

The Effect of White Flight on African Americans

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White flight is a term that came up in the mid-twentieth century. It was used to describe the phenomenon of many white residents moving away from urban areas to the suburbs (suburbanization). This was attributed to several reasons. First, the urban areas became more diverse due to African American or other minority populations settling in. Such a demographic shift caused changes in the socioeconomic dynamics of these areas. Another reason for white flight was racism, although this was not always the case. However, there are documented accounts of whites fleeing the neighborhoods because they did not want to live next to blacks and other minority groups (Crowder & South, 2008). Additionally, as evidenced in the South Shore, crime rates, desire to live in less densely populated areas, and concerns about tax burdens fueled white flight. Many scholars argue that racism and prejudice also played a small part in fueling white flight. Regardless of the reasons for white flight, many African Americans became homeowners in metropolitan areas in the US. There are multiple effects of white flight on African Americans.

Many scholars agree that white flight had positive outcomes for African Americans. The socioeconomic dynamics at the time meant that most African Americans could not afford to buy homes. However, after World War II, many African Americans started getting jobs and good incomes. As they trickled into metropolitan areas, white flight became rampant. As more whites moved to the suburbs, the demand for houses in urban areas declined. This made the housing prices drop to affordable levels for African Americans. Many of them became homeowners, further fueled by the improved access to credit by black buyers (Boustan, 2007).

Another positive aspect of white flight was political representation. As African Americans became more concentrated in urban areas, it became easier for them to elect leaders

who understood their issues. Racial composition played a significant role in attaining political power. It meant African Americans had more representation in the legislative and executive arms of government. This meant they could influence resource distribution and policies that solved their unique issues.

However, there were also several adverse outcomes of white flight. For instance, one of the most apparent negative outcomes was economic disparities, notably between the suburbs and the metropolitan areas. White flight had a negative economic impact; many white-owned businesses were closed, leading to the loss of jobs. The tax base was also reduced, leading to reduced revenue inflows. This led to a decline in the local economy, causing a glaring disparity with the suburbs (Pais et al., 2008). This decline in the local economy had a ripple effect on the social aspect of metropolitan areas. For instance, the crime rate significantly increased, and many areas became slums.

White flight also fueled a decline in the quality of education in metropolitan areas. The diminished returns from property taxes meant that local schools were underfunded. This led to unequal access to education between African American and White children. Underfunded schools meant that African American children did not get the best education as compared to their counterparts in the suburbs. This had lasting socioeconomic ramifications for years to come. White flight had adverse social outcomes, too. For instance, it led to a geographical, social segregation of communities. As white people moved to the suburbs, the metropolitan areas became populated mainly by African Americans and other minority groups. This limited racial interaction, leading to social segregation.

In contemporary American communities, gentrification is considered an equal opposite of white flight. However, the effects of white flight had lasting outcomes on many communities.

There is a need to understand the underlying causes of white flight. This understanding will inform mitigation measures to address issues of socioeconomic disparities, racial prejudice, diversity, and improved quality of life in metropolitan areas.

References

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