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# Jewish Responses to the Integration of a Suburb: Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 1960–1980

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The pattern of Jewish exodus is a familiar theme in American urban history: from Detroit to Southfield, from Roxbury, Massachusetts, to Newton, from Baltimore's North Gay Street to Pikesville, from the South Side of Chicago to Skokie, from Harlem to the Bronx, from Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley. During the 1960s, in American Jewish communities from coast to coast, changing neighborhoods—a euphemism for a steady influx of African-Americans—presented significant problems to Jewish residents and to leaders of Jewish institutions. Although the circumstances varied from city to city, there were enough common features for the historian, two decades later, to describe the process and to draw certain conclusions about this urban drama. After a brief look at the general pattern of change, we will focus on one community, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and attempt to understand the dynamics of the Jewish response to integration.

## *Boston and Philadelphia*

In Mattapan, on the southern border of Boston, where steady African-American movement into the suburb led to accelerated Jewish movement out of the area, the Boston Jewish Community Council spearheaded and staffed the Mattapan Organization (made up of Jewish and non-Jewish residents), whose goal was to keep the area viable. Its activities included block parties to discourage exodus and to educate the residents on real estate values, visits to real estate agents urging them to stop block-busting practices, and the establishment of a real estate service to find homes in the area for interested white families. The organization also developed a program to improve the educational system, develop neighborhood beautification programs (especially those focusing on public services and

neighborhood maintenance), get better recreational facilities for teenagers, and establish liaison with the police department. But these efforts were not paralleled by other Jewish agencies, nor by a significant attempt to maintain the community's Jewish institutions. The movement of Jews out of the area steadily accelerated, and Mattapan, half-Jewish as late as 1968, quickly emptied of Jewish residents.<sup>1</sup>

In the Germantown-Mount Airy, or Northwest, area of Philadelphia, where 50,000 Jews lived at the beginning of the 1960s, served by one Reform, four Conservative, and two Orthodox synagogues, the African-American population steadily increased and the white population steadily decreased throughout the decade. Germantown High School went from 32 percent African-American enrollment in 1957 to 79 percent in 1968, Wagner Junior High from 17 to 90 percent in the same decade, while Kinsey and Rowen Elementary Schools, which had less than 1 percent African-American enrollment in 1951, were more than 90 percent African-American by the 1968–67 school year. By 1968, none of the seven elementary schools had less than one-third African-American enrollment, while the only other junior high school in the area, Leeds, was 40 percent African-American.<sup>2</sup>

It has been argued that the actual change in the neighborhoods may have been less than what is indicated by these figures, since they do not take into account the possibility of white families remaining in the area but sending their children to private schools. This was not the case, however, because every synagogue had fewer members at the end of the decade than at the start. Ramat El (Conservative) declined by 58 percent, West Oak Lane (Conservative) and Beth Solomon (Orthodox) each lost half their members, while Ohev Zedek (Orthodox) had 47 percent fewer members in 1969 than in 1965. By the end of the decade the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia estimated the Jewish community in this area at less than 20,000, though not without a description more hopeful than accurate, calling this figure "substantial."

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) carried on a variety of programs during the 1960s to attempt to stabilize Northwest Philadelphia. These included block meetings with synagogue leaders and individuals to prevent an accelerated exodus of Jews from the area, vigorous actions against realtors attempting to create

panic on specific streets of the Northwest, and the creation of education task forces to work with school officials facing problems related to integration. Concerned residents periodically established interracial dialogue groups, but these usually disbanded because of a feeling among the participants that communication between African-Americans and Jews had broken down.

Although experience and the facts might have made it seem likely that the change in racial character could not be stemmed, the JCRC leadership in Philadelphia concluded at the end of the 1960s that the "rate of change has been slowed down," emphasizing that "time is an ally." The leaders recommended to their parent organization, the Federation of Jewish Charities of Greater Philadelphia, a "multi-faceted program" and "maximum efforts" to affect the rate of change in the Northwest. Underlying this ambitious program of maintenance as well as other programs, old and new, were two mutually reinforcing approaches: a merchandising effort to encourage and assist young Jewish couples to purchase homes in the area, and, conversely, citywide programs to encourage the movement of African-American families into other suburban areas of Philadelphia. Both of these steps were central to the strategy Cleveland's Jewish leaders would adopt, though only the former offered any reasonable opportunity for success.

### *The Jewish Community of Cleveland Heights*

The city of Cleveland Heights, which lies to the south and east of Cleveland on a plateau that was once an old lake plain, is an older, inner-ring, middle-income suburban community of spacious estates, ranch homes, colonials, bungalows, numerous apartment buildings in the grand old style, and some two-family structures. At the end of the 1960s it had the largest Jewish population of any Cleveland suburb. Incorporated in 1925, and largely developed between the world wars, the population of this community trebled in the 1920s from 15,396 at the start of the decade to 50,945 in 1930. Its development was aided by its convenient location to shopping, cultural facilities, Case Western and Western Reserve Universities, and the Cleveland Clinic, as well as by its developers' instant concern for extensive park and recreational areas; by the 1960s it had nationally recognized

schools and hundreds and hundreds of beautiful residences. It also had a large elderly population (18 percent of all residents were age sixty-two and over, one of the highest percentages in the United States), with significant pockets of Jewish aged. Together with the presence of a substantial Orthodox population, this made it the least transient Jewish community in the Cleveland area, something that would change dramatically in the early 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

