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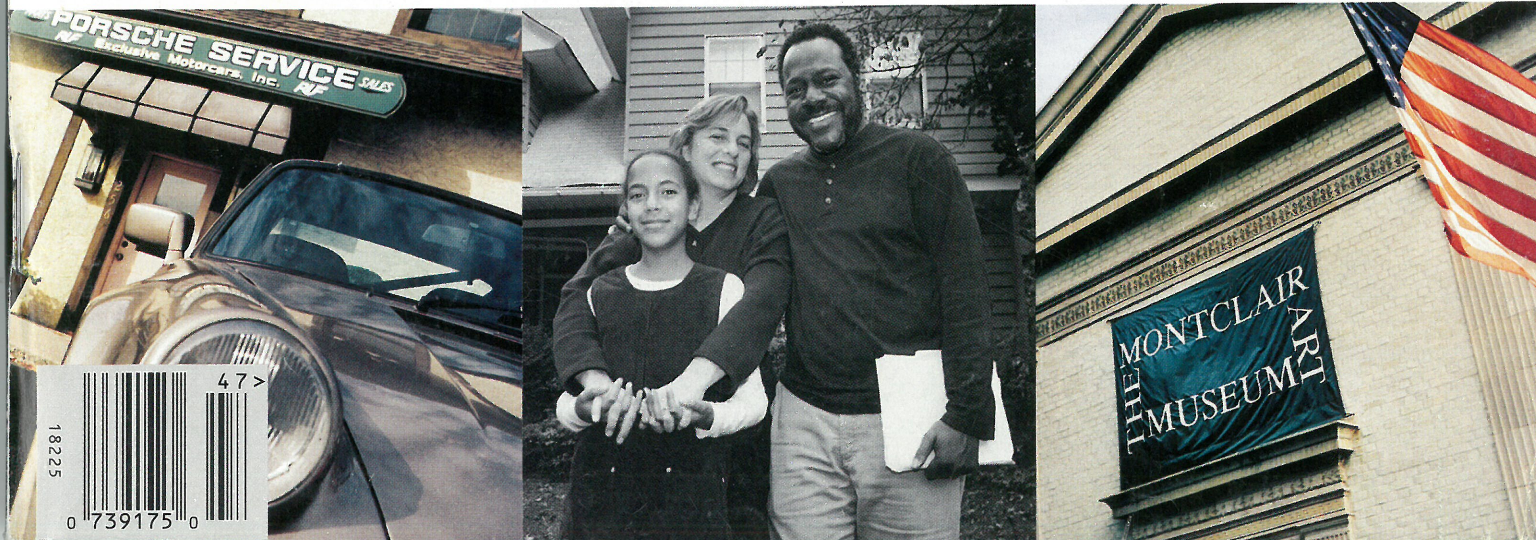
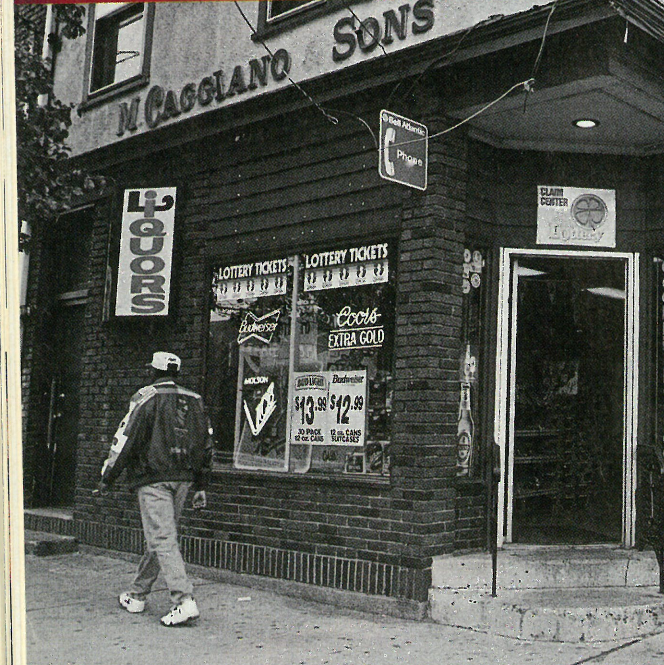
New York

THE URBAN SUBURB

Progressive, cultured, integrated, Montclair is the Upper West Side of New Jersey. But nobody said enlightenment was easy. BY CRAIG HOROWITZ





THE UPPER WEST SIDE OF SUBURBIA

With all the amenities but Zabar's, Montclair, N.J., has become a refuge for New Yorkers who say they like everything about the city—except living there.

