, providing

¹⁸See Westchester County Historical Society Vertical Files; Yonkers-Trolley

access to the major shopping strip in lower Westchester County, Central Park Avenue, as well as to the four major thoroughfares.

In addition to new forms of commuter transportation, the 1920's brought a new system of land control as city governments adopted zoning ordinances. Prompted by the efforts of realtors to insure land values (Schwartz, 1976: 27-29), zoning laws restricted land use, consequently raising property values by limiting the types of structures that could be built in the area. The first zoning ordinances came to the City of Yonkers in 1920, following the example set by New York City. In addition to limiting land usage, "white" developers sought to limit Negro accessibility to suburban land, fearing that property values would deteriorate. Many developers, like those in the neighboring Homefield community, utilized deed exclusions or restrictive covenants in order to restrict Negro opportunity in the new suburban landscape (Schwartz, 1976: 27).

Residents, led by the Runyon Heights Improvement Association, fought hard during the 1960's with City Hall and City Planning to insure that land use in the area would retain a suburban character. The first intrusion was the construction of low-income housing on Dunbar Street. Businesses, taking advantage of available land along the defunct Putnam railroad, would soon emerge along Runyon Avenue, posing new problems for residents. The strip next to the railroad and along Runyon Avenue had originally been zoned for industrial use in 1920, when zoning was first adopted by the city. In 1928,

when zoning codes were modified, the area was designated an "I" District, which allowed for the continued industrial use of the land. According to Director of City Planning Lee Ellman, "The 'I' Zone is the most permissive in terms of what kind of business you can put there." In 1953, the Runyon Avenue strip was upgraded by the city to a commercial use zone ("C" District), which permitted wholesale businesses, storage warehouses and private residences. After Conrail closed passenger service on the Putnam line, the company began selling large parcels of land along the Runyon Avenue strip in the late 1950's. The change to the "C" District designation in 1953 had effectively solidified the strip for the development of commercial enterprises, which did begin infiltrating the area after 1960. While the Runyon Heights Improvement Association (RHIA) made plans to construct the new Community House along Runyon Avenue during this same period, the community was unable to afford the cost of the large land parcels offered by the railroad. Consequently, the RHIA purchased, from a local resident, two 50 foot lots directly across the street for the price of fifteen hundred dollars. Today, the Community House sits opposite a row of commercial enterprises which border the old railway.

The original zoning designation on Runyon Avenue had a high height designation of 60 feet as well as the highest population density designation, "A." The "C" designation allowed for the construction of multiple-unit apartment buildings as well as business development alongside the railroad

thoroughfare. Up until the early 1960's, only a coal bin existed along this strip. During the Depression, the coal bin became a source of fuel to supplement struggling families. One male resident remembers:

And at that time when we was kids, it use to be a lumber yard there and a coal yard. And part of the lumber yard ran along here and up further on Runyon Avenue, we had a great big silo there, great big silo and that was the coal silo. The trains would come there and deposit their coal there and they would take it out of the coal cars and put it up in the silo. And on this side when they come to sell the coal or come to get coal a truck would come past and a guy would raise the shoot and all the coal comes down. . . Well it was a company called Baers Wood & Coal Company (that owned all the coal). And that was way back in the early 20's. Because, I caught the tail end of it, you know. During the bad times we used to go up there and steal all of the slats to burn the wood. They would steal the coal and all of that. That was during the Depression. But then again, they folded up in the 30's and it just laid vacant there, there was nothing but woods all along there.

In fact, residents remember playing around the coal bin as children, after the company stopped warehousing coal there during the 1930's. One longtime resident recalls:

And at that time when we was kids, it use to be a lumber yard there and a coal yard. And part of the lumber yard ran along here and up further on Runyon Avenue, we had a great big silo there, great big silo and that was the coal silo. The trains would come there and deposit their coal there and they would take it out of the coal cars and put it up in the silo. And on this side when they come to sell the coal or come to get coal a truck would come past and a guy would raise the shoot and all the coal comes down.

After World War II, the city warehoused salt for the city's streets in the old coal bin. With the growing encroachment of local businesses, the neighborhood experienced a deterioration in its quality of life. The RHIA exerted

pressure on government agencies to use zoning to limit land use to single and two-family residences. In 1968, the RHIA succeeded in having the Runyon Avenue strip upgraded to a "CM" zone. According to the Director of the City Planning Bureau in Yonkers:

As I remember, the "CM" zone is less permissive in terms of uses (light manufacturing instead of industry), and more restrictive in terms of area of the business. The "I" zone, it's something like a 75% lot coverage, and a "CM" zone is somewhat less.

Indeed, the "CM" District is less permissible than the original "I" designation assigned to the Runyon Avenue strip. Although the new designation resulted in only minimal improvements for a residential community, one aspect of the change was significant. While the "C" District allows for wholesale businesses and storage, as well as residences, the "CM" District allows for commercial storage and light manufacturing, while excluding residences¹⁹. Since the community had resisted local governmental attempts at building low income housing developments in the area since 1956, the zoning change, which excluded residential use of the property, insured that the Runyon Avenue strip could never become a future site for low income public housing, or a private apartment complex.

¹⁹See Article III, Section 107-11 of The Code of the City of Yonkers. Rochester, New York: General Code Publishers Corporation, 1993

The portion of land east of the railroad, originally designated for low-population density and 35-foot high structures, was designated a "T" District by the city in 1928, when zoning categories were revamped. A "T" District permitted the erection of both single and two-family dwellings on 50 foot lots. The land west of the tracks, with the exception of Runyon Avenue, was originally designated, in 1920, a "B" District with medium population density and a 60-foot height limitation. "B" Districts allowed for neighborhood businesses, and apartment buildings with 175 persons per acre. According to the Director of City Planning, the "B" density designation allowed for "lodging or boarding houses, hotels, churches, schools, libraries, museums, clubs, railroad passenger stations, farming and accessory uses, customarily incidental to the principle use. In other words, your basic garage, stable, whatever."

He continued to explain that the "B" and "A" population designation was usual for land which was contiguous to local arteries. To the detriment of black suburban communities like Nepperhan, the local artery provided the only available land to Negro homebuilders in Yonkers. In 1953, the land west side of the tracks and north of Dunbar Street, including Kenmore Street, Potomac Street, Dearborne Street and Roanoke Street, was designated by the city a "C" District (commercial), along with Runyon Avenue. In 1953, the city also designated the small area south of Dunbar Street and west of the railroad a "T" District. Having had numerous battles with local businesses over parking, trucks, and noise, the RHIA made efforts to use zoning ordinances to their

advantage. At the urging of the community, the city upgraded the area east of Hunt Avenue and Belknap Avenue, including a small part of "Old Nepperhan" as well as "the Hill" area, to an S-50 District in 1968. The S-50 classification restricts land use to detached single-family units on 50-foot lots. A large portion of eastside residential real estate in Yonkers is currently in the S-50 zoning category. The remaining Runyon Heights area west of the railroad, excluding the Runyon Avenue strip, was also upgraded to a "T" District in 1968. From the standpoint of preserving the suburban character of the community, the "T" District designation, which permitted single and two-family homes, was an improvement over the old "B" designation, which had permitted apartment buildings and neighborhood businesses. The S-50 designation excluded future construction of two-family homes on "the Hill" and east of Hunt Avenue, solidifying the middle-class, detached, single-home character of the eastern section of Runyon Heights.

The presence of multiple family dwelling units in Runyon Heights would have raised population density and strained community services. The net effect of these zoning changes was to insure that the single and two-family home remained dominant in the area, along with the suburban character of the community and middle-class character of its residents. The RHIA plans to continue its fight for improved zoning ordinances in the community.

By 1951, diesel engine trains dominated American railways, including the "Put." The transformation of the old coal bin into a salt storage facility was

indicative of the shift in suburban transportation after the World War II. The creation of a national highway system favored the use of the automobile for both private and commercial conveyance, rendering locomotion by rail nearly obsolete. While Westchester County spent more than \$62 million for the purchase of land, highway construction raised property values by more than \$1 million between 1921 and 1931 (Zukin, 1991: 168). As a result of highway construction and zoning regulations between 1920 and 1930, the road was paved for the post World War II suburban real estate boom and subsequent middle-class gentrification.

As real estate prices continued to rise in Westchester County, so did the cost of home construction in Nepperhan. According to residents, new homes cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 dollars during the 1920's, and \$10,000 to \$15,000 during the 1950's. By the late 1960's, home costs had risen to the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range, and by the 1970's, they ranged from \$70,000 to \$85,000. While inflation consistently raised the costs of property and home construction throughout the community's history, during the 1980's, land values skyrocketed, while building costs soared. This took place throughout Westchester County. By 1990, new home building costs to builders was upwards of \$125,000, while purchasing the same home on the market may cost as much as \$250,000. Rising property and housing costs made buying property in Runyon Heights increasingly expensive. As a result, the median economic level of community families increased significantly. These figures

represent an upscaling or gentrification of the area, and not necessarily a rise in the family incomes of the average family. Many older residents are retired, living off of savings, pensions, and social security. Nevertheless, between 1980 and 1990, the Runyon Heights community experienced a 38% gain in real income. (See Table 3.5)

The Runyon Heights area was and still is the only predominantly middle-class neighborhood in Yonkers populated by a significant number of black American homeowners. Newer and more financially secure residents are increasingly drawn from professional and managerial occupations, while older residents are increasingly concerned with preserving the area for future generations. However, the establishment of racially exclusive institutions, which form the basis for community solidarity, has tended to minimize these material differences. Vast cultural and even economic differences among residents have been de-emphasized in favor of collective community action structured around racial identity. Historically, the issues galvanizing community solidarity have implicitly or explicitly involved both a racial and common material basis. The history of the Runyon Heights community embodies both class antagonisms and racial solidarity, as a stable working- and middle-class population sought to shield itself from the poor, and at the same time maintain national (racial) solidarity with the poorer African-American population on the west side of the city, as well as with the much larger African-American population across the nation. The result was that the Runyon area was

transformed into an isolated residential suburban community, which was imbued with a racial and class consciousness.

Table 3.5: Demographics of Runyon Heights, 1980-1990

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>
Total Population.....	1,270	1,378
Total # Families.....	324	352
Total Hispanic.....	26	96
Non-Hispanic Black....	987	1,085
Non-Hispanic White....	238	214
Total # Households....	469	478
Total Units.....	482	491
% Owner Occupied Units....	58%	56%
Median Rent.....	\$322*	\$475
Median Family Income...	\$31,467* ...	\$43,500

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1980 and 1990.
*Figures Presented in 1990 Dollars

Conclusion

Since the early industrial period in Yonkers, black working- and middle-class workers were segregated in local industry and housing. Even after the suburban expansion into rural lands during the early twentieth century, blacks had difficulty securing land for home construction. While blacks across Yonkers purchased homes where they could find them, most were steered to areas not far from the developing black community in the downtown area. The area would soon experience the overcrowding and underemployment characteristic of innercity ghetto areas. Only Runyon Heights, an area transverse by a railroad and physically isolated from both hostile whites and less fortunate blacks, managed to develop a truly middle-class suburban character.

Chapter Four

The History of Nepperhan Real Estate Development:

"Sell it to the Niggers"

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A unique set of circumstances opened the suburban real estate market to black homeowners in Yonkers after the turn of the century. During this early period of suburban expansion, African-Americans found widespread resistance to their presence throughout the city and Westchester County. This was particularly true in the newly created suburban areas to the east. Restrictive covenants on land deeds were commonplace, as were attempts to isolate black children in specific schools, and black workers in service and marginal occupations.

The early development of Nepperhan, the original name for the Runyon Heights area, reflects the collapse and subsequent breakup of large estates in lower Westchester County as real estate speculation blossomed, foreshadowing the rise of the residential suburb. But the area also attracted black homeseekers as they experienced racial barriers and rejection in other suburban communities. This led to middle-class black gentrification in Nepperhan. Runyon Heights became a place which represented middle-class achievement to many local blacks and whites. This reputation developed because the locale was the only area available to black homeseekers. As a result, Nepperhan developed a reputation for being a place where the black middle class could live a suburban lifestyle relatively free from the daily assaults common in many predominantly white neighborhoods. This further attracted black middle class homeseekers.

neighborhoods. This further attracted black middle class homeseekers. The net effect of the community's black middle-class reputation, as well as the ongoing racial discrimination (see also Massey and Denton, 1993: 105) found in the housing market, was continued middle-class black gentrification throughout the area's history.

Prior to its development as a black residential area, Nepperhan was the private estate of Charles Runyon, an industrialist who lived in New York City. Zukin describes this period in Westchester County as a process of de-gentrification, when New York City financiers purchased property from the descendants of colonial elites (Zukin, 1991: 142). The first period of land sales, in the western Nepperhan area, reflected the de-gentrification process as the working- and lower middle-classes purchased lots from the Runyon estate through real estate speculators. Runyon Heights provided the only available land for Negro home builders outside of the traditional "Negro area" of Getty Square. It was the only east side area available to "coloreds." The second period of real estate sales reflected the continued de-gentrification of the area, while newer homeowners in the eastern section increasingly possessed traditionally middle-class occupations and higher economic status. World War II ushered in this second period of real estate development, characterized by a process of slow but continuous black middle-class expansion in Nepperhan.

The present chapter details the process of land acquisition in Nepperhan by black residents. It explores the effects of both race and class upon the development of private home ownership in Yonkers, and in shaping

the distinct racial and economic character of the Runyon Heights community.

Two Names, One Community

The two names adopted by residents for their community correspond to two distinct periods of land development in the area. Nepperhan was the name first used by most residents in the area. The first period of land development details the establishment of the early Nepperhan community in the western section of the area. The western portion was originally called Nepperhan because of the existence of the Nepperhan Railroad Station at the southern end of the neighborhood. The Nepperhan name came to represent the rapid movement of people and freight, rather than the "rapid running water" of the original Nappackamanck inhabitants. During the first twenty years, a settlement of black homeowners who held occupations as industrial and service workers evolved primarily in the western portion of what is today often called Runyon Heights. While they carried middle-class status by being the most prosperous of black workers and also owning real estate, by and large, most residents were not a part of the traditional managerial and professional classes.

The second period of real estate development occurred in the eastern section of the area after World War Two. As the eastern portion began developing, the name Runyon Heights became used more frequently to refer to the entire area, especially by newcomers to the community. This second period captures an era of middle-class mobility as the children of older

residents were among the first blacks in Yonkers to hold white-collar jobs. In addition, this period represents an era of black middle class gentrification to the area as more upscale blacks continued to be attracted, as well as steered to the area. Though divided by both historical development and an emerging class structure, the entire community was nevertheless defined by race. Runyon Heights, in the minds of residents as well as outsiders, included all black residents in the area. Still within this racially based definition of the Runyon Heights community, residents maintain local status distinctions which include recognition of economic differences between groups. Inferences are often made based upon east-west geographic references. The newer more upscale eastern section is often called "the Hill," while the western section, the home of many of the original settlers, is often called "old Nepperhan." While the west carries status based upon its authenticity and standing as the original founders, the east carries more socioeconomic status. Both are important dimensions of the local status order.

Prior to its subdivision in 1872, the Runyon Lands to the west were not completely undeveloped. Yonkers had become home to numerous boarding schools by the turn of the century. The Sarah E. Baxter School for Girls was located on Tuckahoe Road, between Altonwood Place and Runyon Avenue. Baxter also owned a few lots on the corner of Saw Mill River Road and Third Street (Kenmore St.). It is interesting to note that though the school was present on city planning department maps in 1907, both

the school and the Baxter land were no longer in existence by 1914. On maps dated 1931, the Mary E. Johnson Boarding School for Girls appeared where the Baxter School had once stood on Tuckahoe Road. Older residents have no recollection of the school although its presence overlapped with the neighborhood's settlement. School 1 had been located on 2nd Street (Dunbar Street) since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and was rebuilt just prior to subdivisions of the estates around nineteen hundred. In addition to schools, Memorial M.E. Church was also situated on Tuckahoe Road, across the street from the Baxter School on the west corner of Altonwood Place. While the church's basement became the first home of the all-black Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion congregation during the 1920's, the church was later converted into a rooming house during the 1930's; today a garden supply store occupies the original wood frame and stained glass structure.

Archival maps show that, as late as 1931, only the property belonging to St. Mary's Cemetery cut into an otherwise solid forty-acre rectangle. Though the map indicates that a church was located on the site, a representative from the cemetery explained in a telephone interview that the church was never located on that site. Apparently, the map shows a shed or small building which was already present on the land when the church took possession of the land in the late 1800's. The 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres were eventually converted into an extension of the cemetery. The first burial occurred on that site in 1946.

Local black residents, however, were only infrequently buried at St. Mary's Cemetery. Many blacks in Nepperhan, as in the rest of black Yonkers, were buried through Brooks Funeral Home which was established in 1929. According to funeral home representatives, a large portion the black population in Yonkers have been buried at Oakland Cemetery, the only other large cemetery in Yonkers. Others are buried at Mount Hope Cemetery which borders Hastings and Yonkers, while still other are buried further north in Westchester, or south in New York City. The most consistent indicator of black burial patterns in Nepperhan was past family history. Burial site preferences tend to follow patterns already established by family members. This meant a diverse burial history for Nepperhan residents. Some were buried with their families in the South, others were buried through their old churches in New York City, while still others were buried in local cemeteries in Yonkers and in other parts of Westchester County. This dispersed pattern, according to funeral home representatives, seemed to reflect the entire African American population of Yonkers.

One source did report that even the Oakland burial site was segregated, so that many blacks were buried in an area called "the hill." (Esannason and Bagwell, 1993: 30). A survey of the cemetery grounds including "the hill" area revealed no clear pattern of segregation. Nonetheless, older black family names were often to be found in the vicinity of the hill area.

Two Estates, One Community

The first sales of the Runyon properties to Negroes were an unprecedented action on the part of white suburban realtors. Nepperhan residents, both young and old, reported difficulty in purchasing homes in other parts of Yonkers. Oddly, the neighborhood's genesis stemmed directly from the actions of real estate developers and financiers. Initially, six developers were involved in real estate speculation in Nepperhan: Hudson P. Rose Company, Henry Southgate, Beechwood Realty Company, Queen Mab Company, Marcy Realty Company, and Wekando Inc. All six companies were involved in land sales in the Runyon area. What is most striking is that property sales to Negroes in Nepperhan were deliberate. Both Southgate and Rose ran advertisements in the popular black weekly the Amsterdam News between 1922 and 1925 (see Figure 1). Many older residents told of newspaper advertisements as well as auctions, where Negroes from Harlem were invited. Since none of the Runyon Heights residents interviewed, or their families, purchased their homes through these auctions, it seems unclear whether auctions actually took place for any of the Runyon Heights lands. However, similar "outings" did occur during the twenties for the large estate located to the north, which belonged to the Odell Estate. This area developed primarily after World War Two, and is today the predominantly white middle-class community of Homefield.

Runyon Heights developed in two distinct yet overlapping stages. Rather than through the straightforward sale of the entire area by one real estate developer as has been the case for many of America's planned suburban communities, Runyon Heights developed more haphazardly. The first stage of development involved the area just east of the Putnam railroad tracks, and extended west out to the Saw Mill River Road. The western portion of Runyon Heights sits on the land of the erstwhile Runyon Estate. The tract is bordered by Saw Mill River Road (SMRR) to the west, by the Odell Estate ²⁰(the southern most part of which is Homefield) to the north, and by Tuckahoe Road to the south. The tract runs as far east as Hunt Avenue and the southern segment of what is today Belknap Avenue. The second stage of development actually involved a second estate. Originally, this area was a forty to forty-two and a quarter acre estate belonging to Sarah A. and Isaac V. Fowler.²¹ This is the area east of the Runyon estate, as defined on the subdivision map entitled "Second Amended Map of part of the Runyon Estate," filed with the county in 1912 and also defined on the "Map of Nepperhan Gardens, Nepperhan Station,

²⁰The Odell Estate was subdivided prior to 1924. The lands bordering Runyon Heights were at this time owned by the estate of William B. Rice. In 1924, the Homeland Corporation filed subdivision maps on behalf of the Rice estate, and the land in the neighborhood known today as Homefield was placed on the market.

²¹Libre of Deeds and Libre of Mortgages are filed with the Westchester County Department of Land Records, located at 110 Court Street, White Plains New York. See Libre of Deeds 1764, page 13

City of Yonkers, N.Y., The Property of the Nepperhan Home Building Corporation," which was filed in 1927.²² This area is the territory which begins east of Hunt Avenue and the southern portion of Belknap Avenue. According to residents, and confirmed by deeds, this section remained largely undeveloped (excluding the southern end of Bushey Avenue) until after World War II. The newly constructed New Croton Aqueduct Easement now provides a convenient landmark since it was cut through the community close to the Fowler-Runyon estate borders. This can be observed by comparing the Planning Bureau maps of 1907 with the subdivision maps noted above.

The Early Years

The sale and development of the Runyon Estate mirrors the continued de-gentrification and subsequent suburbanization of Yonkers as the nineteenth century came to a close. Until 1871, the land known as the Runyon Estate was owned by Benjamin Curser. On the thirteenth of December 1871, Runyon purchased land from Curser totaling sixty three acres for the sum of sixty-five thousand dollars.²³ In April of the following year, land was sold to Reuben Van

²²Land Subdivision Maps are filed with the Westchester County Department of Land Records, White Plains, New York.

²³Libre of Deeds 791, page 302

Pelt, and to School District No.1, Yonkers.²⁴ The Van Pelt property was on the western side of Saw Mill River Road along the Saw Mill River (SMR)²⁵, and lay outside the area later to be known as Nepperhan. The land was eventually zoned and developed for industrial use. On the east side of the street, additional land had apparently been purchased by the city for the purpose of constructing a new elementary school.

This new school was to replace the old one-room school house which had been built on the northeast corner of Tuckahoe Road and Saw Mill River Road in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. According to Allison's History of Yonkers, originally published in 1896, the school had recently been torn down (Allison, 1984: 176). The new School 1 was located on 2nd Street (Dunbar Street) and was known simply as "School Number One." The school drew from a broad geographic area, including Homefield and neighboring Nepperhan Heights, and served residents inside as well as outside the Nepperhan community until World War II.

Charles Runyon had little involvement or influence over the sale of his properties in Yonkers. It appears that both husband and wife jointly owned the property since both parties signed the deeds from the first sale in 1871. While

²⁴See Libre of Deeds no. 802, page 315, and no. 895 page 233 for sale to Reuben Van. Pelt. See Libre of Deed no. 811, page 65 for sale to School District No. 1, Yonkers.

²⁵Saw Mill River was originally called the Nepperhan River

Charles Runyon was still living, approximately ten to twelve acres were sold off. Van Pelt purchased eleven lots and parcels, and the school district purchased an additional lot. However, a sizable plot of land still remained by the time the first official map of the Runyon Estate was commissioned in 1872. The remaining lands concentrated the estate in an area of approximately 52 acres, bounded by SMRR to the east, the Odell estate to the north, Tuckahoe Road to the south, and the soon-to-be-sold Fowler Estate to the east.

On October 13, 1903, Charles Runyon died in his home at 25 Fifth Avenue, New York City. However, a local folklore exists concerning the origins of Runyon Heights. This folklore reinforces the racial identity of the community and its members while it also fictionalizes the late Charles Runyon. It has often been expressed by residents that the community is situated on land once owned by the late Senator Charles Runyon and known as the Runyon Estate. Deed records confirm that the land was once the property of Charles Runyon. However, the belief that he was a senator and that he originally intended to sell the land to Jewish people who desired to build a cemetery there are both unsubstantiated stories. It is often said that Runyon had responded to local concerns about plans for a Jewish cemetery on his property, and decided to sell the land to Negroes instead. Even Philip Pistone, the city's Planning Director during the 1950's and 1960's testified at the infamous housing discrimination trial in 1985 that the neighborhood was founded on a tract of land owned by a state senator who brought bus loads of Harlem residents to Runyon Heights

for weekend picnics and auctions (Opinion 80 CIV. 6761: 48). He recounted essentially the same story during an hour-long interview. Apparently, he was simply repeating the stories that he had heard around town. This community folklore as stated by one male resident who moved to the community in 1926 was that:

Well you see, you see, Runyon Heights, this used to be an estate. It used to be the Runyon Estate and all this side and all on the other side . . . across the bridge. We used to say across the tracks. They broke it up and they made it into lots . . . In the 20's. And what the old-timers use to tell me is that the Jews wanted to buy it and use it for a cemetery. And so the guy in charge of the estate said that he would rather sell it to the niggers than sell it to the Jews.

Other residents told similar stories. A couple of respondents even interjected that the preference was for "live niggers" over "dead Jews." The racial origins of the local community is used to reinforce community cohesion through the telling of the story. It clearly places the community's relationship to the outside world in purely racial terms. A more complicated and dubious picture emerges of the community's true origins upon examination of the historical record. Runyon's obituary in the October 14, 1903-edition of the New York Times helps clarify the record:

During the last forty-five years he (Charles Runyon) had been in business in this city, his start having been made with the Union Rubber Company, of which he was Secretary and Treasurer. Later he was with the firm of Randolph Brothers, which firm he left to become Secretary and Treasurer to the Superior Mountain Coal Company.

Mr. Runyon was instrumental in organizing the Hoboken Coal Company, of which he became the head. The Communipaw Coal Company was his next venture, and since its organization (until his death) he had been the President. Mr. Runyon married Isabel E. Randolph, a niece of former Gov. Randolph of New Jersey. A wife, a daughter, and three sons survive him. (The New York Times obituaries. October 14, 1903.)

It is clear that Runyon was never a senator, although his wife was the niece of a New Jersey governor. Additionally, Charles Runyon was dead long before real estate investors entered the picture in 1911. Contrary to local folklore, he could not have been involved in the sale of land to African Americans or to anyone else, save Van Pelt, since the next private land sale was not until 1912. Whether or not a cemetery was ever proposed for the Runyon Estate, or any part thereof, is difficult to verify. It is still possible for their to be truth in this aspect of the local tale, given the existence of St. Mary's Catholic cemetery on the east side of the Fowler Estate. Additionally, verification is made difficult due to the fact that many of the proposed subdivision plans, developed by real estate agents, never reached the final stage of being officially submitted to City Planning Bureau for approval. Only scattered records of such proposals exist²⁶. Lastly, given the wide availability of other land in Yonkers, the Runyon land was likely to be less desirable on the market. Finally, any

²⁶Ironically, the Yonkers Planning Bureau did in fact have proposals for subdivisions in the eastern section of Runyon Heights modeled after the grid pattern common of the early metropolis, and typical of the streets on the west side of the community. Instead of the grid layout, the more rustic pattern of curving streets, common with many post World War Two suburbs was adopted in the east as well as in the neighboring Homefield community .

opposition to plans to build a Jewish cemetery may well have found fertile soil among the expanding Catholic population that had been purchasing lots in the region in great number after the turn of the century. Soon after Charles Runyon's death, at the turn of the century, the Runyon Estate became controlled by the Runyon family. Documents filed with the Westchester County Land Records Department indicate that by 1910, the Runyon Estate was owned and controlled by Carmen R. Runyon, Arthur S. Runyon, and Charles Runyon Jr. as executors, Margaret C. Runyon (wife of Arthur Runyon), Isabelle M. Runyon, and Helen R. Belknap.²⁷ It is this group which chose to sell off the Runyon lands. Carmen, Arthur, and Charles are most probably the Runyon's children or siblings. The relationship of Helen Belknap to the Runyons remains unclear, although she did independently own a small parcel of land in the area.

In addition to the gradual selling off of the Runyon Estate prior to 1911, The Putnam Division of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company (now Conrail system) began operation in 1893 after the line was purchased at auction from the New York and Northern Railroad for one million dollars (Barlow, 1980). The route, then known as The Putnam Line, cut through the center of the Runyon estate, bordering Runyon Avenue on the west and Moultrie Avenue (Merril) and Touissant Avenue (Wilson) to the east. At first it appears that the railroad leased land from the Runyon estate, although

²⁷Libre of Deeds 1902, page 208

this could not be verified. It is clear, however, that by the time the first lands were sold as subdivisions in 1911, the Nepperhan Station located near Tuckahoe Road was in active use, and the railroad owned the right of way. It is this railway station, consisting of two small wooden buildings with pitched roofs, which provided the initial name for the emerging community.

First Sales and Suburban Expansion

The stage was set for suburban residential development and expansion when New York Telephone purchased, directly from the estate, the land necessary to place telephone polls in February of 1910.²⁸ Anticipating residential growth, the utilities and railroads were the first to purchase land. The Hudson P. Rose Company of #32 West 45th Street, New York City was on the scene soon after. Rose was the first realtor to capitalize on the opportunity to buy the Runyon lands; he purchased his first parcel from the Runyon estate in December 1911.²⁹

At first, Rose was selling land almost as fast as he could purchase it. In December of 1912 Rose purchased the land which bordered the railroad tracks. In April of 1913 Rose sold the same land to the New York Central Railroad

²⁸Libre of Deeds 1902, page 208.

²⁹See Libre of Deeds 1971, page 154 and 158.

Company.³⁰ The railroad had a significant impact on the land surrounding it. Businesses often were attracted to railroad access, and the trains themselves were extremely loud. In addition, land in lower Westchester, particularly in Yonkers, was widely available for sale. This set the tone for the area's relative undesirability as the railroads became associated with disturbing the tranquility of the rural character of residential suburban life. This single fact was the likely explanation for the availability of the Runyon land to black home builders. In a market saturated by new, racially restrictive properties, Rose had a ready and willing market among the most successful working class Harlem Negroes.

Foundations of the Suburban Racial Community

African American families were not the first to settle in Nepperhan. A few European Americans, largely of Italian descent, were first to come to Nepperhan. The first sale for the purpose of constructing a private home was in March of 1912 when the Hudson P. Rose Company sold a lot to Vito Barattino, the first of many Italian immigrant buyers.³¹ Interestingly, although the first to purchase property, Barattino had yet to establish residence in Nepperhan by 1920 according to the Federal census manuscripts. This pattern was observed for many Italian purchasers when comparing the names on the

³⁰Libre of Deeds 2019 pp.419

³¹See Libre of Deeds 1980, page 9.

deed records to the names on the 1915 and 1925 New York State Census Manuscripts, and the 1920 Federal Census Manuscripts. Many Italian-Americans who first bought land never built homes or moved to the area. In fact, deed records show that a number of Italian-Americans who purchased lots actually sold the land back to the realtor, who again sold the same lots to black buyers. A smaller number built homes and stayed.

Older residents, referred to locally as "seniors", tell of Italian-Americans from the Bronx who never did settle in Nepperhan, but who kept small gardens on their land during the late teens and early twenties. Presumably, many of these gardens would eventually be resold to blacks. Barattino, however, did build a home on Altonwood Place, and moved there in 1928 with his family, which included his five adult children and their families. Prior to the move, he had owned a home on Arthur Avenue in the Bronx which he sold. A third generation member of the Barattino family, born just prior to the move just north of New York City, still resides with their spouse at the seven unit walk-up building Mr. Barattino constructed.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the first Negro resident to own land was Joseph Morgan, who purchased land in 1918.³² However, based on surnames and previous home addresses, it is possible that Arthur Ryce was the

³² See Libre of Deeds 2170, page 233

first Negro to actually purchase land, in 1914.³³ Ryce was formerly of 168 West 136th Street, which was located in the soon to be predominantly Negro Harlem. The conclusion that Ryce was "Negro" is speculative since race is not recorded in deed records, and his name fails to appear either on the 1920 Federal or 1925 New York State Census. Without doubt, Joseph Morgan and his family were among the earliest African-American families to settle. The Morgans became a significant family in the community's development spanning four generations of community organization and participation in local affairs. Arthur Morgan's sons are most noted for creating a social club after World War II, called the Sportsmen Lounge. Joseph Morgan's great-grandchildren now live in the home he built. Like many other African-American families, the Morgan's spread out in Nepperhan and what was to be called Runyon Heights. Joseph Morgan's children married, and eventually purchased homes themselves. Some still reside in the community. This pattern of successive generations buying homes in Nepperhan was observed only among African American families, and not among European American families, most of whom came to settle as adults outside of Nepperhan. The Perencheif family also reportedly moved to the area in 1918, but record of their presence was not noted in the census. They rented housing for the first few years, until they purchased their own home during the early 1920's.

³³See Libre 2072, page 150

For the next few years in Nepperhan, Rose was apparently successful as a salesmen. Between 1912 and 1917, *Libre of Deeds grantor records* indicate that Rose made seventy two (72) land sales. The majority of purchasers listed their former addresses as either New York City or Yonkers. In those first five years, of the seventy two (72) entries listed, only six had non-Italian surnames, Arthur Ryce and Joseph Morgan counted among them. For some undiscovered reason, Rose's initial primary market was recent Italian immigrants. Why he began to advertise to blacks is a mystery. He possibly envisioned a faster sales turnover, and decided to seek an untapped market. Possibly, the railroad station made the area less attractive to white buyers who had access to a broad real estate market.