By 1960 the Jews of Cleveland had virtually abandoned the city proper. A local Jewish leader, Sidney Vincent, estimated that 1,000 Jewish students graduated from public high schools in Cuyahoga County in June 1961, of whom a maximum of six received diplomas from a Cleveland high school. In all grades combined, perhaps fewer than 250 of the 140,000 children attending Cleveland's public schools were Jewish. A "city without Jews" he called Cleveland as the 1960s began.<sup>4</sup>

The Jews who left Cleveland and remained in the county overwhelmingly settled in one of eight eastern suburbs, and in those suburbs in which they settled they concentrated as heavily as they had done in the city itself. Besides having the largest number of Jews residing in any Cleveland suburb (16,300 in 1970), Cleveland Heights contained a tremendous capital investment in Jewish institutions and agencies. Although the \$100,000,000 estimated replacement cost of these buildings (the Cleveland Jewish Federation's official figure) was surely exaggerated, no other community in the Cleveland area compared in terms of sheer number and value of Jewish institutional development.<sup>5</sup>

Along the three-mile commercial strip of Taylor Road, the Cleveland Heights Jewish community had erected brick and concrete homes for the Hebrew Academy day school, the Jewish Family Service, the College of Jewish Studies, and the Bureau of Jewish Education. Orthodox congregants had built Or Chodesh, Shomrei Shabbos, and the Taylor Road Synagogue. Three blocks east of Taylor was the Community Temple; three blocks to the west, on thirty-three wooded acres astride a natural ravine, rose the copper-domed Park Synagogue. Not far to the north, the Temple on the Heights and the Jewish Community Center became landmarks, while Jewish storefronts boldly advertised kosher meat, kosher bakery items, and Jewish ritual objects. Other Jewish institutions in the Heights included the Mon-

tefiore Home for the Elderly, the Aliyah Center, B'nai B'rith Women, the Zionist Organization of America, Jewish Vocational Service, Hadassah, Council Gardens Apartments, Warrensville Synagogue, Oakwood Country Club, the Kangesser Transportation Depot, Berkowitz-Kumin Funeral Home, the mikveh, Sinai Synagogue, and Mayfield Temple.

### *The Hippie Influx*

In addition to the problems facing aging communities everywhere (blighted business districts, old housing badly in need of repair and renovation, almost no new building during recent years), the Jewish community of Cleveland Heights faced two additional problems at the end of the 1960s: the dramatic takeover of a small area of the city by hippies and motorcyclists, and the quickening pace of integration. Together these newcomers brought tensions and fears to a community which vividly remembered uprooting itself after World War II *in toto* from its previous areas of settlement (the 105th Street and Glenville areas of Cleveland), which, by the early 1970s, were almost totally African-American.

The counterculture flower children with long hair, health food, music, and, most significantly, drugs virtually took over a major residential and shopping area (Coventry Village) during the second half of the 1960s. Hippies overflowed the Gothic apartments, cardboard "Store for Rent" signs seemed to be everywhere, and motorcycle groups (if not gangs) dotted the corners in the evening. In September 1966 the community newspaper noted that guns were in short supply as Cleveland Heights citizens were "arming themselves" against "violence in the streets." By the end of the year a dual stabbing had taken place after the Shaker Heights—Cleveland Heights football game, and the police had begun to probe recurrent reports of drug use (marijuana and LSD) among Cleveland Heights High School students. Before the end of the year the police had brought thirty-one cases to the attention of the county prosecutor.<sup>6</sup> The following year ended with a two-month police investigation of juvenile crime in Cleveland Heights and the arrest of twenty youths aged thirteen to sixteen. What especially frightened some residents was the realiza-

tion that not only in Madison, Berkeley, and San Francisco but in Cleveland Heights, "all of the boys," according to the police chief, were "from good middle-class homes with professional parents."<sup>7</sup> And 1968 was worse, with teenage drug busts and even the discovery of a "drug ring," juvenile crime, including armed robberies, and riot-control training for the police in anticipation of a summer of riots.<sup>8</sup>

The counterculture, however visible, did not dominate Cleveland Heights. The high school still tied for the state lead in National Merit semifinalists. Six hundred students enrolled in the Cleveland Heights Hebrew Academy for the start of the 1968–69 school year, and they would learn in a new building housing a gymnasium, library, and classrooms. More significantly, the Heights Citizens for Human Rights, organized in 1963, was vigorously organizing informal coffees and evening meetings to help African-American and white residents of Cleveland Heights come to know each other better. In December 1967 the Cleveland Heights City Council declared war on blockbusting and approved a ban on "For Sale" and "For Rent" signs.<sup>9</sup> In August 1968 municipal officials opened a realty clearinghouse with the "initial goal," according to the assistant city manager, "of attracting white buyers to areas that [are] now integrated."<sup>10</sup> More dramatically, the educational officials gambled with a double school levy on the November ballot, and both the \$15.4 million renewal levy and the \$7.7 million new levy passed. More remarkably, this came only one year after the voters had approved a \$4.2 million four-year levy by more than a two-to-one vote.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Beginning of Integration*

