

Mobility and the (In)Significance of Place in an Evangelical Church: A Case Study from the South Side of Chicago

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Abstract

There continues to be ongoing discussion about segregation and white flight in northern US cities. Numerous authors have articulated and detailed the impetuses for the dramatic shifts of white population out of central city neighborhoods and into the suburbs. These reasons have included outright racism, concerns over property values, residential preferences, and neutral ethnocentrism – among a host of others. However, in this article I will contend that these causes might be further nuanced by a case study of a small religious community on the South Side of Chicago that departed en masse for the suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s. The story of this religious community delineates how insular spiritual communities can foment poor conceptions of place. That is, within these highly socially isolated religious communities there are such weak ties to the broader neighborhood that members are easily predisposed to mobility: when they felt their neighborhood threatened by the arrival of African Americans they simply packed up and reconstituted themselves in the suburbs.

INTRODUCTION

Many authors have comprehensively discussed the social changes that swept Chicago and other rust belt cities in the aftermath of the Great Migration and the ingrained residential patterns that resulted. However, in this paper I want to examine two particular neighborhoods of Chicago – Englewood and Roseland (see Figure 1) – and a common sub-community that existed in both. Within these two neighborhoods resided six congregations belonging to a denomination called the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The CRC traces its ethnic roots to the Netherlands and self-identifies as “evangelical.” These two communities played notable roles in the racial residential succession pattern that pervaded much of the South Side of Chicago. Within a decade, each neighborhood witnessed the departure of all CRC congregations. Left in the wake of their departure was a sole mission chapel – not a formally organized congregation. In this article I will argue that the rapid departure of these six congregations was dependent, at least in part, on a poor conception of place that manifested in weak ties and affiliations to the neighborhoods surrounding the churches. In other words, the typical white flight issues of racial change and concerns over property values certainly played a role in the rapid departure of these CRC congregations. However, a more nuanced examination of this case study offers particular evidence about the historical importance that the concept of place played in the process of white flight.

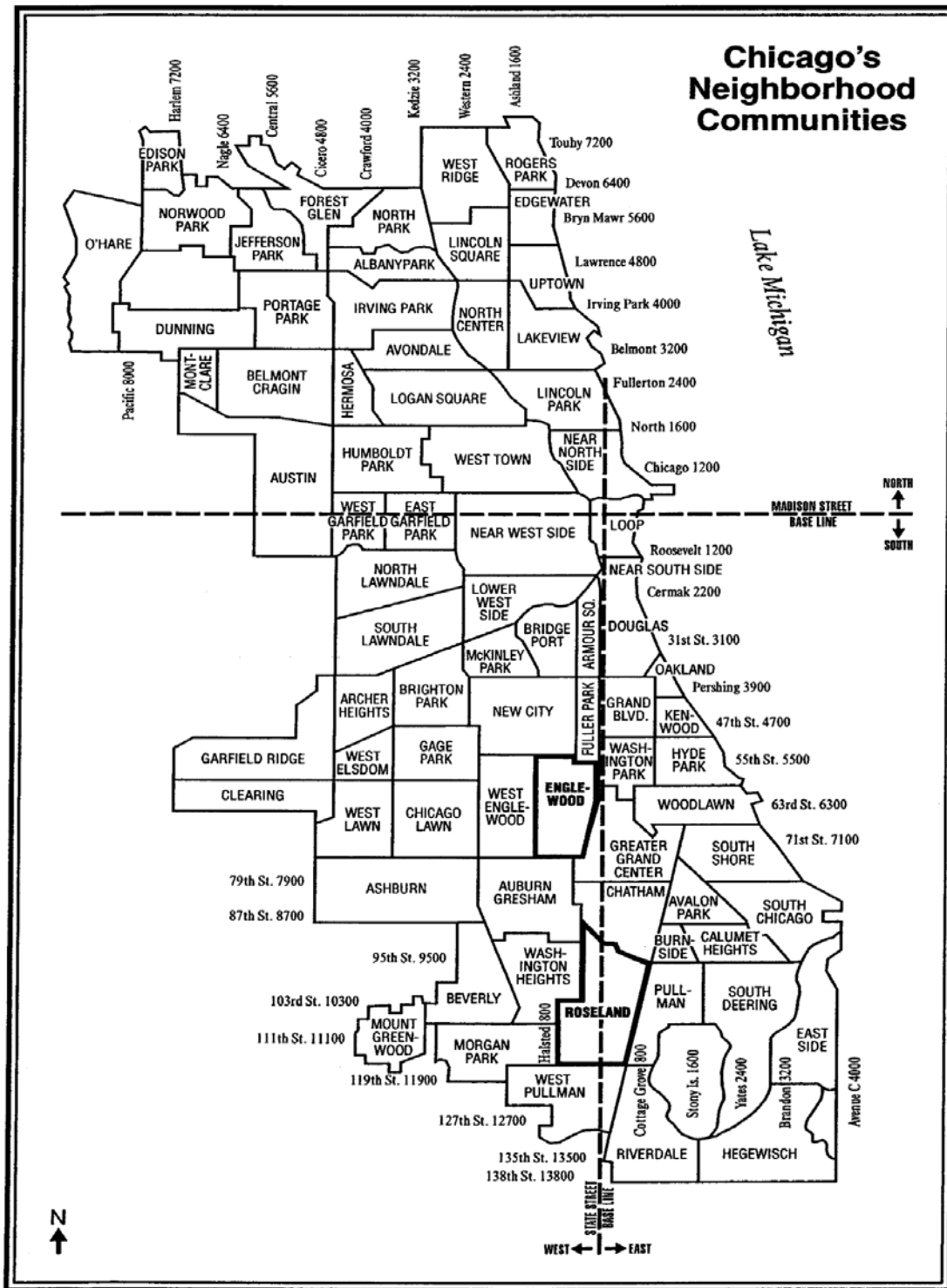


FIGURE 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The members of these CRC congregations in Englewood and Roseland represented an insular social circle that utilized the local church instead of the local park or square as the unifying focal point for the community. Such a construction abetted an easy detachment and relocation to the suburbs. The story here reveals the difference between being rooted in neighborhood and being rooted in less geographically determined communities – such as congregations. In essence, these CRC congregations operated as fully functional isolated communities. However, those communities tended to be largely spiritual – there did not exist an emphasis on community being connected to “place.” Within the interdisciplinary field of urban studies, there has been a burgeoning literature concerned with the notion of place and its relationship to community.

Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) wrote perhaps the classic tome on place, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Tuan created the term “topophilia” to describe the “affective bond between people and a place or setting.” He argued that culture and environment remain closely linked. He also asserted that man-made environments could provide evidence about the worldviews of the people who inhabited the area in question. One reviewer wrote: “Again, Tuan points out that the impact of architectural space transcends that of much larger natural configuration outdoors; one is led to muse about the aim of the builders, about the responses of clients and other observers” (Lowenthal 1975, 423-424). In essence, places reveals much about a people and their values – place has meaning. One geographer has noted: “It is generally accepted that the art museums, along with universities, are established primarily to pursue and display intellectual achievements and meanings, whereas prisons, law courts, factories, and offices mostly create and sustain social relations. Place helps constitute and balance this basic structure of nature, social relations and meaning” (Sack 1997, 61). In addition, place both constrains and enables. Place has effect: “The easiest way to understand how places work is to recognize that they all, large or small, thick or thin function to include or exclude different elements of forces of the world” (ibid.).

Being a pervasive entity, place has a crucial role in developing social connectedness – yet it can also be configured to have a coercive effect. In either case, place does not remain neutral. Rather, it takes on conscious characteristics and meanings that have importance within the urban arena. For our purposes, it would seem the CRC congregations of Englewood and Roseland first manipulated their places in an effort to remain exclusive. However, when such strategies became unviable, the six congregations displayed a visceral indifference to their larger communities and mobilized.

Not only does this case study further our understanding about how communities understand place, it also lends further insight into how religious bodies participated in white flight. John McGreevy (1996), Gerald Gamm (1999), and Eileen McMahon (1995) have all discussed how Catholic parish identity led some white Catholic families to fiercely defend their neighborhoods as African Americans moved in. McGreevy especially noted that the manner in which Catholic communities in northern US cities defined their surroundings in religious terms had profound consequences on the emerging residential patterns of the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast, the CRC communities within Englewood and Roseland on the South Side of Chicago accorded their surroundings with very little religious or spiritual significance. Thus when their place/neighborhoods started changing, they readily mobilized for the suburbs.