Whatever the motivation, Rose continued to procure land from the Runyon Estate while he sold it off to individuals. In this way, the Runyon Estate owners were party to the selling of the land to blacks, choosing to subdivide their property and sell off lots to Rose in small portions. At any time, the estate owners could have sold the lots to individuals or to other realtors. Rose, on the other hand, was truly a real estate speculator, investing in the initial purchase, clearly having had hopes of turning a profit by selling to the railroad, telephone company, and even black homeseekers.

In 1920, an abrupt shift took place that raises interesting questions concerning the relationship between racial status and real estate markets. A realtor by the name of Henry Southgate began to purchase lots from Hudson P.

Rose. He purchased more than a dozen between 1918 and 1925. During the same period, a number of Italian-American landowners sold their property back to Rose. Hudson P. Rose was apparently still interested in possessing the land. New sales to European Americans dropped significantly, dwindling down to small number by 1925. During the same period, sales to African Americans blossomed.

On numerous occasions, long time residents indicated that they believed that either Rose or Runyon had at one time advertised to Harlem's black population. The Amsterdam News was frequently cited. The Amsterdam News, a Harlem-based weekly paper, was just gaining popularity in New York's Harlem community. Residents' assertions were substantiated by a search of the newspaper for that time period. In the first available issue, dated November 29, 1922, on page eight Rose's advertisement appears.³⁴ It remains unclear how long Rose had been advertising to African-Americans. However, deed records indicate that migrants from Harlem did purchase land with increasing frequency after 1920, just when Italian-American sales began to slump. Meanwhile, Henry Southgate was also purchasing lots from Rose. Rose's

³⁴ Reference librarians at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture informed me that the earliest issue available anywhere in the country was November 29, 1922. This includes the Library of Congress as well as the Amsterdam News Archives. According to Wolseley (1990), the paper was founded by James H. Anderson during the late 1910's.

advertisements were present in every available issue of the weekly paper.³⁵ What is interesting is that April 25, 1923 was the last issue in which Rose ran his ad. However, in the very next issue of May 2, 1923, in place of Rose's ad was an ad for Southgate proclaiming burgeoning opportunities in Yonkers: "Build Your House at Nepperhan, Yonkers" (see Figure 1).

Although Henry Southgate became involved in land sales, it was Hudson P. Rose who first opened the Runyon lands for the unprecedented sale to Negro buyers. Southgate continued to purchase lots from Rose until the Depression. Some residents believed that, along with real estate brokers, the city itself helped to determine the development of the community. One resident, who moved with his family in 1929 while he was a young boy of seven years, remembers:

My father built a house up here in 1929 on Chelsea Pl. 29 Chelsea Place . . . It was one of the first houses up there. I guess everybody told you, there was a real estate broker and he was selling homes. And they opened this area up. At that time I think the city opened this area up, half of it was for Homefield, this was the white people, and this side was for blacks. And they had an imaginary line there drew up between the two of them, Homefield and this was called Nepperhan Station, Runyon Heights.

The City of Yonkers was also involved in land sale after real estate agents failed to keep tax payments during the Depression years. Rose actually sold a

³⁵December 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th, 1922. March 3, 1923. April 25, 1923

few parcels of land to the city in the nineteen fifties and sixties. However the city's direct involvement in land sales appears to have had little impact in shaping the demographic character of the community. Specifically, the racial makeup of the neighborhood had already been fixed by realtors who, for unknown reasons, broke with accepted business practices and began selling land to African-Americans as early as 1914. There is no other area in the City of Yonkers where African-Americans purchased land in such great volume. One significant factor which may have contributed to the sale of the Runyon lands to "coloreds" was the existence of the Nepperhan Railroad Station, which greatly reduced the desirability of the location. The railroad helped to rob the area of its natural rural appeal. Racial discrimination by many realtors, including widespread use of restrictive covenants and the unwillingness of many European-Americans to live near the darker skinned African-Americans, insured that most developing residential neighborhoods in Yonkers would favor so-called Caucasians. The racial homogeneity of Runyon Heights and its neighboring areas was brought about in part by internal social forces. However, racial constraints on the local housing market proved to be of much greater significance to the development of racial residential homogeneity.

HENRY SOUTHGATE, Owner, 112 W. 130th St.
 PHONE MORNING SIDE

Offers for sale a very fine house on 137th St. between 80 and 82 Edgecombe Avenues.

Also offering one on West 130th St. and one on West 127th St.

My terms are noted as the easiest and safest in assistance. My mortgages run until paid out. Others sell their mortgages and then you are at the mercy of sharks.

47 NEPPERHAN, YONKERS. I offer a few very fine building lots splendidly located; fully improved. 23 minutes to "L" and 30 minutes to Broadway Subway. 200 homes already erected. \$25 down and balance monthly starts you. I help you to secure your building mortgage. Call and see my house plans and get my terms.

HENRY SOUTHGATE

May 2, 1923

'BUILD YOUR HOUSE AT NEPPERHAN, YONKERS'

The only decent place ever offered the people of no lowlying land. No swamps; no mosquitoes; everything to attract the home seeker. It is a high-class property; many beautiful homes already built; only 23 minutes from "L"; 35 minutes from Broadway Subway; school is in center of property; Station on property will assist you to secure your building loan. Lots cost from \$200 up to \$800. \$25 down starts you on contract. See my plans describing many low-price homes.

\$500 cash down buys 7 room modern house, at the Nepperhan Station. Steam heat, electric light, also of plot 60x125. House is vacant.

— For Sale—Immediate Possession.

218 EDGECOMBE AVE.—12 rooms, electric lights, parquet floors. This a grand mansion in every respect.

23 WEST 127th ST.—A splendid house, in fine condition, 10 rooms, electric lights, floors carpeted. Possession at once.

For these houses my usual easy terms. To inspect you must have my card. Remember you are seldom offered such houses as these. Act quickly if you want a real house.

Fine corner plot for sale at the station of Hedgesfield Park, N. Y. 12 minutes out from West 42nd St.

Small amount down. Balance monthly.

HENRY SOUTHGATE
 112 WEST 130TH ST. Phone Morning Side 8152

July 11, 1923

BUY NEPPERHAN LOTS!

FORGET Croton Palm—No mortgages on the land—Free and Clear of heirs—All your battles have been fought by me. Your troubles are over when you start with me. The property is the best ever offered to you. Backed by one of the strongest companies doing business. There are now 30 houses built and occupied by owners. Ten new 1 1/2 and 2 family houses are being built. The improvements on the property are sidewalks, Electric Lights, Graded Streets, Public School, Church, Railroad Station, Trolley to Subway Trains to Sixth and 12th Aves. "L" Time 23 minutes to city. Price start at \$200 and run up to \$1,000 per lot. Terms \$25 down, warranty 200 or \$300. I personally assist you in securing your loan to call. Call and see me. My references are 600 satisfied people everywhere.

EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY—\$2,000 down buys fine house located between 7th and 8th Avenues on 125th Street.

TO LET—One five-room and four six-room apartment, electric lights; possession sixty days. No agents. Rents \$30 and \$40 a month. Location 130th Street bet. Brewster and Lefferts Avenues.

HENRY SOUTHGATE
 112 WEST 130th ST. Tel. Morning Side 8152

October 10, 1923

Real Estate Bargains

\$200 Cash Down and Up to \$1,500 Cash Down—Brick houses that are located in the best part of Harlem.

Modern and Up-to-Date. See Owner.

Nepperhan, Yonkers—Fine building lots. Loans arranged to build. 250 houses occupied by owners. Well restricted property. (New parkway building) public school and church; 23 minutes to elevated; 13 minutes to subway. New electric line connecting with Grand Central trains. Small down payments.

HENRY SOUTHGATE
 201 1/2 WEST 123rd STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 PHONE MORNING SIDE 8152

May 5, 1925

One deed³⁶ dated 1935, from a property in Homefield on Curtis Lane near the Runyon Heights border, read:

"The granted premises shall be sold only to and occupied by members of the Caucasian race."

The boundaries of Runyon Heights, both spatially and demographically were laid by both the market decisions of individual realtors and their own social assessment of and willingness to sell to African-Americans.

The Second Period of Real Estate Development

The Fowler estate, much of which is known locally as "the Hill," developed somewhat less clearly than did the original Nepperhan area. Comprising slightly more than forty acres, the Hill and the surrounding area constitute four-fifths the size of the western (Runyon) Nepperhan area. Although the Fowler estate was sold in 1906, the first houses were built on the southern portion of Bushey Avenue in the late nineteen twenties and early thirties. No record of private land development was discovered prior to 1927. During this period, other realtors attempted to take possession of the lands. This period between 1906 and 1930 illustrates the importance of realtors in shaping neighborhood boundaries and development.

A number of interested parties at one time or another came to possess the Fowler estate, the eastern most section of what was to become Runyon

³⁶Libre 3459 of deeds, page 390-393

Heights. Beechwood Realty Company first purchased the entire Fowler estate on July 3, 1906 from Sarah A. Fowler. The estate contained between forty and forty-two and one quarter acres of land.³⁷ On July 6th, 1906, just three days later, Beechwood Realty entered a mortgage agreement with Woodson R. Oglesby for twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000). Balance of the mortgage agreement was to be paid to Oglesby by July 3, 1909.³⁸ However, Beechwood lost the lands as a result of state action. Most probably, Beechwood Realty either defaulted on their agreement with Oglesby, or attempted to sell the lands while they had yet to hold title. In October of 1914, Queen Mab Company brought suit against Beechwood and others in a special term of the New York State Supreme Court. The court ruled and appointed a referee, William L. Snyder, to settle the matter by offering the mortgaged lands at public auction. On October 6, 1914, at the front door of City Hall, an auction was held. The premises conveyed to Beechwood Realty Company were purchased by the plaintiff Queen Mab Company for the amount of five thousand (\$5,000) dollars. On May 18, 1917, Queen Mab, a Wall Street based firm, sold all forty to forty-two and one half acres to another New York based firm, Marcy Realty Company.³⁹

³⁷Libre of Deeds 1764, pp.13-15

³⁸Libre of Mortgage 1412, pp. 388-89

³⁹Libre of Deeds 2144, page 460. Libre 2159, page 192

After a careful search of land sales through deed records, I was unable to locate Marcy Realty as either grantor or grantee. Residents indicated that the first homes built in this area were on Bushey Avenue and occurred sometime during the late 1920's and early 1930's. This is consistent with other evidence. No lands could have been sold off prior to 1927 when the first subdivision map of the area was filed with the county.⁴⁰ The map was entitled "Map of Nepperhan Gardens, Nepperhan Station, City of Yonkers, N.Y." This was one of the first actions that was necessary in order to divide the estate into lots for sale. It is not clear from the record which real estate company was in possession of the land when the map was filed. Interestingly, only a small number of homes were built during the Depression years. As mentioned earlier, most were constructed along the southern end of Bushey Avenue. Italian families were among the first in this area as well, but increasingly they were replaced by African-Americans after 1925. Since the deed records were apparently too incomplete to trace the sales forward from Marcy Realty, I decided to use informants to help me locate the earliest residents who moved to the area.

Informants reported that one early resident in this section was Thomas Keno and his family, who purchased their property in August 1946. They were among the first residents on "the Hill." Using the Keno name, I attempted

⁴⁰See subdivision map 3208

to trace the purchase of their home and work backwards chronologically, checking both grantor and grantee listings. What I discovered was shocking. The Keno's had purchased from Wekando, Inc.⁴¹ In the deed records I could not locate Wekando as grantee, nor Marcy Realty as grantor. How did Wekando, Inc. come to possess what turns out to be a large portion of the Fowler estate? Deed records show numerous entries in which Wekando continued to sell property in the area as late as 1969. In addition, a few lots were sold to the city of Yonkers during the forties and fifties, possibly to cover taxes on the remaining properties. No entries for Marcy Realty exist after their initial purchase in 1917. What is even more striking is that Woodson R. Oglesby was the president of Wekando, Inc.

It seems likely that Oglesby was able to capitalize from the misfortunes of others during the Depression in the mid to late thirties. He was able to either purchase lands from another realtor at a cheap rate, or to purchase the lands at public auction as a result of the previous owner having defaulted on taxes. Tax default was a common occurrence in real estate during the Depression years.

After nearly forty years, Oglesby reentered the real estate market in Runyon Heights after World War II, although the city retained a small parcel of land. Oglesby's son, Woodson R. Jr., today a seventy-five-year-old retired oil geologist living in Florida, indicated in a telephone interview that he knew little

⁴¹Libre of Deeds 4457, page 162

about his father's real estate dealings even though he was listed as vice president of Wekando on the 1960 deeds.

Clearly, ownership of the vast strip called "the Hill" was not a fast money making investment for Oglesby. Residents reported that the Keno family had an opportunity to purchase much of the entire "Hill" area from Oglesby when they arrived in 1946. Indeed, the Keno's did purchase a few lots as speculative investments, as did a number of other families who moved to the area. Many, however, purchased from the city rather than from Oglesby during the post war years, when the area experienced its greatest growth.

Today, few sizable pieces of land are available for development in the western section of the neighborhood across the tracks, although a few lots still remain on the hill. On "the Hill" to the east, the area is still in the process of residential development, and black gentrification. Along the southern end of Ridgeview and Patmor Avenues, and the eastern portion of Drake Place, new construction is currently underway. At least eight to ten homes have been newly constructed in the past decade. A number of private developers have also purchased lots in recent years. One major builder in the area is a West Indian born resident. The remaining undeveloped land in Runyon Heights is shared by both black and white private developers, and local residents. Even one plot, located on Sprain Road, is still owned by the City of Yonkers, and is designated Carter Ash Park. Unless this site becomes the future home of public

housing in the tract⁴², it seems likely that the remaining land will develop in much the same way as the rest of the area has developed since 1970, remaining black and middle class. New housing should reflect the single-family zoning currently designated for the area. In addition, new housing will reflect the rising costs of both real estate and building expenses in Westchester County. Whether built by a builder and sold on the open market, as were many of the Bushey Avenue homes, or built by an individual for his own use, as were many of the original Nepperhan homes, housing prices today in Runyon Heights range from approximately \$100,000 for older homes in the west, to \$250,000 for newer homes in the east. This is a far cry from the \$1,500 minimum housing cost covenant that appeared on the original deeds prior to 1920⁴³, or the reported \$2,900 one resident paid for their home as late as 1940, or even the \$15,000 paid by another resident in 1952.

One interesting note: The March 1, 1993 edition of the Amsterdam News contained an advertisement for a "Yonkers. Starter Home, Two Bedrms" Unlike the ads realtors placed in the twenties, this advertisement, for a home in the northwest section which is heavily populated by minorities, was placed by a private owner who sought to sell a home located in a predominantly black

⁴²During the summer of 1992, the city proposed building low income town houses on the site, believing that the land was vacant. The city abandoned its plan after community objections were voiced, at which time, the "park" designation of the land was made clear.

⁴³Libre of Deeds 2072, page 150

neighborhood. A telephone interview with the proprietor revealed that they had little luck selling their home through real estate agents. Few prospective buyers came to see the house. Their advertisement, which had been running for about a month, increased the potential for buyers at a rate of one to two a week. Needless to say, they were happy with the results.

Real estate development in Runyon Heights occurred at first in two distinct, yet overlapping stages. Rather than the straightforward sale of the entire area by one developer as was the case in many of the planned suburbs of the 1950's, the neighborhood was influenced by the actions of a number of realtors. The first stage involved the development of the area near the Putnam railroad tracks and extending out to Saw Mill River Road. This area is the western portion of Runyon Heights which sits on the land of the one time Runyon Estate and was the original Nepperhan neighborhood. Hudson P. Rose and Henry Southgate were both active players in determining the availability of the entire area to African-Americans. This laid the pattern for the second stage of development, involving the area which is known by local residents as "the Hill." This area, which was called Nepperhan Gardens by the Nepperhan Home Building Corporation, had no need to place minimum housing cost covenants on properties to exclude poorer families, as did Hudson P. Rose Company and Henry Southgate. The municipal practice of using zoning laws to limit the types of structures that could be constructed in residential areas made such measures unnecessary by 1940. By and large, "whites" increasingly avoided the area.

The net effect of the actions of these realtors and those who financed them, like Oglesby (Wekando) and The Trust Company of America, was to place both economic and racial constraints on the ownership of the Runyon and Fowler lands. This channeling effect to Nepperhan was aided by restrictive covenants restricting “non-Caucasians” across Yonkers. This led directly to the formation of a neighborhood which was racially and economically homogeneous.

World War II brought about a shift in both the educational status and occupational profile of new residents. Continued residential development brought increasingly middle class homeowners to the area, as reflected in the name change from Nepperhan to Runyon Heights. One older woman expressed an awareness of the differing economic positions between residents on the west side of Runyon Avenue and the Putnam, and those east of it, although she focussed on the timing of development in the two sections. She was careful to make clear that these class divisions do not transcend the boundary of community. While recognizing race as significant for the local conception of community, she nonetheless reiterates her keen awareness of class and status distinctions within the group. In a sense, this resident appears to gain social benefits from the recent gentrification of the area.

From the group we first had, I think we had a very ambitious group that made this community. They all moved from Harlem to this place, because they wanted more better and freedom. Not on this side, but this composes all, it looks like the tracks has divided, and mainly this side more business, you understand. That side is more residential. But like I said, we have judges, lawyers, doctors, and we have plenty of teachers and we have plenty of social workers across the tracks. Because it's all

Runyon Heights, 'cause when I say across the tracks, that area is more recently built up, so we have a very advanced community, I think. To me, now it's more professional.

Older, less educated and working-class residents have increasingly been replaced by more managerial and professional inhabitants, due to retirement and death. Thus the overall process of de-gentrification, which began in 1906, has gradually been supplanted by a process of middle-class gentrification since World War Two. Hudson P. Rose started the process moving. He broke with the racist tradition of suburban realtors and sold land to Negro buyers at a time when racial restrictions on suburban lands were prevalent. This action laid the foundation for black suburbanization in Nepperhan.

Over the years, other individuals have become involved in real estate speculation in Nepperhan. Some were local residents like local realtor Paul Bray. Other residents have profited as well. The Holiday Inn was built at 125 Tuckahoe Road. The land on which the hotel stands was originally owned by black Nepperhaners when it was purchased in 1959. The same was true for the Carvel Inn, which sits at the opposite corner at Sprain and Tuckahoe Roads. One Runyon Heights resident from the West Indies recently built a number of homes in "the Hill" area. Some are valued at well more than \$200,000. Still, non-residents, most of whom are white, have invested in property in the locale. One local business owner on Runyon Avenue owns a number of properties in the area. Some residents are disturbed over the fact that federally subsidized section 8 tenants occupy two of his properties. Their concerns reflect the fact

that absentee landlords have grown in number in recent years. Residents believe that property owners are more likely to maintain their homes, yards, and community than either landlords or renters.

While residents perceive that their way of life and their property values are threatened by a continued influx of economically marginal residents, another reality suggests that the process of middle-class black gentrification which began after World War II will continue, barring the construction of low-income housing in the area. This is due to rising real estate values in the county, and to the racialized characterization of the community, which continues to discourage most white home seekers.

Chapter Five

The Effect of Race on Community Formation

In its origins, the Runyon Heights area had the potential to develop into a multi-racial working-class settlement. Working-class Italian-Americans began to settle just prior to when Negroes began purchasing lots for the construction of their homes. The transformation of Nepperhan from a multi-racial working-class settlement to an area dominated by a stable African-American working- and middle-class community was, however, rapid. Within five years after the first African-American settlers arrived, the racial character of the Nepperhan area had been fixed. From its foundation, racial segregation provided the context in which a community of associations developed among residents. Nepperhan was, and still remains, the only residential area in Yonkers which is dominated by African-American middle-class homeowners.

Race and Suburbanization

At the turn of the century, the majority of Blacks and non-English speaking European immigrants were segregated on one side of town in industrial cities (Zunz, 1982: 57). This holds true for the City of Yonkers as well. Most working-class Negroes and European immigrants lived in the downtown Getty Square area located in the southwest of Yonkers. As inexpensive real estate on the fringes of the city was placed on the market in the late teens and early

twenties, land became increasingly available for sale to anyone who could afford it, with the exception of "Negroes" and other so-called "coloreds." Stable working- and middle-class families began to purchase homes on properties outside the traditional nineteenth-century ethnic slums. Zunz writes:

Blacks were the last group to arrive in large numbers in the industrial city. They experienced a settlement process radically different from that of white ethnic groups, a process which led to the formation of the ghetto. Compared with white ethnic groups, Blacks lived history in reverse: while foreign immigrants ultimately became assimilated into a unified structure dominated by the native white American world based on rank and social status within it, Blacks were increasingly segregated from whites on the basis of race and irrespective of their social status (Zunz, 1982: 6).

What Zunz hints at, but fails to make clear, is that the racial classification system in the United States, a system which designates social and human value based on skin color and other human physical characteristics, is itself a system of ascribed social status. Status within this system, however, is linked to a system of economic subordination which is centered in the labor and housing markets. It is a hierarchical system which favors European peoples over all others intellectually, morally, and culturally, and posits African peoples as the antithesis of the modern European. Individuals of African descent have been classified by a set of observable biological characteristics associated with central and sub-Saharan peoples, such as dark skin, thick lips, broad nose, and dark curly hair, and are placed in the racial category "Negro" (today "Black"). Those attributes which signify Negro racial membership have been deemed

inferior. Inferior status has served as a justification for occupational and residential exclusion. The Negro's low economic position has reinforced conceptions of his inferior social status; rather than viewing the Negro as dirty because he performed dirty work, it was believed that the Negro performed dirty work *because* he was dirty.

Race and Community Solidarity

All European immigrants were designated "white," regardless of the presence among many of them of the physical characteristics associated with Negroes. In addition, their lack of American language and culture did not prevent them from exercising the civic and social privileges which accompanied the "white" political classification. As they adopted Anglo-American culture, they were increasingly embraced as "White-Americans." Assimilation, as the term is used by Zunz, connotes not only cultural adaptation but, more importantly for the European, inclusion within the "white" political group. The result was that the non-English speaking European immigrant was granted honorary membership into the "white" group once he settled in the industrial city of twentieth-century America. Acceptance was crucial in the areas of housing and employment. European cultural differences, at first a barrier to inclusion, soon faded. Their children, in essence, became more "white" as they continued to identify with the American system of racial labels predicated upon the exclusion of the Negro. They benefited from the process of education and

assimilation towards the cultural mainstream, unlike the majority of their darker brothers who were consistently held separate and apart.

However, not everyone with visible sub-Saharan attributes or known African ancestry was completely excluded from industrial employment or better housing. Not everyone lived in the ghetto. In isolated spots, both land and employment were accessible to a few. As the streetcar suburb became a reality, African- and Caribbean-Americans, like their European cousins, sought new housing opportunities in the suburban countryside. Those who could afford to "move to the country" attempted to do so. Many worked hard, but found their dreams deferred by widespread discrimination in suburban residential areas. Others became homeowners in enclaves near the ghetto, only to find their homes later engulfed by the ghetto, as housing for Blacks became increasingly scarce (Zunz, 1982: 398). The eastside community of Runyon Heights was the one exception to this pattern of ghettoization in Yonkers. The original working-class area around Getty square on the west side continued a slow growth after 1920. However, by 1960, black migration to Yonkers had increased significantly. With the introduction of low-income housing projects, which were deliberately concentrated in areas dominated by Blacks, the area was transformed into a ghetto, which expanded dramatically during the 1970's. Working- and middle-class homeowners were enveloped in its path.

Zunz argues that as "occupational bonds began to replace ethnic bonds in the white community that Blacks were drawn into an ever growing ghetto,

irrespective of their social status" (Zunz, 1982: 398). Runyon Heights represents an anomaly to this pattern. It makes possible a closer look at the impact of racialization upon community formation and identity. Zunz fails to acknowledge the significant fact that the "white community " is a political fiction predicated upon the exclusion of non-European peoples from both industrial work and housing, thereby reinforcing occupational bonds as well as residential racial homogeneity, based upon so-called racial criteria. Negroes, as a result of racially-based discrimination, were overwhelmingly excluded from both industrial jobs and better housing opportunities, thus reinforcing racial boundaries along both occupational and community lines. Not only did European ethnics forgo ethnic bonds for occupational ones, those occupational bonds were closely tied to the exclusion of black workers from the industrial labor force as well as from the residential communities of so-called "white" Euro-American industrial workers.

While occupations along ethnic lines reinforced occupational bonds, as Zunz contends, "race" and racial ideology were equally important sources of group solidarity for the masses of European workers who originated from such diverse cultures. In fact, racial ideology was, and still is, crucial to the maintenance of the social order in the United States. (Omi and Winant, 1986: 63). Within that order, property and race are intricately linked (Dominguez, 1986: 56, 89) The politicization of African "blood," symbolized by skin color, within labor and housing markets helped to give racial categories the illusion of

being self-evident and primordial to both black and white workers. Black inferiority and racial difference became apparent to white workers since substandard jobs, schools, and housing among Negroes were testimony to their lower status and inferior nature. Ongoing political, economic and social exclusion helped to structure community political organization along racial lines. The need for community solidarity necessitated and reinforced the development of an active racial identity among Negroes. Maintenance of a self-conscious white racial identity among European immigrants in industrial cities was contingent upon the threat of Negro workers to the industrial labor and housing markets; maintenance of a strong Negro identity was predicated upon the ongoing occupational and housing discrimination which the group experienced. This helped to reinforce primordial sentiments among the Negro group, imbuing their segregated communities with a unique sense of peoplehood.

While black racial identity is made manifest by a rigid system of racial subordination and exclusion, white racial identity is dependent upon the threat of the black "other." A single racial label is imposed upon all African descendants, while those labeled "White" enjoy a wide range of identity choices, and often adopt both an ethnic-American and racial label. The benefits of inclusion within the white group are taken for granted (Waters, 1990: 18), and white racial identity is invoked when blacks threaten to challenge the political, economic and residential norms of exclusion.

Cultural and class differences among blacks are largely ignored by both Blacks and Whites, although the reasons and consequences are quite distinct. On the one hand, class and cultural differences within black communities are, by necessity, minimized in order to foster community solidarity and political empowerment; on the other hand, the threat of the racial "other" tends to focus Whites' attention away from their own exploitation and towards maintenance of the racial order. The creation and preservation of clear racial boundaries and the relegation of Blacks to inferior jobs and housing insure better jobs and housing for white workers and their families, while reinforcing notions of natural black inferiority. Whites become preoccupied with maintaining racial inequities, Blacks with eradicating racial inequities. Both groups tend to ignore the historical development of industrial capitalism and its role in the political construction of racial categories for the exploitation of American workers.

The near complete economic exclusion of the Negro worker was intertwined with racially-based discrimination in the housing market. The joint effect of housing and occupational segregation was a structuring of racial group membership along occupational and residential dimensions, thus reinforcing racial identity. Land restrictions placed upon African-Americans in Westchester County limited opportunities for the development of black suburban communities. At times, residents of some of Westchester's more exclusive suburban towns and villages will today boast fewer than 100 Blacks. The majority of Westchester's 119,000 Blacks are concentrated, in part as a result

of government policies, in the older cities of New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Port Chester, Tarrytown, White Plains, and Yonkers (Berger, 1993: 6). In 1920, new areas open to residential development in places like New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Bronxville, and Yonkers regularly restricted "coloreds." Numerous newspaper articles, dating from the 1920's to the present, have appeared detailing resistance to a Negro presence.⁴⁴

Resistance in Yonkers came from "white" residents, local financial institutions, and government agencies. In 1926, one Negro residential development, proposed by the Paterno-Morales Building Corporation, was redlined and refused mortgages by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, the Westchester Lawyers Title and Trust Company, The New York Title Company, The Prudential Life Insurance Company and many local banking institutions.⁴⁵ By the time the area was clearly redlined, fourteen homes had already been

⁴⁴For a general discussion of Negro residential resistance in Westchester County see "Working For Fair Housing," in the Herald Statesman, March 4, 1990, page J 1, by David Johnson, and "In Accord, Black and Hispanic Families Would be Offered Westchester Homes," in The New York Times, April 1, 1993, page B 6. For a discussion of Negro resistance in the Park Hill section Yonkers, see the Herald Statesmen, May 5, 1939, page 1; the Herald Statesmen, May 22, 1939, page 1; and the Herald Statesmen, May 19, 1939, page 1 and 2. For a discussion of Negro residential resistance to employment see the Amsterdam News, July 29, 1925, page 1. For a discussion of residential resistance to Negroes in the City of Yonkers see the New York State District Court ruling of USA, and Yonkers NAACP et al, v. Yonkers Board of Education, City of Yonkers, and Yonkers Community Development Agency, 80 CIV 6761 (LBS) , 1985 .

⁴⁵New York Age, July 3, 1926: 1

constructed, two Negro families had moved in, and a number of Negroes had purchased lots. The corporation purchased back the lots and homes from the Negro tenants. The Negro Sprain Ridge Park development, located in northeast Yonkers, was aborted and plans were made to "designate" the area for white homeowners. The practice of redlining was widespread in suburban areas across the nation. FDR's Home Owners Loan Corporation, as well as the Federal Housing Administration which continued the practices of the HOLC, all used residential security maps which designated Negro areas as undesirable investments. These maps were influential in the banking industry at a time when government assisted nearly 40% of eligible homeowners, refinancing more than a million mortgages between 1933 and 1935 alone (Jackson, 1985: 196-203). These practices hindered black suburbanization after 1930. Evidence suggests that these practices are widespread today. Yearly studies conducted by the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council since 1990 show a consistent pattern of bias against black applicants. Regardless of income, black applicants are rejected at nearly twice the rate of white applicants.⁴⁶

While respondents told of being refused mortgages in other residential areas in Yonkers and Westchester County, many would later manage to secure mortgages from local banks on Runyon Heights properties. In essence, middle-

⁴⁶New York Daily News, October 27, 1994 p. 61, "Mortgage lending bias clear as black and white."

class blacks were discouraged from property ownership in much of east Yonkers, while encouraged to lay roots in Runyon Heights. Runyon Heights proved to be one of the few areas in Yonkers and lower Westchester County where black home-seekers could secure mortgages from local banking institutions.

The Racial State, the U.S. Census and Black Community Formation

Nepperhan was the sole area, outside of the industrial section in southwest Yonkers, to become available to Negro buyers. However, its transformation into a Negro working-class community was gradual. The first buyers in the area were of European, and not African, descent. However, once African-Americans began to purchase land in the area, the territory was quickly identified as Negro.

Of the original ten heads of households who had settled there by 1920, five were Italian immigrants. One head of household was a French national. The remaining four were American-born European descendants. All ten were classified as "white" by the census. It was clear that the political and social designation of "White" was to be reserved for any person of European descent, provided they had no known African "blood." While respondents told of being refused mortgages in other residential areas, many would later manage to secure a mortgage from a local bank on a Runyon Heights property. In essence, middle-class blacks were discouraged from property ownership in much of east

Yonkers, while encouraged to lay roots in Runyon Heights. The prevailing racial taxonomy, described by anthropologists as "hypo-descent," is crucial to establishing the unique character of black racial communities in America (Nelson, 1986: 320; Davis, 1991: 5, 113-117; Dominguez, 1986: 26). Any amount of "African blood" was sufficient to warrant the "Negro" racial label. Since the demographic data employed in this study have used specific criteria for establishing race categories, an analysis of the presumptions implicit in those categories is necessary for a reflexive interpretation of racial demographic trends in Nepperhan.

Historically, the U.S. Census recognized a "mulatto" category, but had yet to define the term by 1860. "Mulatto" originally had a social definition which implied half Negro or African and half European or White. The terms "octoroon," "quadroon," and "mulatto," which referred to 1/8, 1/4, and 1/2 African ancestry respectively, were popular racial terms in the antebellum southern states of Louisiana, South Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia where sexual relations across "the color line" were common (Dominguez, 1986: 46; Davis, 33-50) In 1870, the "mulatto" category was officially defined to include "quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood" (cited in Davis, 1991: 11-12). The developing system of multiple racial categories prior to the Civil War became increasingly bifurcated by the 1860's, as mixed-race persons encountered white rejection and a rigid Jim Crow color bar. Politically distinct from the masses of Negroes, yet publicly stigmatized as

being Negro, mulattos increasingly saw themselves as a part of a larger Negro community, often finding only Negro housing and economic opportunity available to them. The census counted so-called mixed race mulattoes in a category distinct from "pure Negroes" until 1920, when the category was dropped. At that time, all persons with any known or visible African ancestry were labeled "Negro." Half of the so-called Negro category in the 1920 census would have been classified as mixed-race in any previous census.