Cleveland Heights in 1960 was a very attractive suburb hugging the eastern edge of the city; it is not hard to understand why it should have appealed to African-Americans seeking suburban homes, schools, and parks. The civil rights enthusiasm of the late 1950s led a handful of African-American families to finally tackle a move to an all-white suburb, and the Heights was a stone's throw from the previous residences of most of the earliest African-American newcomers. One member of the Heights Citizens for Human Rights Housing Committee (HCHR) recalled in 1970 that when she moved to Cleve-

land Heights in 1960 "it was an all white city," that "real estate salesmen would not even let Negroes into 'open' houses," and that "if and when the black pioneer finally bought a home in the suburbs he, as well as the white seller, was usually subjected to violent harassment." By 1970, thanks to vigorous efforts by the HCHR to change the policies of lending institutions and real estate agents, Cleveland Heights had become modestly racially integrated. Four percent of the population was African-American in 1970, mostly middle-income families who, according to one pioneer resident, wanted "attractive and inexpensive housing in pleasant neighborhoods with outstanding schools." The steady movement of even this small number of African-Americans into Cleveland Heights during the 1960s was met with harassment, threats, stink bombs, and considerable discrimination; in May 1966 a house put up for sale by Fair Housing Inc. had dynamite tossed inside, and one year later, as J. Newton Hill and his wife Louise (an African-American couple) slept upstairs in the very same house, a time bomb exploded in their living room.<sup>12</sup> Despite the harassment, the demand for housing in the Heights grew each year as Cleveland African-Americans sought better schools and better housing and, perhaps most importantly, found other suburban areas totally closed or much less hospitable than the Heights.<sup>13</sup>

While all the neighborhoods of Cleveland Heights had some of the 1,200 African-American homeowners who lived in the suburb by 1970, most of the integration took place in a concentrated manner in the west-central area of the city (on or near Lee Road south of Mayfield Road), in a high-density Jewish residential area and on the edge of the center of Jewish institutional life. By 1969 there was enough evidence of change for the leaders of Jewish institutions to begin to formally meet together and discuss the future of their organizations and their community.<sup>14</sup>

### *Concerns and Fears*

In November of 1969 the president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland sent a letter to Jewish organizational leaders in Cleveland Heights noting that "there have been increasing signs of concern in the Taylor Road and Lee Road areas of Cleveland Heights

that the neighborhoods may soon be confronted by problems of substantial change," and requesting a formal meeting, under Federation auspices, in early December. The meeting was well attended, and while everyone voiced commitment to keeping the Heights open to citizens of all races, most expressed serious concern.<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Engelberg of Taylor Road Synagogue began the discussion by stating that "the basic problem was a racial issue concerned with the rapid influx of Negroes into the area" and that "all the rabbis present at the last meeting of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council expressed great concern around the future of the area." Several participants felt that they were witnessing the beginning of what had happened in the 105th Street and Glenville areas of Cleveland a few years earlier, while others underscored the role of realtors who had been using scare tactics, exacerbating feelings and heightening tensions by preying on the residents' fears that the area would become predominantly African-American. Others, primarily officers of the Federation and its Community Relations Committee (CRC), worried about the Jewish community's investment in its institutions and the multimillion-dollar budgets that would be needed to rebuild them.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Mattapan and other places, it would be difficult to exaggerate the rhetorical importance which the Cleveland area's Jewish leaders placed on this situation. Sidney Vincent, the executive director of the Federation, told a prominent lay leader that "this may be one of the most major issues ever to confront the community," a sentiment one finds echoed by several participants in the December gathering. But the direction to move in response to this situation was not at all clear; Vincent himself wished that "I were more confident as to what direction to lead the gang in after we establish there is a mutuality of interest."<sup>17</sup>

### *The All-Out Approach*

By reflecting upon the response of Jews in similar situations in other American cities, we can discern at least three possible reactions by Jewish leaders and residents to the movement of African-Americans into an area of high Jewish concentration. Each of these was available to the Jews of Cleveland Heights in the late 1960s, and there is evidence that each of them was considered by some individuals.

The first alternative I will call the all-out approach. Those who held this view constantly pointed out (and almost always exaggerated) the millions of dollars which the Jewish community had invested in its institutions and the additional millions it would take to replace these institutions in another suburb. Moreover, some added the value of the homes and stores owned by Jews in the Heights and concluded that major changes would prove "astronomical."<sup>8</sup>

The only practical solution, therefore, was for the community to make major investments of time, energy, and resources, far exceeding anything done up to 1970, to assure the area's stability. Among other measures, this would require an office and full-time staff members to work exclusively on the problem, as well as intimate and daily contacts with school authorities, city authorities, realtors, and representatives of other religious groups. There is, however, no evidence that the supporters of this position included contacts with African-Americans on their agenda.

Most important, perhaps, was the area of housing. Major sums would have to be invested in rehabilitation of all sorts, in encouraging and then aiding Jews to move into the area, and in revitalizing neighborhood businesses. Concomitantly, Jewish institutions which were then discussing a move eastward would have to be vigorously discouraged, and the rather polite discussion of this issue (filled with euphemisms such as "change") needed to give way to a forthright confrontation with the reality of the situation. On the one hand, the Taylor Road Synagogue's announcement in its September 1970 *Bulletin* that a karate (self-defense) class was organizing needed to be dramatically tied to the sporadic harassing of congregants who walked to the synagogue on Friday and Saturday evenings, the vandalism at the Lee Road mikveh, the auto racing in the parking lot of Park Synagogue, and the tire tracks on the Montefiore Home's lawn. On the other, the enormous demand of overseas Jewish needs on the Jewish community made quite problematic the expenditure of large sums for new facilities in another suburb when the present structures were relatively new. In sum, the proponents of this position believed that just as certain kinds of illnesses can be cured by massive injections of antibiotics but are little affected by mild doses, so the com-

munity had to be prepared for unprecedented decisions rather than modest measures if it was serious about dealing with the problem.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Mortgage-Assistance Program*

