

# The Gautreaux Program

## *An Experiment In Racial and Economic Integration*

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**R**arely do people of different races and classes live and work together in this country. As a result, there are few opportunities to discover what these experiences are like for the people involved. We have been studying a highly unusual experiment in racial and economic integration, the Gautreaux Program. This program helps low-income black families move into better housing in many kinds of neighborhoods, including mostly black city areas, integrated city areas, and predominantly white middle-class suburbs throughout the six-county Chicago metropolitan area. The Gautreaux Program is administered by the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities. The Leadership Council locates apartments and arranges for participants to receive a Section 8 federal housing subsidy. Section 8 participants either receive a certificate which allows them to rent apartments on the open market or move to buildings which were constructed or rehabilitated with federal funds. In both cases, participants pay only 30 percent of their income for rent. Gautreaux participants are former residents of, or are on the waiting list for, public housing in Chicago. Begun in the late 1970s, the program has now placed over 3,800 families in private sector apartments — over half in the suburbs. Some of these families have now lived in these communities for more than 10 years. In this article, we report on our results from our research on the experiences of the Gautreaux participants. Our first study, begun in 1982, focused on how the program affected the Gautreaux children — how they adapted to suburban schools and how the move affected their academic achievement and their social lives. Since 1988, we have been studying the effects of the program on the Gautreaux mothers. We examined their feelings about their new communities, their interaction with neighbors, and their employment experiences. This article focuses primarily on the study of mothers, since the results of the earlier study have already been widely publicized.

### Significance of the Gautreaux Program

The Gautreaux participants' experiences are particularly significant for two reasons. First, they grow out of the landmark *Gautreaux* case, which BPI took before the Supreme Court in 1976. It is the major Supreme Court decision addressing racial discrimination in public housing, analogous to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in the area of public education.

It provided a metropolitan-wide remedy for discrimination in Chicago's public housing.

Second, the Gautreaux Program is one of the most extensive housing desegregation efforts in the history of this country. Although Section 8 is a national program, it is rarely used to increase integration. While "residential integration is one of the goals of Title VIII" (53 Federal Register 26318), HUD officials admit that "there does not seem to be any evidence of a pattern of movement from segregated to integrated census tracts" by people with Section 8 certificates. (James L. Logue, III, Dep. Ass. Sec., HUD to A. Polikoff, Nov. 4, 1989). This finding is consistent with research on the certificate program from the early 1980s. Thus, the Gautreaux Program provides a rare opportunity as a



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### Gautreaux Fact Sheet

- The Gautreaux Program is the result of a class action lawsuit filed by black tenants of the Chicago Housing Authority.
- The complaint against the Chicago Housing Authority and the Department of Housing and Urban Development alleged that CHA and HUD chose public housing sites in areas that were virtually all black and employed discriminatory practices in their tenant selection process, thereby restricting housing opportunities for eligible black families.
- After the U.S. Supreme Court decided in favor of the plaintiffs, HUD and BPI's Alex Polikoff, as general counsel for the plaintiff class, agreed to adopt and expand a demonstration housing program, voluntarily begun by the Illinois Housing Development Authority in 1976, that would assist plaintiff class families to secure housing in the private market through the use of the Section 8 rental subsidy.
- Eligible persons are past or present CHA tenants and persons who applied to CHA before June 16, 1981.
- The program is administered by the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities. The Council screens applicants and locates apartments for them. Participants receive a Section 8 rent subsidy and pay only 30 percent of their income for rent.
- To date, more than 3800 Gautreaux program families have made housing choices throughout the six county area in more than 115 communities.
- Of the families assisted, 54% have moved to suburban communities, 46% to outlying city neighborhoods.
- More than 80% of the families who have made suburban moves since 1976 have remained in suburban locations.
- An estimated 40% of those heads of households who were neither employed nor in school immediately prior to their moves are now either employed, in job training programs or have returned to school to further their education.
- Illinois Bell Telephone Company estimates that at least 10,000 families attempt to register for the program via the phone registration in January.

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laboratory for studying the experiences of families participating in such an experiment.

## The Gautreaux Children Study

Our first study compared the experiences of Gautreaux children whose families moved to the suburbs with those of children whose families moved within the city. The outcomes for the suburban movers were generally

very positive, although they had to contend with more demanding schools, a dramatically different environment, and some racism from teachers and peers.

The suburban children experienced an initial decline in grades immediately after their move because the suburban schools had higher academic standards than their city schools. However, by the time of the interviews, their grades had improved and were on a par with those of their city counterparts. Gautreaux

mothers who moved to the suburbs were more satisfied than city mothers with their children's schools, particularly with teachers and the safer environment. Teachers were able to respond to these new students, and many went out of their way to help Gautreaux students. Further, suburban children made friends with their white classmates and had the same number of friends overall as their counterparts in the city.