Between 1920 and 1950, only three major race categories were officially used by the U.S. Census Bureau: white, Negro and other races. Ironically, the census fails to elaborate on just how one is designated "Negro," relying on the visual inspection of census enumerators. Implicit in the "white" category is the inclusion of all Europeans and their descendants, provided they possessed no "perceptible trace of African blood." The white category is essentially exclusive, placing limitations on membership. The Negro category is inclusive, confining those tainted by known African blood to the role of "Negro." In fact, "included as Negro are persons of mixed white and Negro parentage and persons of mixed Indian and Negro parentage unless the Indian blood definitely predominates or the individual is accepted in the community as an Indian⁴⁷" By the 1920's, "mulattos" had been socially and politically redefined as "Negro" and, accepting the new definition, actively participated in forming a new Negro

⁴⁷U.S. Census Report, 1950: 2

consciousness during the Harlem Renaissance (Davis, 1991: 42). The racial order in the United States had been effectively bifurcated, reflecting the political climate of Jim Crow America.

The racial order in America has been maintained by the U.S. Census, and its classificatory system of racial labels, even though "race" is no longer officially considered a scientific term by the bureau. The office of Management and Budget (OMB) which oversees the Census Bureau, created four official racial categories in 1978: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black, and white (Sandor, 1994: 38) Hispanic is classified as an ethnic category distinct from race. Increasingly Americans, who now self-designate race on the census form, are rejecting the four categories. Between 1980 and 1990, those who checked the "other race" category increased by 45% to 9.8 million. Since 1993, Congress has been struggling with revising the racial categories. Expanding the racial categories would draw attention to the arbitrary nature of the socially constructed classificatory system. Creating a multi-racial category would be an admission that races are not pure (Lee, 1993: 84 cited in Collas, 1994: 4). The abolition of racial categories raises the problem of government enforcement of anti-discrimination and affirmative action laws which require detailed knowledge of racial groups (Sandor, 1994: 36-42). However, this explanation alone cannot account for government reluctance to abolish racial categories. "Race" was an explicit part of the American definition of political citizenship since the Naturalization Act of 1790, which declared that

only "free white persons" could become naturalized citizens (Ringer, 1983: 109). Knowledge of who is "black" has been essential not only to anti-discrimination legislation but, more importantly, to the maintenance of the very system of racial segregation and discrimination that the Civil Rights legislation was intended to abolish. The racial paradox of American society is clear: racial classification (and racial identity) is needed politically and personally by Blacks as long as racial discrimination remains a force, even though the racial categories were themselves the result of the political, economic, and social subordination of the African slave.

Foundations of the Nepperhan Community

Between 1915 and 1920, Nepperhan's population grew slowly. The 1915 New York State Census recorded a total of 33 "white" persons in the 3rd election district of the 10th Ward, which encompassed what would later be known as Nepperhan. There were seven households. The heads of three households were foreign-born, two from Italy and one from Germany. In the entire ward, there was only one person designated "Negro" by the census. She was a cook at the Sprain Ridge Hospital, the only Negro among the 38 people living there at the time.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Also within the 10th ward on Sprain Road were two other hospitals. The Municipal Hospital housed 56 persons, but no blacks, and the Scarlet Fever Hospital housed 35 persons, no blacks.

A review of the demographic characteristics of those first settlers indicates a stable, predominantly "white" working-class settlement by 1920.⁴⁹ The occupations of the eight heads of households (see Table 5.1) indicates that early Nepperhan contained a semi-skilled, and skilled working-class population. In addition to having working-class roots, the majority were foreign-born. Five of the ten heads of households were born in Italy, one in France, and the remaining four came from either New York or New Jersey. Only one extended family was listed. All other families were considered nuclear, consisting of a married couple and their children. None of the wives or daughters was recorded as employed, although a number of sons began working by age sixteen. In total, the ten families accounted for fifty-six persons, including twenty-three children less than sixteen years of age, seventeen men sixteen years of age or older, and sixteen women sixteen years of age or older.

These first homesteaders purchased property in the southwestern portion of the Runyon estate. They lived predominantly on Runyon Avenue, Altonwood Place, 1st Street (Clement), 2nd Street (Dunbar), 1st Place (Horatio), Altonwood Place, and Saw Mill River Road (SMRR).

⁴⁹In the 1920 Census Manuscripts, occupation data on two Heads of Households were either missing or destroyed, although other information was still available on those individuals.

TABLE 5.1:
Occupations Of Employed Heads of Households 1920: Source:
 14th Census of Population Manuscripts Vol 398

Stone Cutter	Chef
Machinist	Laborer
Engineer	Sculptor
Salesman	Conductor
n=8	
missing=2	

In addition to the west side, a number of Italian-American families would soon settle on the southern end of Bushey Avenue, on the eastern boarder of the neighborhood. This street was unique. As a part of the Fowler estate, it was one of the earliest east side streets to be developed. Homes were built there in the late 1920's and early 1930's, by both European and African Americans. This settlement pattern remained as the neighborhood evolved, although many so-called whites, would relocate as the black population expanded. These few streets housed the majority of non-Negro residents. Over the next five years, blacks would become increasingly concentrated along Belknap, Bushey Avenue, Merrill Avenue (Moultrie), Monroe Street and Wilson Avenue (Touissant), before later expanding to the remainder of the Fowler estate.

In the vicinity of Nepperhan in 1920, more blacks lived and worked in the homes of "whites" than those who lived in their own households. Only four (4)

Negro⁵⁰ families actually lived in the area, out of the 7,905⁵¹ residents living in the entire 10th Ward. Nepperhan itself accounted for less than 1 percent of the ward's population. Most of the first Negroes who lived in the area rented on Saw Mill River Road, not far from Nepperhan. Only the most economically stable families would remain in the area. Two families were female-headed households and two were nuclear families with young children. The two female-headed households relied upon the income of a laundress and a washerwoman, neither very stable nor lucrative jobs. There were six children in each of the two households. The first nuclear family was that of Thomas Peterson, a laborer in a local hospital. Only the second of the two nuclear families would remain in Nepperhan. George and Lorrene Wilson first lived at 564 Saw Mill River Road, and later moved to 646 Saw Mill River Road (between Dunbar and Clement Streets), where they still remained in 1925. They and their three children would later live on Belknap Avenue, and become an integral part of the developing Nepperhan community. According to the Federal Census, George Wilson was a clerk in 1920. According to the New

⁵⁰ Although "Negro" was the category used in Census tables, census enumerators used the symbols "W" (white) and "B" (black) when designating race. The category which enumerators actually filled out on the census manuscripts was labeled "Color or race". We can conclude that "Black" and "Negro" were treated as interchangeable terms by census enumerators.

⁵¹ See Table 4, Population of Wards of Cities and Villages Having 5,000 Inhabitants or more: 1920, U.S. Federal Census.

York State Census, he was an electrician in 1925. This change, sometime between 1920 and 1925, reflects the essential role of stable employment in the community's development. In fact Mr. Wilson practiced his trade, working on many homes throughout the community.

In total, 54 Negroes lived in the 10th Ward in 1920. The four families, two of which lived on Saw Mill River Road on the border of Nepperhan, accounted for 21 persons. In addition, another 33 African-Americans lived in the households of European-Americans, where they were employed as nurses, maids, and servants.⁵² Blacks accounted for less than 1 percent of the Tenth Ward's population.

Establishing a Negro Community

Although records of deeds indicate that individual Blacks had purchased land from Hudson P. Rose by 1920, apparently no one had yet finished construction on their home, according to the 1920 Federal Census. Problems of exhaustiveness and accuracy plagued the census bureau. One family maintains that they arrived in 1918. The Perencheif family rented a home on Monroe Street during the summers for two years prior to the census. In addition, the 1925 New York State Census fails to list all of the members of the Perencheif household who were living there at the time, including the informant

⁵²1920 Federal Census Manuscripts, 10th Ward, District 3.

who was recently recognized publicly at the Second Nepperhan Reunion Day for being the longest living resident of the community.

Even given the possibility of an undercount in both the federal and state censuses, the area experienced a metamorphosis between 1920 and 1925, which laid the foundation for its future race and class character. The 1925 New York State Census manuscripts show that a significant demographic change had occurred within the locality since 1920. This census data corresponds with that of real estate records, as well as with the memories and legends of local residents.

Negroes first responded to advertisements placed in the *Amsterdam News* by Rose and Southgate. Word of mouth seemed to be equally, if not more significant, than the advertisements. The newspaper was not, however, the main source of recruitment for many of the earliest tenants. Residents reported that many of their families had learned of Nepperhan through friends, acquaintances and relatives in New York, as well as through those who had already ventured north into Nepperhan and other parts of Westchester County. Coming to Nepperhan, in many cases, was simply a matter of circumstance and timing. People were searching for a place to build a home, but often found resistance in other suburban areas. Nepperhan provided a safe haven for black home builders, with its country dirt roads, apple trees, and wild flowers. The news spread through word-of-mouth. At that time, most of the territory was still undeveloped woodland and farmland; in short, land was cheap and plentiful.

One resident, who first purchased his land in 1921, recalled how he came to Nepperhan. Born in Barbados, he and his family were living in Harlem on West 143 Street. They had been looking for property, responding to ads in newspapers, when they first discovered Nepperhan. After having been ignored by a realtor in New Rochelle, they came upon Nepperhan by happenstance.

They (a New Rochelle realtor) didn't notice me so I came back. You see my wife was down in the store across the street (West 143 Street), telling them that she had went to New Rochelle to look at this land, and they wouldn't even notice her. And the woman said to her, why don't you come go with us to a place called Nepperhan. You may like it there. Sure enough she built that house across the street there. And one Sunday we came up to take a look around, to see what's going on. This was the only lot on this street that was vacant, that wasn't sold.

Over the years, multiple generations of families have settled in Nepperhan and branched out into the neighborhood. As the community expanded, along with its reputation as a middle-class haven, a number of residents came to the area during the late nineteen thirties and forties by having developed contacts and friendships at bridge club gatherings attended by Nepperhan residents. After 1960, real estate brokers, who knew of the community's outstanding reputation, increasingly directed black middle-class home buyers to the area.

Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, in their book American Apartheid (1993), maintain that as blacks moved north after nineteen hundred, whites increasingly barred blacks from white neighborhoods. Black migration and Industrialization brought about increased racial and class segregation in

American cities (Massey and Denton, 1993: 25). This pattern is evident in Nepperhan. By 1925, 369 people had moved to Nepperhan (see Table 5.2). Not only had the neighborhood grown by more than 600% since 1920, but the Negro group had grown at a rate which surpassed both the native white and foreign-born white categories. The "white" group, which had originally constituted virtually 100% of the district's population, now accounted for only 47% of the population. The Negro population, on the other hand, rose from a handful of families, which was probably ignored by the 1920 census takers, to at least 195 people, constituting 51 households. One resident remembers that the area was, at first, racially balanced:

Respondent: We had a lot of Italians living here at that time.

Interviewer: When you first moved to the neighborhood, how many blacks were living there? Half and half or... ?

Respondent: No, personally a lot of people will dispute me, but at that time it was half and half. Maybe a tip of the scale more blacks. You had a lot of Italians and you have got to realize that with all these houses, there was nothing but vacant land up there. A lot of Italians from the Bronx, owned all this vacant land, and what they used to do was plant their gardens and they use to live in the Bronx.

Table 5.2: Population of Nepperhan by Race and Nativity, 1920-1925

<u>Year</u>	<u>1920</u>	<u>1925</u>
Total Population	56 (100%)	369 (100%)
Total Negro	NONE	195 (53%)
Total Foreign Born Negro	NONE	14 (4%)
Total White	56 (100%)	174 (47%)
Total Foreign Born White	12 (21%)	57 (15%)

Table 5.2 demonstrates the rapid expansion and racial transformation of the area in merely five years. Not only was land being rapidly purchased but, also, many new homes were being constructed. Many settlers were actually homebuilders who possessed carpentry and masonry skills, and were active in the construction of their homes.

Over the years in Runyon Heights, many black residents were active in the construction of a number of local buildings and homes⁵³. During the twenties and thirties, Charles Poe, George Wilson, Shaw Dickerson, Mr. Cook,

⁵³Sources: The Civic Recorder, and interviews.

Mr. Williamson, and Norman Downs, were all active participants in the construction of Nepperhan homes. Charles Poe did carpentry work, while George Wilson did electrical work for local residents. Shaw Dickerson built his ranch style home at 25 Moultrie Avenue. Mr. Cook, a brick mason, built two brick homes on Chelsea Place during the early nineteen thirties. Mr. Williamson, a realtor based on 145th Street in Harlem, also built a red brick home at 148 Belknap Avenue. Norman Downs, a Prince Hall Mason and second black to join the carpenters' union in Yonkers during the forties, The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, had helped in the construction of a number of homes in addition to his own at 54 Moultrie Avenue. He built small bungalow style homes at 39 Moultrie Avenue, and at 142 Belknap Avenue, and also helped to lay the foundation for the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, located also on Belknap Avenue. His specialty was pitched roof buildings, although he did help to build the small brick building at 13 Monroe Street, which was home to two locally owned markets. Mr. Downs, who died at the age of ninety-nine in August of 1994, was former Grand Master in the James H. Farrell Royal Lodge of the Prince Hall Masons in Yonkers. This is an honored position among Masons, and is a testament to his skill and wisdom as a master carpenter. Many Nepperhaners are still often participants in the building of their homes today. Of most recent note is Tom Coleman who has reportedly built four homes, including his own, on Patmore Avenue. Unlike the first residents, who built only their own home or was

contracted to work on a neighbor's home, today's builder/residents are more likely to be contractors or builders who also speculate by engaging in other new home construction in the district. Since the 1930's, such small scale speculation has occurred periodically by both black and a few white builders.

The phenomenon of skilled artisans from the local community building their own homes was usual for working-class suburbs in the 1920's (Zunz, 1982: 170). While the practice was prevalent among both white and black homebuilders in Nepperhan, Zunz does not identify any Negro builders in his study of the Chicago suburbs. However, if Yonkers is representative of other housing markets, the availabilities of land and stable employment would have been crucial determinants of Negro home builder success.

In his study of American suburbanization entitled Crabgrass Frontier, Kenneth Jackson describes how the development and availability of inexpensive construction techniques, such as the balloon frame structure, made home ownership possible for the first time to the masses (Jackson, 1985: 125-126). However, like Zunz, he also maintains that Blacks did not participate in the home ownership boom:

As in so many other aspects of national life, black Americans didn't share in the home ownership boom. Their migration from the plantation south to the urban north led to gains in civil rights, but the pattern of the ghetto - residential segregation, underemployment, substandard housing, disrupted family life, inferior education, and disease - separated the black experience from that of white ethnics. Because of racial discrimination, blacks were unable to enter the housing market on the same terms as other groups before them. Thus the most striking feature of black

life was not the slum conditions, but the barriers that middle-class blacks encountered in trying to escape the ghetto. (Jackson, 1985: 132-133)

The black settlers in Nepperhan managed to overcome the obstacles leading to innercity ghetto entrapment. They purchased land and constructed their own homes on the one time Runyon Estate in the eastern suburban periphery of Yonkers. In addition to the new home builders, many families settled in already existing residences, often renting at first and later purchasing a home in the district.

The white population in Nepperhan was made up largely of immigrants, as was the rest of Yonkers. However, this group was predominantly of Italian descent. The foreign-born European population accounted for 33% of the total white group of Nepperhan in 1925 (see Table 5.2). Of the 57 foreign-born white persons, 47 (82%) were from Italy (see Table 5.3).

Employment patterns among the early Italian-American residents paralleled those of other Italian immigrant communities. The men of European descent were employed in local unskilled, semi-skilled and craft industries. Those in Nepperhan, however, fared above average. Between 1895 and 1910, 15% of new Italian immigrants in America were skilled workers, while the majority, 77%, was unskilled (Weigold, 1984: 63). In Nepperhan, 27% (n = 49) of all employed white men were in the skilled labor category, while another 35% were classified as "other labor," meaning non-skilled (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.3:
Population of Nepperhan by Nativity, 1925.

Total		
Population.....	369	
		(100%)
Total Foreign		
Born Black.....	14*	
		(4%)
West Indies.....	9	
Virgin Isles.....	3	
Trinidad.....	1	
Puerto Rico.....	1	
Total Foreign		
Born White.....	57**	
		(15%)
Italy.....	47	
Poland.....	5	
Ireland.....	3	
Austria.....	2	

*Includes one Child

**Includes Two Children

TABLE 5.4
New York State Census Demographics Of Nepperhan, 1925

	Black	White	Total
Total Persons	195	174	369
Total Females			
16yrs and older	70	42	112
Total Males			
16yrs and older	62	54	116
Total Children			
under 16 year	63	78	141
Total Households	51	29	80
Total Female Headed			
Households	3	0	3
Total Foreign Born			
Headed Households	7	24 (21 Italian)	28
Total Foreign Born			
Persons 16 yrs and older	13	55	68

TABLE 5.5
Occupations of Employed Women 16 Years and Older by Race,
for 1925*

	White Women	Black Women
OCCUPATION		
Social Worker.....	None	1
Teacher.....	None	1
Nurse.....	None	1
Merchant.....	1	None
Dressmaker.....	None	4
Chef/Cook.....	None	1
Weaver (carpet mill).....	4	None
Drum room (carpet mill).....	1	None
Presser.....	None	1
Maid/Housemaid and Cleaners.....	None	17
Messengers.....	None	2
Housework (not employed).....	32	38
Retired.....	None	1
School.....	3	3
Missing Data.....	1	None
Total Employed.....	6	8
Total Persons.....	42	70
% Employed.....	14%	40%

*Source: 1925 New York State census Manuscripts.

TABLE 5.6:
Occupations of Employed Men 16 Years and Older by Race, 1925*

	White Men	Black Men
OCCUPATION		
Contractor.....	3	1
Salesman.....	1	None
Tailor.....	1	None
Bookkeeper/ Clerical.....	2	1
Builder.....	None	2
Clergyman.....	None	1
Musician.....	None	1
P.O. Clerk.....	None	1
Granite Merchant.....	1	None
Skilled Labor..	13	11
Cook/Chef.....	1	2
Decorators....	None	3
Chauffeur.....	4	4
Coachman.....	None	2
Porters.....	None	8
Truckman.....	None	4
Other Labor.....	17	18
Laborer on Railroad.....	4	None
Expressmen/ Messenger.....	None	5
Farmer.....	2	None
School.....	3	None
Missing Data....	2	2
Total Employed.	49	64
Total Males....	54	66
% Males Employed.....	91%	97%

Source: 1925 New York State census Manuscripts.

TABLE 5.6b
Corresponding Class and Occupational Categories

<u>Economic Class</u>	<u>Occupational Type</u>	<u>Jobs</u>
Upper Middle Class	High White Collar	Professional Large Merchants, Managers, Industrialists.
Lower Middle Class	Lower White Collar	Teachers, Social workers, Clerical, Sm. Business owners, City admin.personnel.
Upper Working Class	High Blue Collar	Police, Fire, Sanitation, Postmen, Porters, skilled craftsmen, semi- skilled union workers.
Lower Working Class	Low Blue Collar	Unskilled workers, Salaried service workers, Domestic, cleaners.

Negro men in Nepperhan were largely semi-skilled and skilled workers. Their employment pattern reflected a segregated occupational structure. While no white men were employed as truckmen, messengers and porters, these occupations accounted for 25% of all employed black men (see Table 5.6). The combined categories of "truckmen," "messengers," "porters," and "other labor" (non-skilled), accounted for 55% of the employed black men in 1925. A full 24% were non-skilled laborers. The traditionally stereotyped "Negro jobs" of chauffeur, coachman, porter, cook, and non-skilled laborer ("other labor") accounted for 53% of the male labor force. Those holding skilled labor or traditionally middle-class occupations were a minority of the male residents, but nonetheless a significant portion of the workforce. Skilled laborers represented 17% of the working male population. Among those employed in traditionally middle-class occupations, three (3) decorators, one (1) musician, one (1) clergymen, two (2) builders, and one (1) contractor together accounted for another 12.5%. Twenty-nine percent of the employed men in Nepperhan had either skilled or middle-class occupations. Using occupation as a proxy for class (see Table 5.6b), this original Nepperhan group was a mix of skilled and unskilled workers, clearly blue-collar, with a sizable middle-class (white-collar) constituency (see Table 5.6).

Black workers were segregated into largely service occupations that existed outside of local industry. The local industry jobs that were available to Blacks were few, and almost always the most undesirable. One resident, the

son of a cook and a Pullman porter for the New York Central Railroad, purchased his home in Nepperhan in 1929. A worker at Otis Elevator since 1955, he recalled:

Well, there was a lot of Blacks working there, but at that time most of the Blacks worked in the Foundry. And there were porters. During the war, Blacks started working there. There weren't no Blacks working there before the war.

One woman, who moved to Nepperhan in 1939, was active later in protesting black exclusion in Yonkers' industrial sector. She remembers the employment situation for black workers during World War II, when she was the first black nurse to work at Yonkers General Hospital:

There was several (Blacks) who worked at Phelps Dodge, and there were a few up at Anaconda, and a few at Alexander Smith, several at Otis. The sugar place, but as things began to open up, there was always a few people to go into them.

She continued to tell how local black doctors like Dr. John Alexander Morgan⁵⁴, a noted physician among Negroes, were denied the right to treat their patients at Yonkers General. White counterparts did the treatment or even surgery, receiving all of the recognition. Even with the opportunity for employment which World War II brought to Yonkers, Negro employment always remained marginal. Blacks were not hired until outspoken black residents, both

⁵⁴Esannason and Bagwell (1993) report that Dr. Morgan, the second black physician in Harlem, moved his successful practice to Yonkers in 1905, becoming Yonkers' first black doctor. (see page 28).

from Nepperhan and the west side, protested. They organized during the 1950's, taking their message directly to employers.

Not only community people, but they were people from out of the community who were interested in it. But they decided that the community should get busy, because in all of these plants and things people were going to work for defense. And they weren't hiring black people here, you know. So they decided that they would make a survey and a visit to all of these plants. And Mr. McRae and Dr. Rivera I think it was, and me. The three of us went to these various places like Alexander Smith down here. That was a big going factory then. And we went to Phelps Dodge, and we went to Anaconda Wire and Cable, and asked them why they didn't hire blacks. ...I didn't go to Otis, but I think they went. I think they went, but I think Otis had one or two black people anyway . . . And there was money around, and black people weren't getting any. And so that's why they went into it. We were being called to go fight, well not really to go fight, but to go serve those fighters.

Negro men were largely segregated within the local labor market. Moreover, interviews revealed that the majority worked outside of the City of Yonkers, finding better opportunity and pay in New York. Some of the porters worked for hotels and movie houses in Harlem, sometimes not far from their previous apartments in the community. One woman, who has lived in the area since the late teens, recalled:

Yonkers just wasn't hiring black people, so you had to work in New York . . . we had a lot of porters. That was considered at that time a good job, you understand. We had a lot that worked in the movie houses. I don't mean the big movie houses. I mean the two cent movie houses. And still that was considered a big job for a Negro at that time too . . . Alexander Smith, period, didn't hire no blacks, period!

TABLE 5.7:

Population of Persons 16 Years and older By Race and Gender,
1925*

	Black	White
Female	70	42
Male	66	54

Source: 1925 New York State census Manuscripts.

While the vast majority of both white and Negro men more than sixteen years of age were employed in 1925, Negro women worked outside the home at rates far higher than those reported for white women: 40% for Negro women as compared to 14% for white women (see Table 5.5). Three of the six women in the white group who worked outside of the home were of Italian descent. Those white women who did work were most likely to be employed locally in the carpet mills as weavers. Weavers accounted for 66% of all employed white women. Black women were employed in a wide range of occupations, including social workers and teachers. However, the vast majority held more marginal "Negro women's" jobs. In fact, 45% of all employed Negro women were employed in low-skilled, service-oriented jobs as maids, housemaids or servants. Like the men in Nepperhan, most experienced a highly segregated and limited job market. Interviews revealed that many worked for

hotels and in the homes of wealthy whites who lived in the more exclusive areas of New York City and lower Westchester Count. One woman recounted:

Bronxville. That was the place where most black people (women) worked from the area here. There was a lot of people working, doing domestic work, and I guess the pressure was on them, because there wasn't very much for men to do during those days with the Depression, but the women were more or less able to keep things going by this "day's work," which was four dollars a day.

Another male resident stated:

During the Depression, if it wasn't for my mother working, because the factory jobs were down to nothing, so by my mother and her aunt and all of them doing domestic work helped to bridge the gap during those lean years . . . Oh, they were working like one day a month, two days a month until things picked up. After Roosevelt got in and they started that New Deal, back in the late thirties, then things started picking up. But up from the time I was born, up until 1931 I was born, until that time things were pretty rough. They were only paying like fifteen dollars a month rent and they could hardly pay that. And at that time, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and my sister and myself, we were living in the same apartment. So one week they would pay the rent and the next time my father would pay it . . . For quite a few years there, they weren't working that much. But they held onto their jobs, they didn't quit their jobs and go to another job which is good, because they were both able to get a pension and everything. In those days, not too many jobs that blacks could get had pensions.

Domestic employment for women was common in Nepperhan until World War II, when the first opportunities emerged for their employment in public institutions and private businesses. This high rate of employment among women in the community has remained constant. Black women have historically been more likely than their white counterparts to be employed

outside of the home. This was particularly true of the women of early Nepperhan.

It has been argued that the marginal incomes of the black middle class require that there be two wage earners in order to maintain middle-class status and family stability (Landry, 1987: 97-98). Landry maintains that among white families, employment of the mother had no effect upon the educational achievement of the sons. However, the opposite is true for middle-class black families. "Unlike white wives, black wives' additional economic role often enabled their sons and daughters to obtain a college education" (Landry, 1987: 98). While this did not insure middle class mobility or stability for Nepperhaners, employed women raised the prospects for their children's education, thus increasing their likelihood of obtaining future middle-class employment.

The evidence in Nepperhan suggests that the two wage-earner model is essential to both the middle-class mobility of working-class families and the stability of traditionally middle-class families. Many families would have lost their homes during the Depression was it not for the working women in those households. A number of families maintained a middle-class lifestyle due to the salaries earned by women. Often their income supplemented and compensated for the racially depressed incomes of their husbands.

The West Indian Presence

Prior to the enactment of restrictive immigration laws during the 1920's, more than 100,000 West Indians migrated to the United States between 1900 and 1920. A majority located in New York City and neighboring areas. By 1930, foreign-born blacks, mostly of West Indian origin, represented approximately 1% of the Negro population in America (Sowell, 1981: 219).

A number of authors have made reference to what we shall call "West-Indian exceptionalism," and what Stephen Steinberg critiques as "the myth of West Indian success" (Steinberg, 1989: 275). According to the mythology, West Indian black culture provided West Indian-born workers with a decisive advantage over American-born blacks, whose culture was deemed dysfunctional in industrial urban society. In Beyond the Melting Pot, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer argued that: "The ethos of the West Indians, in contrast to that of the Southern Negro, emphasized saving, hard work, investment, education" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970: 35). Thus, they contend that cultural difference and family account for the large number of Negro leaders and accomplished men who originated in the West Indies. Like Frazier (1962) they trace the problems facing native-born blacks back to the supposed disintegration of the black family during slavery (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970: 52; Frazier, 1962: 114).

Thomas Sowell made a similar argument ten years later in Ethnic America (1981). Pointing out that West Indians possessed lower unemployment rates,

higher incomes, lower fertility rates, lower crime rates, and over-representation among professional occupations when compared to those of native-born black Americans, Sowell argues that the differences lay not in occupational backgrounds but, rather, "in their behavior patterns" (Sowell, 1981: 219). Like Moynihan and Glazer, he posits the "culture" or "values" of native-born black Americans as the primary source of their limited mobility. Sowell takes the argument one step further, suggesting that the relative success of West-Indians is proof that racial discrimination is not a major obstacle to native-born black Americans; he states that "the West Indian Experience itself seriously undermines the proposition that color is a fatal handicap in the American economy" (Sowell, 1981: 220).

In The Ethnic Myth (1981), Stephen Steinberg critiques the proponents of West Indian exceptionalism. He asserts that cultural traits fail to explain economic success in American society. Arguing that immigration to the United States was selective, drawing some of the most skilled workers, Steinberg details the considerable social class advantages which immigrants held over native-born blacks. He points out that West Indian immigrants were largely skilled (40%) and literate (89%), giving them a distinct advantage over native-born blacks in the job market (Steinberg, 1981: 276). Sowell himself points out that West Indians were overwhelmingly from urban areas (Sowell, 1981: 219), which also provided them with another comparative advantage in the New York regional economy when contrasted with the largely rural native-born black

migrant population. Steinberg provides the most comprehensive critique and rejection of the "West Indian exceptionalism" model, building on the works of Reynolds Farley (1987), Nancy Foner (1987) and Roy Simon Bryce-Laport (1979) who have also discarded it.⁵⁵ The myth of West Indian exceptionalism, like many myths, is rooted in part in reality. Many West Indian immigrants were indeed economically successful in America. Their presence was also significant in Nepperhan. However, many of the West Indian born Nepperhaners came to the United States experiencing downward economic mobility. One resident, who was originally from St. Croix, was a classical music teacher by profession. Settling in Nepperhan in 1926 with his family, he was unable to find work teaching music. However, his literacy skills favored his scoring well on the civil service exam. He secured what was considered a "good job for a Negro" and joined the Postal Service. Another resident who was originally from the Dominican Republic, also found it difficult to secure work in the field in which he had been trained. He arrived in the U.S. in the late fifties, after having been head engineer for an airlines in the Dominican Republic. Yet he was unable to find work in the engineering field at Teterboro, Laguardia or Kennedy (formerly

⁵⁵Reynolds Farley, "West Indian Success: Myth or Fact," unpublished manuscript (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Population Studies Center, University of Michigan, 1987.) Also see Nancy Foner, "West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis," in Sutton and Chaney, eds., *Caribbean Life in New York City* (New York Center for Migration Studies, 1987) and Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, "New York City and the New Caribbean Immigration: A Contextual statement," *International Migration Review* 13:2 (1979)

Idle Wild) Airports. He reluctantly drove trucks to the south for a while. Frustrated, he returned to trade school for welding. Eventually, he secured work as a maintenance man for the Hotel Taft in New York City, while he worked part-time as a superintendent of a building on South Broadway in Yonkers. Although these men, like many others, worked long hard days, the skills they possessed permitted them access to some of the few stable jobs available for blacks in the region. This pattern was typical among Caribbean-born Nepperhaners. Southern-born blacks, unless they came from the most advantaged families, were at a decisive disadvantage in the job market. For southern migrants in Nepperhan, mobility was generally upward. Access to stable employment was the essential prerequisite for becoming a homeowner in the Nepperhan community. Thus skills and education, rather than "culture," account for any advantage in family mobility foreign-born blacks may have held over the native-born.

Many Nepperhan residents perceived that a large portion of early Nepperhan was of West Indian descent, while many others pointed to the presence of large numbers of southern migrants. Emphasis depended primarily on family background. Indeed, the majority of Nepperhaners over the years have come from the West Indies and the upper Southern states of Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. While the native born appear to have always significantly outnumbered the foreign born population in Nepperhan, a number of current residents can trace their families to the West Indies. Interviews

confirm that many native-born and West Indian-born residents first lived in predominantly Negro Harlem. Most native-born black residents in Nepperhan were first-generation southern migrants, while others were Yonkers natives, their families often being second, third, or even fourth or fifth generation northerners. Still, others came from varying parts of Westchester County. While it is true that virtually all of the foreign-born blacks were from both the French and British West Indies, they represented a small minority of newcomers moving to Nepperhan during its formation, accounting for only 7% of the total African-American population in 1925.

Family, culture and individual perseverance were noted as important characteristics of individuals and the community by the descendants of both foreign and native born settlers. Regardless of being proud of their family heritage, residents valued racial cohesion over national or ethnic culture. In retelling their own collective history, the Nepperhan community emphasized race above all other factors as the key to both individual and group success. The significance of race over culture or nationality is evidenced by the high rate of intermarriage between the different stocks, which was common among even the first generation.

One resident, not atypical of those early settlers, was the son of a West Indian-born Pullman porter father, and a North Carolina-born mother who was employed as a cook. The family moved from Harlem to Nepperhan in 1929 when he was a child. While he was employed primarily as a stock clerk at Otis

Elevator Company, he and his wife managed to build a home in Runyon Heights.

He remembers those early years of sticking together:

"I think we, as a group, race didn't bother us too much, because we were kind of clannish, and we wanted to keep the original families together. We all kind of held onto our lands- to our families, so it was kind of hard anybody buying into the area unless they were a family member or knew somebody."

It is interesting that hostility between immigrant and foreign-born residents never developed, neither among the first generation of residents, nor between those who have recently settled. In the minds of most residents, community survival has always necessitated racial solidarity. Philip Kasinitz suggests that although an underlying tension existed between Caribbean-born and native-born blacks in Harlem, race dominated both the life chances of Harlemites and the political discourse of local politicians (Kasinitz, 1992: 51-53). Even the tensions between the two groups described by Kasinitz can be easily explained as class rivalry and conflict between the better educated and skilled immigrants and the more rural and unskilled southern migrants. Thus in Runyon Heights, where class differences remained minimal and in many cases nonexistent race became the clear focal point for collective mobilization and community identity formation.