An example of this massive input was the discussion which took place, quite preliminarily that December, about a mortgage-assistance program "to attract Jewish families into the area." Already well established in some other cities, and attempted on a very small scale in another eastern suburb of Cleveland (Shaker Heights), this program called for the institutions in the Heights to contribute money (at a modest interest rate) which would be loaned for second mortgages to needy Jews attempting to purchase homes in Cleveland Heights. One of the first local leaders to develop this concept was Herman Herskovic, the president of Or Chodosh Synagogue. He suggested that since synagogues had modest capital funds, they might help guarantee their survival by loaning \$5,000, \$10,000, or even \$20,000—guaranteed against default by the Jewish Community Federation—for mortgage assistance. The 5 percent return might be less than the 8 percent the money was earning, but the 3 percent loss was a minimal contribution to make sure that the synagogue remained in the Heights indefinitely.<sup>20</sup>

This program was soon begun, with the Jewish institutions in the area contributing thousands of dollars (\$50,000 was available by September 1971) for second-mortgage loans. It quickly became evident, as one Jewish leader, Elmer Paull, observed, "that the problem is in housing; those houses that are available are beyond the price of the young people who want to move in as they do not have the down payments." Another leader, Harold Neustadter, was more specific: "I and my family are members of Young Israel and have three preschool children. I have been in the housing market for about eight months; I want to live in Cleveland Heights because of my identity with the Orthodox community. But I cannot find adequate housing; even a home with two baths and a family room is beyond my means. And there are other young couples in the same circumstances." The coordinator of the program, Rabbi Marvin Spiegelman (known as the "kosher stabilizer"), recalled that "for the first time in my profession-

al life I was offering something that people were waiting in line for." At the end of 1974 the chairman of the Community Relations Committee told a national audience at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds that "while 60 homes had been purchased with mortgage assistance, at least four times that number have been attracted to the community because their initial interest in the community was stimulated by the thought of free mortgage money that could be available."

The mortgage-assistance program was initiated with \$20,000 from the Jewish Community Federation Endowment Fund; by the summer of 1975 the fund had provided \$90,000 for reduced-interest loans. As more money was needed, the Endowment Fund agreed to guarantee up to \$100,000 that would be provided by area synagogues and temples and used for loans to home purchasers. As the program developed through the first half of the 1970s, it became obvious that some of the clients were not in need of reduced-interest loans; rather they needed a more favorable arrangement in terms of interest charged and length of the repayment schedule. The Endowment Fund agreed to guarantee second-mortgage loans made by the Cleveland Trust Company, at a reduced interest rate, to clients approved by the Mortgage Advisory Committee and the board of the Hebrew Free Loan Association. By the fall of 1975 the Endowment Fund had made possible \$250,000 in second-mortgage loans to over eighty families; there was not a single default. Figures from the end of the decade indicate that the mortgage-assistance program gave \$575,775 in loans to 186 Jewish families to purchase homes. These loans purchased \$6,126,526 of property which was appraised at over \$9,000,000 in 1981, and every resident interviewed for this essay agreed that the loans had contributed greatly to the stability and vitality of the Heights.<sup>21</sup>

They were probably correct. Mattapan had about 10,000 Jews in 1968, and by the mid-1970s virtually every one of them had left the community. Boston banks poured hundreds of thousands of dollars of low-interest mortgages into the area, but almost exclusively to African-Americans. Since the Mattapan Jews, according to a student of this community, realized the many advantages of the area and regarded it as a good place to live, "encouraging whites to buy in the area could have had an important demonstrative effect on the Mattapan people."<sup>22</sup>

Several of the leaders of the Jewish community had already concluded, by 1970, that one key to the survival of Cleveland Heights as a viable Jewish community was to convince banks to help Jews move into the area as inexpensively as possible. Unlike Mattapan, where the rapid movement of Jews out as African-Americans moved in never ceased, and where virtually no whites bought homes at the same time as African-Americans, Cleveland Heights witnessed a steady influx of new white and Jewish homeowners. In 1974 only 9 percent of the Cleveland Heights homes sold by real estate brokers went to whites; by 1978, 42 percent of their sales were to whites. Even in the most heavily African-American school district of Cleveland Heights (Millikin), more than half the homes sold in 1978 were to whites (41 to 38). While many whites moved into the community without mortgage assistance, a significant number of Jews, especially in the latter half of the 1970s, chose Cleveland Heights over nonintegrated suburbs because of the availability of low-interest loans and mortgages.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Holding Approach*

The second possible alternative, what I will call the holding approach, was articulated by a small number of important leaders in the Jewish community. Its proponents argued that the forces for change were so powerful that it was a delusion to believe that they could be overcome by any action on the part of the Jewish community—even in cooperation with other groups. However, these leaders and residents felt, although change was certain, it was important to avoid panic and to slow down the pace of the movement. Therefore, the proper strategy was to offer a modest number of mortgage loans in order to attract some Jewish families into the area, to work vigorously with the city on such problems as safety, school improvements (levies, curriculum, etc.), and legislation against blockbusting, to work with realtors to encourage fair housing practices, and to encourage neighbors to meet and discover that their differences of skin color were not matched by differences in basic values and concerns. The advocates of the holding approach opposed increased investment of either funds or staff time (“wasteful,” said one leader), arguing that

the goal should be to slow down rather than attempt to reverse a process which, in any event, was beyond their control.