THE GREAT MIGRATION AND CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE

As African Americans came into Chicago during the Great Migration, Englewood became a suitable destination because of its proximity to the Black Belt and the industrial factories. A general population growth in Englewood during the 1930s had led to an increase in housing conversions. At the same time, however, the housing stock in the neighborhood began to decline in quality. During that particular decade white middle-class families began departing for points farther out in the city and to the suburbs as well (Santow 2000). From 1930 to 1960 the population total remained fairly stable, only increasing from 89,000 to 97,000. However, such stasis in population totals fails to adequately convey the tumult and radical demographic shift of those decades. During that time period, Englewood shifted from a predominantly white population to predominantly African American. During the 1940s the African American population of Englewood increased five-fold (*Englewood Study Area* 1963, 7-9). In the years 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1960, the percentage of the population represented by African Americans rose from 1.3 to 2.2 to 10.5 to 68.9, respectively. It should also be noted that during the decade of the most drastic racial change, 1950 to 1960, the general population of Englewood only increased from 94,134 to 97,595 (*Local Community Fact Book* 1984, 151).

In response to these changes, in 1939 a group of citizens from Englewood created the Southtown Planning Association (SPA) in an effort to create “ingenious ways of preventing Negroes from moving into the area” (Hirsch 1983, 37). The SPA was founded by and run realtors, bankers, and the local Chambers of Commerce. Although most energies of the SPA were spent in crafting and enforcing restrictive covenants, at other times the organization did demonstrate creative means for maintaining buffers between African American settlements and the white areas of the South Side. More explicitly, these “ingenious” methods included lobbying to create the Illinois Redevelopment Act of 1941. The SPA reaped the reward of the Act when they were allowed to create a subsidiary organization, the Southtown Realty and Development Corporation (SRDC) under its auspices. The new corporation had an aggressive policy to buy property from African Americans who had bought into the community. Moreover, the Corporation obtained “structures for demolition and rehabilitation if those alternatives were deemed necessary to keep property out of black hands” (Ibid.). The new association also had the authority to eradicate blight in its neighborhood. In 1946 the SPA attempted to utilize the SRDC as it launched a “build the Negroes out of Englewood campaign” in an effort to rehabilitate an increasingly African American corner of the community. The SPA plan called for the relocation of African Americans to the suburb of Robbins in order to redevelop their currently inhabited settlement in favor of middle class housing. Another scheme of the SPA was 1947’s “Choose Your Neighbor Campaign” – an obvious promotion of restrictive covenants. In fact, that same year the SPA allotted half of its \$30,000 budget for the enforcement of covenants (Santow 2000, 117-120).

Six years later in 1945 the acrimony continued as white students at the local high school went on a “hate strike” to protest the new racial demographics and local businesses “resisted black patronage in an attempt to placate their white clientele” (Hirsch 1983, 117-120). Though the ruling of *Shelley* made restrictive covenants illegal, the SPA continued to expand its activities and presence in Englewood as well. Indeed, many local businessmen and property owners understood Englewood to be a significant

strategic importance as white Chicago sought to defend its borders from the growing Black Belt. One SPA activist asserted in 1950 that “if Englewood’s residential areas remain healthy and stable, all areas of the south and west will also maintain their integrity” (Santow 2000, 120).

Though the population levels remained fairly static, the activities of the Corporation conspired with larger government projects to actually reduce possibilities and further strain the local housing market. The construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway and demolition of a number of dilapidated structures collaborated to cause a net loss of 902 housing units between 1950 and 1960. As a result, the growing African American population began seeking housing more actively in previously white neighborhoods in Englewood (Bergsma 1968, 3).¹

Local whites, however, did not always attempt to mitigate African American influx through associations and corporations. Instead, they sometimes displayed a violent defensive posture in response to the in-migration of African Americans. In one case, a rumor spread that a home within the community was simply being “shown” to an African American couple – in fact, the African Americans were attending a union meeting. Gaining a life of its own, the rumor “called forth large crowds, which registered a destructive protest against the presence of blacks ... and ‘outsiders’ in general” (Hirsch 1983, 89).

Estimates at the time had the Englewood crowds peaking at around 10,000 participants. In actuality, the house of the union meeting sustained little damage as police moved in to protect the property. Instead, the targets of the violence became unrecognized outsiders: “‘strangers’ who entered the area to observe the white protestors and innocent passers-by were victimized by roving gangs” (Ibid., 55). The riot lasted for three days and any strange whites or blacks who entered the district could expect to be assaulted. The ferocity of Englewood residents’ reaction to a rumor was indicative of the tension that existed in many of the white communities bordering the Black Belt.

Despite the activities of whites, by the late 1950s Englewood was reported as having pockets of both “changing” and “changed” areas. In other words, the transition to African American had been completed on some blocks, but others were still in process. Even with the change, the community managed to maintain the largest “out-lying shopping area in the City of Chicago.” The neighborhood was also described as still having good transportation to the Loop. Some light industry remained and in the southeast corner of the community Wilson Junior College and Chicago Teachers College still functioned. Overall though, Englewood suffered from “crowded schools and residences, high rates of unemployment and school dropouts, and a disproportionate number of families on Public Aid” (Study Committee of the Englewood Committee for Community Action 1963). By the early 1960s the residents of Englewood found themselves in a community on the precipice of slum-like deterioration. One local minister assessed the situation: “The problem it faces is whether it is to become another

¹ Derke Bergsma, “A Tale of Two Churches: An Analysis and Critique of the Process of Decision Leading to Relocation from City to Suburb,” unpublished seminar paper, University of Chicago, n.d. Dutch Heritage Center at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL, p. 3. While his paper is ultimately a sociological analysis that focuses on the decision-making process, Bergsma nicely delineated the history of the CRC congregations in Englewood. Much of the narrative here about the Englewood and the churches is based on his assessment in the paper and in an interview conducted with the author, July 24, 2002, Palos Heights, IL.

deteriorated and dilapidated slum, populated exclusively by Negroes and headed for mass clearance, or whether it is headed for rebirth in which its substantial human and physical resources will be capitalized, redeveloping and maintaining it as a productive live community” (Ronnow 1963). The same minister went on to note that Englewood possessed some positive capital for fomenting a rebirth: the large business district and at least thirty Protestant churches and two Roman Catholic churches. By that time, however, both First Christian Reformed of Englewood and Second Christian Reformed of Englewood had departed for the suburbs.

Roughly ten years later, four CRC congregations would leave Roseland under similar circumstances. Almost directly five miles south of Englewood, the community would not experience the block by block advance of African Americans in Chicago until the early 1960s. However, by 1972 all four congregations had relocated to suburbs with names like Orland Park.

During the 1940s white residents in Roseland began to mobilize to protest the Chicago Housing Authority’s plan to construct a public housing project that would undoubtedly bring more African American residents to the community. As byproducts of central business district redevelopment, the residents of Roseland viewed the housing projects as threats to the stability of their neighborhood. Much like Englewood, these protests in Roseland sometimes became violent. At an assembly to protest the Fernwood Park Homes project, author Arnold Hirsch reported that the police arrested numerous persons with Dutch last names for racial rioting (Hirsch 1983). Despite these efforts by white residents of Roseland, African Americans continued to settle in the community. By 1950 the overall population of Roseland was a little over 50,000 and African Americans accounted for 18 percent of that figure (*Local Community Fact Book* 1984).

Hirsch also asserted that Cornelius Teninga (a conspicuously Dutch last name), a realtor from Roseland, offered the “most articulate” argument to the Housing Committee of the Chicago City Council. Teninga noted the people of Roseland detected a “‘disastrous financial burden’ in the forced rehousing of thousands of displaced persons but also the ‘kindling of alarming racial tensions which will result from the wholly unnecessary dispersal of the colored inhabitants at the center of our City ... into the outlying areas’” (Hirsch 1983, 131).

Teninga’s efforts notwithstanding, in 1954 the Chicago Housing Authority completed the construction of the Governor Frank O. Lowden Homes in the Roseland area. The 128-unit housing project was largely inhabited by African Americans. In 1960 African Americans accounted for 23 percent of the total population of Roseland (Hirsch, 1983). One resident in 1964 noted that the “Hollanders who made up the greater portion of Roseland ... are now moving to the suburbs to avoid the next population change in the community.” He also related that “the local community improvement association has the avowed purpose of ‘keeping the negro out’” and that in his “judgment they will be unsuccessful” (Patterson 1964, no page).

Despite the demographic changes, Roseland continued to be the dominant retail complex for the Far South Side² of Chicago into the 1960s. A real estate assessment

² The southeast corner of Chicago proper that included the communities of Roseland, Pullman, South Deering, East Side, West Pullman, Riverdale, and Hegewisch. The area centered on Lake Calumet which had become a harbor and port for national and international freight. The total population of the Far South Side in 1960 was 164,951. For more information on the Far South Side, see James C. Downs, Jr.,

conducted in 1963 found the shopping center to have a vacancy rate of 15 percent and the buildings to be in “fair” to “good” condition. The stores there included Robert Hall, Sears, Roebuck, and Gately’s Peoples (*Local Community Fact Book* 1990). The reality, though, was that the 1960s represented the seminal moment in the decline of Roseland’s business district. The South Side of Chicago began to experience erosion within its industrial base. The effect trickled down to the retail stores. Eventually, Robert Hall, Sears, Roebuck, and Gately’s Peoples – the four major anchors – would all close their doors (*Ibid.*).