The myth of West Indian success, widely espoused by scholars and the media (O'Donnell, 1994: 4A) and embraced by some residents, is not supported by the historical evidence in Nepperhan. Clearly, some of the community's

most prominent members have either come from or had roots in the Caribbean. However, their success in Nepperhan is not particularly unique. What is of greater significance is that the residents of Nepperhan emphasized community racial solidarity, over and above their regional, religious, cultural, social class, and national origins. The root of this solidarity lay in their common experiences with racial discrimination. The same forces that channeled many foreign-born blacks to Harlem, and that channeled them into service and menial jobs, and that opened limited housing options in Yonkers and other suburbs, were also the forces which impressed upon residents the need for minimizing differences. Ethnic and cultural identity among native- and foreign-born blacks, while observable in both groups, did not take precedent over racial identity. As Kasinitz writes about the Harlem community that ". . . a feeling of commonality, based partially on an awareness of a common history and heritage, but also on an awareness of common problems faced in racist America, helped forge a shared black identity (Kasinitz, 1992: 50).

Caribbean immigrants in the community acknowledged their unique cultural background when discussing family histories. However, local descriptions of the community and its members emphasized a racial identity over distinct ethnic or national identities. While interviews suggest that first-generation immigrants maintained the strongest ethnic identity, their children became increasingly socialized into a context which recognized skin color, rather than a specific ethnic culture, as significant social markers of status. While

friends, linked through churches, social groups and work, race provided the central mechanism for recruitment into the neighborhood. A new community of associations was constructed within this new locale. This new setting was structured by the racialized environment of the outside world. Due to segregation and their relatively small numbers, West Indians were forced to locate within the larger American Negro community. Their approach was not nationalistic, though they advanced the cause of "the race" over and above that of their ethnic or national identity, "which accounted for the limited disharmony between the groups" (Green and Wilson, 1992: 121). Nonetheless, ethnic or national identification persists, and is evidenced by the over glorification of Caribbean successes by a few individual community members.

TABLE 5.8: Occupations of Foreign-Born Black Heads of Households, Nepperhan, 1925*

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Class</u>
Builder	1	West Indies	ao
Steamfitter	1	Virgin Islands	w
Chauffeur	2	Bermuda	w
		Virgin Islands	w
Cook/Chef	2	Trinidad	w
		French West Indies	w
Porter	1	Danish West Indies	w

 Source: 1925 New York State census Manuscripts.

ao=self employed

w=salaried worker

Table 5.8 shows that West Indian workers were evenly distributed among both skilled and semi-skilled occupations. While they and their descendants have played an integral role in the Nepperhan community, their numbers did not dominant over native-born and southern blacks.

In addition to the "myth of West Indian success" held even by a number of Runyon Heights residents, another myth concerning the community's founding also persists. According to community folklore the area was founded by black Pullman porters and postal workers. Although postal jobs became increasingly available to black men throughout the 1940's and 1950's, those who first settled were most likely to be skilled or semi-skilled workers. This myth was even repeated in a recent historical account of blacks in Yonkers called A Study of African-American Life in Yonkers From the Turn of the Century (1993) In fact, only one postal clerk was among the employed residents of Nepperhan in 1925.

One Runyon Heights resident, who moved to the community in 1955, retired from his post office job, as a "carrier," in 1989 after 35 years of service. While he acknowledged widespread racial discrimination in the postal service, he at times rationalized this discrimination by "blaming the victim." Since the system of testing for prospective employees seemed more ethical and fair than earlier "political" hiring practices, the respondent attributed the failure of blacks to obtain employment as an indication of individual failure, rather than

of discrimination or a biased test. This view, which is indicative of the negotiated self interest inherent in a racist and materialistic society, allowed the respondent to claim personal achievement, rather than to acknowledge that job security was a matter of luck. Still, in the end, the respondent was uncomfortable with his conclusions:

Interviewer: Were there many black postal workers in Yonkers?

Respondent: Not when I started, no. They were very rare. I was one of the few, back in 1956, I was one of the few letter carriers. They had some clerks working inside, but there was only.. One of the first black letter carriers in Yonkers lived out here. Roland Francis. He lived down on Bushey Avenue. In fact there were two. He was up there when he died .. But he was one of the first. You see, when he got on, they didn't even have to take a test. It was more political. They just said, I have a guy here and I want you to give him a job. When I came on, you know, you had to take a test. I think the same thing then holds true today, that the blacks don't want to take those tests. They are fighting there now. They're trying to get more black policemen on, but for some reason or other the blacks don't want to take those tests and get on those jobs. They're begging them, you know, I guess you've seen the signs around. They have a test coming up in December, I think, or January. And it was the same thing then, of course we weren't making that much when I started, but at the same time, they could have gotten on if they could have passed the test. And the same thing holds true from 1956 and here it is 1992 and they're still having trouble recruiting those- I don't know what it is.

Porter was the single most popular job category among Caribbean- and native-born black men in the Nepperhan community, accounting for 13% of all employed males in 1925. Most porters, however, did not work for the railroads or belong to the influential and sometimes radical Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Six of the eight porters were not Pullman porters (see Table 5.6).

The emphasis placed upon the occupations of the Nepperhan men should not obscure the role of black women in maintaining a stable working- and middle-class standard of living for the families of Nepperhan. Residents made surprisingly few references to women working during this early period. This may be attributed to the fact that many of the first women who worked were employed in domestic service. The low status of the domestic worker is at odds with the traditional image of the middle-class woman as suburban housewife. This romanticized image of women permeated many recollections of the past. While a large percentage of black women remained employed throughout the community's history, the image of the housewife persisted since many mothers did indeed take on this traditional role in the community. During the fifties, some even sold Avon and Tupperware products part-time, or worked for the school district, allowing their schedules to match their children's.

Housing, Employment and the Black Middle-Class Suburb

In Nepperhan, native-born and Caribbean-born black men were largely employed outside of local industry in Yonkers. Many were the first working-

class commuters to New York. Like black women, the vast majority were hired in service-sector jobs. Unlike the majority of women of European heritage who remained at home, black women were employed in large numbers, primarily in domestic service as cooks, cleaners, housekeepers, maids, and laundresses. The relatively stable employment conditions Nepperhan workers enjoyed allowed them to take advantage of the unique opportunities available in the local housing market.

The black worker's concentration in service jobs and industries indicates the continued presence of a racially segmented labor market in Yonkers. Labor segmentation held significant consequences for reinforcing local bonds and community identity based upon conceptualizations of racial solidarity. This was evidenced later when the local community rallied support to challenge African-American exclusion in local industry in the 1950's.

The fact that Negroes gained access only to certain jobs, while living a segregated existence, meant that the formation of occupational status within the black community differed qualitatively from that of "white" Americans. Many blacks were self-conscious of this distinction. Ideas such as "that's a good job for a colored man" were not uncommon. Black workers who maintained stable working-class jobs were recognized as high-status members of the community. They often considered themselves, and were considered by other community members, to be "middle class."

Thus Nepperhan has always been considered a middle-class community, both by outsiders and locals, although the demographics of the area did not approximate the traditional middle class until the 1950's. These observations are consistent with past research, which indicates that black America has had a class structure distinct from that of the larger society (Frazier, 1962; Landry, 1987) The American class structure has historically been founded upon the exclusion of black workers from the pre-industrial (slavery), industrial, and post-industrial labor forces. As Frazier noted, the marginal position of African-American workers has consequences for the status structure of the occupations in which they are employed. However, equally important is that this marginal position of even middle-class black workers, and the segregation they experienced in the housing and labor markets, also carries consequences for the formation of racial boundaries and the fostering of racial identity. Earlier researchers failed to recognize the inherent conflict between the material and racial interests of the black middle class. Earlier assessments chose to embrace a social class model, which emphasized status and lifestyle over economic and political hegemony. Thus, as the black middle class experienced more economic success, it was argued that race was less significant in shaping their lives. They are used as evidence of the "color blind society." In fact, the relative success of the black middle class is often used as justification for dismantling affirmative action programs. Even with moderate material advantages, race is

constantly invoked by the black middle class in Nepperhan, because their way of life is threatened by the forces of racial subordination.

Nonetheless, the subordinate role and status of the black worker in the American occupational structure does not indicate a truly separate class structure. Rather, the black worker's exclusion from industrial, and later corporate employment, relegates him to a marginal position within the American class structure, both within the traditional blue-collar working class, and within the traditional white-collar middle class. In effect, the black class structure can only be understood within the context of this larger class system, historically predicated upon the large scale exclusion of black workers.

From its beginnings, Nepperhan provided a unique setting for the development of a black middle-class community. Over time, associations formed which were predicated upon race in addition to class unity. While the community was founded upon the primary group and social contacts which black newcomers had developed in their places of origin, community solidarity was created and maintained due to the continued significance of race in the local occupational and housing markets.

Chapter Six

Historical Periods of Community Development

Spatial and Temporal Conceptions of Community

The social organization of Nepperhan evolved over five distinct historical periods: 1912 to 1925, 1926 to 1945, 1946 to 1960, 1961 to 1980, and 1981 to the present. While each time period is analytically distinct and captures a unique phase of community development, community members only roughly refer to the divisions used in this analysis. Residents were most likely to refer to general historical points of reference such as World War II, the Depression, or the 1960's. At other times, allusions were made to significant incidents in their personal life histories, using the event itself as a historical reference point.

However, four distinctions were used consistently by residents throughout the community to refer to either time or place. Temporally, residents discriminated between "Old-timers" and "Newcomers." While the definitions vary from individual to individual, generally speaking most residents consider the early 1950's to be the cut off point between the two groups; those who settled before are considered "Old-timers" while those who settled after are considered "Newcomers." The closing date of School 1, in 1954, roughly coincides with this distinction. However, the labels of "Old-timers" and "Newcomers" are contextual. They mean different things to different

community members depending upon the context and person(s) with which they are used. For instance, residents who were children in Nepperhan during the 1920's might refer to those from their parents' and grandparents' generations as the "Old-timers," while those who were children in Nepperhan during the 1940's might also refer to those from their parents' or grandparents' generations as the true "Old-timers." Still, newer members to the community tend to refer to the older adults, who were already established when they arrived, as the "Old-timers." As with age in general, the concept of "old" is relative in Nepperhan.

Spatially, residents made a distinction between those who lived on the west side and those who lived on the east side of the Putnam railroad tracks. This geographical division loosely corresponds with two distinct periods of real estate development in the areas. The west side of the tracks was developed largely before World War II. However, this area originally contained a few streets which were actually east of the tracks. The southern portion of Bushey Avenue (below #98) and Sprain Road, as well as Monroe Street, Belknap Avenue, Touissant Avenue (formerly Wilson Avenue), Moultrie Avenue (formerly Merrill Avenue) and Hunt Avenues were all east of the railroad and developed before World War II. This area was originally populated by a largely lower middle- and working-class population. The remainder of the east side, a steep

hill, developed largely after World War II. This area, often called "the Hill,"⁵⁶ contained a predominantly middle-class population of managers and professionals.

The term "across the tracks" conveyed different meanings to different residents depending upon which side they lived on and which side they happened to be on at the time they were speaking. While the west side residents carry the status of being the authentic and original founders of the area, the east side "Hill" residents are recognized for being more financially stable. These two references overlap in the minds of many community members. Boundaries within Runyon Heights are fluid, and no clear-cut relationship exists for most community members. Residents usually avoid confusion on this matter by making reference to actual streets or families, which then situates the conversation both spatially and temporally. Table 6.1 shows the official dedication dates of west and east side streets, according to the *Yonkers City Planning Bureau*. Of the 14 streets dedicated in Runyon Heights between 1927 and 1930, six were actually east of the railroad, but not actually on "the Hill."

A third distinction made by residents concerns the community labels themselves, which embody conceptions of both time and place. To the west

⁵⁶The "Hill" area developed primarily after World War Two due to the difficulty of clearing dense land on steep grades prior to the widespread use of automobiles and tractors in home construction.

of Hunt Avenue is the original settlement area, referred to as "Nepperhan" or "Old Nepperhan." Most residents consider the "Old-timers" as living in what they think of as "Old Nepperhan." However, "Old-timers" themselves include Bushey Avenue, the street on the eastern border of the community, along with Sprain Road, as an extension of "Old Nepperhan." To the east of Hunt Avenue is the most recently developed area, generally known as "the Hill." Most "Newcomers" live on "the Hill," or east of the "Put." Most residents think of the entire area as Runyon Heights, including both the "Hill" and the original Nepperhan area. The name "Runyon Heights" was used by residents as early as 1933 to refer to the "Old Nepperhan" area. The Runyon Heights Improvement Association, and the Runyon Heights Democratic Club both adopted the "Runyon" name early in the community's formation. Other community groups used the Nepperhan name. During this early period, no distinction in place was made between the two labels. Nepperhan, in essence, was Runyon Heights. The two names were used interchangeably. Today, however, the two labels sometimes carry distinct connotations of time and place. "Old-timers" tend to live on and be associated with the west side, or old Nepperhan, while "Newcomers" tend to live on and be associated with the east side, Runyon Heights, or "the Hill."

It is no coincidence that after World War Two, the term of preference for the entire area increasingly became Runyon Heights. The name "Heights" invokes images of exclusivity, characteristic of the wealthy estates of the

industrialists, which once dotted the Westchester landscape. Nepperhan, increasingly invoked images of the railroad, rather than of the river which originally gave meaning to the word. Streets which were once named after the streets of large cities, like First Street and Second Street, were renamed with proper names during the nineteen twenties and thirties. By the 1930's, "Place" was often used as a street name title. Like "Heights," the title "Place" also connotes exclusivity.

A fourth distinction was made between the early rural and later suburban characterizations of the Nepperhan community. The Getty Square area on the west side, largely populated by the black working class, was referred to as "downtown," whereas the Runyon Heights area was referred to as "out here," "out in Nepperhan," or "out in Runyon Heights." Traveling to Getty Square, residents would often say that they were "going downtown," "going to Yonkers," or "going to the Square." Black residents from the Getty Square area, on the west side of the city, often made reference to Runyon Heights with phrases like "out in Runyon Heights." While the references to time and place, embedded in the labels of "Old-timers," "Newcomers," "Nepperhan," "Runyon Heights," "downtown" and "out here," do not fully reflect the historical development of the community, they have been fundamental in helping to shape local conceptions of community.

TABLE 6.1: Dedication Dates for Runyon Heights/Nepperhan Streets*

West Side Streets	Dedication Date	East Side Streets	Dedication Date
Runyon Avenue	August 2, 1927	Monroe Street	August 18, 1927
Altonwood Place	May 26, 1928	Touissant Avenue	August 18, 1927
Clement Street (1st Street)	January 28, 1929	Belknap Avenue	August 18, 1927
Dunbar Street (2nd Street)	1932	Moultrie Avenue (Merrill Avenue)	August 18, 1927
Kenmore Street (3rd Street)	March 15, 1929	Bushey Avenue	October 5, 1929
Potomac Street (4th Street)	October 21, 1929	Hunt Avenue	August 18, 1927
Dearborne Street (5th Street)	October 21, 1929	Chelsea Place	August 9, 1936
Roanoke Street (6th Street)	November 25, 1929	Patmor	April 8, 1958
Horatio Street	June 28, 1929	Lamar Place	April 8, 1958
		Woodrow Avenue	November 25, 1958
		Ridgeview Avenue	September 9, 1958
		Drake Place	1967
		Charlotte Street	(private)

*From the files of the City of Yonkers Planning Bureau

Five Periods of Social Development

While movement to Runyon Heights has continued virtually uninterrupted for more than seven decades, our analytical division of the community into five time periods captures distinct phases in its development. The first period of community social development in Nepperhan covers the years 1912 to 1925. The Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E.), which became the dominant religious institution in Nepperhan, was founded during this period. This epoch also witnessed the physical delineation of community boundaries. The creation in 1924, by the original real estate developers in Homefield, of a "four-foot reserve strip" segregating Nepperhan from Homefield, served both materially and symbolically to reinforce a racial rift between the two communities.

The second period, 1926 to 1945, is marked by the continued development of social groups, organizations and even a few local businesses. The original church group expanded and built a house of worship on Belknap Avenue. Many groups which would eventually form, like the Runyon Height Improvement Association (RHIA), had membership which overlapped with that of the church, as well as many other groups. Other groups, like the Mens Club, were direct outgrowths of the church. While the membership of the RHIA has strongly overlapped historically with that of the church, the organizations have remained distinct. The RHIA, which was founded around 1929, was instrumental in bringing Nepperhan residents together to address the social and

political needs of the community. The Nepperhan Community Center was founded by the Runyon Heights Improvement Association. Located on Monroe Street, its mission was to provide recreational and social life to community members. Also on the corner of Monroe Street was a store reportedly connected to the Colored Merchants Association, a "Negro" cooperative group led by F. J. Moultrie. The store was called Smith's Nepperhan Model Market. Constructed during the late twenties by local resident Norman Downs, the store was owned and operated by the Smith family. The small brick grocery store at 13 Monroe Street had only moderate success; it closed after only a few years, following the death of Mr. Smith.

During the second period, a number of small businesses sprang up in Nepperhan in addition to the Model Market. Some men advertised carpentry and electrical skills to new home builders. Others started small business in their homes. "Trents" barbershop, located in his home, was one favorite meeting place. The Roadside Inn, a local restaurant owned by A. C. Houston, served southern cuisine and a dancing atmosphere at 738 Saw Mill River Road. Right next door, at 678 Saw Mill River Road, The Cabin was another place for food and drink. It too was a locally owned establishment. Paul Bray sold property in Nepperhan. Still others rented rooms to borders, a form of housing subsidy still used by some residents today.

In addition to local business and social organizational development, this period saw the beginnings of political organization in the community, as

attempts were made to isolate the Nepperhan children from the public school system in Yonkers. Nepperhan mothers organized around 1929, challenging the city and the Board of Education, because their children were segregated from the newly constructed Roosevelt High School.

The Depression years brought changes to the stable environment forged during the first years of Nepperhan. The period brought massive job layoffs, and crippled many of the small enterprises in the community. Although many residents lost their homes due to bank foreclosures as the Depression continued, many more stuck together, pooling the resources of neighbors and family members. Many of those who lost their homes remained in the area, and were later able to purchase another home when employment opportunities increased during the 1940's. One homeowner recalled:

Yeah, we brought the house. Then we lost it. So we rented over there and stayed over there for a long time and then we moved over to the house we got now. So we bought that house. That is on the other side on Moultrie Avenue . . . My brother still owns that. My two parents passed away but my brother got it. It is still in the family. And this house here, when we were living on Dearborn Street. This house was built by a guy named Frank Lena. He built it for his daughter. He used to live over there.

Many families took in foster children in order to supplement the family income and keep their dreams of suburban home ownership alive. Foster children were so common in Nepperhan that no apparent stigma was attached to the families or the children. One woman told of her experiences growing up

during the Depression; her father had been furloughed one or two days a week, and family resources were strained:

That's when my mother did take in the children to supplement the income . . . You could board foster children and she did. And it was like one big happy family. They called her mom, and they were like our sisters . . . She had two at a time . . . They would come and stay maybe two years or six months.

The significant commitment made by many Nepperhaners to welcome poor and homeless black children into their homes was buttressed by the fact that the children also provided an often important source of additional family income. While the personal commitments and sacrifices of Nepperhaners who were devoted to improving the lives of these children cannot be minimized, we need to also recognize the material advantages many stood to gain from by becoming Foster Parents. In fact, many older residents recognized this issue, and addressed it during interviews when the topic of Foster Children and the depression came up. This example again demonstrates the negotiated relationship between the community's racial and material interests.

During the Depression, more families took in borders. Both borders and foster children were attempts to maintain financial stability while preserving the integrity of the community. In addition to these supplemental incomes, many women worked day jobs as domestics before the Depression. For many, these jobs became the sole source of stable family income. Other families had enterprising youngsters who learned to pilfer coal chips from the coal bin on

Runyon Avenue during the cold winter months. Some of the boys ventured to the public-owned Sprain Lake Golf Course, where they could find jobs as caddies. One resident told of going to the golf course at age 12, where he could earn \$1 and a \$.25 cent tip in five hours for caddying a round of golf. But even here, racial discrimination was a part of the experience. He explained there were not many black caddies:

In those days it was really something to get a black caddie- for a black caddie to even get a job to even get a job, but since this was a new course, and they needed caddies, they weren't too particular about it, 'cause this was a public golf course. I play golf by there now. incidentally, I'm a golf buff now. If you want to play, I'll beat ya right now! (He chuckles) . . . But that wound up not all roses because, after awhile more of us came up there until we had about a dozen black caddies . . . Sometimes when the caddy master would send you out on the tee, these white golfers would look at you and say to the caddy master, 'Hey, you give us these black boys, we don't want these black boys for caddies.' So the caddy master would say, all right you kids come on back . . . So when we come back, the white kids would look at us- 'what happened, what happened?' We were ashamed, we wouldn't even ay what happened, you know. And the caddy master would send somebody else out. Then, finally, he would send us out.

Women were essential to the survival of many families throughout this era. Besides battling school boards and supporting their families, women were actively involved in local organizations. Their prominent role in the church and local civic associations was fundamental to community stability. In the early thirties, women ran a newsletter for the RHIA. The newsletter, called the Nepperhan Civic Recorder, was a periodic report of community events, clubs, outings, and local businesses and services. It served the important role of

disseminating pertinent information to residents. At least five area women were involved in its publication: Maud Jackson, editor; Lorraine Wilson, Julie Poe, Frances Frances, and Gertrude Skinner, reporters. The publication was discontinued during the depression years when community resources were thin. Today, the RHIA publishes the Runyon Heights Voice, which serves a similar role. However, the Voice no longer advertises local services or businesses.

This era also witnessed the flight of many "white" Americans from the area. Sometimes whole families moved, many relocating to the neighboring Homefield area. At other times, the children (of the original inhabitants of Horatio Street, Bushey Avenue and Runyon Avenues), married after the war and moved elsewhere, some ending up in the neighboring Homefield community.

During the 1930's, some of the families along Bushey Avenue were replaced by members of the Father Divine⁵⁷ Peace Mission Movement. At least three families along the strip were members of the controversial multi-racial religious group. They too became a part of black Nepperhan. Outside the community however, the "multi-racial" religious group drew heated conflict when they purchased a mansion at 357 Park Hill Avenue in the then all-white Park Hill section of Yonkers in 1939. The mansion was to serve as a commune or "Heaven" for the mixed race membership. Even here, race was the clear reason for local objections to the sect. The May 1, 1939 front page of the

⁵⁷Local Historian Michael Rebic provided source materials on the Father Divine Movement.

Herald Statesmen read: "Park Hill Gasps at Heaven Purchased by Father Divine...Former Valle Mansion on Lowerre Summit Acquired by Negroes-Association May Seek to Invoke Zoning Law-Stoltz Threatens to Leave Town." Alexander Stoltz was then director of the Yonkers Chamber of Commerce, as well as resident of Park Hill. The Father Divine movement in Nepperhan was short-lived. By the 1950's, no members of Divine's "Heaven" lived in the community. In 1965, Father Divine died, leaving a dwindling group of followers behind, though an organizational base still remains today in Philadelphia. Ironically, the Park Hill Residents Association which had originally protested the presence of the Negro religious leader, favored the designation of the home as a landmark in 1993 (Fitz-Gibbon, 1993: 10A).

The third period covers the postwar years, 1946 to 1960, and is characterized by increased employment opportunity as well as attempts, on the part of residents, to maintain and insure the middle-class character of the community. New residents came to Runyon Heights, as the area was increasingly called, precisely because it was peopled by black homeowners. While searching for a place to build a home, many learned of this insulated community from friends who had already relocated there. Others were steered by local realtors.

This was also an era of occupational mobility for many Nepperhan families. If Nepperhan experienced a Golden Age, it was the period following the war. Job opportunities abounded in the post war years compared to earlier

epochs. This era also observed a shift in the attitudes of employers in Yonkers. The change in attitude towards the employment of black workers was spurred not only by government policy which now barred discrimination in the awarding of government contracts, but more significantly by demands made by Runyon Heights residents and black residents from the west side of the city for equal employment opportunities in local industry. For the first time black workers were hired in the better paying industrial and managerial jobs. The residents of this period experienced many "firsts." One of the first black saleswomen at Macy's in New York City, the first black nurse in Yonkers General Hospital, and the first black workers at the Alexander Smith Carpet Factory were among the Nepperhan residents of this era. However, the loosened local employment market was more than offset by the rapid decline of the manufacturing base of Yonkers after 1954. In sum, Runyon Heights can be still characterized as a commuter suburb.

The locality continued attracting black homesteaders while the number of whites peaked around 1940 (Table 6.2)⁵⁸. The racial composition of the local school, School Number 1, also changed significantly. However, the change in school demographics was not a result of more black children and fewer white

⁵⁸Note that due to irregularities in the way the census counted race in the 1970 Census, these numbers are most likely attributable to Census error rather than to a rapid rise in the overall white population in the area. Interviews confirm this interpretation of the data.

children living in the area. Nepperhan children were gerrymandered into isolation, leaving School 1 segregated and underutilized.

Attempts had begun to segregate Runyon Heights, not just within the school system, but also by residential space. As Runyon Heights became increasingly populated by black homeowners, the major civic group in Homefield, the Homefield Association, apparently reasoned that restrictive covenants were insufficient at restricting black spillover into Homefield, and felt the need to solidify the boundary between the two communities. While the four-foot reserve strip which divided the two communities was in existence since the Homefield area was first subdivided in 1924, the Homefield Association purchased the four-foot wide reserve strip in 1947 from the resident who had formerly owned the property. This would insure that streets connecting the two areas would never be built. This buffer zone, though invisible to the uninformed, none-the-less symbolized Homefield's racial exclusivity and a rejection of the Nepperhan residents as neighbors.

Table 6.2:
Population of Runyon Heights, N.Y. (Census Tract 18) by
Race, 1925-1990*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Pop.</u>	<u>Black Pop.</u>	<u>White Pop.</u>	<u>Hispanic Pop.</u>
1920**	56	0 (0%)	56 (100%)	NA
1925***	369	195 (53%)	174 (47%)	NA
1940	1,015	736 (72%)	279 (28%)	NA
1950	1,109	836 (75%)	272 (25%)	NA
1960	1367	1,100 (80%)	263 (19%)	NA
1970	1485	1,068 (72%)	397 (27%)	18****
1980	1270	987 (78%)	238 (19%)	26*****
1990	1378	1,085 (79%)	214 (16%)	96

*U.S. Census of Population unless otherwise noted

**U.S. Census Manuscripts

***New York State Census Manuscripts

****Hispanic origin or descent

*****Total Hispanic

What is particularly interesting is that during the same year the reserve strip was purchased by the homeowners association, Blacks first entered the Homefield area. Alfred and Ernestine Morgan, former Nepperhan residents, became one of the first two black families to build a home in the Homefield area⁵⁹. Interestingly, they did not buy their property on the normal real estate market. Indeed, many Homefield properties carried restrictive covenants. The Morgans were, however, able to purchase six lots at city auction. They chose to build on three of those lots. The public auction purchase allowed them to bypass the "normal" racial controls that realtors and owners exerted on property in the area. The spot where they purchased was still undeveloped, so they had no close neighbors. Other lots were also available for sale by the city just across the road for \$200. In short, the reserve strip was purchased by the Homefield Association just at a time when black homeowners first entered the all-white enclave.

In fact, according to U.S. Census data, tract 19 in Yonkers (Homefield) contained only one black resident in 1940, only two in 1950, and merely thirteen as late as 1960. Today, however, the black population in Homefield is slowly growing. According to the 1990 U.C. Census, though Homefield remains 92% white, there are 109 blacks comprising 7% of the community's residents. Social scientific evidence in works like the Chicago Area Study

⁵⁹Reverend Wyatt T. Walker, a noted Harlem minister was also an early resident of the Homefield community.

would suggest that should the black, albeit middle-class, population continue to increase, white homeowners may seek housing options elsewhere. This may occur even though the middle-class residential character of Homefield is insured by housing costs and zoning regulations. In other words, should the area become too "black," white flight may occur and middle-class blacks may come to dominate the area along with the Latino and Asian presence which has also already been established. In the final analysis, the four-foot reserve strip may prove to be only a temporary barrier to a non-white presence in Homefield.

Though the first family-run store proved unsuccessful in Nepperhan, a second store emerged, on Monroe Street in the late 1940's. Owned and operated by Adeline and Richard Williams and Tyler (Jackie) Jackson, this store too was only moderately successful. The Williams' eventually became sole proprietors until this last Nepperhan "mom and pop" store closed in 1952. Retail businesses, except those on Saw Mill River and Tuckahoe Roads, never proved successful in the community.

As outside forces impinged upon their way of life, the maintenance of both the middle-class character of new residents and the suburban single- and two-family home character of the area became increasingly important to the racially isolated community. Political mobilization was aided by the educational and financial resources of the community, allowing for the construction and maintenance of local institutions. The defunct Runyon Heights Improvement Association was rejuvenated in 1956 as a result of the city's plan to build 335

units of low-income public housing on the southern end of Ridgeview Avenue.

Residents wished to maintain low population density, as well as the level of city services which accompanied single- and two-family housing. They organized and petitioned city government to defeat the proposal.

Not only did Runyon Heights organize to oppose low-income housing, but they did so with the help of the Homefield Association, who also contested the proposal. What was particularly significant about this alignment between the two areas along class lines was that the fight for low-income housing in Yonkers has been championed by the local NAACP. In fact, numerous leaders of the Yonkers Branch of the NAACP have been residents of Runyon Heights. So while the community championed the cause of racial oppression by supporting NAACP activities as well as often providing the organization with intellectual resources, it has also sought to protect its own class interests by resisting low-income housing. The community won the battle, successfully resisting the original plan of 335 units, but it lost the war, being forced to accept a smaller 48-unit project on Dunbar and Kenmore Streets. In 1959, the Holiday Inn Company purchased the land and constructed a hotel on the site of the original proposal.

The end of this third period signaled the end of Nepperhan isolation and the beginning of a defended Runyon Heights community. So too, did it witness the period witnessed the beginning of industrial decline in the City of Yonkers, which escalated by 1970 (Zukin, 1991: 145). Industrial decline effectively

negated many employment gains which black workers of the baby boom generation had made in local industry after the war. However, this change would not be felt by Runyon Heights workers until the next decade.

The fourth period, 1961 to 1980, can be characterized as a period of community defense and community building. With the help of local residents, the reactivated RHIA constructed another community center on Runyon Avenue. The expanded services of the new Community House helped to maintain active participation in the RHIA by residents old and new.

While a new community center was being planned and constructed, a hotel and a motel opened on the southeastern boundary of the community. Their presence further threatened the area's tranquility. The Carvel Inn, a parking motel which also sold freshly made ice cream, was built in 1960 at the intersection of Sprain Road, Tuckahoe Road and Bushey Avenue, which made Sprain Road now connect to Bushey Avenue at the fork. The Holiday Inn hotel chain built a low-rise hotel at the corner of Bushey Avenue and Tuckahoe Road in 1959.

In addition to a hotel and motel, other business establishments came to the areas along Tuckahoe Road and Saw Mill River Road. Businesses and industry brought traffic congestion, noise, and the feel of city life to the tranquil borders of Runyon Heights. The establishment of commercial enterprises along Runyon Avenue during the sixties and seventies brought congestion, air pollution, and noise inside the otherwise bucolic community. This was a great

change from the unobtrusive activities which had been common along the railroad.

Ironically, while businesses infiltrated the community, industry in Yonkers continued to decline due to the deindustrialization of the region. Industrial decline, as well as middle-class occupational stagnation, helped to break the widespread pattern of upward family occupational mobility which had characterized the Nepperhan community throughout the nineteen fifties. A new cohort, consisting of those raised during the mid-nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties, was most affected by industrial decline. Just at the point where government-enforced affirmative action was opening up managerial jobs to black workers across the country, local skilled and semi-skilled industry in Yonkers was vanishing. By the 1980's, the two largest employers in Yonkers were the City of Yonkers itself, and its School District (Zukin, 1991: 154). As a result of both industrial decline and white collar "downsizing," occupational mobility was uncertain for this generation. Either they gained entrance to public or corporate employment, or they were relegated to service sector occupations. While the vast majority acquired at least as much education as their parents, the securing of a stable job in the private sector proved to be more difficult.

The occupational and educational mobility of this cohort tended to take three distinct directions. Interviews revealed that one group experienced continued upward mobility, acquiring advanced education and securing professional and managerial positions. Success for many often meant relocating

to other cities and regions, although a few of the more successful children of Runyon Heights have either remained in the community or returned with their families, sometimes purchasing property on "the Hill." A second group experienced downward mobility, achieving high levels of education but failing to find stable employment. A third group experienced lateral mobility, securing low and medium white-collar positions, often in the service-sector, similar to those of their parents, despite the fact that many had attended college and even possessed masters degrees. Among this group, some were able to purchase homes, like their parents; others, still unable to purchase a home, continued to live with their parents; still others turned to drugs or alcohol as societal pressures mounted. This last group represents a significant deviation from former generations, and indicates the direct effect of larger societal influences on the relatively isolated suburb.

