

# SCATTERSITE HOUSING THE BATTLE OF FOREST HILLS

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ARTICLE II: Integration vs.  
"Community Control"

TWO TURBANED plaster footmen, in Mackintosh, stand in front of the Woodrow Wilson Apartments on 196th St. in Forest Hills. Passing the station on an unseasonably warm day, a young hoodlum comments, "dirty." "What's to complain about? It's already an integrated neighborhood."

This tongue-in-cheek remark acts as a reminder of what the Forest Hills controversy and the scatter-site concept is really all about: Integration. No analysis of the evolution and history of scatter-site makes sense without seeing it within the context of the ongoing social revolution that began with the Supreme Court school desegregation decision.

The scatter-site situation is complicated by the fact that integration as a social goal seems to be out of fashion nowadays.

But, when the term "scatter-site" first reared up in the early days of Mayor Lindsay's first term, racial integration was still approved, at least in principle, by most community spokesmen, both black and white. However, the program devised in early 1966 to house low-income families in middle-income areas differed widely from what is going on today, official details aside.

To most planners, scatter-site suggested a post-cocked, fairly small-scale approach to integration. The idea was to place minority families from the vicious cycle of innercity in the slums but, at the same time, not to concentrate so large a number of the poor families in the new neighborhood as to create another slum.

"The Forest Hills project," complains Rep. Edward Koch, "is twice the size of any other scatter-site in the city. Four hundred units in scatter-site, 800 is cannon shot."  
"It's not scatter-site," agrees Rep. Benjamin Rosenthal (D-Queens), another opponent of the Forest Hills project. "It's ad-falshoned warehousing."

City officials, like Housing Authority Chairman Simonson Oskar, respond in such a manner with the argument that fixed costs of land acquisition, relocation and construction prohibit small-scale building on most sites like the one in Forest Hills. The magnitude of the low-income housing need.

"Perhaps 'scatter-site' is an unfortunate term," Oskar said, "but nowhere in the law or in the HUD guidelines or anywhere, does it say it has to be small. And what's small for New York is gigantic. And what's small for New York is gigantic for another city."

A William Green, regional director of the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, concedes that the city "has lacked off somewhat from the original concept of dispersing a large number of small units throughout the city." One of the reasons for this, he suggests, is last year's lifting by the Nixon Administration of the fixed cost ceilings that could be spent on public housing units making larger complexes "more viable."

To qualify for federal funds, the HUD guidelines now require that public housing must "provide areas of minority concentration" although not necessarily in middle-class areas. There is no size limit.

"Public housing should, whenever possible, be sited inside the neighborhood," Green says, "discussing federal aid to scatter-site." But of higher priority is the achievement of housing integration."

In its early stages, scatter-site was propelled by what City Planning Commission chief Donald M. Platt viewed as "a moral imperative." The concept was given impetus

by the warning of the federal Kerner Commission report that we were drifting into two societies, one black in the cities and another white in the suburbs (for New York read: also some parts of the outlying boroughs).

Federal rules, giving the concept a quasi-legal standing, began to evolve as a result of court decisions, especially the Gattuso case in Chicago. This ruling found that the city of Chicago practiced segregation in its public housing policies by building low-income housing only in the slums. The rules, set down last year, established as national policy, the concept of locating public projects "outside areas of minority concentration."

The impact of this policy is a revolutionary one in the context of housing integration. Unlike the integration of schools and civil rights, statutes in housing have, up to public accommodations, such as restaurants, law, had little practical effect simply because economic factors prevented any but a handful of middle-class blacks from taking advantage of open housing laws. Besides, it is harder to object to living next door to a briefcase-toting accountant or transit worker who happens to be black.

However, the object of this new thrust is to undo the vicious economic cycles by placing poor and, sometimes poor families of blacks, Puerto Ricans and whites together by mandating them to live into white neighborhoods. Therein lies the rub.

The problems such a plan triggers are not made any easier by the frontal assault being launched on the philosophy of integration by both black spokesmen and white spokesmen.

"The scatter-site was conceived out of a philosophy of promoting the black man to run away from himself," says Dr. Thomas Mathew of NEDHO, a black self-help organization.