The demographic transformation and accompanying economic decline during the 1960s devastated Roseland. During the mid-1960s the in-migration of African Americans gathered such momentum that in 1970 they constituted 55% of Roseland’s population. The growth in percentage found aid in the fact that many white families departed. Between 1970 and 1980 the white population of Roseland dropped by almost 96% while the African American population grew by 82%. By 1980 African Americans accounted for 97% of a total population of over 64,000 (*Local Community Fact Book* 1984).

Such a rapid racial turnover had devastating consequences for the community. Business and industry followed the whites to the suburbs. Residents of Roseland found themselves dealing with myriad problems: “unemployment, inflation, mortgage defaults, business failures, and gang-related problems” (*Ibid.*, 129). In the 1970s alone, the community experienced over 900 mortgage foreclosures. Quality of life declined as the infant mortality rate rose to 26 per 1000 – one of the worst in the city. In 1960 the community had been served by 58 physicians; that number dropped to 31 in 1970 and 11 in 1980 (all while the total population grew by over 5000) (*Ibid.*, 129).

The social transitions that affected Chicago proper had particular consequences in local neighborhoods like Englewood and Roseland. The massive influx of African Americans and the struggle for housing had devastating consequences for communities. The erosion of the quality of life in both Englewood and Roseland was attributable to radical residential isolation based on race. In both communities, the local CRC congregations were conspirators in the aforementioned racial transition that left a legacy of deeply entrenched segregation. As the neighborhoods became increasingly African American, the CRC families followed the trend to find an ostensible comfort and security in the surrounding suburbs. By 1962 and 1972 a total of six CRC congregations had left Englewood and Roseland and, subsequently, Chicago proper as well.

AN EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY ON CHICAGO’S SOUTH SIDE

The two communities in question, Englewood and Roseland, are separated by about forty city blocks. The CRC networks within these two neighborhoods maintained highly insular characteristics. All social life revolved around the institutions of the church and the Christian school. In *Dutch Chicago: A History of Hollanders in the Windy City* (2002), noted Dutch-American historian Robert Swierenga asserted that “...social life was lived among family and fellow church members.” He stated that “... the Christian Reformed churches organized a host of cultural, religious, musical, and sporting activities for young and old alike” and that one member had noted that church

“Zones of Analysis: City of Chicago.” A report prepared for the Real Estate Research Corporation, March 1963. Church Federation of Greater Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, pp. 119-128.

life “is one round of ceaseless activity” (Swierenga 2002, 450-451). Throughout the Chicago area CRC communities, the church-school monopolization of social activity was a common theme.³

Within CRC circles, almost all social activity was conducted under the auspices of the church. Because of that isolation, the Chicago CRC communities of Roseland and Englewood remained stable and homogeneous for over one hundred years and eighty years, respectively. However, the social forces of the middle half of the twentieth century would eventually overwhelm these CRC communities. Leaders would have to make a decision regarding the maintenance of isolation and homogeneity and whether those even existed as laudable goals by the late 1960s.

Like the other Dutch Protestant settlements in the Midwest, the Dutch Reformed in the Chicago area arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of economic hardship and religious persecution following the 1834 Secession from the National Reformed Church of the Netherlands. In 1849 a group of immigrants from the North Holland province founded an Illinois settlement called High Prairie – later to be called Roseland – some six miles north of another Dutch settlement known as Low Prairie – later to be renamed South Holland (Rowlands 1949).

The Dutch settlers immediately began their farms, erecting their barns and then their homes. They produced eggs and dairy products to sell and barter with at the local store. For the first summer, they traveled to Low Prairie for Sunday worship. However, the six miles to services were difficult since the families had to extend their trip to avoid paying a toll on the Sabbath at Riverdale. Thus, when the first winter came, the settlers of High Prairie made the decision to establish their own church. Eighteen charter members founded the Holland Reformed Church of High Prairie. The next spring (1850) the church built a structure for the Sunday worship services (Rowlands 1949, 1-42). An influx of immigrants from the Netherlands continued as the settlement of High Prairie grew and by 1855 the congregation became too large for its original building. They quickly constructed a new larger house for worship in order to accommodate the flourishing young settlement.

Soon, however, the Dutch Roselanders experienced a dramatic transformation of their environs. By 1880 the Pullman Company had built a series of factories just to the west of Roseland. Eventually, the massive industry employed roughly 10,000 men. Moreover, the entire district quickly became an industrial hub as International Harvester, Sherwin Williams, and Illinois Central constructed factories there. Until the arrival of Pullman, Roseland had steadfastly remained an ethnic Dutch community – some said almost a reproduction of a village that could be found in the Netherlands. The original inhabitants of Roseland now found themselves in close quarters with new settlers, immigrants of Slavic origin. The value of the Dutch vegetable farms and their product expanded immensely.

³ Interestingly enough, the CRC closed social community seemed to have much in common with Peter Muller’s later assessment of middle-income family suburbs: “The management of children is a central ... concern, and most local social contact occurs through such family-oriented formal organizations as the PTA, Little League, and the Scouts Neighboring is limited and selective.” *Contemporary Suburban America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 72.] It seems that replacing the PTA, Little League, and the Scouts with the social organizations of the CRC would create an interesting analogy.

Despite the radical changes in the populace and structure of Roseland, the Dutch Reformed congregants remained in the community. In fact, many became extremely wealthy from real estate as they sold parcels of land that they had bought for five dollars per acre for up to \$2000. With such incomes, the Dutch actually expanded their activities and founded new churches of the Reformed persuasion. However, not all of the Dutch felt so comfortable in their communities within rapidly expanding Chicago: “Hollanders from Englewood and Roseland, who preferred rural life, moved into” northwest Indiana (Swierenga 2002, 327).

Despite that exodus, many did stay in Chicago proper. Though they constituted an insignificant minority within the city, they still prospered enough to have established 24 churches along with a number of Christian schools. In 1920 the Chicago Association of Commerce computed that in the 9th Ward (which included Roseland and Englewood) persons of Dutch birth or ancestry constituted 8.37% of the total population. However, some scholars cast a critical eye on such a low figure and asserted that census-takers failed to differentiate between Americans and Dutch persons whose great-grandparents had been of Dutch birth (Ibid., 328).

In sum, the 1900 census stated that the greater Chicago area held 20,000 Dutch and followed only Grand Rapids, Michigan in persons of that said ancestry. As in the rest of the CRC settlements in the Midwest, the typical pattern of settlement involved focally located churches and Christian schools. With such efforts, these ethnic communities ensured their survival. In fact, historian Amry Vanden Bosch made the assertion that the enduring nature of the CRC communities in particular found direct correlation to their “attachment to the church, as well as to their strong race consciousness” (1927, 2). For these Dutch, race meant the same as nationality. Just as fervently, they clung to their religion. Swierenga has insisted, “they were ‘tribal’ in their fierce in-group loyalties, behavior of exclusiveness, and the transplanting of Old Country institutions and the Dutch language and culture. In concert with the other Dutch Reformed communities of the American Midwest, the Chicago Dutch conducted worship services entirely in the tongue of the motherland until the 1920s. But above all they were Calvinists of the old school, dating back to the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19)” (2000, 214). They feared worldliness and attempted to create for themselves closed communities although they could not avoid limited interaction with Jews and Catholics (Vanden Bosch 1927, 5).

In addition, these Dutch made great efforts to control their economic activity. They had a tendency to patronize only Dutch businesses, craftsmen, and banks. Soon many found their niche in collecting cinders – residue from boilers and waste incinerators (Swierenga 2000, 220). Many CRC members worked in blue-collar trades, thus the rising power of the unions during the 1940s and 1950s inevitably became an issue. The CRC had a history of condemning labor unions as “worldly” because of the socialistic bent and reputation for violent tactics. In Chicago, they would only join unions when pressured and would refuse active participation. They often rationalized membership as a necessity for feeding their families. However, the church did not always sympathize and membership in the Teamsters or AFL-CIO could translate to a forced resignation from the church council. Eventually some of the CRC workers in the Chicago area found a solution when they established locals of the Grand Rapids-based Christian Labor Association (Ibid., 226).

With such a predilection for isolation, CRC members had to depend on the congregation as the primary vehicle for social interaction. Swierenga (2002) vividly detailed how the church dominated the social life of these families. He noted that they took the Biblical imperative to “live in the world, but not of it” very seriously. Pastors often warned of the perils of city life. Laboring and doing business with “outsiders” had to be begrudgingly accepted, but “social life was lived among family and fellow church members” (226).