*"Inevitability"*

To the final approach I give the designation "inevitable"; these who held it started from more or less the same premise as the advocates of the holding strategy, but were skeptical about the efficacy of any measures. Instead, they suggested that communal energies should be directed vigorously toward planning the shape of the new community (which unquestionably would be in the more eastern suburbs). It was necessary, they maintained, to make sure that the planning was not done in a frantic and unplanned manner, so as to guarantee that facilities would be located wisely, that provision would be made from the start for the inevitable influx of Cleveland Heights Jews, and that all community decisions and efforts would be predicated upon the inevitability of this next step. This group was dominated by Jews who twenty years earlier had lived in a changing Cleveland neighborhood that had turned African-American and become a deteriorated community. They felt certain that the same thing was beginning to happen in Cleveland Heights. As Henry Lowenthal, an organizational leader, explained to his colleagues in 1970, "When the Negroes move in first comes fear, and then more speed; as one institution begins to move, this results in panic. Public safety is becoming a serious problem, especially after dark. Young people cannot be sent safely on the streets after dark. Everyone is moving out."

Everyone, of course, was not moving out. Two years after Lowenthal's statement, white students still comprised 94 percent of the Cleveland Heights school enrollment; and whites bought more than 75 percent of the homes purchased in the city during that year. But all the schools in Cleveland Heights had some African-American students, and the Jewish population of Cleveland Heights was slowly declining; it would decline from 16,300 in 1970 to 10,341 at the end of the decade—though most of this loss took place in the early 1970s and peaked in 1974. For those who espoused the "inevitable" school of thought, however, the increase in the African-American population and the decrease in the Jewish population doomed the community.<sup>24</sup>

The most vigorous proponents of this position were the rabbi and the president of the Temple on the Heights. Founded in 1866, by the 1960s this Conservative congregation served about 2,000 families and occupied a \$2,000,000 Byzantine synagogue to which it had moved in 1925, but a considerable number of its members had left the Heights and moved to suburbs farther east. As early as October 1969, in a private meeting with two Federation leaders. Rabbi Rudolph ("Rudy") Rosenthal argued that Cleveland Heights was already at the point of "saturation" from African-American migration into the suburb. When one of the Federation leaders pointed out that "Negroes constitute only about three, or at most, four percent of the Heights," the rabbi responded that "there is no way to deal with the situation," as "City Hall has fumbled the ball on so many occasions that it is too late for them to recoup their losses."

Despite this position, Rabbi Rosenthal and the synagogue's president, Nathan Oscar, vigorously denied that "questions of integration" had influenced their decision to move out of the Heights and build a \$6,000,000 edifice on a piece of property they had already purchased in the far eastern suburb of Pepper Pike. Oscar noted "proudly," according to one participant, that the new temple would entail the largest fund-raising campaign ever undertaken by a synagogue in the United States. Oscar said that the congregation had considered remaining in the Heights, but that would have necessitated "purchasing large pieces of property adjoining the congregation and developing these pieces of property as buffers—a 'maginot line'—between the institutions and the Negroes." The minutes do not indicate any response to this comment.<sup>25</sup>

Although the rabbi and the president of the Temple on the Heights did not represent the entire membership (a sizable minority of the congregation opposed their plan), the following month they sent a letter to every congregant announcing the move and including numerous inaccurate or incomplete statements about the pending moves of other Cleveland Heights Jewish institutions. Leaders espousing the all-out and holding approaches vigorously attacked the letters in a series of meetings with Rosenthal and Oscar, and the two synagogue leaders agreed to send out a correction letter. By early 1970 it was clear to all involved in Cleveland Heights that the leaders of the Temple on

the Heights epitomized the "inevitable" approach to the slow but steady increase of African-Americans in the Heights. For some Jewish leaders and Heights residents this signaled a "sense of fear and malaise that appeared to be growing in Cleveland Heights." But as the 1970s unfolded it became clear that the Temple on the Heights stood alone, institutionally, in its decision to move out of the city.<sup>26</sup>

### *Stabilization*

Despite the gloom-and-doom position of the Temple on the Heights, the Jewish residents of Cleveland Heights and the leaders of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland (who did not necessarily live in Cleveland Heights) overwhelmingly supported every effort to keep the housing in the community accessible to all, and also favored, perhaps not so overwhelmingly, a dramatic investment of philanthropic dollars and professional staff time to encourage Jews to move into Cleveland Heights and to stabilize, if not improve, the quality of life in the community. The 1970s would witness numerous neighborhood-stabilization projects, funded and organized by the Jewish communal leadership, aimed not only at protecting the Jewish institutional investment in Cleveland Heights but at making the housing, schools, and social-cultural-recreational opportunities even better. As one resident explained, "Most of my friends and I welcomed integration, and seriously objected to moving the Jewish population out of the neighborhood. We hoped to maintain a viable Jewish community while, at the same time, guaranteeing every Negro a right to purchase the house of his choice."<sup>27</sup>

The mayor of Cleveland Heights, Fred Stashower, an unabashedly old-fashioned liberal, was not so impressed with the Jewish commitment to Cleveland Heights, at least in 1969. He told a Federation leader that "with almost no exceptions, Jewish institutions in the area are concerned with their own well-being and almost totally uninterested in the welfare of the suburb. They will leave when it is in their best interest to leave without being concerned in the slightest as to what happens to the neighborhood after they go." Maybe so, but not one other organization or institution besides the Temple on the Heights planned to leave Cleveland Heights. Nevertheless, the mayor

generalized from one announced move and a rumor of another (Bureau of Jewish Education), to the detriment of those in the community trying to offer alternatives to the "inevitable" approach.<sup>28</sup>