Dr. Mathew, without a suggestion of irony, calls the Forest Hills project "a big white elephant." In an interview in his Jamaica, Queens, office, he marshaled his arguments against scatter-site: "You take a poor person and you shove him into a potentially harmful environment. You learn to protect yourself from the physical violence of the ghetto. But the psychological violence of black people would suffer in middle-class neighborhoods would be far worse."

"It's traumatizing for a black kid who goes into a store and has the white owner follow him around every minute while a white kid can go anywhere and get away unscathed. It's traumatizing for a black man to enter an advocate and have a white woman criticize him in fact."

Mathew advocates giving blacks control over their own neighborhoods and rehabilitating substandard housing in the slums. He views the scatter-site theory as a con game effort by the government to take money from anti-poverty programs and use it for housing which will ultimately go to "blue-collar whites."

Even many of those experts who favor integration as a goal question whether scatter-site is a workable concept.

Koch, who has had impeccable credentials in civil rights matters, says, "I would like to see abandoned the concept that you take low-income people, many of whom are on welfare, and put them into a middle-class neighborhood in order to give them middle-class values. Does that really happen? Besides, there is a lot of criticism of the idea that middle-class values are anything to aspire to in the first place."

Steger, Starr, executive director of the City Planning Commission, says, "The City Planning and Planning Council, has

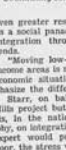
ROSENTHAL:  
A nosebreaker.



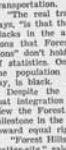
MATTHEW:  
White elephant.



BIRBACH:  
Community control.



CARSON:  
No fairness.



GOLAR:  
Look at the lion.



DAVIDOFF:  
A choice.



## Post Daily Magazine

Just struggled into the middle-class area and asked to shoulder an unfair share of the burden of curing social ills," he says. "Granted the rich can buy their way out of such problems. They're right. Next to the lower class, the middle class gets scolded the hardest. But what can you do about it? The law cannot be asked to prevent other people from moving into the neighborhoods to which they've escaped. They are asking the Groucho Marx in the country club house to beg, 'Come Forgive me, please the Groucho.'"

The scatter-site debate, turning on the relative merits of integration versus segregation and other principles has resulted in some bizarre crossovers of racial and ideological lines.

In the "strange bedfellows department" we have Sen. Buckley and Rep. Koch; Jerry Birbach, president of the Forest Hills Residents' Assn. and Dr. Mathew. Less surprising, however, is that Gov. Rockefeller no friend of Mayor Lindsay's administration, has declared his opposition to scatter-site in general and the Forest Hills project in particular.

What unites some traditional foes, and divides other traditional allies is the issue of "community control" as well as integration. The issue taken on an added leg with the re-election campaign was once the cause of another serious rift between the city's black and Jewish communities during the 1969 decentralization school crisis in Ocean Hill Brownsville.

"Community participation," asked Birbach, "apply to Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem... and not to middle-income people in Forest Hills?"

Black leader Simon "Uddies" Carson, who was in the thick of the Ocean Hill fight as an official of the Brooklyn chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), sees Birbach's point.

"I'm against the Forest Hills project," said Carson, now director of Brooklyn's "School of Common Sense," "and my position goes back to the fight in Ocean Hill. Every community has the right to determine what kind of housing they want, to control their own destiny."

Carson conceded, too, that the principle of community control was not the only reason for opposition to scatter-site. He said Dr. Mathew, Carson's foe, "has been trusted as an attempt, conscious or not, to 'fragment' the black community and, as a result, break up the power base black leaders.

"I think it's a power play by the white liberal establishment," he added. "I think the word 'scatter' itself is significant. It implies that black folks are gonna have to 'scatter.'"

"The Lindsay administration seems to be following two directions," says asserts Roger Starr. "You can't favor community control on the one hand and scatter-site on the other. Because, otherwise, you're giving us black community opposition to scatter-site."

Davidoff takes a different tact:

"Local control is great," he says, "but it has to be within constitutional limits. Residents of Forest Hills don't have the right to control what class of citizens live in Forest Hills."

"Nobody government has ever advocated community control," says Housing Authority Chairman Golar, "but community participation."

In any case, he said, middle-class citizens always in need of more dollars in their own affairs than the poor minorities.

Continued Tomorrow