A study of intermarriage – a common indication of levels of assimilation – demonstrated the insular nature of CRC social circles. Any non-Christians clearly fell outside the pale of potential marriage partners. Even marriage to Catholics was infrequent because of cultural taboos – Reformation Day sermons frequently enumerated the failings of Catholicism and the CRC doctrinal standard, the Heidelberg Catechism, referred to the “popish mass” as “idolatry” (*Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* 1988, 49).

Before marriage young CRC people in Chicago received strict admonition not to get involved in “worldly” activities. In fact, the CRC leadership attempted to channel the entire social life of its children “into an exclusively ethnoreligious track” (Swierenga 2000, 224). The consistent effort to remain “spiritually separate from the world” meant that movie houses, theatres, cabarets, and dance halls were off limits. The CRC Synod of 1928 condemned theatre attendance, dancing, and card playing:

Synod instructs consistories to inquire of those who ask to be examined previous to making public profession of their faith and partaking in the Lord’s Supper as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements, and, if it appears that they are not minded to lead the life of Christian separation and consecration, not to permit their public confession.... Synod urges consistories to deal in the spirit of love, yet also, in the view of the strong tide of worldliness which threatens our churches, very firmly with all cases of misdemeanor and offensive conduct in the matter of amusements; and, where repeated admonitions by the consistory are left unheeded, to apply discipline as the last resort (*Acts of Synod* 1928, 88).

Since the denomination had such strict sanctions against worldly amusements, they created social activities for the young people that kept them isolated. Beginning in the 1890s the denomination created Young People’s Societies. Swierenga quoted one minister’s rationale: “We believe our young people ought to stay in their own circle and are very glad to see our young people join our Society. In unity there is strength” (2002, 458). These societies varied from church to church, but usually included social and religious teaching and organized weekly activities. The minister of the congregation usually provided leadership and intentionally used the Society as a method for integrating the younger generation into the life of the church.

The youth of the CRC had the opportunity to become involved in the Young Calvinist League (YCL). In the early 1950s YCL morphed and created the Boys Calvinist Cadet Club and the Girls Calvinette Club. In many ways, these two clubs operated as religious counterparts Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts (Ibid., 467-468).

Social programming went beyond the youngsters of the CRC. Adults also had societies, missionary fests, and conferences. Beginning in 1937, CRC families could even vacation together exclusively at the Cedar Lake Bible Conference and Campground. Activities ranged from Bible studies to evening worship to inspirational speakers to lake recreation. In the end, the church dominated social life. Swierenga quoted one female CRC member: “Church societies were a way of life. Our three young ladies’ groups were very large. Annual socials were great occasions – mother and daughter festivities, socials for older ladies’ aid groups, and also home-talent programs” (Ibid., 450-451). A typical week for a CRC family in Roseland was summed up:

Before the widespread ownership of cars by our people, families would troop in a body, in rain or shine, to church for services that lasted an hour and a half. Monday nights were for Catechism; Tuesday nights were for Young Men’s Society, Young Women’s Society (none of this mixed sexes Christian Endeavor stuff such as the Reformed churches indulged in), and Consistory; Thursday nights were for Choral Society (Tiemersma 1987, 15).

The church, however, did not claim the entirety of CRC members’ social lives. Instead, the church and the Christian school worked in concert. Leaders of the CRC understood the Christian school they established to be a “feeder” or “nursery” of the church and a vital link in the CRC social chain. Though the church did not operate the schools, the two institutions, according to Swierenga, were equal partners and very closely associated (2002, 351). In fact, one publication clearly articulated an apology for the Christian schools: “We have reasons to believe that the rearing of our children in the fear of the Lord, including instruction in the Bible, leavening the whole of primary education, largely accounts for the loyalty to our church [CRC] and its doctrines” (“Ebenezer Christian School Semi-Centennial Celebration” 1933, no page).

These CRC members felt compelled to establish private schools because they fervently contended that education remained the responsibility of parents, not the government. By 1910 the CRC families had established five Christian schools in the Chicago area. In 1918 they completed their educational system with establishment of Chicago Christian High School in the center of the Englewood community. The local CRC congregations did not administer or control the schools. Rather, the more informal CRC “societies” retained all responsibility for them. In essence, these Reformed Dutch sought a Christian education wherein the teachers articulated Christianity within every subject and insisted that religion stood as the “chief motive in life” (Swierenga 2002, 351).

The consistory (the board of elders for the congregation) of First CRC of Englewood summed up the importance of Christian schools: “We love to speak of the chain consisting of three links – home, church, and school” (Ibid., 447). Though the school did not have a formal relationship with the church, the CRC Synod of 1936 clearly delineated a de facto relationship:

It is the duty of the consistory to use every proper means to the end that a Christian School may be established where it does not exist, and to give

wholehearted and unreserved moral backing to existing Christian Schools and a measure of financial help in case of need If, in the judgment of Classis, a Consistory does not support the cause of Christian Schools, Classis should continue earnestly to admonish such a consistory publicly in its classical meetings and privately through church visits until it truly repents (*Acts of Synod* 1936, 35-37).

The CRC congregations took the instructions from Synod very seriously. By 1940 the seventeen area churches had 89% of their children enrolled in Christian schools. Swierenga noted that in many congregations the refusal to send children to Christian schools meant social isolation at church. Another man who had grown up in the CRC and Christian schools of Roseland asserted that membership in good standing in the church “all but presupposed sending one’s children to Christian school” (Tiemersma 1987, 15). Moreover, some have argued that the schools as institutions:

... were the most critical link in the chain that maintained cultural and ecclesiastical oneness in the church; they kept alive the Dutch language until the 1920s and transmitted Calvinist theology and cultural values for many generations. The schools stood in the shadow of the churches, and this naturally concentrated the families nearby, which strengthened community and church life immeasurably. The Christian high schools also provided a place to find a marriage partner within the greater Chicago Reformed communities. Christian schooling thus kept the children within the cocoon of the church (Swierenga 2002, 448).

In almost every facet of life – work, socializing, politics, religion, ancestry, education – the CRC remained so closed that they even demonstrated ambivalence concerning their relationship with the more mainline Reformed Church of America (RCA) – even though they shared a common ethnicity (Dutch) and theological orientation (Calvinist). Such an insulated and isolated demeanor did not bode well for the CRC Dutch who resided in Chicago proper on the eve of some of the most radical social restructuring to sweep across the industrial core of the United States after World War II. It would be these changes that would begin to cause fissures in the edifice of the CRC community in Chicago.

A CHANGE IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOGRAPHICS FOR ENGLEWOOD

The social transition and resultant turmoil of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in Chicago had drastic effects on some of the most significant institutions, including the churches and schools. Many of the local congregations reacted with alarm to the significant changes occurring near and within their once-stable white environments. One church newsletter reported that the expansion of the African American ghetto had caused “panic bordering on hysteria.” The same issue reported that as bordering communities saw widespread white flight, residents of the Englewood area felt a “shadow of fear” hovering and lurking in their midst (Bergsma 1968, 1).

By 1959, however, the two CRC congregations in the neighborhood (First Christian Reformed with a membership of 1001 and Second Christian Reformed with a membership of 708 – for locations, see Figure 2) displayed a new level of consternation when they organized the Church-School Committee for Community Action (*Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* 1959, 18).⁴ The congregations now joined with the Chicago Christian Grade School and Chicago Christian High School – two institutions supported by members of the CRC churches – in an effort to deal with community problems in a concerted, organized manner. The churches and schools charged the new committee with devising strategies that would preserve the local area as a favorable environment. Derke Bergsma (a local sociologist and CRC minister) would later note, however, that “preservation” would become the most accurate description of the committee’s duties. Though officially titled with the term “Action,” the new organization was frequently referred to as the “Committee for Community Preservation” in council minutes and subsequent interviews (1968, 4).

The new committee responded later in 1959 when rumors circulated that the Board of Trustees of Chicago Christian High School had been considering the sale of its facilities to the Board of Education of the City of Chicago. Such a possibility meant the inevitable removal of the high school to an area farther south and beyond the African American influx. The Committee quickly sent a missive to the Christian High School Board that urged the members to not sell the high school facilities. The Committee feared that the departure of the high school to a suburban location would be a primary catalyst in the removal of families with teenage children away from Englewood. Such a movement would have dire consequences for the two churches. In the end, however, the Christian High School accepted the offer from the Board of Education (*Ibid.*, 4-5).

Numerous sociologists (Nancy Tatom Ammerman 1997; Michael Emerson 2006; and Omar McRoberts 2003) have noted that one strategy for congregations in changing neighborhoods is to adapt to a worship style more welcoming to the newcomers in the area. In this case, these congregations seemed to never fully consider an alteration in congregational style in response to the changing community. While they did not prohibit African Americans from attending, there exists little evidence that the CRC congregations sought out new membership among their African American neighbors. Both CRC congregations in Englewood established policies of inviting African American visitors to meet with the pastor and members of the council after the service. However, it should be noted that no such policy existed for white visitors and that the leadership conducted the procedure to screen African Americans with the excuse: “to consider with them their motivation” (“Second CRC of Englewood Council Minutes” 3 October 1960, Article 12).

