

WHEN Irwin and Delores Quintyne decided to move from their cramped apartment in a Harlem housing project to the suburbs in 1961, like many other blacks from the city they found their way to North Amityville.

At the time, they say, they did not realize they were moving to a community that was more than 75 percent black, a segregated place that would in many ways be different from the rest of Suffolk County.

"We didn't see it at the time, but it became clear pretty quick that we wound up here by design," Mr. Quintyne said. "We didn't get service like other parts of town. Like if it snowed, we'd be the last to get dug out."

Once it dawned on them that North Amityville, an unincorporated hamlet in the Town of Babylon, was separate and not equal to primarily white communities in Suffolk County, the Quintynes became local activists who pushed for more attention to North Amityville's concerns.

In the last 40 years, they have seen North Amityville go from a solidly middle-class community to an impoverished high-crime area so plagued by drugs and violence that in the 1980's a television network ranked the hamlet's main intersection as one of the nation's top 10 drug markets. The last 15 years have seen a slow reversal of the economic and social blight. But throughout it all one thing has remained constant: North Amityville has stayed a minority community.

"It's never bothered me being in a segregated community," said Mr. Quintyne, 76. "I just came in, made myself at home and I got involved. But it's been a long struggle to make things better for my community."

North Amityville is one of 13 "basic minority communities" that have existed on Long Island since 1960, according to Lee E. Koppelman, the executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board. His review of census data shows that the same communities that county planners initially referred to as "racial ghettos" with high percentages of Negroes in 1960 continue to exist today.

Despite the various federal and local laws that have been passed since 1960 to fight racial discrimination in housing, the patterns of segregation that took hold on Long Island in the first half of the 20th century remain unchanged. In addition to North Amityville, the minority communities include Wyandanch, Central Islip, Gordon Heights, Flanders, Brentwood, North Bellport and North Bay Shore in Suffolk County, and Hempstead, Freeport, Roosevelt, New Cassel and Uniondale in Nassau County.

The persistence of these communities reinforces the findings of a study released last year that accorded Long Island the dubious distinction of being the most segregated suburb in the nation. And while that study showed that Long Island overall is not quite as segregated as it was in the 1980's, the 13 communities show that in one important way, the Island remains as segregated as it was more than 40 years ago.

"There's been virtually no movement towards becoming a more integrated society," Dr. Koppelman said. "There's always going to be a certain amount of voluntary segregation. You find it in all ethnic communities. But with African-Americans it's been pretty much the result of basic racism and what you have is an almost enforced apartheid."

Dr. Koppelman said that once a neighborhood has been established as a minority community, even federal laws intended to discourage segregation "can't do anything to un-establish it."

David Rusk, the Washington-based consultant on urban and suburban policy who found Long Island to be the country's most segregated suburb, agreed that it was not unusual to find minority communities staying unchanged over time. He analyzed Long Island's segregation patterns for Erase Racism, a group sponsored by the Long Island Community Foundation. "There are only a very few instances where you would find significant numbers of white people moving into black neighborhoods," he said, adding that it would tend to happen in areas of gentrification close to cities and in historic neighborhoods.

Because most of the housing in North Amityville and other black communities on Long Island dates to the 1940's and 1950's, he said, "their housing stock is too old to be competitive and too young to be quaint" and therefore unlikely to attract white residents in large numbers.

Suburban minority settlements across the country follow similar patterns, according to John R. Logan, director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the State University of New York at Albany. "They are created very much as a result of the exclusion from most suburbs," he said. "Then once they're established, future minority migration is concentrated there because the mere fact that they are the few places where minorities are welcome makes them a magnet."

Despite the fact that North Amityville and the 12 other minority communities have changed little in their racial makeup, the communities have not remained totally static since 1960. Most have grown significantly, mirroring the Island's development and population growth in the last 40 years.

North Amityville has doubled in population from 8,366 in 1960 to 16,572 in 2000. In 1960, North Amityville was a largely middle-class community that was 76 percent black, the largest minority population in the county. The median family income was about \$5,100 a year, significantly higher than the average for Suffolk County, which was only \$4,653.

In 2000, the community's population was 86 percent minority, with a growing Hispanic community accounting for about 13.5 percent of that. The median family income was one of the lowest in Suffolk County, \$49,901, compared to \$72,112 for the county overall.

Mr. Quintyne said he had been drawn to North Amityville by the ads that ran in local Harlem newspapers in the 1950's and 1960's and by word of mouth from friends. He also remembers that other growing Long Island communities, Levittown in particular, made it clear that they didn't want blacks.

"I didn't like the idea that we weren't able to go where we wanted to, especially after I came out of the service," said Mr. Quintyne, who was a Navy seaman during World War II. "But after we got here and got acclimated, we were satisfied." And why not? North Amityville gave the Quintynes their own slice of suburbia, a place where they could leave their doors unlocked and not worry about their children playing in the streets.