By the late 1970s, in fact, it had become clear that the efforts of residents and organizations to keep Cleveland Heights an integrated and desirable community had paid off. The annual rate of increase in non-white enrollment had declined from 5.5 percent in 1975 to 3.5 percent in 1978; in those same years, whites purchased three of every four houses sold in the Heights, and the value of Cleveland Heights homes increased an average of 58 percent (according to a study by Women's Federal Savings and Loan).<sup>29</sup>

### *Interfaith Efforts*

One of the earliest steps taken by Jewish residents and leaders who had decided upon the all-out approach was the forging of alliances with Catholic and Protestant leaders in Cleveland Heights. It was obvious to many that decaying areas of the Heights needed modernization and rehabilitation, that a growing number of lending institutions were becoming reluctant to invest mortgage money in various areas of the Heights, that African-Americans needed assistance when they sought housing in some parts of the city, and that whites needed encouragement when they considered purchasing homes in the community. The five Lutheran congregations in the Heights (Bethlehem, First English, Gethsemane, Grace, and Hope), together with Forest Hills Presbyterian Church, sponsored a housing program which selectively rehabilitated single-family homes in Cleveland Heights and made them available to residents in need of more adequate housing. Jewish leaders observed this program closely and joined the Protestants in seeking white inhabitants for this housing. In addition, throughout the decade Jewish and Lutheran white women and men accompanied African-Americans, when asked, as they sought to purchase homes, and worked closely with realtors to guarantee fair housing opportunities to African-Americans who sought homes in the Heights. By the end of the 1970s, Jewish and Protestant organizations working together had secured a federal community-development block grant to purchase, renovate, and resell as separate units

twenty-four two-family houses over three years in a three-street area within the Boulevard School District, the census tract area with the highest concentration of Jews.<sup>30</sup>

Close relations developed with representatives of the three Catholic parishes (St. Louis, St. Ann's, and Gesu), which were strongly committed to neighborhood stabilization. Initially the Jewish-Catholic dialogue ranged over numerous topics, but it slowly began to focus on what the Jewish and Catholic communities in the Heights might do together to calm the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that pervaded the community in the face of changing neighborhoods and white flight. What they shared in common was a concern for the future of Cleveland Heights. Together they successfully accomplished their first two goals: working to pass the monumental 1972 school levy that would rebuild most of the schools in Cleveland Heights, and lobbying the council for an ordinance against telephone solicitation in order to discourage real estate practices that were illegal and unethical. With this success, the Jewish and Catholic leaders decided to expand their base and created the Heights Community Congress, dedicated to promoting and maintaining an open and integrated community of the highest quality. By the end of the decade it could boast of extensive work in open housing, class-action lawsuits against realtors and anti-mortgage red-lining, housing inspection, senior citizens issues, recreation, schools, transportation, block clubs, and neighborhood associations.

### *Dealing with the Realtors*

Realtors posed one of the most worrisome problems to Jewish leaders in the early 1970s. With most other suburban areas informally closed to African-Americans, or priced beyond the range of families seeking to leave the city of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights had become an attractive area to Cleveland African-Americans by the end of the 1960s. Jewish leaders devoted considerable time to meeting, both informally and formally, with individual realtors and real estate companies in the hope of discouraging what the Jewish leaders called blockbusting and the realtors defended as accepted business practices.

In 1960, when Cleveland Heights was an all-white city and real estate salespeople would not even show houses to African-Americans, there were no savings and loans or banks that would grant mortgages to African-Americans seeking property in all-white areas. African-Americans interviewed for this essay claimed that they were not shown listing books, so the rapidly emerging multiple-listing service was, in effect, for whites only, and realtors regularly discouraged African-Americans from looking at homes on streets that did not already have African-American residents.

Jewish leaders frequently noted that there was only one motive in real estate—money, and nothing quite as profitable as a changing neighborhood. With Noble, Oxford, much of University Heights, parts of Shaker Heights, and Beachwood closed to African-Americans in search of housing, white brokers steered almost every African-American family into already integrated areas of Cleveland Heights and used a variety of techniques to encourage whites to put their homes up for sale. By the early 1970s, with the passage of a state law which gave injunctive powers to the plaintiff, a 1965 housing addition to the Ohio Public Accommodations Law (Ohio Fair Housing Law), the federal civil rights legislation of the 1960s, the creation of several fair-housing organizations (most importantly, Heights Citizens for Human Rights, created in 1963), and the appointment of a human relations assistant to the city manager, housing discrimination in most areas of Cleveland Heights had become less acceptable.

### *Relations Between Jews and African-Americans*

The Jewish leadership felt that the test of integration was the market, i.e., were both African-American and white people buying? By the second half of the 1970s, despite the precipitous drop in Jewish population in the first half of the decade, the answer was clearly yes. Not only whites in general but Jews specifically (aided significantly by the mortgage-assistance program administered by the Hebrew Free Loan Association and by housing directories issued by several synagogues in the city) were moving steadily into the community, while African-Americans had relatively free access to most areas of the Heights.<sup>31</sup>

In the early 1970s, when African-American–Jewish relations had yet to be placed under the microscope of the national media, the alliance between these two groups, at least in Cleveland Heights, was quite strong. One long-time African-American resident noted that “unlike the 1980s, when the ascent of Jesse Jackson into Democratic politics produced a furious debate among African-Americans and Jews and led the media to emphasize issues that drive African-Americans and Jews apart,” in the 1970s, “on most issues, we shared the same basic values—the points of agreement outweighed the points of disagreement.”<sup>32</sup>