⁴ *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1959), p. 18. Previous membership totals for First CRC: 1954 – 1033, 1955 – 1062, 1956 – 1031, 1957 – 1000, and 1958 – 799. Post-1959 rolls stated the following: 1960 – 939 and 1961 – 864. Previous membership totals for Second CRC: 1954 – 999, 1955 – 950, 1956 – 879, 1957 – 830, and 1958 – 770. Post-1959 rolls stated the following: 1960 – 697 and 1961 – 678.

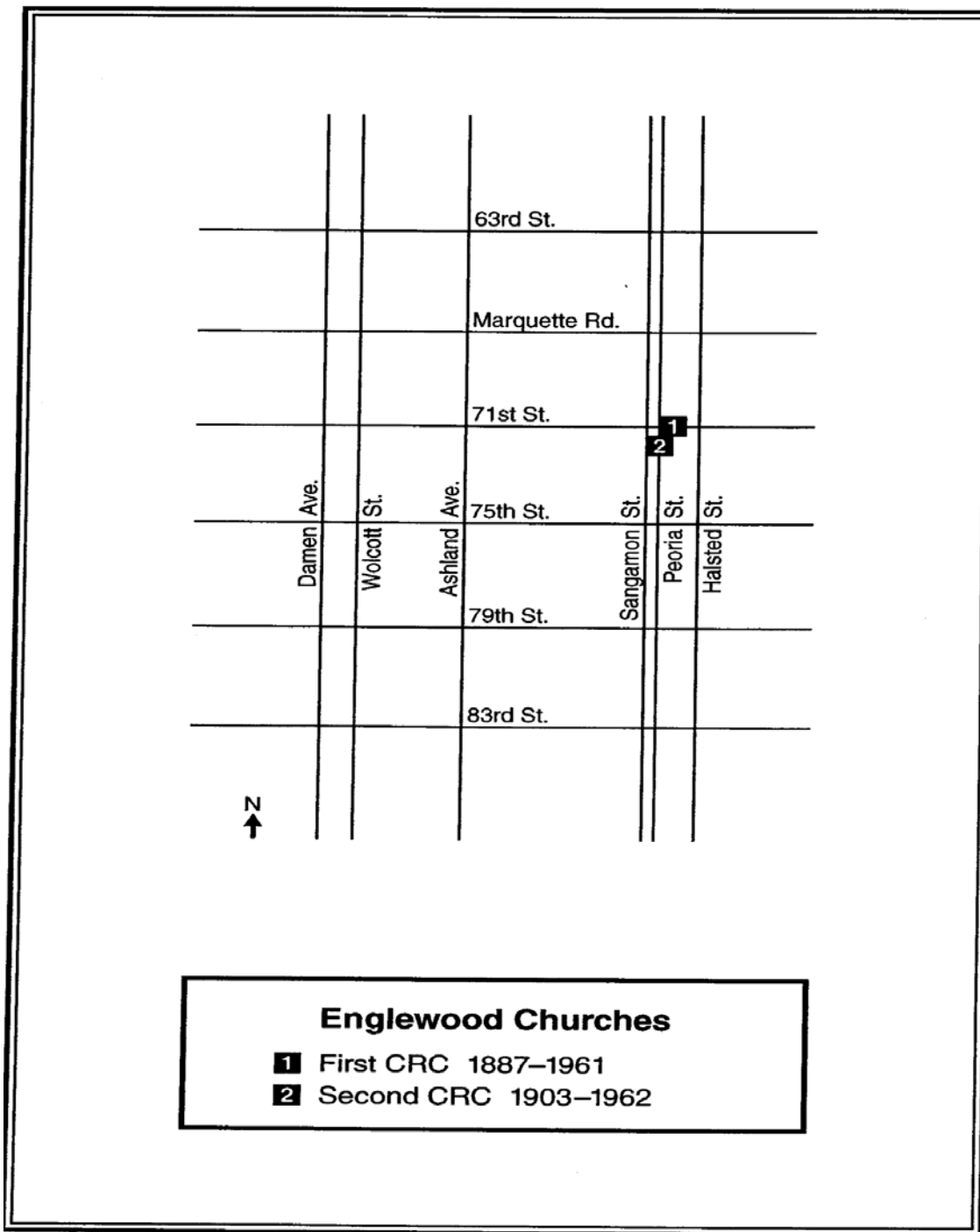


Figure 2

The councils defended the separate policies by noting that in 1960 a civil rights group had announced intentions of organizing sit-ins to draw attention to white churches in Englewood that had demonstrated an unwillingness to welcome African American worshippers. Some parishioners also noted that African Americans “invariably came in late, after the services were well underway, and this was disturbing” (Bergsma, 1968, p. 6). First CRC of Englewood locked their doors shortly after services began in response

to the aforementioned problem with interruptions (“First CRC of Englewood Council Minutes” 28 January 1961, Article 20).

In 1957, Second Englewood formed a committee to study the effects of the changing community on the future of the congregation. Although the committee devoted some time to community and congregational preservation, they also concurrently considered the alternative of relocation. In 1960 the committee commissioned the creation of a map that revealed the residence locations of member families. The map clearly demonstrated a pattern of membership drift to the southwest suburbs of Chicago (Bergsma 1968, 9).

That same year, First Englewood established a Long Range Study Committee to examine the “present situation and the future of our congregation in regard to our changing neighborhood” (“First CRC of Englewood Council Minutes” 19 September 1960, Article 8). The committee seemed to immediately set itself about the task of assessing the feasibility of relocation. Less than a month after its formation, the committee recommended that the council send a questionnaire that ascertained the membership’s opinion on buying property elsewhere as a future site for the church (Ibid. 23 October 1960, Article 6). The majority of member families indicated via the questionnaire a disposition to remain with church – particularly if a new structure were to be built in the southwest suburban area. Subsequently, less than four months after the formation of the Long Range Study Committee, the council approved the purchase of property in the suburb of Oak Lawn for the future site of the church (Ibid. 6 January 1961, Article 4).

Although Second Englewood had begun the process three years earlier, not until October 1960 did their Long Range Planning Committee actually send out a congregational questionnaire. The poll asked whether the respondents thought the church should move and, if so, where. Sixty eight families responded to the questionnaire. Fifty nine of the families expressed a desire for the church to move and overwhelmingly recommended that the church should relocate to the southwest suburbs (“Second CRC of Englewood Council Minutes” 10 October 1960, Article 11). The council registered these responses as a mandate from the congregation and began to actively pursue both the sale of the current structure and the purchase of property elsewhere.

In the end, the leadership of both churches began to realize that only relocation would allow for a continuation of the current congregational identity. Membership rolls remained in steady decline and many of those who had not transferred drove to Englewood from their suburban homes on Sunday mornings and evenings past other CRC congregations. In fact, many of the members of the councils had become suburbanites themselves, thus there remained very little inclination to continue existence in Englewood. By 1963 both churches had dedicated new edifices in the suburb of Oak Lawn.

A CHANGE IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOGRAPHICS FOR ROSELAND

In essence, Roseland’s rapid residential transformation precipitated a serious socio-economic crisis. The churches that left Roseland wholesale had a role in this drama. In the end, a manipulation of and disregard for place operated to facilitate the massive exodus. Members of the CRC churches, the dominant culture of the community,

created for themselves insular social networks that functioned in manner almost entirely disconnected to the larger neighborhood.

Though the four CRC congregations (for locations, see Figure 3) did not approach the changing demographics of their neighborhood monolithically, the patterns contained enough commonality that a reporting of the activities of Second Roseland and Fourth Roseland, the two would eventually merge as Orland Park CRC, serves well as a case study. Fourth Roseland would be the first church to leave and Second was the last, the two bookends of the departure of the CRC from Roseland.

In February of 1964 the Evangelization Committee at Fourth Roseland reported at the council meeting that they had discussed “bringing the gospel” to and taking a survey of the “church membership of the colored folk in the near neighborhood” (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Council Minutes” 5 February 1964, Article 12). That early tone of embrace of the newly arriving African American population had changed somewhat when over a year later the council took up the topic again. The discussion reportedly revolved around four key questions:

1. How does our congregation feel about possible future integration?
2. In view of the fact that we may lose a number of families due to the changing neighborhood should we seek to increase our neighborhood evangelism?
3. Should we as a congregation seek to move to a new location and encourage our membership to move to a particular location?
4. Should we seek to buy land for the future and appoint a committee for this purpose? (Ibid. 19 May 1965, Article 8).

After the discussion the members of the council decided to go on record as concluding that they would encourage membership to stay within the community.