Since School 1 was closed in 1954 as a result of complaints by Runyon parents, this cohort did not experience community-based education, as had earlier generations. The closing of School 1 made it more difficult to recruit members of the cohort into the central social and organizational bodies of the community. School 1 had been a community school, where the local Boys Scout Troop met, and community children developed lifelong bonds with school mates who had also been their neighbors. In fact, Boy Scout Troop 34, made up of only Runyon Heights children, had been sponsored by the School 1 Parent Teachers Association. The closing of School 1 dispersed the Runyon Heights

children to a number of schools. This helped to not only weaken community bonds among the group, but also to weaken social control over deviant behavior among youths. Today, the only major focal point for integrating both children and parents into the community is the Community House and its array of youth-oriented programs.

Many of the new, more affluent homeowners on "the Hill" were not born or raised in Nepperhan. They arrived after 1960 and tended to possess higher than average levels of education, and hold managerial, administrative and professional occupations. A number had broken or at least cracked the "glass ceiling" so prevalent in private industry. Like earlier settlers, many are married with children. However, while extended families were commonplace during the first fifty years of Nepperhan, families of these latest homeowners tend to be nuclear.

The fifth period of social organizational development in Nepperhan is, in many ways, the least clear. Covering the years between 1981 and 1993, this fifth and final period has seen older residents retire to the South and the Caribbean. At the same time, however, there has been a return to the community by some of the children of early Nepperhan residents. These returnees tend to hold the most middle-class occupations in the community. Most have returned with their new families, to an environment they believe to be beneficial to their children. Today, many are employed by city, state, and federal agencies as administrators, supervisors, counselors, teachers, and social

workers. Public sector employment is prevalent among the youngest families. Managerial and administrative employment in corporate America seems to have relocated most native Nepperhaners to other areas. Remaining Nepperhaners are more likely to be employed in the local public sector. Those few holding high level administrative positions in the private sector often possess unusual skills in their fields. For instance, the community contains lawyers, realtors, local business professionals, and a Federal Judge, as well as two security experts who manage security for two different national sports organizations. Many of these residents, however, were not native Nepperhaners, having purchased their home after securing their employment status. A few have technological expertise as computer consultants. Many of the most successful members of the community are entrepreneurs, having broken the constraints of both corporate and private sector employment. While predominantly middle-class by socioeconomic indicators, the Runyon Heights community in no way resembles the kind of middle-class suburban community one might associate with the "organizational man." By objective standards, the community today contains a diverse representation of both working-class and middle-class occupations.

Place, Space, Race and Class

The physical space, in which the community of associations has developed in Nepperhan, is defined as "black space," both by those inside and outside the community. While local labels in Nepperhan make further distinctions which incorporate status, tenure, and locality, the racially segregated social life in Nepperhan makes racial identity an integral part of community identity. In addition to the racial basis of community identity, the area is also imbued with a particular suburban, middle-class character. While Nepperhaners recognize that financial, educational and occupational status differences often exist between those from "Old Nepperhan" and "the Hill," both groups characterize the entire Runyon Heights area as both middle-class and black. This dual race/class image is based on the belief that home ownership in the community represents entry into middle-class society, while racial membership is determined by their widespread acceptance of the "one drop rule." Part of what makes the community distinct in the minds of its residents is their perception and maintenance of the illusion of both racial and class homogeneity in Runyon Heights. Those from outside the community also view the area fundamentally as both black and middle-class, and often contrast it with either the more working-class black community on Yonkers' west side, or other predominantly white suburban areas. In fact, Runyon Heights symbolizes the black middle class in Yonkers.

Although a small white, largely Italian population has resided in the area since its settlement in 1912, the two groups remained segregated for much of their institutional and social life. During the early period, only the children interacted on a regular basis, playing baseball and football in the undeveloped lots which characterized the area. A few became lifelong friends. Adult neighbors often became friendly towards one another, but friendships were rarely maintained across institutional boundaries. Members of the white, largely Italian group were likely to attend Catholic churches and schools. Black Nepperhaners were likely to attend School 1, and Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church. While the two groups lived seemingly side by side, institutional segregation structured interaction between the groups. One Italian-American woman believed that the local community association, called the Runyon Heights Improvement Association, was a relatively new organization to the community. While she has been a resident since 1928, and even raised her children there, she did not know of the existence of the original association which had played a pivotal role in the lives of many black Nepperhaners from the same period. Interestingly, once retired, a handful of non-black residents have become involved in the local Runyon Heights Improvement Association. This was likely spurred by their desire to maintain the area's quality of life, and the fact that many are now retired.

While residents of the community are still aware of social class differences between community members, and even use terms such as "The

Hill," "old timers," "newcomers," and "old Nepperhan" to convey subtle status distinctions, residents nonetheless invoke a middle-class and black definition of community and self. The constant influx of increasingly higher status black residents continues to provide the basis for reinventing both the race and class identity of the community and its residents.

Chapter Seven

The History of Social Organization in the Nepperhan/Runyon Heights

Community

"I think that one of the things that happened in Runyon Heights, right, this is a stable community. I don't think there is a community in Yonkers- white, black, or otherwise that can say the things that we could say. For example, most of the people who started the community are still here. But my grandfather, to my information, was about the third to build out here."

-Male resident born 1944 in Nepperhan.

Social organizations played a pivotal role in the development of community solidarity and identity in Runyon Heights. The community can be described as hyper-organized. Numerous social groups and associations developed over the decades. Many groups have shared many members, and many individuals belong to the interlinked groups. The high level of local social organization contradicts conservative assumptions of black-American cultural weakness and presumed social disorganization. Runyon Heights residents responded to their suburban middle-class environment by establishing churches, civic associations, political clubs and social organizations as have other middle-class suburban Americans.

However, unlike other middle-class Americans, their lives were also structured by the impact of race on their opportunities for housing, work, school, friendships and ultimately, community formation. Race was an inescapable part of their middle-class existence. Indeed, community cohesion

was encouraged by the community's racialized relationship to and interaction with the rest of the city. Race and race identity became central to the construction of local organization and a community ethos. Problems confronting the residential collective were funneled through community organizations, further solidifying community cohesion, while reinforcing the centrality of racial identity in the maintenance of that cohesion. Chapter Seven examines the historical role played by specific social institutions, including family, churches, civic associations, social clubs, and schools in the reproduction of a collective sense of community.

The Family

E. Franklin Frazier has written extensively on the primary role of the black family in forming stable social relationships. Frazier maintained that the family was the primary institution for "organized social adjustment to American life" (Frazier, 1949: 333). While Frazier indicated that social disorganization was characteristic of black family life in urban areas, his analysis also suggests a strong correlation between home ownership, occupational stability and family stability (Frazier, 1949: 326-328). In Runyon Heights, occupational security preceded home ownership, while both greatly influenced strong family organization and stability in the area.

Family bonds have been central to both the identity of individuals and the identity of the Runyon Heights community. When first exploring the

community, residents referred me to individuals who might have had intimate knowledge of the community's history, as well as to specific families who were held in high esteem by the community. While the scale of this project did not afford the opportunity to interview members of all of the significant Nepperhan families, many of the same family names came up again and again during the research. Among these families are: the Mingo Family, the Smith Family, the Downs Family, the Perencheif Family, the Keno Family, the Moore Family, The Fields Family, the Colymore Family, the Bray Family, the Holsts Family, the Skinner Family, the Jackson Family, the Frances Family, the Poe Family, the Wilson Family, the Joseph Family, the Giddings Family, the Booker Family, the Ross Family, the Grayson Family, the Morgan Family, and a number of distinct Williams Families. Most of these families are still present in the community today; some are third and fourth generation Nepperhaners. While many families are mentioned here, many more contributed significantly to the history of Runyon Heights.

Families are central to the community's conception of itself. Social institutions, like the church and the local improvement association, were identified through reference to the names of those who were involved in their establishment and maintenance. Local homes were often referred to by the names of families who had once resided in them. Even local streets take on the names of persons who were, at one time, significant to the area: Runyon Avenue, Moultrie Avenue, and Belknap Avenue. Runyon and Belknap Avenues

are named after the original owners of the estate, while Moultrie Avenue is named after the most successful black business person in turn-of-the-century Yonkers.

A common history is constructed by residents, based upon the perception that family roots are anchored together in Nepperhan. Their single most common denominator is their local conceptualization of identity which links race, class and community in both time and space. This common history, both real and imagined, helped to foster a local community folk culture which has identified specific members who are regarded as the official keepers of the local history. These individuals, the majority of whom are a part of the families mentioned above, embody the spirit of the community and are symbols of it.

The presence of multiple generations of families, combined with the fact that two families may become linked through marriage (a frequent occurrence in generations past), has created a community of interconnected extended families. Many children in Nepperhan experienced extremely close-knit communal ties when growing up. One resident explained:

And it has a link I think through our morals and our values again because you know it was kind of a place - where everybody knows everybody else as a child, everybody else, as least back when I was growing up, is your supervisor or guardian and you were a little more restrained about doing things because you always kind of had eyes on you all the time. And I'd like to feel that in other communities that might not have been the case. You know, in other communities where maybe the first, some of the first and strongest links are made through you know schools and things like that, and being next door neighbors and belonging to school organizations, a lot of the initial links, I mean even as a

child is family links. I mean people who I met later on through school or through participating in sports together, that was because again, my mother's sister-in-law, her cousin or sister-in-law, her kids, it's just family. Basically it kind of started as this large extended family, it kind of, you know, gets down to your core family, but I think you meet first that way too. There's always a family kind of thing. People out here identify themselves as being a part of such and such family. They identify somebody's house, that's the so and so house, and that's the way you do normally with let's say a town or a larger area, but people out there still say that. They'll say well the car is parked out in front of the so and so house. That family could have been out of that (house) seventy years ago, but this person is going to say the so and so house . . . That's how we identify things. And we identify a lot of things here by people. I am Joe Jones' son. I am Carol Jones' son. Until I get to a certain point, and maybe when my generation dominates a little bit then and my kids will be, that's Pete Jones' son.

While families provided the basis for community identity and communal social relationships, social organizations were central to the politicization of this community identity. Without social organizations, individual families would have remained isolated and atomized, and no central community identity, racial or otherwise, would have developed in Runyon Heights. Social organizations provided residents with a sense of an interconnected history, thus promoting community solidarity while also providing the basis for political mobilization.

The process of being socialized within the spatial boundaries of a racially and economically homogeneous community unifies individuals along race and class dimensions. While debates have presented these concepts as mutually exclusive, that is, being both black and middle-class are viewed as inherently oppositional, in fact the intersection of race and class represents the true

negotiated basis of identity among the black middle class. Racial identity is reconstructed within the confines of a class segregated residential space. The community provides the basis for racial identity construction by creating a sense of historical permanence and continuity. While the term "community," as it is applied in this study, implies "place," it also embodies the constellation of personal connections and sense of historical belonging which individuals experience with one another. These contacts with others are structured and filtered through local institutions, such as the family, church, school, political organization, and voluntary civic associations, forming a multidimensional basis for group identities. Yet, the unifying theme in Nepperhan is the dominating significance of both race and class in the organization of daily life.

The consistency and apparent permanence of race in structuring the daily lives of Runyon Heights residents provide the basis for a shared group experience, the creation of common bonds based upon both real and fictitious notions of African ancestry, and the formation of both the institutional and cultural basis for the maintenance of that group identity. In short, a community of associations is constructed which provides a basis for the maintenance of a racial identity.

The Churches

According to Frazier, the church represents the second most important institution in the black community (Frazier, 1948: 333). From the first days in

Nepperhan, residents constructed a tightly knit community of associations through the development of social, and religious institutions. Founded officially in 1914, the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church played a particularly significant role in the lives of the early Nepperhan settlers, providing a central organizing force for community cohesion.

A second, smaller church evolved much later in Nepperhan during the 1960's called the Kings Highway Apostolic Church. The church, led by Reverend Harrison, has not played a significant role in the community's development, although the congregation claims a handful of community residents. Many in the congregation reportedly migrated from West Virginia like Reverend Harrison, but unlike the Reverend, they live outside the district. Today, the church building is undergoing renovation and expansion of the original structure located at 36 Kenmore Street, reflecting the expansion of the congregation over the years.

Just across the tracks on Belknap Avenue stands one of the oldest institutions in the community. The Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Runyon Heights not only embodies the history of the Nepperhan community, but it also chronicles a chapter in the formation of a distinct Negro church in America. The history of this particular church is embedded within the history of spiritual segregation that characterizes American religious practice.

The cohesion provided by the church was crucial for the survival of settlers who came to Nepperhan. In order to fully understand the significance of

organization for group solidarity, it is necessary to examine the history of the Negro church's development.

One of the most comprehensive studies of the Negro church in America is E. Franklin Frazier's The Negro Church in America (1974). Frazier maintains that Christianity provided the basis for social cohesion among African descendants in America during and after racial slavery (Frazier, 1974: 14). Baptists and Methodist missionaries evangelized both Negro slaves and free men in both the South and the North during the 1700's. In 1784, the Methodist conference proclaimed that slavery was opposed to the laws of God (Frazier, 1974: 14-29). However, just prior to the Civil War, a rift arose between the southern and northern sections of both the Baptist and Methodist organizations over the status of the Negro. Consequently, by the 1800's, while joining the two church organizations in large numbers, Negroes were segregated in sections of "white" churches in the North and South (Frazier, 1974: 14- 31).

Frustrated with discrimination and racial segregation, influential Negroes in the Methodist organization sought to form an independent Negro religious organization. After being removed from prayer at the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized the Free African Society with other Negro members of the St. George congregation around 1787. Allen believed the Methodist form of religion to be most suited to the needs of Negroes, while Jones favored the Protestant Episcopal Church model. Differing over the direction which the budding

organization should take, the men split. Absalom Jones founded the African Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Allen, after being ordained a deacon and later an elder by Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church, formed the all black Bethel Church in 1794. Adopting Allen's idea of African societies, all-Negro churches began organizing in other cities as well. In 1816, representatives of many of the newly formed Negro churches convened in Philadelphia, and established the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In New York City, Peter Williams Sr., a sexton in the John Street Methodist Church⁶⁰, also followed Allen's lead. He helped to establish another all Negro Methodist organization (Frazier, 1974: 34). Drawing Negro congregants from John Street Methodist Church, he helped to organize the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1796. The church, officially founded by its first Bishop, James Varick, was the first all-Negro congregation to be established in New York State. Varick, a native of Newburgh, New York, was elected Bishop in 1822 (Allen, 1964: 19). Both the A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion Churches have maintained separate organizations to this day (Frazier, 1974: 32-34).

A third Methodist organization was formed from the remaining Negro members of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Organized much later in 1870, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was established in Tennessee

⁶⁰Located on John Street near City Hall in lower Manhattan, the church was stationed near the earliest Negro community in New York City.

(Frazier, 1974: 34) Today, the organization is known as the Christian Methodist Church, having dropped the term "Colored."

One respondent, a Presiding Elder in the A.M.E. Zion Church, shows how the history of the Metropolitan congregation is intertwined with the larger history of segregated Negro church organization:

Maybe you want to know why we started with the two groups. The A.M.E.'s was led, they started because the first Bishop, Richard Allen, he might have been a local preacher then, Richard Allen was praying downstairs in a white church in Philadelphia, and they came, some of the white people, pulled him up off his knees, and took him out. They didn't want him to pray down there. That was about 1787, or something like that. And then he decided we are going to walk out, and we are going to establish our own church out of protest. Now the A.M.E. Zion, all the A.M.E. Zion belong to John Street Methodist Church in New York, white church . . . They weren't A.M.E. Zion, they were just a group of black people. Well they went to the Bishop, who was Asbury, and to some white ministers, and they said, we would like to have our own church so we can worship God the way we want. And the people in New York said, well we'll help you . . . One minister by the name of Stillwell, he said, I'll get some of you ready, and we will ordain some of you preachers, and that's the way that started, way back when . . . They ordained them after they had split. They came out of the church, and decided to form their own little church. And they got a stable. But they didn't have to fight like the A.M.E.'s did in Philadelphia. The people in New York were different. Now the C.M.E.'s were started much later, when the white people still wanted to have some influence, but they wanted to have the black people to have a church, so they helped them people in the South to establish the C.M.E.'s. Now you have these three groups. All three are completely independent.

Reverend C. Guita McKinney, pastor of Metropolitan from 1973 to 1993, explained in an interview the church's hierarchical structure, which centered around Episcopal heads or Bishops:

(It) started off with set superintendents that were Presiding Elders, and in later years we called them Bishops.

Today, the organization has 13 Bishops who preside over the thirteen Episcopal Districts. Each district is divided into conferences, and each conference is again subdivided into districts. Each district is headed by a Presiding Elder. Metropolitan is a part of the Hudson River District of the New York Conference, which is a part of the Fourth Episcopal District. The Fourth Episcopal District includes the New York, New England, Western New York and Bahamas Conferences. The New York conference includes the Hudson River District, the Long Island District, and the Brooklyn District. The Hudson River District encompasses the lower Hudson Valley.

The continued development and expansion of the Negro church was predicated upon the continued unwelcome reception most Negroes received from established "white" churches. Just as Negroes were segregated in predominantly "white" churches during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Christian Negroes in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Yonkers were often segregated in the basements of "white" denominations before being able to raise the funds to build their own churches. Segregation in religious life was taken as a norm among most Christians in Yonkers, as it was elsewhere across America.

The maintenance of all-white institutions in Yonkers, particularly religious institutions which invoke the weight of God's law, cannot be overemphasized

in shaping community institutional formation in Nepperhan. The maintenance of distinct racially-based church organizations among whites also inspired religious and social organization along racial lines for blacks. During the 1870's, all-black churches were formed in Yonkers. The first A.M.E. Zion Church, originally called Memorial⁶¹ A.M.E. Zion, was established and organized in 1871⁶². Messiah Baptist Church, the first all-Negro Baptist congregation in the city, was established in 1872 and organized in 1879. Both groups rented Townsend Hall on North Broadway in Yonkers (Allison, 1984: 289-291). Messiah Baptist was originally an extension of the Warburton Avenue Baptist Church, an all "white" congregation. This relationship was akin to that at the segregated John Street Methodist Church just prior to its split into two distinct church organizations. Messiah and Institutional (Memorial) later raised enough funds for the construction of their own houses of worship. Institutional was the only Negro church formally established from its beginnings, unlike Metropolitan and Messiah, which were first organized as local prayer groups. Institutional was founded by Reverend Jacob Thomas of New York City (Allison, 1984: 289).

⁶¹Memorial A.M.E. Zion changed its name to Institutional A.M.E. Zion by the time the corner stone was laid for its second building in 1923.

⁶²Allison reports the founding as May 1870, although the church record report May 1871.

Prior cultural or religious ties fail to explain the development and growth of all-Negro churches in Yonkers, since cultural and religious differences were prevalent among the black population. In fact, many of the original founders of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church came from a variety of Christian denominations. Though records of the period are incomplete, only one of the original members of Metropolitan A.M.E. appears to have been a former A.M.E. member before moving to the area. However, in their attempt to create spiritual solidarity and a sense of community, residents minimized religious differences between them. Creating a safe place to worship took precedence over cultural, national, and even religious differences. The Metropolitan A.M.E.'s Sixty-Third Anniversary Souvenir Journal reports: "The original prayer band had long recognized the desirability of a church affiliation and though, on their own accord, would not necessarily have chosen to come into the Zion Methodist fold, the members, feeling the need perhaps for the stability afforded by a denominational tie, acquiesced in the move by Mrs. Borden." Thus, the segregated existence of Negroes in Yonkers precipitated Negro church development in general and the formation of Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion in particular.

Though a number of "white" churches existed in the Nepperhan vicinity when Negroes first arrived, church organization continued to evolve along racial lines. Maps from the Yonkers Planning Bureau show that in 1917 the closest church to Nepperhan was the Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, located on the corner of Tuckahoe Road and Altonwood Place. Allison's History of

Yonkers (1896) also reports a chapel at the corner of Saw Mill River Road and Tuckahoe Road called Wood Hill Methodist Episcopal Church (Allison, 1896: 294). All map evidence indicates that these structures are one and the same. The church was situated in an ideal location for Negro Nepperhan residents. It's interesting to note that both the earliest black and white Methodist churches in Yonkers had nearly identical names: Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. Like the Messiah Baptist congregation, the first black Methodists in Nepperhan were merely tolerated by the local "white" Methodist congregation located at the corner of Tuckahoe Road and Altonwood Place. One informant, a resident since 1924, reported that the original group which founded Metropolitan A.M.E. at one point met in the basement of Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church on Tuckahoe Road. According to the Sixty-Third Anniversary Souvenir Journal, this lending of space to the Nepperhan Negroes occurred between 1928 and 1931, when Nepperhan was expanding significantly. The phenomenon of Negro basement preaching in "white" churches was common practice in Yonkers, as no effort was made to integrate the Nepperhan black residents in local "white" church organizations.

Reverend Dr. McKinney, Pastor of Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church from 1973 to 1993 and former Pastor of Institutional A.M.E., retold the story of the transition from the original small prayer group, first formed by the Negro Nepperhan settlers, to an established institution in the community. His account

highlights the internal conflicts present within church associations, and the origins of the church from two distinct groups.

But now this church was, I was thinking as I came down here, it was started with a prayer meeting that used to congregate and meet in the houses. A few people that moved into this section used to meet in houses . . . That was around 1914. And we have a sister church across town called Institutional. I also pastored at Institutional. Institutional is a much larger church, much more prestigious church. We had a very brilliant man, whose name was Smile. I think Smile was a graduate of Harvard, I believe. Smile was pastoring over there, and when conference came in 1915, the A.M.E. Zion Annual Conference in 1915, it met at Institutional. This had nothing, so far, to do with the little group that you had having prayer meetin' out here. But this minister was a tremendous leader, and Bishop Hood, Bishop Hood started the educational system for the white people in the State of North Carolina, during the reconstruction period. He was an extremely brilliant young man. He started out in New York. Our church was established in 1796. Varick (James Varick) was the first bishop, and Varick died in 1828, and the Bishop that followed Varick, at that time there was only two, now we have thirteen, the bishop that followed Varick was Christopher Rush, a historian and a bishop. He was originally from North Carolina. Varick was from New York. Rush, who was the second Bishop of the church, ordained Hood, and Hood lived to be the same man that I'm going to tell you about that moved this pastor to Institutional. He was a bishop for fifty years, and he covered a lot of territory: he was a writer, also a historian.⁶³ Also helped to establish Livingstone College, at Salisbury, North Carolina, and Hood Theological Seminary, along with two other very bright men. But Hood was the Presiding Bishop over the New York conference in 1915. He was Presiding Bishop up until 1916. In 1915, he moved Smile, the man I was telling you about, from Institutional. Smile decided he would pull out some of the members and set up his own

⁶³Frazier reports that Bishop James W. Hood was elected president of a convention of Negroes in North Carolina, which may have been the first such convention for newly freed Negroes after the Civil War. In addition, Hood served as local magistrate and later as Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue for the United States (Frazier, 1974: 48).

church. Smile started working on setting up a church. Smile's sister was a member of this church that pulled out: they had to leave Institutional. Now the reason he left, instead of the bishop promoting him, he thought the bishop had demoted him, because the bishop sent him to Port Chester, and he wouldn't go to Port Chester . . . action (of Smile), it's unlawful. You see in our church, when you are being ordained on your knees, you say that where those who have authority over you send you, you would go. And the Presiding Elder and the Bishop have authority over you. So he wouldn't go. This precipitated a fight in the local church, Institutional. They had gas lights. They broke all the gas lights out with big bats and bottles . . . Hood was an old man then in his nineties and in a wheelchair. They had to take him out of the back of the church, put him in a big wagon, and take him away. But when it simmered down, Hood had moved two men. That caused trouble - the men at Mother Zion, that's the oldest church and the largest church in the connection in New York City. It ranged from 137th back to 136th, just behind Abyssinia. So he moved him too. Both of these men tried to establish new churches. Smile was trying to establish one, and he got a building on Main Street. And Smile went to the general conference and told the people he had been mistreated by Hood. He was a great orator, and Hood was not able to compete with him then. He was forty; Hood was ninety. So they retired Hood in 1916. Smile came back to try to push the church he had established the year before. And he was up on a ladder painting the church, and he fell off dead. So Millie Smile, his sister, came to this church, and she got together with that group of people who had been having prayer meetings. And when they went to the annual conference, she carried the church in to join the annual conference. And that's how this became an A.M.E. Zion Church . . . They date this church, on our record, they date it for 1914. I really think it should be dated for 1916. The first Minister, of record, for the church was Reverend Moore. And his stay was from 1928 to 1931.

The official church history, printed in the Sixty-Third Anniversary Souvenir Journal, tells a similar story, but emphasizes Mrs. Anna Borden as the central figure pushing for A.M.E. designation. It seems possible that both accounts are true. The journal reports:

This group (the original volunteer prayer band) was later joined by a dissident faction which had followed Mrs. Anna Borden out of the Institutional A.M.E. Zion Church of Yonkers. The latter, being very active and influential in the New York Conference of the A.M.E. Zion Church, proceeded on her own initiative, but without the full consent of the members of the merged organization, to enroll it under the Zion Methodist jurisdiction.

Both accounts highlight the arbitrary nature of the decision to join the A.M.E. fold, while emphasizing the need for a community building centering around the issue of race. The larger social environment which channeled the group into the Zion Methodist organization was determined by the existence of a racial color bar in Christian churches in Yonkers. Data also indicated that Anna Borden and Millie Smile may have been related by marriage. It was reported that Charles Borden was the brother-in-law of Reverend Smile. Assuming that Anna and Charles were husband and wife, and given the fact that Mr. Borden was also on the church board in 1931, we may conclude that either Anna is also Reverend Smile's sister, or that Charles Borden had a sister who married a brother of Reverend Smile. However, no other Borden or Smiles family members are recorded as ever having been involved in Nepperhan.

By 1928, John B. Fields Sr., who was one of the original prayer group members, as well as George Brown and Edward Smith, had purchased from Hudson P. Rose two adjoining lots on Runyon Avenue for one hundred dollars. After learning of the availability of a church in the Williamsburg section of the Bronx, the structure was purchased for a reported one hundred fifty dollars, with funds provided by Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown. John B. Fields Jr. and

Warner M. Fields, two sons of John B. Fields Sr., dismantled the structure and relocated it to the Runyon Avenue site. Norman Downs, a master carpenter and Prince Hall Mason, laid the foundation. Edward Smith did much of the reassembly of the structure. Ernest Query constructed a cesspool. Mrs. George Brown financed the roof and did fund raising for the payments. The construction of the church was truly a community affair. Though delayed by the Depression, the cornerstone was finally laid in 1931.

Eric Lincoln, in The Black Church Since Frazier (1974), reevaluated the black church in light of the cultural and political changes that occurred during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, when Frazier's work was first published. He argues that in the 1960's a split had occurred between the dawning of the Black Church and the demise of the Negro Church (Lincoln, 1974: 106). His point is relevant to this study in that current church history is viewed through the prism of the present. "Negroes" of yesterday identify themselves as "black" today, and the change in identity is significant. According to Lincoln, the dawn of the Black Church marked the church's transformation as a self-conscious, self-asserted, inner-directed institution, in contrast to the "otherworldly" orientation described by Frazier (Lincoln, 1974:109; Frazier, 1974). Both Frazier and Lincoln argued that despite the fact that the Negro church provided a haven from "white" oppression and symbolized, by its very existence, the power of Negro self-determination, the

church often accepted and accommodated an inferior Negro status (Frazier, 1974: 50; Lincoln, 1974: 107).

The black church in Nepperhan was never a direct source of social transformation or direct political mobilization, as was the SCLC during the 1960's. However, its presence helped to centralize and organize community interactions, while providing a necessary source of group belonging, essential to the continued survival of the community. The solidarity this early Negro church provided was a crucial source of group mobilization in the Runyon community. The original church population welcomed new members into Nepperhan, provided a basis for the establishment of community social organizations, including the Nepperhan Community Center, and most importantly, fostered a sense of unity, history, and identity for community members. While the church still provides these things today, its role has diminished over the last twenty years as newer residents have not joined at a rate comparable to that of the past. Today, new membership in the A.M.E. Church is about equal to the attrition rate of older members out of the church.

The Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church in Runyon Heights refutes Frazier's assessment of middle-class black religion, culture and identity. In The Negro Church in America, Frazier continues his condemnation of the black middle class' estrangement from its Negro heritage, arguing that the new middle class has abandoned its religious heritage as well as its folk heritage. According to Frazier, this new middle class developed after traditional middle-class

employment opportunities became available to blacks after World War II. He posits the class' abandonment of the Baptist and Methodist faiths, their retreat from the emotionalism characteristic of the two faiths, their rejection of identification with Africa, and their selection of "intelligent ministers" as evidence of their alienation from their black cultural roots. Lastly, he maintains that professional and business associations have become the center of social life for the black middle class (Frazier, 1974: 83-89). Frazier's assertion seems unwarranted when as early as 1899, W.E.B. Dubois recognized the importance of the Methodist church for Negro community life in Philadelphia even among the middle class.

The A.M.E. Zion Church remains the central religious institution in predominantly middle-class Runyon Heights. The newest members to arrive in the Runyon community are indeed the least likely to be local church members. As Frazier notes, their professional status requires that more time be spent in professional, business and civic associations that exist outside of community boundaries. However, the church has maintained its central organizing force in the community, and a number of new solidly middle-class residents have joined. Even residents who may not be church members actively support church activities and fund raising events. This suggests that the institution still retains a value to most community members. Africa is increasingly recognized by the Methodist Church, as well as by local residents, as providing a source of identification. Additionally, it is clear that for the Runyon community, the

Methodist faith is the denomination residents have most often converted to rather than from. Yet, even with a strong black identity and culture, estrangement exists between the largely middle-class community of Runyon Heights and the largely working-class community on the west side. Reverend McKinney explains:

But the whole thing is, they (the west siders) have false conceptions. These people are down to earth, they're fine people. I don't see any sophistication in them, you know. They are friendly, they like other people to come, they're emotional like other people, when they have an emotional preacher. (He laughs). They like good preaching, good singing...We have one group of singers over there called the Metrolites, and they sang these gospel numbers, and my members are just crazy about them.

Regardless of declining membership across classes, as a group, the black middle class in Yonkers does not seem to have abandoned their so-called religious roots. While the church has played a fundamental role in community organization, other community organs came into existence which helped to channel social organization and political participation, while uniting members along racial lines. Early Nepperhan founded a newsletter and a community center, as well as clubs and social organizations. Many members of these associations belonged to Metropolitan. All of these were, in part, a response to the segregated environment community members encountered. The church was central to the active construction of community bonds, associations, and the formation of racial identity which allowed for the social cohesion of the diverse population of Nepperhan.

Over the years, placing racial and community solidarity over religious differences was not only characteristic of the A.M.E. Church, it was also characteristic of the entire Runyon Heights community. Just as many Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion members have come from many religious denominations, members of the community have held a variety religious faiths and practices, and attended many different churches and temples in Yonkers and in New York City. Catholics, Baptists, Episcopalians, Apostolics, and Muslims are today represented in the area. Some residents still maintain affiliation with their old churches, many of which were in Harlem. Many newcomers, as in the early period, have become a part of the A.M.E. congregation, often sending their children to Bible School there. A few even sent their children, while they still do not attend themselves.

Religious tolerance is the norm in the community, as residents make personal and familiar religious choices. Members affiliated with different denominations still support one another's events. One can often find community members from other churches attending special events at Metropolitan. In fact, the black churches in Yonkers, particularly the Baptists and Methodists Gospel Choirs, communicate regularly. Thus a strong, but sometimes strained relationship exists between the west side churches and the central religious institution of the Nepperhan community. I was invited by Mrs

Esther Williams⁶⁴ to one affair held at the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in Runyon Heights. Choirs from across Yonkers, the Bronx and the lower Hudson Valley participated. It was a joyous and song-filled celebration.

Civic Associations

Civic organizations proved essential for maintenance of community cohesion. The principal civic organization throughout the history of Runyon Heights has been the Runyon Heights Improvement Association. The association, founded during the late 1920's, provided recreational services and a meeting place for Negro residents, as well as an organizational rubric for local clubs. Its first three presidents were George Brown, James Howell, and Norman Downs. All three men were dedicated community members during the early days of the association. Women in the RHIA published a newsletter called The Nepperhan Civic Recorder. The Recorder was a major source of information for community members. In 1933, the Recorder placed a notice from the RHIA soliciting registrations from the various clubs and organizations in the community. In it, a number of existing associations were listed. Some of them, like the Women's Civic Club and the Mother's Club are still in existence; others, like the Rod and Gun Club, fell into obscurity. Significantly,

⁶⁴Mrs. Williams, sometimes called Mother William, has been a resident longer than any other community member. She is Vice Chairman of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church and is the community matriarch.

the notice points out membership overlaps between clubs, indicating the highly organized nature of the Nepperhan community.