One of the most interesting and significant programs of this period was that of joint African-American–Jewish educational endeavors stressing each group’s history, culture, and contribution to American society. White students, from elementary grades through Cleveland Heights High School, were exposed to the academic study of the lifestyles, contributions, sensitivities, and values of African-American culture and, from time to time, listened to African-American writers and singers who visited the schools. Technically the curriculum emphasized the historical contributions of all minority groups, but there was an overwhelming emphasis on the black experience in Africa and America.<sup>33</sup>

One African-American parent, whose children were called “niggers” and physically threatened when the family moved to Cleveland Heights in the mid-1960s, responded by joining with a African-American neighbor to create the Committee to Improve Community Relations. This group demonstrated at the Cleveland Heights Board of Education on June 10, 1974 to, among other things, increase the percentage of African-American teachers and administrators, add African-American history and culture to in-service training for teachers, develop an African-American history and culture course at the high school level, investigate allegations of racist behavior by teachers, make Martin Luther King’s birthday an official school holiday, and provide ongoing training of all staff in minority history and cultures. Talks between the CICR and school officials ultimately bogged down until the Department of Justice intervened. On April 1, 1975, the school officials and African-American residents signed an agree-

ment calling for the district to carry out most of the requests of the African-American residents.

Out of this agreement came the Inter-Racial Concerns and Curriculum Task Force Committee. African-American residents were encouraged to continually review books written by African-Americans or about African-Americans and make recommendations to the school authorities. One African-American resident recalls that she and her friends submitted scores of reviews which, according to school records, were evaluated seriously before books were purchased or in determining books to be removed from school libraries. Jewish residents played a key role on both sides of this nearly three-year struggle over alleged discrimination in the Cleveland Heights schools; the school board president and the assistant superintendent, who worked closely with African-American residents trying to work out an agreement, were Jews, while other Jewish residents joined with their African-American neighbors in demanding more African-American personnel.

In addition, African-Americans and Jews, working through numerous street and neighborhood associations as well as with the Urban League and the Jewish Community Federation, spearheaded a vigorous (and successful) drive to pass the \$19.5 million bond issue in November 1972, which represented a dramatic instance of the faith that most of the community had in the school system and the community in general. The funds were used almost exclusively to renovate the physical plant of the schools, and most of these new facilities opened for the first time with the 1975-76 school year. In addition, African-Americans and Jews joined with administrators to secure federal funds, under Title VII of the 1972 Emergency School Aid Act; and in the 1975-76 school year almost \$500,000 was budgeted for projects related to the process of integration.

Not all Jews and African-Americans agreed on the demands, of course, but the first half of the 1970s was striking for the extent of cooperation among Cleveland Heights African-American and Jewish parents seeking to educate their children in a pluralistic environment which would respond equally to both groups. Jewish residents not only worked with African-Americans to secure their demands but demanded that African-American parents support programs in

which non-Jewish students met Jewish artists and performers in residence, participated in workshops on human relations, were offered courses on the Holocaust (one such course even took students from Cleveland Heights High School on regular journeys of conscience to the death camps of World War II), and found themselves exposed to materials that Jewish residents of the Heights had carefully reviewed, just as their African-American counterparts had done.<sup>34</sup>

### *Outcome*

In the last years of the 1970s, Cleveland Heights spent hundred of thousands of dollars on high-powered advertising campaigns designed to "sell" this city of about 60,000 to prospective white home buyers and current residents. As the decade came to an end, the city was the scene of a vigorous and diverse Jewish institutional life. With Taylor Road as the focus, ten synagogues (eight of which were Orthodox), five day schools (two Conservative), five afternoon schools, a Jewish community center, Jewish Family Service, Hadassah, five kosher butchers, and two kosher bakeries filled the area. And the 1980s would witness a continuous stream of young, (mostly) married, white couples moving into the community as well as the rapid gentrification of parts of the Heights. These newcomers included a substantial number of middle-class Orthodox Jewish couples, who provided considerable stability and growth for nearly every one of the Jewish institutions, and helped make Cleveland Heights a most attractive suburb for Jews and African-Americans in the 1990s.<sup>35</sup>