Meanwhile, throughout 1966 the Evangelization Committee continued to discuss the matter of “working with the colored in the area” (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Evangelization Committee Minutes” 4 October 1966, no page). In October the Committee broached the subject of obtaining a store for a meeting place explicitly for African Americans. In December of 1967 the Committee discussed obtaining “a man to work the area due to changing racial conditions” (Ibid. 1 December 1967). However, by July of 1968 the Committee tabled both attempts at racial outreach for at least a year

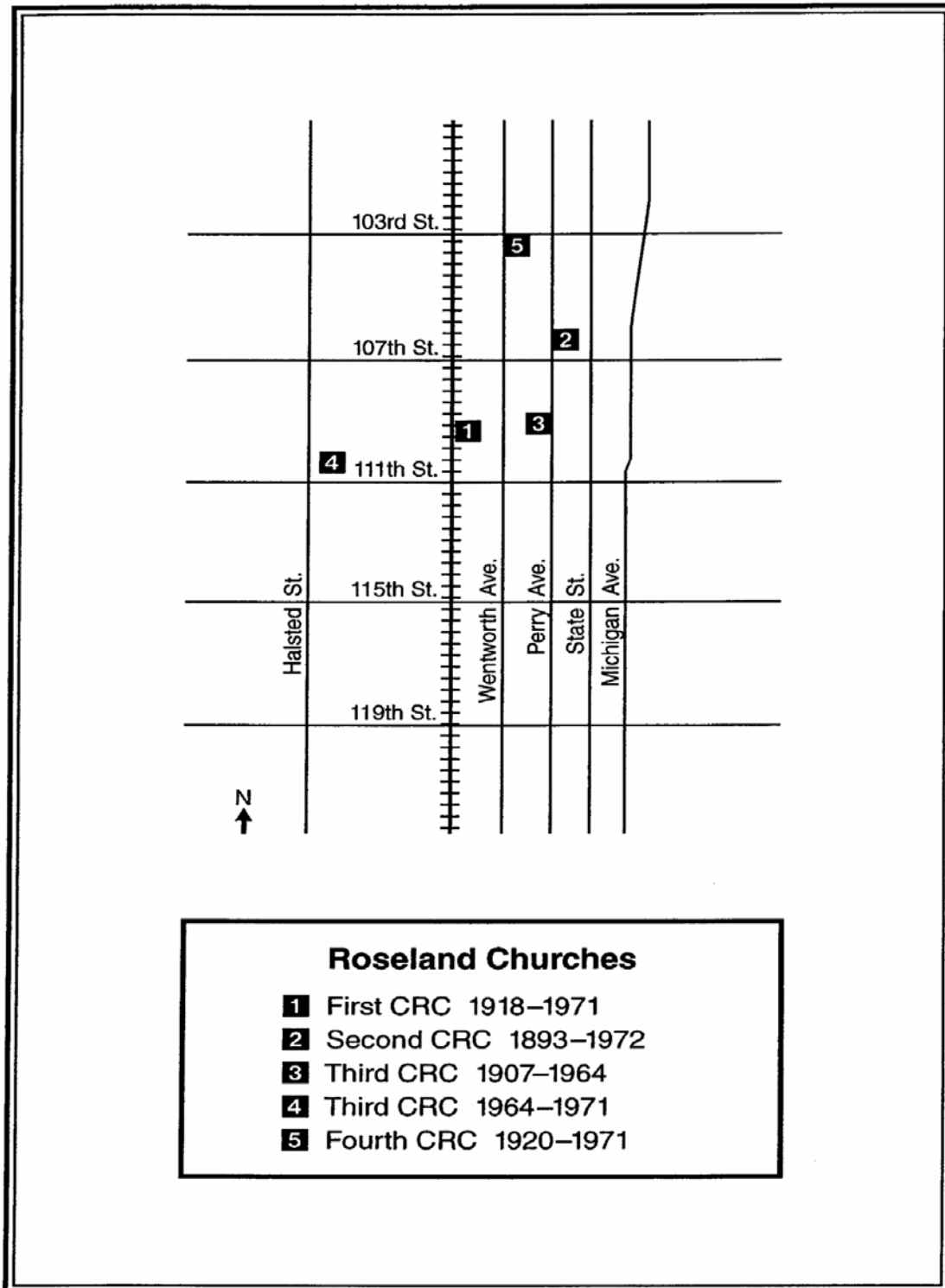


Figure 3

(Ibid. 12 July 1968). Though not explicitly stated in meeting minutes, this “tabling” of racial outreach, raises questions about the tenuous presence of the congregation and its future commitments to the neighborhood.

While the council and Evangelization Committee wrestled with challenges associated with the evolving local community, the Building Study Committee of Fourth Roseland discussed the congregation’s space needs. The inaugural meeting of this committee occurred in January of 1965. The minutes of the meetings reveal that debate about constructing more meeting space had been hotly contested within the church for a number of years. For the first few months of the year the committee considered sketches of the potential addition. However, by May the committee made the decision that it would be difficult to justify any construction due to the “prevailing and possible later developments with respect to the stability of our membership as a result of significant population changes which may take place in our area.” In light of that attitude the committee ultimately recommended that the congregation not be presented with any proposals having to do with physical expansion for the next year and that trends be evaluated “with respect to the stability of our membership in view of the developing population changes” (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Building Study and Report Recommendations” 5 May 1965, no page). Thus, by 1965 the entrance of African Americans into the Roseland area took a prominent place in the leadership dialogue of Fourth Roseland. In a deliberate manner, the church began to assess the changes taking place in the community. The questions to be addressed had to do with integration and its effect on membership and the production of physical space.

Roughly a year later, the issue turned again to the evangelism of the newly arriving African American population. At the April council meeting the Evangelism Committee sent a delegate to petition the council to reconsider an earlier decision to not canvas the area north of 103 Street and west of the railroad tracks – an area that had become largely African American. The delegate asserted that such inactivity would bring the church in direct violation of a number of mandates set down by various authorities: scripture (Matthew 22:37-40 and 28:19-20), the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 2, Question 5), the Church Order (Articles 73 and 74) and “the position of the Christian Reformed Church regarding the race issue” (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Council Minutes” 6 April 1966, Article 6). Based on these arguments, the council agreed to rescind its earlier decision and gave permission to the Evangelism Committee to begin the canvas.

Meanwhile, the congregation’s leadership began the initial plans for wholesale departure. In September of 1967 the council passed the motion approving the recommendation of the Planning Committee that a questionnaire be sent to the membership of the church regarding the relocation of church property (Ibid. 12 July 1967, Attached document). The initial draft of the questionnaire included the following questions:

- 1) Would you remain where you now reside if Negroes move on your block? [This question was deleted for the final edition to be sent to the congregants]
- 2) Have you any intentions of moving at the present time? If so, where?
- 3) Would you join another CRC church or remain a member of Fourth Roseland?
- 4) If conditions, which in your opinion, require moving elsewhere, into what area would you most likely move?
- 5) Would you consider it wise for the church to

purchase land in some area for future development provided it becomes necessary to vacate the present edifice? 6) If your answer to the above question is yes, in what area would you like to see the property purchased? 7) If you move into another area and transfer your church membership to a church in that area, would you, if the Fourth Roseland Church were moved into the same general [location] in which you then reside, rejoin the church? 8) Would you consider a merger with an existing church outside of the Roseland area? (Ibid.).

Two months later with questionnaire results in hand the Planning Committee moved that the council establish a Long Range Planning Committee to investigate the available land in South Holland for a future church building. The survey included an assessment on how many families had plans to move, whether the families thought it wise for the church to purchase land in another community for future development, and, if so, what communities should be considered. The findings included the following: 1) 17 families had intentions of moving, 60 did not; 2) 31 families responded that it would be wise for the church consider land for purchase, 30 did not; and 3) the Lansing and South Holland area received the most votes (14) for the future community to be considered. Upon the recommendation of the Planning Committee, the council passed a motion to establish a Long Range Planning Committee (Ibid. 1 November 1967, Article 11).

While the council went about the business of planning for a future outside of Roseland, they also remained active with the other three Roseland churches in supporting and coordinating the activities of the Pullman Gospel Center. The center operated under the auspices of the four churches and a report in April of 1968 noted that “Negro adults have been in attendance and they seem to be well-received” (Ibid. 17 April 1968, Article 3). Less than a month later the council of Fourth met and decided that it would be agreeable to now identify the Gospel Center with the Christian Reformed Church (Ibid. 1 May 1968, Article 18). So it seemed plausible to assume that the church wanted to maintain an outpost in the area even while they made plans for departure. It should also be noted that the Gospel Center was often referred to as a “mission” – a fairly loaded term—within the minutes (Ibid. 15 May 1968, Article 2).⁵ The typical connotation of mission usually had to do with individuals ordained by the church to bring the Gospel message to underdeveloped regions of the world. There would seem to be broad and significant implications in the notion that a mission had to be established within a community in which the CRC had had a presence for over a century. In other words, there was very little thought given to making the already-established churches in the area more hospitable to African Americans.