Notices

The Runyon Heights Improvement Association is asking the various clubs of Nepperhan if they would condescend to register their club and affairs with the Civic Recorder so as to prevent a confliction of so many events happening in one night, due to the fact that the Nepperhan Clubs are practically composed of the same people and naturally carry the same followers. These clubs in particular are: Westchester Junior League, Nepperhan Unit; Nepperhan Republican

Club; Runyon Heights Democratic Club; Runyon Heights Boys Club; Rod and Gun Club; Runyon Heights Mothers Club; The Frivolities; The Blue Monday; The Four Hundreds; The Unique; Les Jolies Coeurs; Club Thirteen; Royal Boys; Studio Bachelors; Sewing Circle; Royal Athletic League, and Womens C.C. If there are any clubs that are not mentioned here, that have been formed and composed of the majority of Nepperhaners, kindly send in your names to the Editor of the pamphlet.

The Nepperhan Civic

Recorder; June 1933, Vol. A. No.4

The RHIA also constructed the Nepperhan Community Center on Monroe Street during the same period. The center thrived in the community until it was destroyed by fire in the late 1930's. When the center was rebuilt, it was relocated to the west side, where the majority of Blacks in Yonkers lived, in order to qualify for public funding. Today it is located on Warburton Avenue near Point Street. Though the center once again carried the name of the

Nepperhan Community Center, Runyon Heights residents now had to travel to the west side of the city in order to take advantage of its services.

After World War II, the RHIA was virtually inactive. The original community center, the central achievement of the association, originally provided social and recreational activities to residents. However, the association was reactivated in 1956 in response to plans by local government to build low-income public housing in the area. Only after the housing issue was settled did the RHIA return to the old issue of community recreation. Land-development projects have been cited as a primary cause in the formation of neighborhood associations in other northeastern suburban communities after 1980 (Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990: 77-78). However, unlike other suburban communities, industrial and commercial encroachment has not been the primary concern in Runyon Heights. The only black community in east Yonkers was an early target for low-income housing development. Business encroachment in the area did become a community concern, but has remained secondary to the housing project issue. The RHIA represents an early example of a suburban community's response to the politics of growth, urban renewal, and land-development. Yet, the association's prior existence, which focused on neighborhood upkeep, sports, and social activities, also reflects resident's determined effort to create a sense of place and community.

A number of residents participated in the new center's organization. They included: Mrs. Adele Mingo, Mr. and Mrs Edward B. Smith, Mr. Norman

Downs, Mrs. Ora Curtain, Mr. George W. Bonner, Mr. Thomas Keno, Mr. Frank Hurley, Mr. Jack Moore, Mr. Milton Holsts, Mr. Fred Taylor, Mr. Eugene W. Smith, Mrs. Elise Williamson and Mr. John Bryant. Some of the organizers were new members to the community; others were long-time residents. In 1961, after more than twenty years operating without a community center, the reactivated RHIA made plans to construct a new center on Runyon Avenue. Dedicated in 1963, the new center was named the Runyon Heights Community House. Like its predecessor, its purpose was to provide residents with locally-based services.

Over the years, services from the one-room brick building have developed and expanded. Today, many services and programs are delivered to the nearly all-black community members, although a number of people travel from other parts of the city to participate in activities at the Community House. The Community House boasts a volunteer staff of twenty five (25) individuals. In addition to Mary L. Tynes, past Director of the rebuilt Nepperhan Community Center, current Executive Director of the Community House and valued friend to the community, four other individuals are held on staff: an Administrative Assistant, an After School Instructor, a Crisis Intervention Supervisor, and a Recreation Director.

The Community House is overseen by the Board of Directors of the Runyon Heights Improvement Association. The board draws its membership from residents who wish to be active organizers of community affairs. While

the board has traditionally drawn its membership from the older generations in the community, over the last ten years younger residents have become more actively involved. The current president is a 43-year-old resident who moved to the community with his wife in 1984. Like many residents, the house he purchased had been previously owned by his father. Since his arrival, his wife has given birth their second child. Like other newcomers, increasing concern for the children and the quality of life in the community has led to his increased participation in local affairs over the years. In addition to the young president, two board members are less than 35 years of age. Younger membership in the RHIA provides the basis for the future maintenance of this vital community institution.

The variety of services and programs which have developed reflects the community's needs and concerns in the 1990's. The staple program of the community center over the years has been its sports program. This program was made popular by Athletic Director Hudean (Boo) Wilson who ran the youth program, as well as coached the Runyon Heights Colts basketball teams in the 71 team citywide Recreation Basketball League. The Colts have been a part of the citywide league since the late 1950's. Since 1967, the RHIA has also sponsored the Runyon Heights Summer Basketball League. Founded by Boo Wilson, the league has been known for attracting some of the best players in the entire city. Teams start at the Pee Wee Division (8-10 year old) and go to the Open Division for adults 20 years and older.

The second most active program is the Senior Citizens program which is organized through the Yonkers Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation. The "Seniors," as you'll often hear them affectionately called, meet every Wednesday at the Community House. Many members meet in card clubs which hold competitive games of Bridge and Pickino. Others sew or do crafts. The room is alive with the buzz of activity when the Group Number 8 seniors meet. In addition to the Wednesday meetings, Group 8 participates in the Senior Bowling League in Yonkers, often faring well in their tournaments. The "Seniors" in Nepperhan are a unique group indeed. Though mostly retired, members are active. Many stay active by volunteering in Community House events. Many are hobby enthusiasts who enjoy reading, painting, golfing, traveling, gardening, fishing and walking. In short, they are extremely active as a group. Other staple programs include an Office Skills Program which helps train adults with typing and clerical skills for those experiencing work transitions or unemployment. The Computer Program helps to teach computer skills to adults, while the Community Advocacy Program provides workshops, seminars, and conflict resolution to aid community advocacy on community preservation, as well as on crime and other negative environmental issues. The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program and Parent Advocacy Program provides guidance, education and workshops for children and teenagers six (6) to eighteen (18) years of age. The Alcohol and Sports programs are most widely used by residents from outside the community. In addition to program activities, an

annual New Years Eve party is thrown for adults at the Community House, while Christmas, Kwanzaa and Easter parties are held for the local children. The Community House has also been host to weddings, craft fairs, gift fairs, and art shows.

Over the years, the operating budget has expanded from a few hundred dollars donated by local residents to more than \$50,000 per year, most of which is obtained from public funding sources. Services have dramatically expanded as well, and many programs, such as the sports, and alcoholism programs serve the entire city. While the Community House received approximately \$45,000 from the federal government's Community Development Program, that figure was cut to \$30,000 for fiscal year 1994-1995. The difference, however, was compensated for by Youth Services, which contributed an additional \$25,000 to Community House programs. Local fund raising and membership dues, as well as the occasional rental of the Community House facility for weddings and private parties, still provide a necessary source of funding.

Though the community has been drawn by the attractiveness of increased funding through federal programs, these programs have also brought consequences to the community. Federal money comes with federal guidelines which regulate how those monies may be spent which helps to rob the local community institution of autonomy. In addition, not all R.H.I.A members are happy with the level and character of services provided to non-residents and

residents. Some feel that the current trend towards the delivery of citywide services runs the risk of neglecting many needs of the community. They prefer an earlier era where they had more autonomy from government control and more isolation from the westsiders who use government sponsored programs.

Residents described how children's activities became central in the Community House during the mid- 1960's. Parents took advantage of the athletic and social programs offered to their children year round. The focus upon children by the Community Houses reflects the child-centered attitude of the community. One resident whose son and daughter were raised during the era of the Community House recalled:

When they were young the parents with young kids used to take turns going over. With Mr. Wilson they used to have, on weekends, little socials . . . as long as the parents, someone could be there to supervise . . . Before that they were in the day camps and things over there. They played on the basketball teams. That was very instrumental in their development too. The center over there, that was sort of a focal point for them and their activities.

Mothers in all time periods organized the households around their children. Preparation for their children's futures was a central preoccupation. Mothers stuck together as their lives were revolving around their families and/or jobs. Women who were mothers with jobs organized for day care when their children were young. Some children stayed with relatives. Others stayed with neighboring women who stayed at home. Women who were mothers, and stayed at home doing housework, occupied some of their leisure time by

forming groups such as the Idlers Club and the Mothers Club. In many ways, the community functioned like an extended family network. Women were essential to the maintenance of the network, and ultimately to community as well as household organization. They provided support through their school, church, and civic involvement, and many contributed to the family income by working. They thus helped to draw residents into a network of local associations. Women were central to bringing the community together.

In addition to supplying recreation and services to both children and adults, the RHIA has provided a major source of community cohesion and has served as a centralizing force in community political mobilization. Over the years, a variety of issues have confronted the community and ultimately the association. Some issues shouldered by the association have not been essential to community life, such as a Christmas Tree in December or flowers along Chelsea Place. Other issues have been crucial to maintaining the quality of life in the community. The association monitors the maintenance of community services such as snow removal, garbage pickup, abandoned cars, and traffic flow. In fact, the association closed Runyon Avenue to two-way traffic, and made Altonwood Place a dead-end street. After having been petitioned by the association, the city decided to erect a concrete barrier at the intersection of Tuckahoe Road. This prevents commercial traffic from driving through the area, making a shortcut between Saw Mill River Road and Tuckahoe Road in an attempt to avoid the traffic light at the intersection of those two streets.

Zoning has been another issue of concern to the reactivated Runyon Heights Improvement Association. In fact, zoning as a community issue arose from the 1956 proposal for 335 units of low-income public housing, designated to be located on Ridgeview Avenue. It was this proposal which reactivated the defunct Runyon Heights Improvement Association, and also taught the lesson of community control through the politics of zoning. Today residents are attempting to restrict business enterprises in the area by upgrading zoning codes.

The fight to maintain the middle-class character of the Runyon Heights community has taken place within an environment permeated by the dynamics of both race and class. After the 1950's, working-class blacks and Latinos increasingly populated lower Westchester County, while industrial jobs for the new minority population were scarce. Meanwhile, public housing was built only in areas with previous minority concentrations, including Runyon Heights. Black homeowners on the west side increasingly found themselves living in an expanding ghetto, while Runyon Heights residents struggled to prevent the ghettoization of their enclave. During the same period, corporate office relocations converted central and northern Westchester into affluent commercial suburbs (Zukin, 1991: 145). Consequently, while the majority of the black population in Yonkers has been largely excluded from suburban prosperity in both housing and employment, Runyon Heights residents have managed to defend a small corner of the suburban landscape for themselves.

Although the Runyon Heights Improvement Association had remained in existence, its role in the community had diminished significantly after World War II. Outside challenges to the community became a wake-up call. As one former president of the association commented: "This is the reason why you see a Community House. This is the reason why you see us organized now, because we had to get organized. That was it."

In 1956 community members quickly mobilized, and the association petitioned the City Council, rejecting their plan for public housing. Such a housing project would have radically transformed the economic composition of the community overnight, housing more families than were currently living in the entire area. Since the designated site was literally inches away from the Homefield border, the Homefield Association also petitioned against the project. Ironically, after having created and maintained an artificial border to separate themselves from Nepperhaners, they now found common interest in maintaining the middle-class character of the area. Both groups of residents felt that single- and two-family private home ownership better insured the area's economic character.

While both community civic organizations concentrated their efforts around resistance to the transformation of the tract's class composition, the two groups carried out independent struggles and agendas. For Runyon Heights residents, race was a motivation behind the site selection in their community. An attorney for the RHIA told the City Council that the trend was "away from

putting housing sites in minority areas, as it has a tendency to create slums." In essence, placing a public housing project in Runyon Heights would have had the effect of creating a slum. He added: "If we drop a housing project in there, it will never have a chance" (80 CIV. 6761 LBS.:19). Speaking to the City Council, representatives from the Yonkers branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League of Westchester County⁶⁵ voiced similar concerns over black residential concentration, segregation and community deterioration (80 CIV. 6761 LBS. : 19). While the initial proposal was defeated, another, although much smaller, proposal was put forth in 1958. After an arduous battle, and numerous City Council meetings, the 48 Unit Hall Court Housing Complex (called the Dunbar Housing Project by local residents) was constructed on Dunbar Street. It opened in 1962, being located, ironically, at the site of the old School 1. This was the only public housing site for families located in all of east Yonkers. The remainder of public housing came to be located in the predominantly black Southwest area.

⁶⁵Both the Urban League and NAACP have supported the Runyon Heights community and have often rallied to its defense. This may be attributed to the fact that both associations are linked to the community. The congregations of both Baptist and Methodist churches in Yonkers support the local civil rights organizations. Thus strong organizational links occur through dual membership or affiliation. In addition, a number of Runyon Heights residents have held active leadership roles in the local NAACP and Urban League organizations, further interlocking the commuuinty with these traditional civil rights organizations.

At first, the housing project had little impact on the community. In fact, a number of current homeowners were some of the original tenants. Today, however, home-ownership is placed out of reach for most working-class families, and the housing project no longer provides transitional housing for mobile working-class families. In fact, movement from public housing to private home-ownership is more difficult today than it has ever been. Moreover, drugs are a common feature of the suburban landscape, and are common at most public housing sites. While the small size of the complex allows for most its working families to monitor their immediate environments, crack vials have, nonetheless, been found along the block. Some residents have voiced their concern, particularly since Runyon Heights teenagers frequent the local Boo Wilson Park. In fact, while the community continues to boast of one of the lowest crime rates in the city, drugs, especially "crack," are feared by local residents. While the majority of Runyon teens are not involved with drugs, fear looms over the heads of the watchful adults in the community.

While public housing was being built on Dunbar Street, a hotel and a motel were being constructed on the east side of the community. The Carvel Inn opened in 1960 on the corner of Sprain Road and Tuckahoe Road. The inn closed during the 1980's, leaving a dilapidated building, as well as the potential for more low-income housing. Originally a spattering of Nepperhan homes were constructed along the strip during the nineteen-thirties. While originally the strip

was predominantly Italian-American, it was entirely black by the time community residents sold their land to the company.

Over the last few years, the vacant inn has been an eye sore and source of community frustration. On numerous occasions, city officials have tried to build low-income housing on the site. Each time, the community has mobilized against it, using the RHIA as its mouthpiece. In 1993 and 1994, there was talk made among a couple of local developers of placing a homeless shelter at the site. The RHIA, along with the Valleyview and Tucloc civic associations, petitioned the Mayor and City Council. Since that time, the original developer has backed out and the building has been purchased by a company which plans to restore the facility to its original use as a motel. Residents are pleased with the results of their efforts, favoring a motel over any form of low-income public housing.

Numerous attempts have been made since the mid-1950's to place low-income public housing in Runyon Heights. As late as the summer of 1993, attempts were made by the Yonkers city government to designate Runyon Heights for low-income housing. The proposed site was a parcel of land owned by the city on Sprain Road. This area contains some of the most expensive homes in the community, some ranging above \$300,000. The site itself is an undeveloped plot of land which, in actuality, is designated Carter Ashe Park by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. This last housing proposal was part of the city's plan to meet the 1986 ruling handed down by U.S. District

Court Judge Leonard B. Sand in the 1980 housing and school desegregation suit. Finding that the city and its agencies had intentionally segregated blacks in housing and schools, the judge directed the city to remedy past housing discrimination by building 200 units of low-income housing in the predominantly white east Yonkers. After opposition was heard from the RHIA and the NAACP, and after the park status of the land was made clear, the site proposal was abandoned by city government.

Davidoff (1976) noted that resistance to low- and moderate-income housing has often occurred in predominantly white suburban communities. The reactions he cites closely parallel the reactions of Runyon Heights residents to low-income housing in their community, although their concerns are nearly the reverse to that of white suburbanites. Davidoff lists: "(1) a reaction to the families that are believed to be moving into those units; (2) a reaction to the type of dwellings that is associated with low- and moderate-income housing; (3) a fear of the fiscal impact on the community; and (4) the 'why us?' syndrome (Davidoff, 1976: 139). While Runyon Heights residents expressed these same concerns, emphasis was placed on reactions 3 and 4. Unlike white suburbanites, Runyon Heights residents were not concerned with the race of low-income residents. Indeed, the community was already "Black." Concern focused upon the class position of residents and the subsequent impact of rising population density any multiple dwelling unit might bring to the community. Thus, their resistance came from making a distinction between the race and

class of perspective residents, rather than from failing to make class distinctions among blacks, as is common with segregated white communities. Earlier in 1959, The Holiday Inn chain built a hotel at 125 Tuckahoe Road, at the southeast corner of the community near the corner of Tuckahoe Road and Bushey Avenue. The hotel removed a sizable parcel of land from future community residential development. However, since the location of the hotel had previously been considered as a potential site for low income housing in 1956, the hotel's construction removed the potential for future low income residential development in that area.

While land was being gobbled up by commercial building projects and the local city government, other business and commercial enterprises began to infiltrate the Runyon Avenue area. Following the closing of the Putnam Railroad's passenger service in 1958, large parcels of land along Runyon Avenue and near the Tuckahoe Road Bridge were sold off. Businesses invaded the area where railroad tracks, the coal bin and the Nepperhan Station had once stood. The RHIA again turned to city government and zoning for a resolution to their problems. The parcels, which had been too large and costly to be purchased by the RHIA, were taken over by businesses seeking to take advantage of new opportunity along the Runyon Avenue strip. The Paving Company was one of the first businesses in the area at 76 Runyon Avenue. It soon left, but was quickly replaced by a number of businesses many of which still remain in the area. One of the first businesses to settle in Nepperhan in

1965 was Herbert G. Martin Inc., located at 60 Runyon Avenue. In 1974, Otto Brehm Inc., a bakery supply company, relocated from Alexander Street in downtown Yonkers to 75 Tuckahoe Road, near the Tuckahoe Road Bridge. Pecora Construction Company moved into the area around 1978, taking over the previous 76 Runyon Avenue. Mase Electric Inc., which began operation around 1979, set up shop at 24 Runyon Avenue. Other businesses came but did not stay. Miracle Plywood was one of the last to use the railroad for freight. It moved to 44 Runyon Avenue in 1980, but left in 1993 after the closing of the railroad created logistical problems for the company. Medicab and Gerrasi Bros. Inc. both came and left during the 1970's and 1980's. Gerrasi Brothers were located at # 68-72. Badia Spices Inc., which moved from Saw Mill River Road, joined the strip during the summer of 1994, taking over the location of Gerrasi. Tristate Warehouse Distributors took over 44 Runyon Avenue in 1993.

Many of the businesses in Runyon Heights have been distributors: Miracle Plywood distributed wood; Gerassi and Otto Brehm both distribute baking goods; Tristate distributes automotive parts; and Badia distributes spices. Distribution type businesses, which are dependent upon truck or rail transportation for deliveries, have taken their toll on the community's quality of life. Between traffic congestion and parking problems created by company employees and delivery trucks, community patience on the west side of the Runyon Avenue runs thin.

Some businesses have managed to develop a mutually beneficial coexistence with the community. One of the first and largest businesses in the area, Otto Brehm, Inc. has coexisted peacefully with the community. Likewise, Miracle Plywood and Gerassi have maintained respectable relationships with local civic organizations. Other companies have proved more obtrusive. Problems of congestion were created by the MediCab transportation service for the disabled and the Pecora Construction Company during the late 1970's. Pecora owned the building that MediCab, Inc. used. MediCab brought more than thirty passenger vans, as well as the private vehicles of van drivers to the area. The flow of commercial traffic to the largely residential area angered residents. Tractor trailers, delivery vans, and passenger cars already infiltrating the area were now augmented by the more than 50 vehicles which MediCab Inc. sent daily through the two small residential blocks of Potomac and Dunbar Streets. This helped to transform Runyon Heights into a community on the defensive. The conflict was noted by the local newspaper the Herald Statesmen in May of 1977. According to the paper, business representatives charged that the local community leaders did not speak for the entire community. Community leaders were quoted as saying, "The residents are being charged Scarsdale taxes and receiving ghetto services." Residents, however, emphasized the disrupting impact of the activities of the business on community life.

Vice president of MediCab Steven Jones was quoted as saying: "Thank God Milton Holsts hasn't incited the neighborhood against me or we'd have

been burned down." Interestingly, during my research a white local ex-administrator for the City of Yonkers told a story of a Puerto Rican family who was allegedly chased from the Nepperhan area and whose home was burned. This research found no basis on which to substantiate these accusations. However, Mr. Jones' comments appear to reflect an attitude widely held by many local native Whites in Yonkers. Black people, regardless of their education or income level, are potentially menacing. I was astonished at how matter-of-factly I was told by white ex-officials, and one local white business owner that the social problems of the entire city could be attributed to desegregation by the liberals, laziness on the part of Blacks, and corrupt politicians. Even the children of Runyon Heights residents were viewed by many Whites as not following the ethic of hard work practiced by their parents. Neither their experiences nor their viewpoint included housing segregation, restrictive covenants, school gerrymandering, or industrial and corporate exclusion by whites. They believed that none of these things impinged upon the Runyon Heights community. After all, they were middle class and had "made it."

While Pecora Inc. has made peace with the local RHIA, MediCab left the community in the late 1980's amidst federal and local criminal investigations. Tristate, which depends upon tractor-trailers for the movement of goods, still battles with Runyon Heights residents. Large diesel trucks drive through Potomac and Dunbar Streets, to get to Runyon Avenue. Meanwhile, residents

can often be heard complaining of idling diesel engines, and parking problems along the avenue. The battle has reached an impasse since the city erected signs which attempt to regulate both truck parking and engine idling. As a result of business encroachments into the area, controlling business activity has remained a central issue to the community, even growing in significance since 1985. For residents and the RHIA, zoning, combined with the unified front of community solidarity, continues as major sources of hope for limiting business activity and expansion in the area.

The Women's Civic Club is also one of the oldest organizations in the community. Originally formed during the 1920's by the women of Nepperhan, it helped to maintain the beautification of Nepperhan by giving out recognition to the owners of well-maintained properties in the community. By the 1960's, the club no longer functioned as a civic beautification committee, but gave scholarships to community youths.

Social and Political Clubs

Numerous clubs and organizations developed out of the church and branched out to serve the broader community. In fact, during the periods when no community center existed, the church often provided a meeting hall for groups. Other clubs formed through associations developed within the RHIA. While clubs seem to live and die with their original membership, new clubs, with newer and younger members, consistently arise to fill the void. Some of the

clubs which came about through the church are the Calendar Club, which organizes trips to plays and events, and the Missionary Society, which is divided into four age groups and works to help people in Africa. One of the oldest church clubs is the Men's Club, which was originally founded by the first male settlers around 1930. A second Men's Club came out of the church around World War II. This club holds a prestigious role in the community, claiming some of the oldest and most respected men in the community among its members. Its main role is to provide scholarships for youth in the community. Beyond that, the club functions as a peer group, drawing members into trips, card games, afternoon chats, and community chores. Another important group based in the church is the gospel choir called the Metrolites, which was formed in 1982. This choir brings church members into contact with other congregations throughout the region. They are known all over the community.

Over the years, other clubs developed in Runyon Heights. Many no longer exist: the Royal Boys, the Studio Bachelors, Club Thirteen, the Frivolity Bridge Club, the Rod and Gun Club, the San Tous, and the Chetocqua Debs. Others slowly added new members over the years: the Mothers Club, The Women's Civic Club, the Monte Carloites, the Bridge Club, the Idlers, and a group of women who refuse to call themselves a "club" although they meet regularly on Mondays to play cards. In fact, Senior Group #8 seems to function like one large social club.

While not exactly constituting a club, the mothers of Nepperhan have been instrumental in providing a source of needed community stability and solidarity.

After World War II, a number of young men from the community, along with men from the west side of the city, were headed by Leonard Morgan⁶⁶ and formed the very popular Sportsmen's Lounge. Most of the men had been childhood friends. They located the club on the community's border between Clement and Dunbar Streets on Saw Mill River Road; it functioned like a local night club. People came to the club to hear music, dance, socialize, eat and drink. A number of famous acts passed through the Sportsmen's Lounge, including world renowned African drummer Babatunde Olatunji.

In addition to the multiplicity of clubs and organizations specific to Runyon Heights, other organizations have found strong support among community members. Women have belonged to the Terrace City Chapter #26 of the Eastern Stars, sometimes called the women's auxiliary to the Masons; a couple of local men have belonged to the Masons. Both secret societies were popular in Nepperhan, as in other Negro communities in the south and northeast. The secret societies⁶⁷ functioned as a source of social intercourse,

⁶⁶. Leonard Morgan was also past President of the RHIA, an indication of the highly integrated nature of community organizations.

⁶⁷The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows Hero Lodge No. 1520, a secret society, was instituted in 1872 in Yonkers. In August of 1884, the order called Queen of the North, No. 330, of the Household of Ruth branched away from the Odd Fellows. None of the Nepperhan residents interviewed recalled any family connections to these groups. Like the Masons, the Odd

as a domain for experiencing aspirations and intrigue, as well as insurance against misfortune (Dubois, 1973: 224). Others supported or are active in the Yonkers Branch of the NAACP. Others merely participated on their PTA committees.

What is most conspicuous in Runyon Heights today is the lack of social organization among its newest residents. Those under 45 years of age are generally disconnected from social activities with other residents unless interaction occurs through the RHIA. Parents today, whose children attend a variety of elementary and high schools, belong to numerous PTA associations; thus the cohesion which existed among earlier generations is today absent. Over the years, fewer residents have joined secret societies or attended church regularly. In general, baby-boom generation residents have failed to establish small locally-based organizational networks between families outside of the local civic association, as had earlier generations. A number of changes account for the differences. First, younger families are more likely to be newer to the community. Many have not yet been drawn into local issues. In addition, many in this group do not have school age children. Secondly, the closing of School 1 prevented the development of the kind of close-knit associations between children and families that were common in earlier eras. Third, newer residents are more likely to be employed professionally, with jobs which place greater

Fellows was a segregated version of the white fraternal organization.

emphasis upon participation in professional associations. Fourth, both newer and younger residents are less likely to be involved in local church activities or locally based social clubs. While the church, clubs, and secret societies were once a major source of community building and solidarity, the role increasingly falls upon the Runyon Heights Improvement Association. Finally, those who became most active in the community were often those who grew up in the area and were drawn into clubs and associations as the community was repeatedly polarized against the onslaught of outside forces.

However, as tenure has increased, and outside forces have impinged upon the community, local involvement from this group has increased. Their professional experience, education, and networks will prove to be invaluable resources for maintaining future community solidarity. While this group is seldom directly involved in local civic associations, many lend support when issues arise which may affect them. In many ways, this cohort tends to constitute somewhat of an elite among Blacks in Yonkers. Among the newest cohort are officers in local civil rights organizations, prominent black businesspersons and lawyers, corporate managers and judges.

In contrast to widely held beliefs of middle-class organization and working-class disorganization, Runyon Heights has, in many ways, become less organized as it has become more middle-class; ironically, it has also become more politically active in defending its turf. What is telling is that the most civically active residents are also those most involved in community clubs and

associations. Future community solidarity and political power may depend upon the ability of newer and younger cohorts to establish and participate in local community clubs and associations.

The School

School 1, located on Dunbar Street in Nepperhan, functioned as a community elementary school for Runyon Heights children. Up until its closing in 1954, Nepperhan children could walk to school within their own closely knit community. Strong bonds developed between those who attended School 1 and these bonds are still strong today. The majority of Runyon Heights' seniors, many of whom are members of the Group 6 City Park and Recreation group, attended School 1. In fact, some of the bonds created in School 1 transcended racial lines and a few "Old-timers" have maintained these interracial friendships over the years.

While virtually all of the Nepperhan children attended School 1 up until 1954, the school remained racially diverse until 1938. Although most Italian-American children from the immediate area attended Catholic schools, many white children from surrounding areas had attended School 1 up until 1938, when school district lines were redrawn. Students who had previously attended School 1 were relocated from the predominantly white areas north (Homefield), east, south and west of Runyon Heights, to the predominantly white Schools 5 and 22. Up until the 1930's, School 1 was the only truly integrated

elementary school in Yonkers. Black students constituted one-third to one-half of the student body. The school zone change created the smallest school zone in Yonkers, effectively isolating the Runyon children (80 CIV. 6761 LBS. : 273). The four-foot reserve strip separating Homefield served as the northern border of the zone. The southern border was Tuckahoe Road. The western border was Saw Mill River Road, and the eastern Border was Bushey Avenue. Most of the few remaining Italian-American children attended Catholic schools, as had many of their parents, although a small number of Homefield parents continued to send their children to School 1. By the 1950's, white students were overcrowded at Schools 5 and 22, while School 1 experienced problems of underutilization and racial concentration. School 1, which was 91% black by 1950, at the time enrolled a mere 100 students in a facility designed to hold 240 (80 CIV. 6761 LBS. : 274). Underutilization resulted in double-grade sessions which merged first- and second-grade classes, and third- and fourth-grade classes. In addition, the first three black teachers in the city were assigned to School 1 during this period, further emphasizing the school's identity as black.

The result was that Runyon Heights and its elementary school now formed a solid Negro geopolitical community, having been effectively isolated from adjoining, predominantly white communities. Both racial isolation and underutilization contributed to the closing of an important community institution in 1954. In the hope of improving the education of their children, the

community had petitioned the Board of Education to expand the School 1 district lines, which would have effectively reintegrated the school. The School Board decided to solve the immediate problem by simply closing the school and reassigning Runyon Heights children to Schools 5 and 24. The decision by the School Board came immediately following the May 1954 ruling by the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*. Following the court's argument that racially separate schools were inherently unequal, the Board's decision solved the immediate problem the all-black School 1 created, while also improving the racial balance at Schools 5 and 22. Seeking a change for the better, yet fearing the loss of their community school, the parents reluctantly settled for a compromise which bused their children out of the community.

While destroying a neighborhood institution, the closing of School 1 ironically created greater racial balance at both Schools 5 and 24, while compounding the overcrowding situation. Parents from Runyon Heights, who favored a community school and opposed busing their children, legally challenged the Board's decision. However, the legal challenge was rejected by the New York State Commissioner of Education. The decision received reluctant support from the local NAACP, which ultimately supported the Commissioner's decision in light of the Yonkers School Board's rejection of the parents' initial proposal to expand district lines (80 CIV. 6761 LBS. : 272-279).

Much of the history of School 1 is documented in the 1985 landmark decision linking school segregation and housing segregation in Yonkers.⁶⁸ In its opinion, the court makes clear the racial basis of isolating both School district 1 and the Runyon residential community:

Other neutral justifications, if any, for this particular drawing of the School 1 attendance zone boundaries are absent from the record. Based upon the available evidence, the original drawing of School 1's attendance zone boundaries constituted deliberate, racially motivated gerrymandering, done in a manner which carefully incorporated privately created residential segregation (80 CIV. 6761 LBS. : 272-279).

The experiences Runyon Heights inhabitants have had with the Yonkers Board of Education have helped to solidify racial solidarity among residents as well as coalesce community political involvement. Since 1970, children have been shuffled between different schools in a vain attempt to create racial balance in the Yonkers school system. This "Three Card Monte" game has annoyed parents and served to create a heightened racial awareness among parents with regards to the school system. This situation has also inspired newer residents to become involved in local politics and community organization.

Prior to the problems with School 1, segregation in the Yonkers school system was not new to the parents of Nepperhan. In 1929, high school

⁶⁸United States of America and Yonkers Branch- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, et al. vs Yonkers Board of Education; City of Yonkers; and Yonkers Community Development Agency. Opinion 80 CIV 6761 (LBS).

students from Nepperhan found resistance at the newly opened Roosevelt High ⁶⁹School, located a mile away on Tuckahoe Road. Although no school records exist prior to 1938, when attendance zones were changed, residents remembered that the problem at the academically oriented Roosevelt School revolved around taxes and school segregation.

Apparently, taxes from the Nepperhan Valley area had gone towards the construction of the new Roosevelt building. Roosevelt, during its early years, contained both a high school and junior high school. When parents discovered that their children would be denied admittance and gerrymandered across town to Longfellow Junior High School, as well as to Gorton, Saunders and Yonkers High Schools, the mothers of the community banded together, petitioning the school board. Mrs. Downs, Mrs. Bookman, Mrs. Jackson, Mr. and Mrs. Bonner, and Mr. and Mrs. John Fields were leaders in the battle. Reluctantly, Roosevelt permitted the Nepperhan children to attend the school.

Residents remembered being among the first Blacks at the school. Their presence was tolerated, but not welcomed. Respondents told of being encouraged to attend Saunders Trade School while being discouraged from attending the more academically oriented Roosevelt. Others told of being discouraged from participating on the Roosevelt School's sports teams. White

⁶⁹I was corrected on a number of occasions that the correct pronunciation of Roosevelt shortened the "oo" sound using only two syllables, so that locals pronounced "Rosevelt", rather than "Roos-e-velt"

students were apparently not openly hostile towards their Negro classmates. Their tolerance, however, rarely resulted in friendships. Only a few interracial friendships developed during those early days at Roosevelt, and even fewer were maintained over the years. While Negroes and Whites might have become friends at school, they rarely visited one another's homes. This was a change from the relatively congenial atmosphere which had existed at School 1. After high school, most cross-racial friendships dissolved. By the 1960's some of the rigidity in segregated social relationships between black and white teenagers at Roosevelt began to slowly erode and a few established friendships.