But in less than 10 years, the community started to go into serious decline. In 1968, county planning officials declared North Amityville a high poverty area and the regional planning board issued a report that described it as a place with failing businesses and an abundance of "once-sound homes" that had "become dilapidated beyond rehabilitation."

The planning board developed a plan that would turn North Amityville into a model suburban community, complete with a commercial center and a mix of new single-family homes and apartment complexes. But the plan remained just that, a plan. "Nothing came of it," Mr. Quintyne said. "The town just wasn't interested in doing anything that would benefit our community."

Leonard Canton, chairman of the North Amityville Community Economic Council, attributed the 20 years of decline that started in the late 1960's to an exodus of middle-class blacks. "When people feel affluent, they leave for wherever affluence will take them," he said. "Our community failed to thrive because we failed to stay." By 1970, the median family income in North Amityville, at \$9,759, had become one of the lowest in Suffolk County, where the median was \$12,084.

"Black flight" from changing minority suburban communities is a common phenomenon, said Hugh A. Wilson, a political science professor at Adelphi University who studies race and politics. "As soon as poor blacks started moving into these communities, middle-class blacks started moving out and moving into quasi-integrated communities," he said, communities that are predominantly white but have areas that are primarily minority.

By the late 1960's, North Amityville's main commercial zone, at the intersection of Great Neck and Albany Roads, had become an open-air drug market known as The Corner. Drug dealers plied their wares openly to drive-up customers in cars with license plates from as far away as New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The drug trade thrived there through the crack epidemic of the 1980's.

"Drugs turned that corner into a pit," Mrs. Quintyne said. "And we had so many people die from there. It seemed like every week we were burying somebody who had been killed because of drugs."

Drugs took the Quintynes' eldest son, Irwin Jr., who died in 1986 after years of drug addiction, which his parents say he first developed when he was a teenager growing up in North Amityville. During the 1970's, the Quintynes and other community activists would sometimes march at The Corner with picket signs in a desperate attempt to take back their streets. Mr. Quintyne also started a drug rehabilitation program in one of the buildings at The Corner.

"We were threatened from time to time," Mr. Quintyne said. "But I would just say, 'You stay on your side and we'll stay on ours.'"

The Quintynes and other community leaders attribute the hamlet's continued decline to the Republican-dominated town and county governments of the time, saying they paid scant attention to North Amityville's needs because most residents voted Democratic.

"We had literally no representation in town hall when I first got out here 38 years ago," said the Rev. Robert Burgess, pastor of Grace Community Church. Despite community opposition, it seemed that factories and industrial businesses were allowed to build in the middle of residential areas, he said.

Maxine Postal, the County Legislature's presiding officer, is a Democrat from Amityville, and she agreed that it wasn't until Democrats took control of town hall and county government in 1988 that North Amityville started on its road to recovery. The dilapidated shopping strip at The Corner was demolished in 1989, parks were refurbished and a new senior center was built. "The Republicans sat on their hands for years and their attitude was it wasn't worth it to work for these people because they wouldn't get their votes anyway," she said.

But Republicans who were in power in the 1970's and early 1980's said their administrations did try to improve conditions in North Amityville.

"I don't believe for a minute there was a concerted effort to not help North Amityville," said Harry Withers, a former Babylon town board member and Republican town leader. "But segregation and the economic problems that come with it have to do with societal problems that are way beyond the abilities of local government to change."

John V.N. Klein, a Republican who was Suffolk county executive in the 1970's, said Republican leaders used to write off black communities as Democratic strongholds but have worked hard in the last 20 years to woo their support. "But it takes a long time to convince people who have felt that they have been neglected by a political party to turn that around," he said.

Mr. Klein also said that North Amityville's plight "was not a phenomenon limited to areas that lie under Republican control. To the contrary, many urban areas where these same problems exist have always been under Democratic control."

Mr. Quintyne and other community leaders have argued for years that the only way to avoid neglect is to turn North Amityville into an incorporated village. "If we want to control what comes into our community, we have to take our destiny in our own hands," Mr. Quintyne said.

An early attempt at incorporation in the 1970's failed for lack of support, but a new North Amityville Incorporation Committee was created in 1998 and recently completed a feasibility study.

"Incorporation would significantly improve the economic status of the community," said Ivan Young, the committee's chairman. Commercial tax dollars that now go to the town would instead go to North Amityville, as would state and federal grants aimed at helping areas of poverty, he said. "But the important thing is we would finally have more of a say in our community," he said.

Mr. Rusk, the consultant for Erase Racism, said, however, that incorporation might not be the answer to North Amityville's problems. "Considerable national research has shown that the more fragmented local government is, the more it is related to higher degrees of economic and racial segregation," he said.

Mr. Quintyne said incorporation might easily keep North Amityville a segregated community. "But we may well still be a minority community 40 years from now even if we don't incorporate," he said. "I just want North Amityville to become a full-fledged community and it would be nice if it could be one of the communities that people want to move into again."