By late 1968 the activities of both the Gospel Center and the Long Range Planning Committee pervaded the official business of Fourth Roseland. In October the congregation received letters detailing the work of the Long Range Planning Committee and a proposal to purchase land in the general vicinity of 151st Street west of Harlem Avenue in Orland Park. However, First Roseland complicated matters that month when they sent Fourth a missive inquiring about the possibility of a merger. Fourth responded

⁵ Article 2 notes that a tract being distributed by the Pullman Gospel Center was being complained about because of its “Hippie-type language” and had ultimately been rejected by other “mission committees.”

that they would receive the letter as information and table the issue until the next meeting. It would seem, though, that the die had been cast. By late October the council had received permission from the congregation to purchase the aforementioned parcel of land by a vote of 48 to 17. In November, Fourth responded to First's inquiry by noting that because of the recent decision to purchase property for relocation that it would be "inappropriate to discuss the feasibility and possibility of merging" (Ibid. 2 October 1968, Article 8; 16 October 1968, Article 10; 30 October 1968, Article 7; and 6 November 1968, Article 11).

Moreover, in late 1968 the coordination between the four CRC congregations of Roseland seemed to ebb. At the same meeting that Fourth refused to entertain First's request for merger, they also noted that an earlier proposition for the four churches to cooperate to obtain an ordained minister to work in the "inner city" had to be dropped because of a "lack of support by the consistories" (Ibid. 6 November 1968, Article 11). Moreover, the problems of the "inner city" seemed to be becoming more prevalent as Fourth had to replace a vandalized sign and cope with cars being "tampered with" during services. The Building and Grounds Committee reported that new locks had been installed and the council began discussing the desirability of posting guards for the parking lot and church basement (Ibid. 11 December 1968, Article 13 and 5 February 1969, Article 9).

Ironically, while Fourth buttressed their edifice against the local neighborhood and made plans for relocation, they also entertained a noteworthy CRC minister who came to speak to members of the four Roseland churches about the neighborhood conditions. The pastor discussed what could be done to encourage people to stay in the neighborhood. The Fourth minutes reflect that the pastor received a tepid response and that "very few members attended (Ibid. 8 January 1969, Article 8)." In fact, it would seem that the pastor in question did little to dissuade that momentum of departure as in February of 1969 the council of Fourth appointed a Relocation Committee.

The next month Relocation Committee weighed in with the following two recommendations: "1) That the Council be authorized to sell the present church properties and 2) They be authorized to plan the construction of new church properties at 152nd Street and 7500 West" (Ibid. 4 March 1969, Article 8). The committee went further and offered a rationale for such activity: "rapid decline" of the neighborhood, decreasing membership in the church, and the recent sale of the local Christian school building. The motion passed and decided that the issue would be brought before the congregation for a vote on May 7.

At the congregational meeting, the council offered the following proposition to the assembly and moved for its adoption:

- 1) The Fourth Christian Reformed Church of Roseland relocate.
- 2) The Fourth Christian Reformed Church of Roseland relocate to the Orland Park area, specifically to the 2.5 acre site authorized for purchase at the October 30, 1968 congregational meeting.
- 3) The Council be authorized to obtain bids for and/or otherwise seek buyers for the present church properties.

- 4) The Council be authorized to start preliminary planning with a view to constructing new church properties (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Congregational Meeting Minutes” 7 May 1969, Article 5).

Each aspect of the proposition passed that evening.⁶ That same year, the congregation of Fourth Roseland celebrated the church’s fiftieth anniversary. As part of the celebration, the congregation published a history of the church. The booklet benignly presented recent events:

The church reached the peak of its membership in the year 1954 when it numbered 132 families and a total membership of over 550 souls. In 1958 the Roseland area began to change and many people moved to the suburbs. This was also felt in our church as some of our members joined the movement. In the early 60s this loss of membership was somewhat overcome by the influx of many families who moved into Roseland from the Englewood area and affiliated with our congregation. However, at the close of 1967 our membership had decreased to 99 families. The council appointed a long range study committee, its mandate to find an area to which our people could be directed should they decide to leave Roseland in order to give them an opportunity to remain with our church. The committee was also able to find a suitable site for the church to relocate.... In November 1968, the congregation approved the proposal of the council to purchase two and one-half acres at 75th Avenue and 151st Street.... This is an undeveloped area adjacent to land purchased by the Chicago Southwest Christian Schools Association. It is expected that many new homes will be built there providing an opportunity for members of our church to migrate to this area (“Fiftieth Anniversary of Fourth CRC of Roseland, 1969: The History” 1969, no page).

Though the congregation made plans for imminent departure, they still had local problems to address in Roseland. In June of 1969 the council broached the topic of “The Black Manifesto.” The previous month James Forman, a black militant leader, interrupted a Sunday morning worship service at New York’s Riverside Church and presented “The Black Manifesto”: a demand for that congregation’s share of the reparations owed to African Americans by the white religious community in America. The “Manifesto” had been written in April of 1969 by the National Black Economic Development Conference. The “Manifesto” phenomenon spread outside of New York and into other cities (Lecky and Wright 1969, 3). The leadership at Fourth discussed vary ways to address the potential disruption of Sunday worship by the “Manifesto.”

By July the Council had made a decision about both the “Manifesto” and the nagging security concerns. The Building Committee reported that security guards would be utilized in the parking lot (later that year they would formally request police protection) and a motion passed that if ever “confronted with the ‘Black Manifesto’ our pastor or the minister in charge of the service should dismiss the service” (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Council Minutes” 2 July 1969, Articles 8 and 15). Later that year the

⁶ Recommendations one and two passed 55-12 and 47-18, respectively. Recommendations three and four passed unanimously.

council also made a formal request for police protection on Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday evenings “in view of recent happenings in the area of the church” (Ibid. 3 December 1969, Article 9).

At about the same time, the council from Second reported that they were approached by three “boys” who appeared as representatives of the Barren Town Diplomats. The Diplomats asked permission to use the church building for meetings. The council refused to commit and tabled the issue (“Second CRC of Roseland Council Minutes” 7 July 1970, Article 5). A rumor of the Diplomats’ request apparently circulated through the congregation. At the next council meeting, five men from the congregation appeared wanting to know whether the elders had given “permission to a black teenage club to use our church buildings for meetings” (Ibid. 4 August 1970, Article 5). The council responded to the query by noting that they had not had the opportunity to vote on it. Moreover, they attempted to assuage the inquiring men by asserting that if they granted permission, they would also require supervision. The council then dismissed the men so they could discuss the matter.

Ultimately, the council of Second passed a motion to deny the request of the Barren Town Diplomats. The council justified the decision on “the grounds that they were not a religious organization” (Ibid., Article 11). In transparent contradiction, however, the council passed at the same meeting a motion to grant a request to use the church for block club meetings (Ibid., Article 13). Two white women had appeared earlier to make the request. They stated that they represented forty families in the immediate area of the church. They went on to note that the newly formed block club sought to “maintain and improve the community” (Ibid., Article 3).

However, a half year after the block club received permission to use the church, the council displayed a stark disinterest in investing in any other larger community programs. In March 1971 the Greater Roseland Organization sent a letter requesting the cooperation of the church on some community projects. With no rationale expressed in the minutes, the council concluded that Second would not participate (Ibid. 20 March 1971, Article 5).

While Second and Fourth fortified and insulated themselves against their neighborhoods, the other two CRC congregations revealed their ultimate intentions to relocate as well. The four churches had long shared responsibility for the Pullman Gospel Center (often referred to in the minutes as the “Mission” – in 1972 it reorganized as a CRC congregation) and now questioned why they would support it they left the area. In October 1971 the council minutes of Fourth Roseland revealed that First Roseland and Third Roseland had been maleficent in their responsibilities to the Mission: recently they had failed to send delegates on Sunday mornings (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Council Minutes” 19 October 1971, Article 3).

In April of 1971 Fourth adopted the following recommendation:

That the supporting Churches of the Pullman Christian Reformed Church recommend the work to be continued contingent upon broadening the financial base and the restructuring of the control and direction of the Mission.

Grounds: The work of the Mission can no longer be considered the work of the Four Roseland Churches in as much as they no longer related geographically to the Roseland community (“Fourth CRC of Roseland Special Congregational Meeting Minutes” 21 April 1971, Article 4).

At that juncture, only Fourth had confirmed plans to leave the area, but the tone of the proposal clearly intimated that the other three also had similar designs. The recommendation went on to note that the four churches considered the CRC Home Mission Board to be a prime candidate for assuming responsibility for the Mission. By December of that same year, Home Missions did indeed accede and assumed control of the Mission.