Families, schools, churches, civic and social associations provided the basis for the development of local sentimental ties and feelings of community cohesion. All of these institutions were strengthened both implicitly and explicitly by the segregative practices of social institutions, as well as by the housing and labor markets in Yonkers. In short, racial segregation and economic exclusivity in suburban Yonkers provided the basis for a strong sense of a local community. Racial and class identity among residents have been reinforced through attempts to preserve their middle-class status, while creating a sense of unity and community.

Chapter Eight

Race, Class and the Political Organization of Community Self-Interest

While the formation of the black middle-class Runyon Heights community was predicated upon residents' stable jobs and access to suburban property that was isolated from poorer populations, survival of the community has depended upon the community's strong solidarity and its involvement in local political issues. Though physically isolated, Nepperhan nevertheless exerted considerable leverage in local politics. This strong voice has aided the community in defeating segregationist school policies and numerous proposals for low-income and "welfare hotel" housing in the area. This chapter examines the political environment in which the Nepperhan community defended both its race and class interests, and how these interests were reflected in residents' loyalties and voting behavior in both national and local elections.

An Overview of Political Organization in Yonkers

From 1940 to 1991, the political system in the City of Yonkers was a Council Manager form of government, sometimes known as the weak-Mayor form of government. The city was divided into twelve wards. Each ward elected, by majority vote, a council person to sit on the City Council. Both the Mayor and twelve ward representatives were elected for two year terms. The only citywide election was for the Mayor, who served on the council as council member-at-large. The Mayor's primary responsibilities were to appoint members

of the Board of Education, vote in City Council decisions, and act as official head of the city. The City Manager was the chief executive and administrative officer, and was appointed by the City Council to oversee the city budget and the appointment of administrative heads. Termination of the City Manager was decided by a majority vote of the City Council.

The strong Mayoral form of government, which had characterized the City of Yonkers prior to 1940, was abandoned in favor of the Council-Manager style of government, after a controversy involving the former Mayor (Steigman, 1967: 11). Under the old system, the Mayor controlled the budget and all administrative appointments without the approval of the City Council (Steigman, 1967: 69). The new system shifted political power to the wards and ultimately to the City Council Representatives, while the Mayor maintained control of only the school system.

Though the Runyon Heights community was first established during the era of the strong-Mayor, it evolved primarily during this later period of city political organization, characterized by strong wards and weak mayors. Although the area had originally been designated as the 3rd election district of the 10th Ward when it was first developed in 1912, it was later assigned to the 6th election district of Ward 10, in 1930. Throughout both periods, Yonkers was divided into wards, each having a representative on the City Council.

Throughout Runyon Heights' history, up until the 1980's, Yonkers had twelve wards, each of which was represented by one council member.

Following the 1980 Federal Census, a plan was proposed in 1983 to redistrict and switch to a seven-member City Council. Under the plan, the city would be divided into four council districts, each comprising three wards, and each electing a council member. Three additional members would be elected at-large, of which two, who received the most votes, would become the Mayor and Vice Mayor respectively. This plan was challenged by the local NAACP on the grounds that it would have virtually precluded minority representation on the City Council. Redistricting was ordered by the courts. In 1985, elections were held using the old twelve-member ward system. The first black council person, Joseph E. Burgess Jr., was elected to represent the 1st Ward, the area situated around Getty Square. In 1987, new redistricting plans created a seven-member City Council, and the ward system was finally abandoned. Instead of the 1983 proposal, which would have created only four council districts, the 1987 plan created six districts. The four district plan would have gerrymandered the large black area of southwest Yonkers into a predominantly white council district, thereby weakening black working-class influence on the City Council. Runyon Heights also would have become an even smaller minority in its ward.

While creating the first minority voting block in Yonkers by the redistricting of the First Council District, the seven-member City Council system did centralize political power among the six council persons, effectively shifting control to fewer elected representatives than had been on the old twelve-member ward system. But this result left the Runyon Heights community in a

relatively strong position within the new 6th Council District. Compared to the old ward system, the council district system divided the political geography into larger areas, thereby increasing the relative power of each council member, who now represented a larger constituency, while also increasing racial minority representation in the city and preserving the bargaining power of the Runyon community.

The six districts each elected a representative to the City Council, and the Mayor was elected at large. While this new plan established the first predominantly "minority" council district in the Southwest downtown area, it placed Runyon Heights in the predominantly white and Republican 6th Council District. In fact, the majority of the 10th Ward and all of the 5th Ward became a part of the 6th Council District. Since, under the old ward system, the 10th Ward system contained fewer people than did the new 6th Council District, Runyon Heights came to represent a smaller percentage of the political unit. This could have potentially reduced the influence of the community's vote in local elections. However, the closeness of local races insured that their votes would weigh heavily in local elections. Likewise, council districts overlap with the old ward political divisions, thereby diminishing the influence of local ward leaders in local politics. Nonetheless, local ward leaders are still active behind the scenes, community leaders in Runyon Heights still exert influence over political and administrative officials in city government, and the votes of Runyon residents still weigh heavily in local council district races.

After having centralized political power in the newly structured City Council, Yonkers quickly moved to transfer power back to the Mayor. In 1991, the strong-Mayoral form of government, abandoned in 1940, was revived. The new city government reinvested power in the Mayor's office, and weakened City Council influence over administrative decisions. Under the new system, both the Mayor and President of the City Council were elected at large, while the remaining six districts each elected representatives to the council. Based upon the latest census reports in 1990, the 1993 redistricting plan created another "minority" council district in the 2nd Council District. This second district included a portion of the former 1st District. For the first time, Latino residents could reasonably expect to exert influence in city government.

Creation of the new district raised troubling issues for Runyon Heights. Attempts were made to gerrymander the community into the 1st District, thereby politically segregating virtually the entire black population of Yonkers. The plan was resisted by community residents and, as a result, Runyon Heights remained a part of the 6th District. The future of the community would have been placed in jeopardy by the plan. Community voices would have been completely silenced on the seven member council. In addition, their class concerns would have been overshadowed by the needs of the much larger and poorer west side community.

While Runyon Heights narrowly escaped the consequences of lumping all of black Yonkers together into one council district, the final plan still raises

questions for the future of working-class minority representation in Yonkers. The gerrymandering of the two contiguous Black and Latino districts may create conflicts between Latinos and Blacks and prevent minority coalition building, as political incumbents battle over future redistricting. This approach to minority political representation is predicated upon maintaining residential segregation patterns. On the other hand, separating the two voting communities may, in the short run, increase political power for both groups. If the Latino and Black district representatives support each other in council decisions, gerrymandering may prove to be a decisive boost to minority empowerment on the west side of the city.

Yonkers Political Organization and the Runyon Heights Community

From the outset, residents in Nepperhan became involved in community affairs and ultimately local government and politics. The highly organized nature of the community, consisting of a church, school, PTA, social clubs, the RHIA, and a community center insured that residents would quickly learn about issues facing them and their neighbors. In addition, home ownership required that residents invest their life's savings in their homes. With little place else to go, residents contributed their financial and intellectual resources to the development of civic and community organizations dedicated to fostering and preserving the Nepperhan enclave and their financial futures.

Active participation in local affairs became a community norm. High levels of community organization led directly to high political involvement. The first settlers in Nepperhan founded political clubs for both parties. The Runyon Heights Democratic Club was formed in June of 1933. By that time, the Republican Club of Nepperhan and the Phylis Wheatley Republican Club had been founded. As might be expected, early Nepperhaners were predominantly Republican. This fact reflects both the traditional Republican alliances held by many Black Americans prior to the New Deal, as well as the typical suburban voting pattern. Yet evidence indicates that their voting was not only a response to the classic middle-class suburban issues such as crime, schools, taxes, and the quality of life, but also to their self interest as it pertains to racial politics in Yonkers and in the nation.

In 1929⁷⁰, Nepperhan was a part of the larger 3rd election district. In 1930, Nepperhan was redesignated as the 6th election district, which made the community the greater part of that district. Runyon Heights originally comprised a small portion of the 3rd district. By placing the community in the 6th district, community boundaries now closely approximated political boundaries. This action occurred during the same period that the Runyon children met resistance at the newly opened Roosevelt High School. However, the change in election district had little impact on political power in Runyon Heights, although it did

⁷⁰Westchester County Archives maintains voter registration beginning in 1929. No earlier records exist in the county.

allow for an easier assessment of voting behavior in the area. Over the years, the geographical boundaries of the 6th district narrowed considerably, and by 1960, only Runyon Heights remained. Conversely, part of the community was recently removed from the district; in 1993, the southern portion of Bushey Avenue was gerrymandered into an adjoining district. However, this move has had little impact on local voting patterns since the strip remains within the 6th Council District.

Community Empowerment

Given the prevailing climate of resistance to the presence of black homeowners in many residential areas in Yonkers, the Runyon Heights community has, surprisingly, exerted substantial influence in local politics over the years. Four explanations exist for its political empowerment. First, the community's history of active political participation and local solidarity has insured that their votes would be felt in local elections. Second, historically, party affiliation has meant little to Nepperhaners. Consequently, their votes for local candidates went to the individual who best served their interests. This situation has forced both political parties to actively campaign and solicit votes in the community, under both the twelve ward and six council district arrangements. Third, the closeness of political contests for the City Council seat, under both the Ward and Council District systems, has ensured that the Runyon voters would not be overlooked. In fact, during the 1980's, though

local racial issues polarized voting behavior, candidates, who often found themselves "neck and neck" with their opponents, continued to court community voters. Fourth, local community leaders have used existing networks in city government. This last factor is a result of the provincial nature of early Yonkers, where many people, both black and white, established early ties that would later prove advantageous in negotiating the city bureaucracy.

The earliest available voter registration information demonstrates the early Republican leanings of the black population in Nepperhan. In 1930, 77% of the Nepperhan residents were registered Republicans (see Table 8.1)⁷¹. The predominantly Republican character of Nepperhan is consistent with observations of white suburban communities across America. Nonetheless, this is a unique phenomenon for a black community; ever since Truman solidified the black vote by his civil rights campaign of 1948, black Americans have maintained both Democratic party affiliation, and have overwhelmingly voted for Democratic candidates both locally and nationally (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, 1985: 17).

Considering the class and racial character of the Runyon Heights community, one might wonder how the community would vote, which voting

⁷¹ Although, up until 1970 the 6th election district boundary included streets outside of Runyon Heights, the numbers used for this analysis of voter registration excludes street addresses outside of community boundaries. Nonetheless, the 6th district has always included all of Runyon Heights, and by 1970 the district and community boundaries were virtually identical.

pattern it would adopt, and which of its interests it would seek to further. One might wonder whether the community would follow the post World War II, middle-class, suburban pattern of Republican patronage, or whether it would support the Democratic Party as has much of black America since the 1930's and Roosevelt's New Deal. Analysis of national and local voting patterns in Runyon Heights suggests that residents vote to protect their material interests, as well as to further the interests of their racial group. Issues of both race and class motivate and influence the voting behavior of residents, and these two interests are negotiated in the process of defending community interests.

From its inception, Runyon Heights was predominantly Republican, and it remained predominantly Republican into the 1960's, while much of black America became strong supporters of the Democratic Party (Table 8.1). In fact, between 1950 and 1960, the number of registered Republicans actually increased by 56 people, from 237 to 292, while the number of registered Democrats increased by only nine people during the same period. One woman, a resident since birth in 1929 said, "When I registered to vote Republican, it was back in the Eisenhower years." Her comment echoes those of a number of older residents. Apparently, the term "Republican" carried different connotations then, particularly with regard to racial issues. Today, however, like many others who are still registered Republicans, she is considering changing party affiliations. Many residents changed to the Democratic party during the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's.

Table 8.1:
Political Party Registration Election District 6 Ward 10, Yonkers⁷²

YEAR OF PARTY AFFIL	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1992
REPUBLICAN	189 (77%)	223 (57%)	237 (54%)	292 (60%)	260 (41%)	147 (27%)	99 (16%)
DEMOCRAT	42 (17%)	136 (35%)	179 (41%)	188 (38%)	360 (57%)	333 (61%)	429 (71%)
socialist	1 (.41%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
AMER LABOR	0	9	5 (1%)	0	0	0	0
LIBERAL	0	0	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	3 (.47%)	23 (4%)	1
CONSERVATIVE	0	0	0	0	1 (.16%)	2 (.36%)	13 (2%)
Right to Life	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VOID BLANK missing non affil	11 (5%)	22 (6%)	16 (4%)	6 (1%)	10 (2%)	38 (7%)	64 (11%)
TOTAL	243 (100%)	390 (100%)	440 (100%)	489 (100%)	634 (100%)	543 (100%)	606 (100%)

The 1960's saw a significant shift in political affiliation in Runyon Heights. The community shifted from being 60% Republican in 1960 to being 61% Democratic in 1980 (see Table 8.1). By 1992, it was 71% Democratic.

⁷²Registration Rolls were acquired for the years 1930 through 1970. Between 1930 and 1960, political party affiliation was calculated by including only streets within the boundaries of Runyon Heights. These numbers, therefore, do not represent the entire district. After 1960, community boundaries were completely in line with the district boundary so that election district 6 comprised only streets within the boundaries of Runyon Heights. For the years 1970 through 1992, the entire 6th district is used. However, in 1993, the southern portion of Bushy Avenue was gerrymandered into another election district in the 6th Council District.

Still, as late as 1970, 41% of registered voters in Runyon Heights were Republican. While the number of Democrats has continued to grow throughout each decade since 1930, the community saw a large growth in the Democratic population between 1960 and 1970, when the GOP population expanded by 91%.

Runyon Heights residents are extremely active voters, both in local and national elections. Comparing the number of registered voters in 1969 with the number of ballots cast during the 1968 presidential election (Table 8.5), an estimate of voter turnout in the community for the 1968 election can be calculated. Nearly 90% (579/644) of the registered voters in election district 6 cast votes during the national election. Calculating turnout using the 1961 voter registration rolls, 88% voted in the 1960 presidential election (489/556) (Table 8.3). For the 1992 presidential election (Table 8.7), 82% (498/606) of the registered voters cast ballots. Not only was voter turnout large in national elections, but the same trend was present in local elections. Using the 1970 registration rolls to calculate voter turnout, in the 1969 Mayoral campaign, 85% (539/634) of the registered voters cast ballots (see Table 8.12)

The overwhelming support residents gave to the Republican Party, which was reflected in party registrations during the 1950's, was also reflected in their support for GOP presidential candidates. Not only did residents support Republican ward clubs, and register with the GOP, they also voted for national Republican candidates. While Republican registration rose by 35 people from

54% to 60% between 1950 and 1960, 69% of the district voted for the Republican Eisenhower/Nixon ticket in 1956 (Table 8.2). By 1960, community support had begun to shift towards the Democratic Party. Still, the Republican Nixon/Lodge ticket received 51% of the community's vote in 1960 (Table 8.3).

Table 8.2: 1956 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Republican Eisenhower/ Nixon	Democrat Stevenson/ Kefauver	Liberal Stevenson/ Kefauver	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	70%	28%	2%	90,302
Ward 10	75%	23%	2%	7,715
Election District 6	69%	29%	2%	600

Table 8.3: 1960 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Republican Nixon/ Lodge	Democrat Kennedy/ Johnson	Liberal Kennedy/ Johnson	Soc. Worker Dobbs/ Weiss	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	51%	45%	4%	.1%	96,121
Ward 10	56%	41%	3%	.2%	9110
Election District 6	51%	44%	4%	.2%	529

Table 8.4: 1964 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Republican	Democrat	Liberal	Soc. Labor	Soc. Worker	Total
Locality	Goldwater/ Miller	Johnson/ Humphrey	Johnson/ Humphrey	Hass/ Bloomen	De Berry/ Shaw	Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	38%	58%	4%	.1%	.02%	93,750
Ward 10	39%	57%	4%	.1%	.01%	9,328
Election District 6	9%	85%	7%	0	0	600

The 1964 presidential election saw a significant shift in the Republican voting pattern which had become common in the community. The conservative Goldwater and Miller, running on the GOP ticket, received only 9% of the community's vote while the Liberal/Democrats, Johnson and Humphrey, received 92% of the vote (Table 8.4). For the first time, the voting behavior of Runyon Heights residents deviated from that of the city of Yonkers and of the 10th Ward. This shift in voting behavior continued in 1968. The Republican team of Nixon and Agnew gained a little ground by capturing 17% of the 6th district's vote (Table 8.5), but the Liberal/Democratic team of Humphrey and Muskie still claimed 82%. While 41% of the community was registered Republican in 1970, only 17% of the 6th district voted for the GOP candidate Richard M. Nixon. Nixon received appreciable, though not overwhelming, support in the 10th Ward (49%) and in Yonkers (48%). The 1980 presidential election returns reveal a similar pattern. The Conservative/Republican Reagan/Bush team received only 15% of the district's vote, while Carter and Mondale received 83% of the vote for the Democratic Party (Table 8.6).

Table 8.5: 1968 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Republican Nixon/ Agnew	Democrat Humphrey/ Muskie	Liberal Humphrey/ Muskie	Soc. Labor Blomen / Taylor	Courage Wallace/ Griffin	Soc. Worker Halstead/ Boutelle	Freedom and Peace Gregory/ Lane	Irregular Ballots	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	48%	39%	4%	.2%	8%	.3%	.2%	.01%	95,717
Ward 10	49%	39%	4%	.1%	8%	.2%	.2%	.04%	10,578
Election District 6	17%	77%	5%	.2%	1%	.2%	1%	0	579

Table 8.6: 1980 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Republican Reagan / Bush	Democrat Carter/ Mondale	Liberal Anderson / Lucy	Conservative Reagan / Bush	Right to Life McCormac k/ Briscoll	Free Lib Clark/ Koch	Communist Hall/ Davis	Socialist Worker Berry/ Zimmerman	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	49%	35%	6%	9%	1%	1%	.09%	.02%	75,706
Ward 10	51%	33%	6%	9%	1%	1%	.05%	.03%	8,450
Election District 6	13%	83%	2%	2%	.2%	.4%	0	0	541
Candidate Locality	Workers World Griswold/ Holmes	Citizens Commoner/ Harris	Irregular	Total Ballots Canvassed					
Yonkers	.01%	.3%	.01%	75,706					
Ward 10	.01%	.3%	.01%	8,450					
Election District 6	0	0	0	541					

Table 8.7: 1992 Presidential Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Republican Bush/ Quale	Democrat Clinton/ Gore	Liberal Clinton / Gore	Conservative Bush/ Quale	Right to Life Bush/ Quale	Libertarian Marrou/ Lord	No Party Perot/ Stockdale	New Alliance Fulani/ Munoz	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	37%	43%	1%	5%	.03 %	.2%	10%	.1%	67,665
Ward 10	40%	40%	1%	6%	3%	.1%	10%	.09%	7,287
Election District 6	11%	79%	1%	3%	.6%	.2%	5%	1%	498
Candidate Locality	Socialist Worker Macwarren / Debates	Natural Law Hagelin / Tompkins	write ins	Total Ballots Canvassed					
Yonkers	.3%	.06%	1	67,665					
Ward 10	.2%	.05%	0	7,287					
Election District 6	0	.2%	0	498					

The 1992 presidential election returns show little change in the overall pattern of Democratic support by the Runyon Heights community and election district 6 (Table 8.7). However, some degree of dissatisfaction with both Republican and Democratic Parties is evident. The Democratic Clinton/Gore ticket received only 80% of the vote, indicating a slow but steady decline in Democratic support since its height in 1964, while the Bush/Quale ticket maintained the GOP decade average, claiming 15% of the vote in the district. Perot/ Stockdale received 5% of the vote, while Lenora Fulani edged another 1%. Perot actually received 10% of the city-wide ballot. It seems probable that Perot and Fulani each drew a few percentage points from both Republican and Democratic voters, which may account for the slightly lower number of voters for both parties.

The apparent discrepancy between party registration and national voting behavior is explained by the increasing significance of race to community political identity, by a lag between voting behavior and party registration, and by ideological shifts in the Republican Party itself. National elections have embraced political issues which bear directly upon racial politics ever since Eisenhower, and later the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, first began to enact civil rights legislation. Issues over which residents express concern today include governmental enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, affirmative

action, equal educational opportunity, and inequities within the system.⁷³ While many residents reported that they registered and voted Republican during the Eisenhower era, support has grown since 1960 for Democratic presidential candidates who espoused a more liberal domestic philosophy, particularly with regards to racial issues. The GOP had taken a conservative "pick yourself up by your bootstraps" approach toward the poor, working-, and middle-classes while assailing affirmative action policy, a policy originally initiated to address widespread racial discrimination in American institutions, as a liberal waste of taxpayers' money. These changes occurred during a period when the Runyon Heights community found its stability threatened, in large part, by racial dynamics in the changing suburban landscape. Meanwhile, the cultural and identity transformation which changed the humble "Negro" identity towards a proud and assertive "Black" identity was underway across America. Democratic support was strongest in 1964 for the liberal Lyndon B. Johnson, under whose administration Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), and the Fair Housing Act (1968). As this period could be considered the height of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, it also witnessed a decisive polarization of voting behavior along racial lines.

Today, dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party is evident. Many community members expressed the belief that blind allegiance to a party was

⁷³Residents were disturbed over the 1992 ruling, in which Los Angeles police officers were acquitted of the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

not useful to local political empowerment. They wanted no party or person to take their votes for granted. Election results indicate that significant segments of the community often vote across party lines. Thus residents are seeking the candidate that best serves their interests. Of the six presidential elections surveyed in this analysis, Bill Clinton received the lowest support of any Democratic candidate since the Kennedy/Johnson Ticket of 1960.

The polarization of voting behavior along racial lines in Yonkers is most clear in local elections since the 1980's. During the 1950's, residents often split their vote between parties. As a result, local GOP support in Runyon Heights was strong. In 1957 and 1965, support for Republican mayoral candidates in the 6th election district was nearly identical to their support in the 10th Ward and the city at-large (see Table 8.8 and 8.10). GOP candidates received 58% and 48% of the vote respectively. Support was also strong for GOP 10th Ward candidates until 1965, when moderate Alfred Del Bello claimed 57% of the election district (see Table 8.11). By 1969, Democratic support had solidified. Del Bello claimed 63% of election district 6 in his successful bid for mayor, while Dominick Cuccia claimed 60% of the district in his successful bid for councilman of Ward 10 (See Table 8.12 and 8.13). Even with increasing Democratic support, both nationally and locally, GOP candidates still collected between 30% and 40% of the vote.

While the 1980's brought a renewed conservative discourse to national politics vis-a-vis the GOP, a crisis over school and housing desegregation,

which had been brewing in Yonkers further exacerbated local racial cleavages. As community opposition to low-income housing and school desegregation, which may have included a busing component, increased among white homeowners, their interests were reflected in the political discourse of local politicians. Likewise, where Runyon Heights residents traditionally split their vote between both parties, voting patterns during the 1980's increasingly supported challenges to policies of racial segregation in Yonkers.

During the 1970's, former Mayor Angelo Martinelli (1973-1977) had developed a reputation for developing and encouraging the segregationist policies of the city and the school board, which he appointed. During the late 1970's, he led marches and demonstrations against desegregation. He narrowly lost the mayoral bid in 1979 to liberal Gerald Loehr who squeezed 51% of the city vote (see Table 8.14). Angelo ran again in 1981, just as the desegregation lawsuit was underway. During this campaign, Martinelli shifted dramatically towards a less provincial political outlook. Claiming that he had been mistaken in his earlier position, he now encouraged settling the federal desegregation law suit, and ultimately desegregating low-income housing and public schools in Yonkers. Whether desegregation was his aim, or whether he simply reasonably assessed the city's slim chance of victory in the law suit and opted for city control rather than having the city's finances dictated by the courts, is difficult to say. Though Martinelli narrowly won the mayoral race with 51% of the vote in 1981, he was even less popular in election district 6,

securing only 31% of the vote (see Table 8.15). Apparently the majority of election district 6 voters were not convinced of his change of heart. Paradoxically, even though Martinelli had formerly opposed the desegregation plan, he still managed to secure a significant fraction of the voters in the district.

Over time, apparently a number of residents were convinced of his change of heart, and he received an astounding 66% of the vote in election district 6 in 1985 (see Table 8.17). It is actually not a surprising figure since his opponent, Bernie Spreckman, was a stark opponent of settling the desegregation suit. In 1987, concessionist Martinelli lost the mayoral race to the late Nicholas Wascisko, another candidate who flirted with the segregationist idea of challenging the then recent Supreme Court decision, which had found the city and the school board guilty of intentional segregation. Interestingly, Martinelli won a thin majority of election district 6, tallying nearly 53% of the vote.

After the court's 1986 ruling, the schools quickly moved to develop a magnet program to desegregate the schools; however, opposition from homeowners to the low-income housing plan was widespread. Local politician Jack O'Toole organized the Save Yonkers Federation. The Federation was a group of white middle-class homeowners from around the city, who adamantly opposed housing in each of their areas. While the group often claimed racially neutral objectives in protecting their housing values and communities,

discussions often centered around the implied race of the potential occupants of the housing. In this case, class acted as a mask for underlying racial animosities. Before long, however, Yonkers' resistance to the court-ordered housing plan was doomed. In 1988, the city, led by a council majority, resisted settlement; Council Representatives Ed Fagan Jr., Nicholas V. Longo, Henry Spallone, and Pete Chema were found in contempt of court for not voting to approve the court order to desegregate housing. In September of that year, under threat of state intervention and fiscal bankruptcy, the council reluctantly voted to comply with the court, though some members still vowed to oppose Judge Sand. By the 1989 mayoral race, Democratic candidate Nicholas Wascisko had shifted positions, as had Martinelli, and wanted the council to settle. Henry Spallone and the "gang of four" successfully challenged contempt fines levied against the individual representatives by Judge Sand. With renewed vigor they swore to fight on. In 1991, Pete Chema ran for Mayor, still vowing to direct, if not resist, the court order. In an unusual three-way race, Chema lost, though he received a respectable 34% of the electorate. Terence M. Zaleski won on the Democratic ticket with merely 36% of the vote. Angelo Martinelli became the spoiler candidate, capturing 28% of the vote, and crushing Chema's bid.

After the 1991 elections, and the shift to the strong-Mayor form of government, the City Council decided in April of 1992 to finally comply with the housing mandate. Their housing proposal, however, was ultimately rejected by

the judge. Now the council is seeking to comply with the judge, without upsetting their respective constituencies, in the hopes of reclaiming the city's autonomy and future.

The dramatic impact of race on the voting patterns in Runyon Heights is evidenced by the 18-year career of Councilman Ed Fagan Jr., longtime representative of Ward 10, and most recently Council District 6. In his early years as Ward 10 representative, Fagan enjoyed a fair share of the votes in election district 6. As he became more opposed to the housing desegregation order by Judge Sand, voting patterns became polarized along racial lines. A newcomer to the political scene in Ward 10, Fagan received only 20% of the votes in election district 6 in 1979, compared with 58% of Ward 10. By 1981, support for Ed Fagan in the 6th election district had grown to 29%, compared with 64% for the entire ward. His support had gradually grown among local Runyon Heights residents, most likely as a result of his having provided city services to the community. Fagan clearly recognizes his constituency. In 1993, he purchased a full page ad for \$75 in the RHIA's Souvenir Reunion Journal.

During the 1960's, Republican candidates had always claimed at least 30% to 40% of the vote. By 1985, Fagan had regained 37% of the election district, despite his opposition to the desegregation suit (Table 8.18). He gained his relatively strong support, however, in opposition to the future Save Yonkers Federation supporter, John P. O'Toole. Fagan's support had gradually grown among local Runyon Heights residents, in part because he often provided city

services to the community. Over time, Fagan's extremely conservative position finally began to chip away at his local support. In 1987, running for council representative of the newly formed 6th Council District, and just as he was approaching a stand off with Judge Leonard B. Sand, support slid to 32% in election district 6 (Table 8.20). In the 1989 council race, support dropped still further to 18%, where it remained in 1991 (Table 8.22 and 8.24).

According to one resident, active in local Republican politics, the waning of support for the GOP may be attributed in part to the way in which political literature is distributed in the area. A resident who works for the Board of Elections explained that due to the predominantly Democratic character of the Runyon Heights area, and the recent change to a four-digit zip code extension, which has isolated the area, the influx of Republican campaign literature has declined significantly. This could hurt party politicians who choose to campaign only in party-dominated areas. This could also diminish the political clout which the Runyon Heights community has gained through maintaining dual-party affiliations and voting patterns. However, local racial issues which have confronted the city are a more plausible explanation.

Throughout the 1980's, as Ed Fagan Jr. became more adamant about resisting desegregation plans in Yonkers, Runyon Heights voters increasingly supported rival candidates. While at first glance this appears to be either racially motivated voting, or blind party affiliation, the history of the community suggests that residents are careful to select candidates who best represent their

interests. Historically, that has often meant a Republican candidate in both national and local elections. However, the racial polarization in the political discourse between Republicans and Democrats, on both local and national levels, maintains race at the center of the Runyon Heights community. Consequently, race remains a central feature of middle-class black life and identity among residents.

Table 8.8: 1957 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Republican Kristen Kristensen	Democrat Schuyler Patterson	Liberal William E. Slater	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality				
Yonkers	53%	42%	4%	71,560
Ward 10	58%	39%	3%	6,351
Election District 6	58%	39%	3%	490

**Table 8.9:
1957 Elections for Councilman, Tenth Ward: Yonkers, New York.**

Candidate	Republican Merritt A. Cline	Democrat Joseph G. Prior	Liberal Joseph G. Prior	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality				
Ward 10	47%	49%	3%	6,391
Election District 6	51%	44%	5%	500

Table 8.10: 1965 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Republican John E. Flynn	Democrat Thomas G. McSpedon	Liberal John E. Flynn	Conservative Nicholas A. DiCostanzo	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	54%	40%	3%	4%	80,869
Ward10	56%	37%	3%	4%	8,198
Election District 6	48%	48%	3%	1%	525

**Table 8.11:
1965 Elections for Councilman, Tenth Ward: Yonkers, New York**

Candidate	Republican Andrew Hayduk	Democrat Alfred B. Del Bello	Liberal Andrew Hayduk	Conservative Robert J. Molinatti	Total Ballots Canvassed
Ward 10	45%	50%	3%	3%	8,179
Election District 6	39%	57%	4%	.1%	523

Table 8.12: 1969 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Republican James F.X. O'Rourke	Democrat Alfred B. Del Bello	Conservative Matthew J. Holohan	Liberal Irving P. Nash	Ind. Citizens James F.X. O'Rourke	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	36%	57%	5%	1%	1%	78,426
Ward10	28%	67%	5%	1%	.4%	9153
Election District6	33%	63%	3%	.2%	1%	539

Table 8.13:
1969 Elections for Councilman, Tenth Ward: Yonkers, New York

Candidate	Republican Robert J. Molinatti	Democrat Dominick C. Cuccia	Liberal Elmo Rovere	Conservative Robert J. Molinatti	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality					
Ward10	36%	54%	1%	8%	8,954
Election District 6	33%	60%	2%	5%	511

Table 8.14: 1979 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Republican Angelo R. Martinelli	Democratic Gerald Loehr	Conservative Angelo R. Martinelli	Right to Life Angelo R. Martinelli	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality					
Yonkers	36%	51%	8%	5%	59,610
Ward10	39%	48%	8%	5%	6,655
Election District 6	24%	70%	3%	3%	406

Table 8.15: 1981 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Democrat Gerald E. Loehr	Republican Angelo R. Martinelli	Conservative Angelo R. Martinelli	Right to Life Angelo R. Martinelli	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality					
Yonkers	49%	39%	8%	4%	58,432
Ward10	47%	42%	8%	3%	6,616
Election District 6	69%	27%	3%	1%	423

**Table 8.16:
1981 Elections for Councilman, Tenth Ward: Yonkers, New York**

Candidate Locality	Democrat Alan N. Bratter	Republican Edward J. Fagan	Conservative Edward J. Fagan	Right to Life Edward J. Fagan	Total Ballots Canvassed
Ward 10	36%	49%	10 %	5%	6,308
Election District 6	71%	25%	2%	2%	386

Table 8.17: 1985 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Democrat Bernie Spreckman	Republican Angelo R. Martinelli	Conservative Bernie Spreckman	Right to Life Angelo R. Martinelli	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	36%	50%	9%	5%	51,200
Ward 10	32%	54%	9%	4%	5,525
Election District 6	29%	59%	5%	7%	400

**Table 8.18:
1985 Elections for Councilman, Tenth Ward: Yonkers, New York**

Candidate Locality	Democrat John P. O'Toole	Republican Edward J. Fagan	Conservative Edward J. Fagan	Total Ballots Canvassed
Ward 10	47%	44%	9%	5,165
Election District 6	63%	32%	5%	350

Table 8.19: 1987 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate Locality	Democrat Nicholas Wasicsko	Republican Angelo Martinelli	Conservative Angelo Martinelli	Right to Life Angelo Martinelli	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	52%	36%	8%	4%	44,356
Ward10⁷⁴	46%	42%	8%	4%	4,945
Election District 6	47%	41%	7%	4%	352

**Table 8.20:
1987 Council Member- 6th District, Yonkers, New York⁷⁵.**

Candidate Locality	Democrat Ralph Ferraoli	Republican Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Conservative Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Right to Life Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Ind. Citizens Ralph Ferraoli	Total Ballots Canvassed
6th Council District	45%	39%	10%	5%	2%	8,754
Ward 10	41%	43%	11%	4%	1%	4,405
Election District 6	68%	24%	5%	3%	1%	341

⁷⁴Ward 10 as defined within the 6th Council District. This excludes election district 2 and 15.

