



## The New Neighbors

How one town created a vibrant, integrated suburb

Episode Two of The New Metropolis documentary series by Andrea Torrice

Narrated by  
Ruby Dee

### The New Neighbors Synopsis

The film opens with 1950s home movies and family snapshots from Pennsauken New Jersey, a suburb of Philadelphia, give viewers a quick history of suburban development. Springing up after World War II, the nation's first suburbs were "dream towns," places that returning GI's and many middle class families could realize the American Dream of home ownership. But it was mostly whites that were able to take up suburban living. Access to the new housing tracts was largely controlled by discriminatory federal and local policies, including exclusionary zoning and mortgage companies' redlining practices.

Then in the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement fought to overturn housing discrimination, and Congressional passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act helped protect the rights of minority families to live where they chose. Since the 1980s, the number of minorities living in suburbia has doubled. Many of these families have bought property in the first-ring suburbs, older communities that are close to city jobs. Meanwhile, new development and wealthier homeowners continue to move farther and farther out from metropolitan centers. Despite federal laws, many suburban towns are segregating along racial lines in the same manner as urban centers did decades ago.

The film anchors its story in personal portraits of two unlikely community leaders. Harold Adams moved his family to Pennsauken, New Jersey in the 1990s for the good schools. As more people of color began to buy homes in the area, many older white residents put their houses up for sale. A black real estate appraiser by trade, Harold saw firsthand how rapid turnover and changing demographics were starting to push Pennsauken towards decline.

For Lynn Cummings, the realization came as a shock. A white housewife, she and her family had been part of the 1960s wave of Pennsauken expansion. But glancing down her street one morning, Lynn noticed a parade of "For Sale" signs on her neighbors' lawns. She suddenly saw that white flight had hit home. "Racism was happening in my neighborhood," she said. "I looked at myself in a mirror that night, and I said, 'Well, if you want somebody to do something, you've got to do it yourself.' I didn't know what to do; I didn't know how to do it. I just knew that I wanted to live in a town that reflected all the people."

**The New Neighbors** follows Lynn and Harold as they began to learn that building an integrated community involves a multi-tiered process known as stable integration. Working with an integration specialist from the Fund for an Open Society, residents and local public officials joined together to create strategies that reversed a declining housing market and moved towards creating a vibrant, integrated community. Surrounding the stories is expert commentary from David Rusk, and Angela Glover Blackwell. Pennsauken, New Jersey's on-going success offers a model for communities across the country facing similar challenges.