Though not betrayed in the minutes, the debate over the Mission contained much vitriol. One lay person witnessed the dispute and recounted:

...All four of the Roseland churches folded up. The terrible thing in my mind [about it] is that they wanted to drag this little dinky place down with them. They were determined that they were gonna shut down that facility ...Perhaps they thought it couldn't exist. I mean, I think they were putting the truth to the lie to what they were saying about that 'we can't witness to this community, we're so different.' [One local pastor] was adamant that the Pullman Church was gonna shut down. It couldn't survive because the CRC denomination and the black folks had nothing in common. They worked incredibly hard to shutdown Pullman and that was the churches that were folding. They were talking about closing the place. [The consistories of the four churches] would not allow [white] members of the church [Pullman] to come to come and speak to them. [Some members] literally pounded on the doors and windows and they would not let them in to speak (B. Jordan, personal communication July 25, 2002).

A written history of Pullman CRC recounted that by 1970 the Roseland area witnessed "a mass exodus of white families and an influx of new black residents." The author went on to note that the larger established congregations "couldn't adapt themselves to the community" ("Pullman Christian Reformed Church: History" no date, no page). Eventually, however, the problems of the community would be history for Fourth and the three other CRC congregations of Roseland. By the middle of the 1970s all four successfully relocated to the Chicago suburbs with no responsibility for their neighborhood Mission.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEPARTURE OF EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONS FROM ENGLEWOOD AND ROSELAND

The implications of place also resonate within the narrative of the CRC congregations exiting the Roseland neighborhood of Chicago. Intuitively, the assumption could be made that this case of white flight would fit nicely under the rubric established by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (2000). These two scholars posited that the very nature of evangelical Christianity has prohibited it from being an effective agent in the process of racial reconciliation. Indeed, they asserted that in fact the very opposite remained true: evangelical Christianity actually contributed to the construction and maintenance of a racialized society. Though not necessarily intentional, the nature of white evangelical religion – with its inability to address fundamental and structural stratifications – has

functioned to perpetuate racial barriers. The emphasis on “personal salvation” and “personal relationships” made it very difficult for evangelical Christians to understand the deleterious consequences of institutionalized racism.

In essence, white evangelicals have been (at times) vocally opposed to expressions of racial prejudice while they failed to comprehend the structural and institutional manifestations of racism. Emerson and Smith argued that the social reality of many white evangelicals prohibited them from understanding and assessing the lack of equal opportunity in the United States based on race. Moreover, by denying the existence of a racialized system, the white evangelicals have actually fostered and perpetuated it.

On the initial assessment, it would seem that Emerson and Smith’s thesis would have much to contribute to an analysis of the exodus of the CRC from the Englewood and Roseland neighborhoods. It would almost be intuitive to assert that the members of these churches fell under the rubric of evangelical racial blindness – that is, they could not fully understand the devastating ramification of their institutions fleeing the city because they did not possess the cultural tool kit for such an appraisal. In essence, it would be easy to dismiss the episode as simply an early proof of Emerson and Smith’s assertion.

However, a more nuanced exposition of the outward mobilization of these churches would seem to demand a consideration of role (or lack thereof) of place. It has already been established that place in all ranges of society can be engineered to both foster and disintegrate community. To simply leave the suburbanization of these churches at the feet of a special brand of evangelical racialization or as a micro-history within the macro-story of white flight from urban America fails to adequately evaluate the importance of place.

In late 2002, Maria Krysan complicated the literature of white flight with her article, “Whites Who Say They’d Flee: Who Are They, and Why Would They Leave?” She sought to answer the question whether white flight found impetus in racial, race-associated (“the desire to avoid neighborhoods with certain characteristics that whites associate with African American neighborhoods”), or neutral ethnocentric (“the desire to live near one’s ‘own kind,’ out of a sense of neutral ethnocentrism”) concerns. Based on individual-level attitudinal data, Krysan found that personal negative stereotypes acted as a strong predictor of white-flight attitudes. Moreover, she asserted that the neutral ethnocentric interpretation found no support in the data. Finally, Krysan contended that the race-associated concerns of falling property values and the perception of a neighborhood in decline as a cause for white departure had functioned as whites’ most common explanation. Ultimately, the motivations for white flight remain complicated and highly variable.

Though it may risk making a categorization of white-flight rationalizations even more problematic, the case of CRC mobilization out of Englewood and Roseland may add another dimension to the debate. Though their evangelical Christianity may have been complicit, though outright racism may have been implicated, though race-associated reasons could be indicted, and though neutral ethnocentrism may have played a role; these factors inadequately assess the entire situation.

Throughout the story of CRC congregational departure from Englewood and Roseland, the prevalence of place can be clearly delineated. The narrative reveals that place for the CRC congregations had a serious disconnect with the larger community. Though these churches had a conception of place, they often manipulated it to make it

more comfortable for themselves. That disconnect and exploitation of place greatly eased the transfer of these congregations to the suburbs and subsequent solidification of residential segregation.

That trend began in Englewood when the CRC members first addressed the social transition of their community in an organized manner. The formation of the Church-School Committee clearly delineated the fact that these people had social networks very much removed from the larger community. Their initial reaction was not to hold a community-wide assembly in a public space, but, rather, they chose to immediately confront the issue within the private realm of the two institutions that dominated their social lives: the church and school. It seemed that they were so disconnected to the larger “place” of Englewood that they had no social capital resources from which to withdraw. To them, their place in Englewood had some extremely exclusive nuances.

That same pattern held true in Roseland. Already in 1964 when African Americans families started making an appearance in the community, the church immediately discussed what it meant for their place. They asked themselves whether they should seek integration or whether the church should relocate. The leaders of Fourth CRC explicitly discussed whether African Americans would be able to use their place – their church building. It should be highlighted that the notion that the church could take their place to another locale also meant that the congregation could effectively circumvent the possibility of allowing certain people from entering their facilities. Moreover, when the council decided to forego any physical expansion, they also tacitly endorsed the idea that the place within the edifice of the church was closed to families within the congregation. The decision not to create more place implicitly assumed that African Americans would not be joining the church. Indeed, such an assertion becomes more compelling when the council had to reverse itself on an earlier decision to not evangelize a largely African American community near their neighborhood. It would seem that the initial instincts of Fourth CRC had been to not invite African Americans to their place.

Eventually, however, the church would begin to canvas the newly arriving African Americans. Yet even then the newcomers could only enter the place on the terms of the church. Late arrivals would not be allowed to interrupt the service, the place would be reconfigured to force those persons (i.e.: African Americans) to sit in a roped-off area to the back. Such a manipulation of place took on more militant nuances when the churches initially sought security guards and eventually requested police services. When the church employed security to protect its place, it sent a message that this was not the domain of the larger neighborhood community.

Finally, the debate over the Pullman Mission reveals much about the CRC congregations’ disconnect with the larger place called the neighborhood. First, the notion that a “mission” would be established within the confines of the home community connotes much about a church’s relationship with the neighborhood. Some dictionaries described missions as embassies – the headquarters of ambassadors to foreign lands. Such a notion intimates that there resided within the community an element that the CRC congregations deemed “foreign.” This only works to further bolster the contention that these congregants functioned in a social world largely limited to the church and Christian school. Any place in the neighborhood beyond those confines took on aspects of the

“other.” Such an attitude and disconnect from place made relocation an easier proposition to accept.

CONCLUSION

In the end, racial residential segregation continues to be a pervasive source of social inequality. The sources of this division are many, but the complicity of the phenomenon of white flight is undeniable. An accurate assessment of white flight demands that dimensions of religion, racism, race-associated concerns, and neutral ethnocentrism be included in the analysis. However, a vivid explication of the situation would also include an exploration of the meaning of place. Place can engender, but also disintegrate community. Place can be manipulated to function as a gatekeeper: welcoming some, deterring others. Moreover, when an insular community, such as the CRC congregations of Roseland and Englewood, creates a narrow definition of place, mobility is highly feasible. Detachment remains less problematic when the places of the community constitute two buildings (church and school) that can be sold. At the same time, those places can be easily replicated in new locations. It is that mobility that facilitated outward migrations en masse for the suburbs.

The debate concerning white flight must include an exposition of the meaning of place. The case study of these evangelical congregations in Englewood and Roseland clearly demonstrated the role that place played. The congregations first manipulated their places as a defensive mechanism. Ultimately, however, because their places had such a narrow definition and tended to be isolated from the larger community, the six churches in question experienced extremely high mobility and detachment from the City of Chicago proper.

Most importantly, such a narrow view of church as place is not unusual. The church is the site where a particular view of the truth is presented. That presentation must be maintained and protected. When threatened from within, “schisms result and new or splinter churches form” (Sack 1997, 69). When threatened from without, defensive mechanisms and mobilization become viable strategies toward preservation. The CRC congregations of these Chicago neighborhoods clearly felt threatened. In response, they removed their families and places away from the ostensible peril of the changing neighborhoods.

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