

Racism and Prejudice - Fear and White Flight

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Fear and White Flight

No one in my family participated in the Civil Rights movement. Nor were any of them members of Ku Klux Klan. As a white American descended from European immigrants long since gone, my own racial history is largely absent from the American conscience. Yet this history, found in the movements of whites across cities and across time informs us of the movement of ethnicity in America as much as any other.

I am not far removed in my origins in Europe. My father's mother, Marie Devlin, grew up in Kensington, an [Irish neighborhood](#) inside the city of Philadelphia. There she married Anthony McIlvaine, himself descended from Irish immigrants who moved to Northern Philadelphia, and there they had their son, Robert who later became my father.

Before my father was ten, he had already moved three times. First, his family left Kensington for Germantown -- after World War II, word had spread through the working-class Irish neighborhood that the blacks were coming, and once the blacks moved in, it was said that your home would be worth nothing. Real estate agents, the "blockbusters," swept through the ethnic neighborhood, scattering Irish families up north through the city.

From there, they rapidly progressed up Germantown Ave. in Philadelphia. First, they settled in the town of Mt. Airy, which was predominantly white, though not purely Irish. The ethnic background of the whites dissolved in their flight from the blacks. Scotch-Irish, Irish, Polish, English became more arbitrary labels rather than identities. But soon, they would leave Mt. Airy and eventually Germantown itself after [rumors](#) spread that blacks were coming there too. By half way through the fifties, my father, his older brother and his you...

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... family are my history, my part of the story of race in America. This part, seen through the motion of my family is significant even if it is hidden -- so many of the structures that ensure white power in society are. The neighborhood in which I was raised, only a few blocks from "White City." where my grandparents bought a home, is a peaceful neighborhood. However, it is one built on the foundation of fear and a product of white flight. The events by which they came there have meaning and consequence beyond the word "race." My grandparents left the city because they were wealthier, because they wanted better schools, because they needed a backyard. Yet all these concerns work to ever with race; little, if anything, in America does not. The story of race in America is the ground on which I stand. It is hard not to see this history, even if it is easy to ignore it.

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