⁷⁵ 1987 is the first year of the change from a ward to a council representational system.

Table 8.21: 1989 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York.

Candidate	Democratic	Republican	Conservative	Right to Life	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality	Nicholas Wasicsko	Henry Spallone	Henry Spallone	Frances Silkowski	
Yonkers	45%	42%	12%	1%	56,221
Ward10	38%	50%	11%	1%	6,140
Election District 6	89%	9%	1%	.4%	446

**Table 8.22:
1989 Council Member- 6th District, Yonkers, New York.**

Candidate	Democrat	Republican	Conservative	Right to Life	Total Ballots Canvassed
Locality	Ralph Ferraioli	Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Edward J. Fagan Jr.	
6th Council District	43%	44%	9%	4%	10,758
Ward10	43%	44%	9%	3%	5,332
Election District 6	83%	13%	3%	2%	416

Table 8.23: 1991 Mayoral Election: Yonkers, New York⁷⁶.

Candidate Locality	Democratic Terence M. Zaleski	Republican Peter A. Chema	Conservative Peter A. Chema	Right to Life Thomas Byrne	Yonkers Independent Angelo Martinelli	Write Ins H. Spallone Len Andersen David Duke	Total Ballots Canvassed
Yonkers	36%	26%	8%	2%	28%	.06%	46,418
Ward 10	30%	28%	8%	1%	32%	0.0%	5,350
Election District 6	48%	7%	2%	2%	42%	0.0%	381

**Table 8.24:
1991 Council Member- 6th District, Yonkers, New York.**

Candidate Locality	Democrat Donald Weigand	Republican Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Conservative Edward J. Fagan Jr.	Right to Life Marion M. Conner	Total Ballots Canvassed
6th Council District	45%	38%	13%	4%	8,735
Ward 10	41%	42%	13%	4%	4,400
Election District 6	78%	13%	5%	4%	338

⁷⁶1991 is the first year in the change to a strong-Mayor city government. The mayoral term was extended from two to four years.

Conclusion:

While many black Americans adopted the view that equality meant moving "across the tracks" to white areas where better schools, homes, and services were available, in Yonkers, moving to the "good" area often meant moving to Runyon Heights. When middle-class homeseekers ventured into predominantly white areas, most encountered strong resistance. When seeking a new home, many residents, who eventually came to live in the Runyon Heights community, experienced racial steering⁷⁷ practices by realtors, the inability to secure mortgages from banks and, when they did "integrate" white areas in Westchester, often inhospitable neighbors. Each generation of residents tells of similar experiences. In a sense, the continued middle-class black gentrification of the area was a direct result of these exclusionary practices. Runyon Heights itself was the object of school gerrymandering, and other practices which reinforced racial boundaries in the community. The development of the Runyon Heights community was shaped by both the push and pull factors of racial segregation and racial steering.

In 1957 when E. Franklin Frazier wrote Black Bourgeoisie, race consciousness was seemingly on the decline as the black middle class struggled to take advantages of a more open America. But this period of seeming racial

⁷⁷For a recent discussion of racial housing bias and segregation in the New York City area see "Shifts in 80's Failed to Ease Segregation" in the New York Time, July 15, 1992, page B1.

tranquility was short lived. Both the 1960's and 1980's witnessed a resurgence in racial antagonisms and, not coincidentally, racial identity. Both periods were reflected on college campuses across America as protests and conflicts captured newspaper headlines. The seeds of continued identification along racial lines were being fostered by the continued significance of race in the lives of Black Americans.

Community solidarity and political empowerment have been contingent upon residents' ability to foster racial solidarity across social class, religious, and national lines. As solidarity has often produced effective political mobilization, conceptions of community have ultimately been reinforced. Solidarity has occurred along specifically racial dimensions precisely because the assault upon local residents consistently involves racial exclusion and discrimination. Yet there exists a paradox: their racial battle entails protecting their middle-class suburban life in the community, while their economic battle carries a specifically racial dimension.

By 1970, Runyon Heights had come to embody what Gerald Suttles (1972) describes as a "defended community." Community cohesion has been determined by the structural constraints placed upon local residents by the larger environment. Residents who share local territory also share a common fate (Suttles, 1972: 35). Unity is achieved through the development of a community identity, predicated upon a belief in a common history and future. By the mid-1950's, the community increasingly found it necessary to organize

for opposition against outside forces which threatened its way of life. Schools and housing issues came first. By the mid-1960's, business development again challenged the area's suburban character. These issues have been further compounded by the fact that solutions have often brought unforeseen consequences. While it is the socioeconomic character of the area which is most threatened by outside forces, the mechanism for the production of these forces has been explicitly racial.

Maintenance of the social class character of the community relies upon "race" to provide the sentiments necessary for community solidarity and defense. Nonetheless, the invocation of community sentiment, which has often mistakenly been labeled primordial, does not take place outside of the racially and economically structural determinants which push and pull individuals into specific residential localities. Opposition from outside forces rather than "primordial" sentiments give the defended community its solidarity. Communal sentiments embodied within a local sense of identity are constructed and reconstructed in order to provide social solidarity to forces in opposition to the community. The Runyon Heights community differs from its white suburban counterpart fundamentally because of racial subordination, and the subsequent politicization of racial identity the subordination generates. Thus, race becomes a major defining characteristic of any sense of community identity. Rather than declining in significance, race remains the focal point for community cohesion. When the community encountered the strongest threat to the local ecology and,

possibly, the very existence of the community, residents increasingly emphasized their own community empowerment by reorganizing local associations. Meanwhile, ardent support for social policies which specifically benefit black Americans reflects the preeminence of race in residents' political self-identity.

The 1980's and 1990's have brought changes which threaten the way of life of the local community, and which are likely to draw community members together along both racial and class dimensions. White middle-class gentrification, along with the issues surrounding the attitudes and behaviors of local youths, poses challenges to the community's future stability. The threat of white middle-class gentrification is ever-present as young middle-class white families seek cheaper suburban homes in the inflated real estate market of Westchester County. In fact, the "success" of the Runyon Heights community has made the area more attractive to white home-seekers and small real estate speculators. While racial exclusivity has historically been the bastion of white privilege, black residents have increasingly encouraged local homeowners to sell only to other blacks. One resident, who was among the first black women to graduate from Roosevelt High School in 1932, expressed the community's ambivalence towards further integration of the area at the expense of their community. Her statement also demonstrates how race and racial solidarity continue to compete with the community's material and class interest.

I just hate to see the area infiltrated with other people. I feel that this is what black people kind of look up to as a place to be. And if we let everybody, if we let them into the area, after a while we're gonna be pushed out. I mean our young people need a place to live too. My nephew recently got married last August, and he tried to buy a home, and they put him through hell, and he didn't get it anyway . . . They make it so hard for us, and our young people need a place to go . . . They want something nice out of life too . . . And we in turn, I think, when we get ready to sell out property should not be so hungry for the money that we sell it to the highest bidder. We should be able to encourage our youth to stay in the neighborhood. You know, give them a break.

While residents fear an influx of white residents, the Detroit Area Survey suggests that middle-class white Americans will avoid predominantly black residential neighborhoods. In fact, 73% of white Americans would be unwilling to move into a neighborhood that contained a black population greater than 36% (Massey and Denton, 1993: 93; Farley et al, 1978: 335). Given the recent influx of Hispanic residents into Runyon Heights, it seems plausible that some of those who are lighter skinned are mistakenly labeled white (Table 3.5). Combined with the slow but consistent growth of the black population in Homefield, the data suggests that Homefield is more likely to become a middle-class black area, than Runyon Heights is likely to become dominated by whites.

Standards measuring racial integration are usually defined by the dominant white group, and reflect their perspective of social, economic and political relationships. Thus white residential areas are often considered integrated when anywhere from 5% to 15% of the population consists of racial minorities. Applying this standard in reverse, Runyon Heights, with a white

population of 16%, has always been an integrated community. Whites have always constituted a stable segment of the area's population. However, residing within specific geographic boundaries and becoming a community member are two distinct phenomena. From the standpoint of institutional organizations, blacks and whites in the community have remained highly segregated since the early days of Nepperhan⁷⁸.

With the explosion in popularity of the automobile after World War II, Runyon Heights came to find itself ideally situated for commuting by both car and rail to both Manhattan and upper Westchester County. Like other middle-class communities near urban centers, gentrification continues in Runyon Heights. Yonkers has indeed witnessed a return of the middle-class commuter. Should middle-class white homeowners purchase in Runyon Heights, property values could become inflated, as has occurred in numerous metropolitan communities. Many native Nepperhaners between 20 and 35 years of age cannot yet afford to purchase property in the area. Other older residents are on fixed incomes. Increases in property values could lead to the displacement of the more economically marginal residents, and cause the eventual deterioration of the community fabric, though this scenario seems remote.

⁷⁸A small number of "whites" from the area, most of whom have retired, do today support the RHIA and attend some of its functions. The A.M.E. Zion Church has at least one white member. In addition, a small number of so-called mixed-race marriages have occurred over the years between blacks and other whites, Asians, and Latinos.

Of greater immediate concern to residents have been the practices of real estate speculators from outside the community. Many have been more concerned with making a profit from local property than from maintaining the middle-class character of the community. John Massoni, owner of Mase Electric Inc. owns at least two homes, as well as a number of properties in the area. Although he did not disclose exactly how many properties he actually owns, he reported paying more than \$20,000 per year in property taxes on at least seven lots. He indicated that the biggest problems facing the area were those caused by school desegregation, busing, and the laziness of the younger generation in the community. Meanwhile, he has gone to Westhab, and placed section 8 publicly subsidized tenants in at least two of his properties. He articulated that this was the most effective way of his renting the properties. Local residents frown upon the placement of low-income families in the area, particularly those residents who are renters rather than homeowners. Residents believe that owners take better care of their property. Expansion of this practice by absentee landlords could jeopardize the class character of the community, leading to an overall deterioration of local properties, and ultimately, the community.

Historically, however, many residents have come to the area through friends, relatives and acquaintances. A number of people have purchased homes because someone in their network informed them of the availability of property. As a result, many homes are not sold on the formal real estate

market. Residents are largely content with this arrangement, since it also maintains the racial composition of the area. In addition to the recruitment mechanism, white interest in the bucolic environment of Runyon Heights may be offset by continued middle-class black gentrification. Generations of forced segregation and inhospitable receptions in predominantly white areas of Westchester County have led a number of newer residents to choose the predominantly black Runyon Heights.

Their decision to seek out a predominantly black residential area has often been driven by their desire to find a positive and supportive environment for their children. This is the traditional reason given for the selection of suburban neighborhoods among other groups (Suttles, 1972: 38). Still, many interpret this desire for a comfortable environment as the black middle class' abandonment of the 1960's idea of social integration. Since many middle-class blacks no longer appear as anxious to live in predominantly white areas, sometimes preferring to live in working-class and poor areas⁷⁹, some interpret this as a growing militancy or separatism on the part of this group. However, such an interpretation ignores the fact that much of white middle-class suburban America has not accepted black middle-class neighbors. What the black middle class has found is not the color blind society envisioned by Dr. M. L. King Jr., not acceptance as neighbors, but suspicion, and resistance. While

⁷⁹In Brooklyn New York, a small but growing middle-class black population can be found in Flatbush, Jamaica, and Brooklyn Heights.

a number of residents have managed to infiltrate predominantly white areas, many found that their children were alienated in their own communities; the black middle-class enclave of Runyon Heights provides the institutional support and suburban environment which eluded them elsewhere. The conscious seeking of black communities by the black middle class can only be understood within the context of ongoing white resistance to their presence in most suburban residential areas. Black working-class culture, and middle-class ties to it, can only be analyzed within this context of ongoing racial subordination. History suggests that the Runyon Heights community will indeed remain predominantly black and middle-class, due to increased property values, and white resistance to black neighbors, both dominant patterns in suburban real estate over the last century.

Another community concern is the growing cleavage between youth and their adult role models. The issues which are facing today's youth are somewhat more ambiguous than those facing generations past. The issues of today reflect the interdependent relationship between the local community and the larger American society. The first generation not guaranteed economic mobility came of age during the late 1960's and early 1970's. The community responded by looking inward and organizing. Despite their efforts, prospects for the continued mobility of their children remain uncertain.

The generation currently coming of age seems less connected to the traditional value system of the community, which has always stressed hard

work, education and moderation. This generation appears to be drawn more than ever before to American popular culture, symbolized by guns, cars, rap, sex and illicit drugs. More than in past generations, their dilemma appears to be a conflict between reconciling their racial identity with their middle-class privilege.

While past generations developed a strong racial identity based upon the local community, the racial identity of the youth of the community today is increasingly centered upon the "hip-hop" culture of working-class and poor black urban youth, which is embedded within the popular culture and mass media. Community institutions, which were once central to the hyper-organized community, play less of a role as agents of community socialization, weakening bonds between adults and children. The church plays a diminished role in the lives of most teens, compared to past generations, and School 1 no longer exists. Even the Boys Scouts are now gone. Thus, only the RHIA is in a position to address local concerns of teenage attitudes and behavior. Indeed, these issues have been repeatedly discussed in local community meetings over the past year. In some respects, a culture war has been occurring within Runyon Heights and other communities across America. Old institutions and socialization agents like the church, family, and school have weak legitimacy and influence many in the current generation of teens. The Protestant work

ethic of the "Old heads"⁸⁰ has been challenged by the "fat"⁸¹ money of rap stars, sports legends, and street hustlers. Even in isolated Runyon Heights, the effects of this war are evident in community meetings, and in the establishment of drug and alcohol programs in the Community House.

The roots of many community problems are extrinsic to the community and therefor largely outside of its control. At school and on television, teens are exposed to a different set of standards than those which are generally espoused by the community. Over the past 20 years, the relatively isolated Runyon Heights has become increasingly affected by the same social problems that plague other American suburban communities. While this last concern does not threaten the racial composition of the area, it may limit the mobility of this youngest generation of Nepperhaners. In fact, unless significant changes occur within the social fabric of America life, and unless opportunities for economic advancement open up for middle-class black youth, this current group may be the last descendants, from those original settlers, who can afford to remain in the community.

Still, the question remains: How did black newcomers to Nepperhan establish and maintain a stable, black, middle-class, suburban community as early as 1925? Many characteristics of community success were outside the

⁸⁰ For a discussion of "old heads" see Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise* (1990)

⁸¹The term "fat" or "Phatt" is an east coast ghetto slang expression which means a big and excellent.

direct control of the local community, while other aspects were dependent upon community participation. First and foremost, residents required stable employment, which provided the necessary backbone for community life. Second, they needed access to land which was zoned primarily for residential use. Third, they required access to lending institutions in order to secure home mortgages. Fourth, ongoing black resistance in other suburban areas provided Runyon Heights with a constant supply of new middle-class homeowners, as well as fresh financial and intellectual resources. Fifth, active political participation in both political parties provided them with considerable leverage in local elections. Sixth, while a strong sense of racial identity provided residents' the glue for community organization and participation, it nonetheless evolved in reaction to racial subordination. The dynamic interaction between these characteristics allowed the anomalous middle-class black community of Runyon Heights to evolve and even prosper. Its existence demonstrates how one group of African descendants coped with and was even marginally successful over the effects of ongoing racial and class oppression in America.

Appendix A: List of Research Sites

The City of Planning Bureau, Yonkers New York.

The Westchester County Archives, Elmsford, New York.

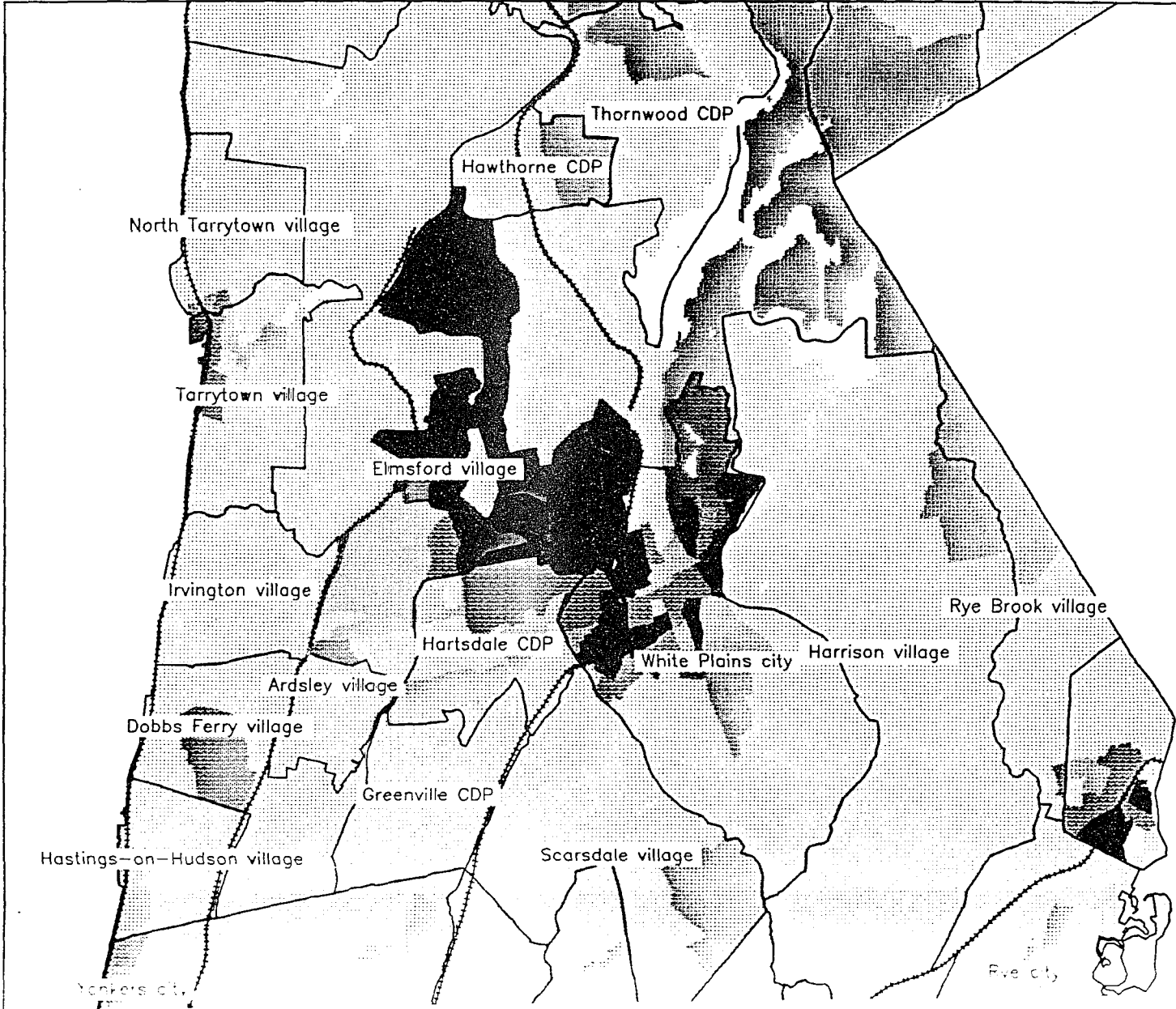
The Westchester Historical Society, Elmsford, New York.

Westchester County Department of Land Records, White Plains, New York.

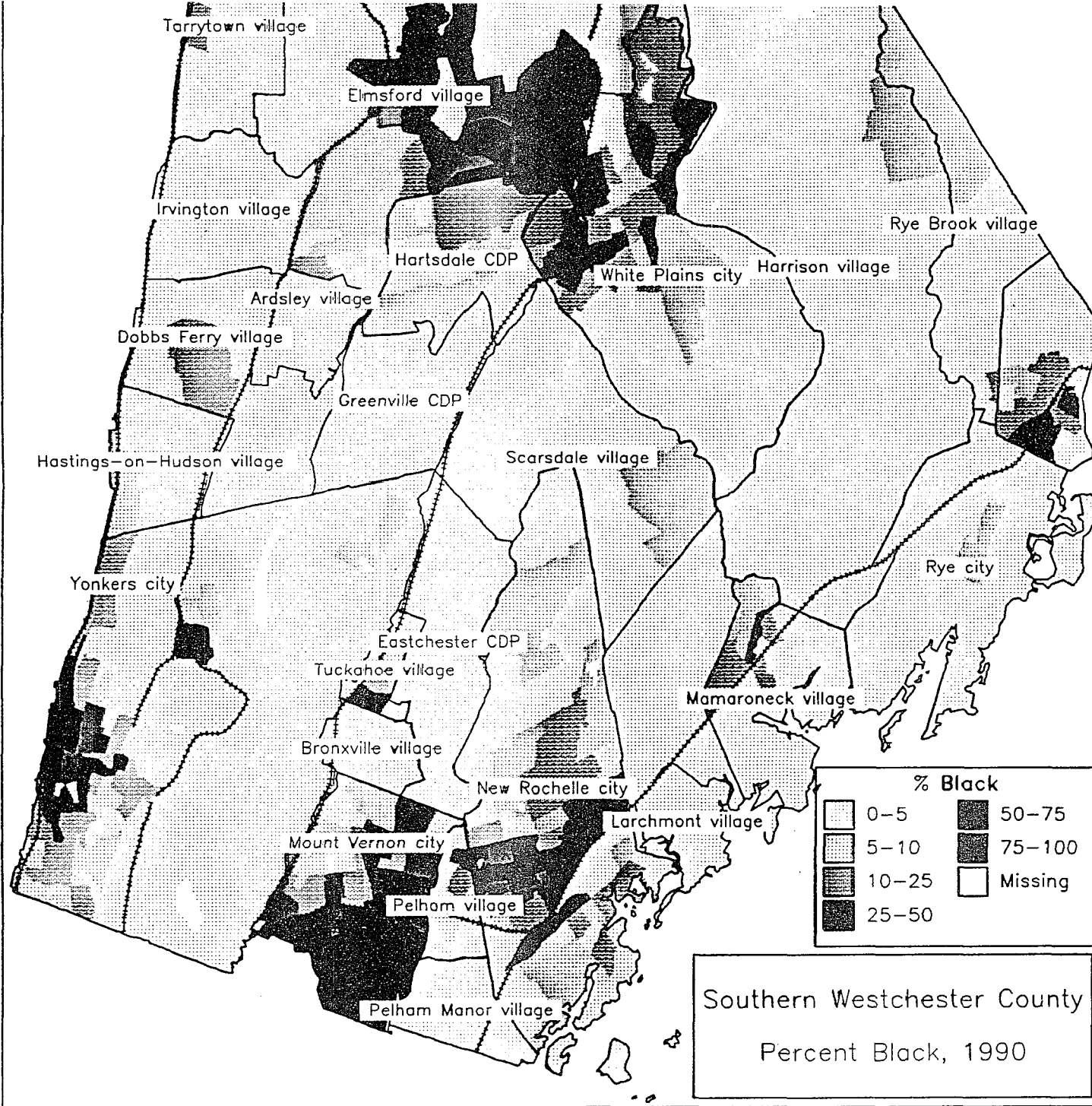
Westchester County Board of Elections, White Plains, New York

The Yonkers Historical Society, Yonkers, New York.

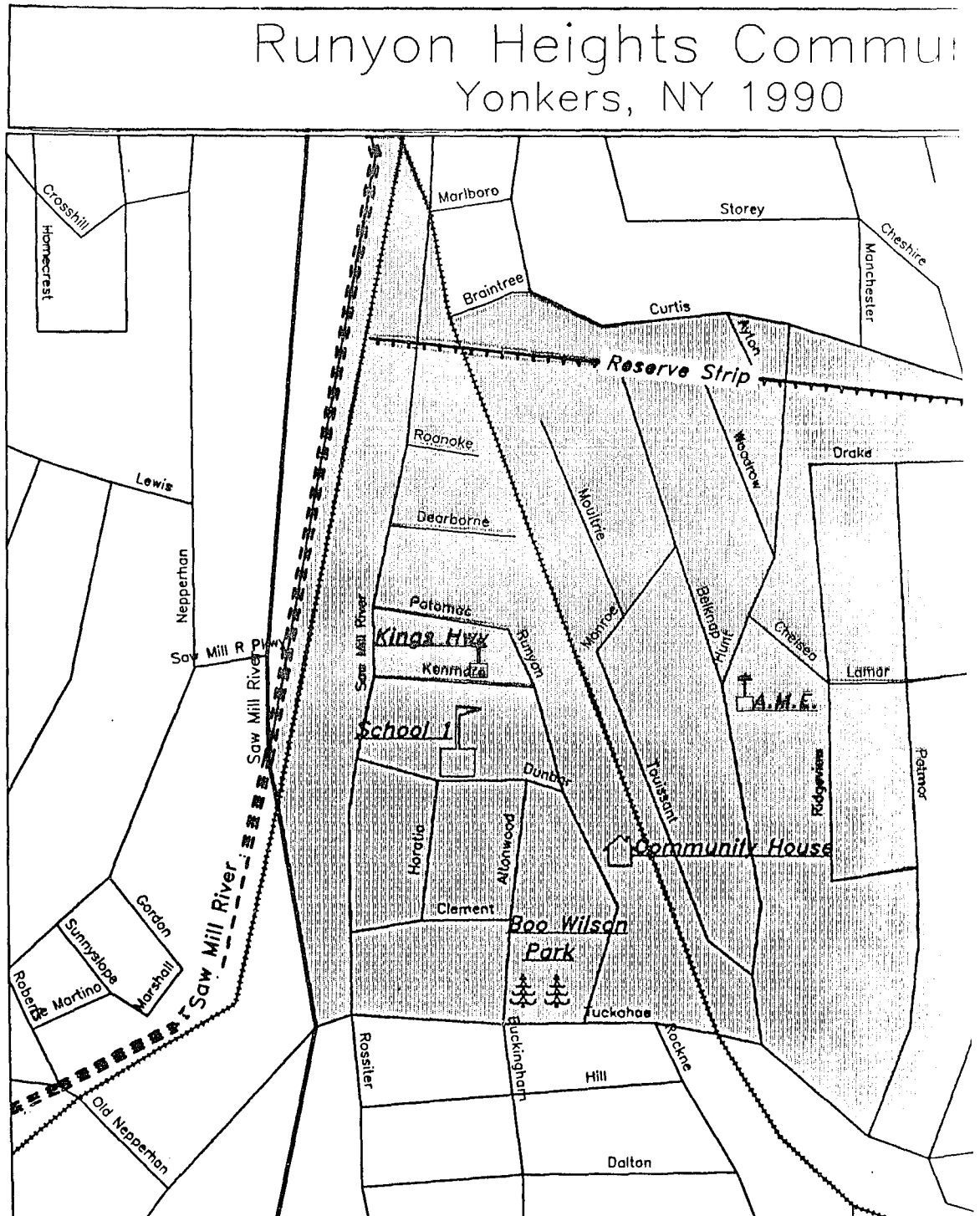
The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, NYC.



Appendix B: 1990 Census, City of Yonkers New York



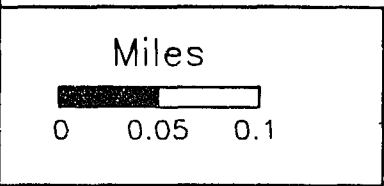
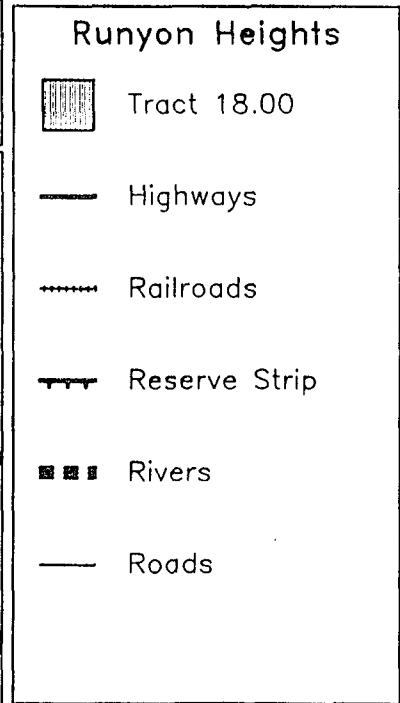
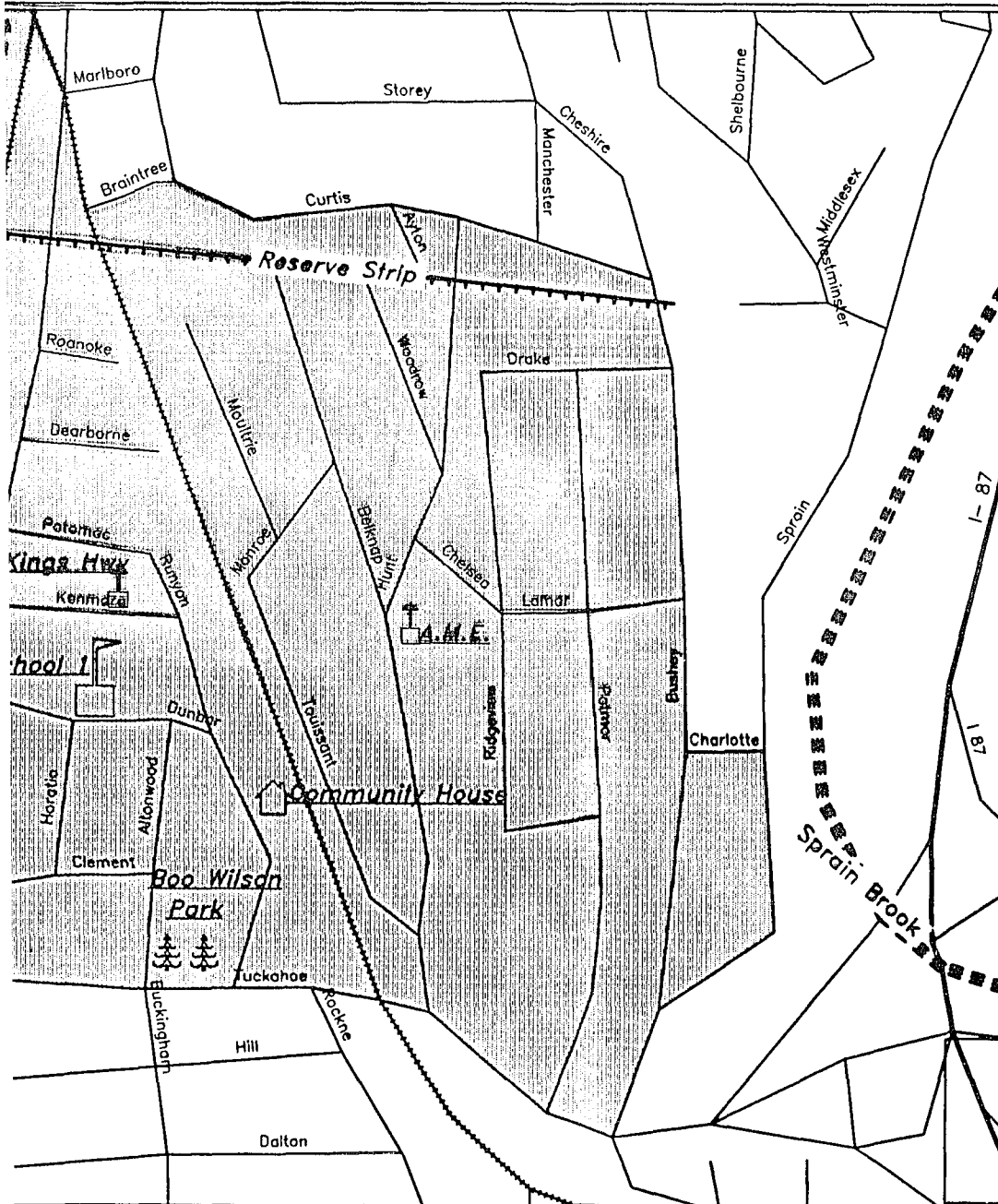
Appendix C: 1990 Census, Tract 18, Runyon Heights, New York.



Runyon Heights, New York.

Runyon Heights Community

Yonkers, NY 1990



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