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## Notes

1. Yona Ginsberg, *Jews in a Changing Neighborhood: The Study of Mattapan* (New York, 1975).
2. This paragraph, as well as the three that follow, is based on the archives of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Philadelphia. I am grateful to Michael J. Austin for his initial suggestion of this comparison.
3. Mary Emma Harris and Ruth Mills Robinson, *The Proud Heritage of Cleveland Heights, Ohio* (Oberlin, 1966), pp. 27–32.
4. Sidney Vincent, "Cleveland: City without Jews," in *A Tale of Ten Cities: The Triple Ghetto in American Religious Life*, ed. Eugene J. Lipman and Albert Vorspan (New York, 1962), pp. 45–77.
5. In 1969, at Federation meetings, estimates ranged from \$10 million to \$20 million; in 1970, from \$40 million to \$50 million; in 1971, \$50 million to \$60 million; and by 1972, \$100 million had become the standard figure. The estimated replacement value increased dramatically as the Federation's commitment to preserve Cleveland Heights increased.
6. *Cleveland Sun Press*, January 25 and February 9, 1967.
7. *Ibid.*, August 17, September 28, and October 12, 1967.
8. *Ibid.*, January 11, February 15, March 7, April 25, and November 18, 1968.
9. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1967.
10. *Ibid.*, August 8, 1968.
11. *Ibid.*, November 7 and September 28, 1967, August 29, September 12, and November 14, 1968; oral interview with Barbara Heald, November 11, 1988; Suzanne R. Jones, ed., *In Our Day: Cleveland Heights, Its People, Its Places, Its Past* (Cleveland Heights, n.d.).
12. *Cleveland Sun Press*, May 18, 1967.
13. Gerda Freedheim, "Housing Report," *Heights Citizens for Human Rights Newsletter*, January 1970; oral interview with Doris Allen, December 13, 1988.
14. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 31, 1970.
15. Lloyd S. Schwenger to Marvin S. Zelman, November 14, 1969 (Jewish Community Federation Archives, Heights Area Project).
16. Minutes, Representatives of Jewish Organizations Regarding Community Betterment in Cleveland Heights, December 3, 1969 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).
17. Sidney Z. Vincent to Bennett Yanowitz, November 17, 1969 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).
18. The term "all-out" was used consistently by Robert Silverman, chairman of the Community Relations Committee in the early 1970s, to describe his program for Cleveland Heights.
19. *Taylor Road Synagogue Bulletin*, September 4, 1970; memoranda from Bennett Yanowitz, January 1970 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).
20. Oral interview with Rabbi Marvin Spiegelman, November 26, 1990.
21. Elmer Paull to Sidney Vincent, n.d. (Jewish Community Federation Archives); *Cleveland Jewish News*, October 18, 1974; Executive Committee Minutes, Jewish Community Federation, July 9, 1971 and June 21, 1973 (Jewish Community Federation Archives); interview with Rabbi Spiegelman; Endowment Fund Committee Minutes, Jewish Community Federation, June 21, 1973 and June 10, 1974; Alvin L. Gray, chairman of the Community Relations Committee, Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, report to the 1974 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Chicago, November 13–17, 1974 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).
22. Ginsberg, *Jews in a Changing Neighborhood*, p. 200.
23. Oral interview with Bennett Yanowitz, October 19, 1988; Executive Committee Minutes, Cleveland Heights Survey, School District Neighborhood Black Percentages, January 1978 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education); Barbara Mervine, Millikin Housing Information 1978, Millikin

Neighbors Board (Jewish Community Federation Archives); Real Estate Activity in Millikin, January 1974–December 1975, Millikin Neighbors Board (privately held); Creative Research Services, Cleveland Heights Survey by School District and Percent of Minority Households, 1978 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education).

24. "Questions and Answers on Cleveland Heights," June 1972 and June 1973 (Jewish Community Federation Archives); Judah Rubinstein to Ted Farber, memorandum re population trends, May 21, 1979 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).

25. Notes on a Meeting, Nathan Oscar, Rabbi Rudolph Rosenthal, et al., October 28, 1969 (Temple on the Heights Archives); Rabbi Rosenthal and Mr. Oscar to Membership of Temple on the Heights, January 15, 1970 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).

26. Minutes, Special Meeting of the Cleveland Heights Assembly, January 22, 1970 (Jewish Community Federation Archives); Nathan Oscar and Rudolph M. Rosenthal to Membership of the Temple on the Heights, April 1, 1970 (Temple on the Heights Archives); Executive Committee Minutes, Cleveland Heights Assembly, April 9, 1970; Heights "Open Doors" Planning Committee [of the Community Relations Committee], April 16, 1972 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).

27. Fay Fine to Howard Berger, October 15, 1969 (Jewish Community Federation Archives).

28. Memorandum of a Conversation between Fred Stashower and Sidney Z. Vincent, November 18, 1969 (Jewish Community Federation Archives); oral interview with Fred Stashower, July 7, 1990.

29. *Cleveland Sun Press*, September 6, 1979.

30. Minutes, Steering Body for Joint Social Ministry of Cleveland Heights Lutheran Congregations, January 27, 1970 (privately held). See also *Family and Housing Characteristics for 1977 Real Property Inventory of Metropolitan Cleveland* (Cleveland, n.d.).

31. Oral interviews with Bennett Yanowitz, Bob Soltz, Barbara Heald, Rose Drake, Robert Silverman, Al Abramovitz, Marvin Spiegelman, and Doris Allen. The mortgage-aid program provided interest-free loans up to \$3,000 and, through an arrangement with a local bank, second-mortgage loans at 9 percent interest which would be guaranteed by the Federation up to a total of \$70,000. Alvin L. Gray, chairman of the Community Relations Committee in 1974, told a national audience at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds that same year that "at least [240 families] have been attracted to the community by the mortgage program."

32. Oral interview with Doris Allen.

33. Oral interview with Rose Drake.

34. Charley J. Levine, "Jews and Integration in Cleveland Heights," *Congress Monthly* 42, no. 5 (May 1975); Cleveland Heights–University Heights Board of Education to Committee to Improve Community Relations, July 15, 1974 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education); K through Six Integrated Curriculum, June 24, 1974 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education); Bernice L. Van Sickle to Walter Kincaid, February 12, 1973, Belva A. Singer to Albert Abramovitz, June 24, 1974, Leonard Freyman to A. J. Abramovitz, June 20, 1974 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education); Community Relations Service, Department of Justice Press Release, April 2, 1975 (Cleveland Heights Board of Education); oral interview with Doris Allen and Al Abramovitz.

35. *Survey of Cleveland's Jewish Population, 1981* (Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, 1982), and a visit to Cleveland Heights on July 6–7, 1990. An essay which discusses community organizing at the neighborhood level vs. community organizing at the agency level and helped me to conceptualize this essay is Michael J. Austin and Neil Betten, "The Roots of Community Organizing: An Introduction," in their *The Roots of Community Organization, 1917–1939* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 3–15.