By Craig Horowitz

A little more than six years ago, after much hand-wringing, soul-searching, and kitchen-table debating, Stuart Rubin and his wife decided it was time to sell their Manhattan co-op and move to the suburbs. It was, at best, a painful decision. Rubin, a 46-year-old criminal-defense lawyer, and his wife, an artist, had lived in Kips Bay for twelve years and thought of themselves as hard-core city people: hip, sophisticated, and progressive. The kind of people who see *Trainspotting* the weekend it opens.

But after their two boys were born, the Rubins began to reconsider their carefully crafted urban existence. The once-irresistible appeal of ethnic restaurants, downtown galleries, and weekends in the country now had to

Sunny scenes of suburbia: Montclair mayor Bill Farlie and his wife, Barb (top right), in front of their home; lawyer Stuart Rubin with his wife, Rochelle, and two sons (bottom center).

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERNESTO BAZAN, JEAN LAUGHTON, AND GREG MILLER FOR *NEW YORK*

be weighed against paying for a family-size apartment and expensive private schools. They looked at houses in Westport, Larchmont, Hastings, Westfield, and Short Hills. But the problem was always the same: The Rubins simply didn't like the suburbs. Too sleepy. Too sterile. Too homogeneous. Too many Republicans. How could they move to a place where the most taxing intellectual activity, they believed, would be keeping track of car-pool assignments? Though they craved more space, a yard, good schools, and a safe environment for their boys—now 12 and 10—what they really wanted was to have these things without leaving the East Side.

"We just didn't identify with the suburbs," says Stuart Rubin, a self-described former hippie whose gray hair is thin on top but long and thick in the back, hanging several rebellious inches past his collar. "We wanted to find a town where we wouldn't feel like suburbanites."

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For John Curtis and his family, moving out of the city presented a different set of challenges. Curtis, a black man who grew up in South Jamaica and graduated from Queens College with a degree in African-American studies, was always committed to living in the city. The son of a bus driver, Curtis owns a marketing-and-promotions company that helps major corporations penetrate minority markets. Though he could afford to live almost anywhere, Curtis believed it was important to stay in the inner city. He bought a brownstone on Monroe Street in Bed-Stuy, moved his family in, and began to renovate. He was gambling that with a similar commitment from other people like himself, the neighborhood would eventually get better.

It never did. "We were waiting for gentrification," says Curtis, whose son Coltrane went to private school in Park Slope, "but it always seemed to pass us by." Ultimately, it was Coltrane's welfare that prompted the exodus. Curtis was not willing to subject his son—just beginning his teenage years—to the temptations and dangers of Bed-Stuy's streets.

"When we lived in Brooklyn and he was on his bike or just outside, I could never let him get beyond my line of sight. I got tired of worrying about him every moment. I know there are some people back in Brooklyn, some of the brothers, who might say I sold out or turned my back on the neighborhood. That's all right," Curtis says without rancor. "I know I did the right thing and I've never looked back . . . not even once," he adds, smiling now. "I did what I had to for my family. I wanted to live someplace where I felt my son would be safe."

But it wasn't quite that simple. Sure, the Curtises wanted a place where their son could get a good education in the public schools. But they also wanted—perhaps even needed—a place where they wouldn't feel left out. Or worse, feel as though they had checked out.

Despite their differences, the Rubins and the Curtises ended up choosing the same town for the same reasons: aesthetics; proximity to Manhattan; old houses. Most significant, however, was the fact that both families were willing—indeed, eager—to live with people of a different skin color.

So after all the awkward moments in cars with real-estate agents, the follow-up strategy sessions in coffee shops, and the inevitable moments of doubt, both families moved to Montclair, New Jersey.

"I felt immediately comfortable here," says Curtis, sitting in his office in the heart of Montclair's downtown business district and listening to Oscar Peterson on Newark's WBGO, the last all-jazz radio station in the metro area. "I understood that Montclair was predominantly an upscale town, but I also recognized that there were lots of people who looked like me."

Despite its traditional green-shuttered, leafy appearance, and the obligatory soccer moms tooling around in pricey Jeeps and minivans, Montclair is actually a suburban anomaly. Of its 38,000 residents, slightly more than 30 percent are black. By comparison, Summit is less than 6 percent black. There are other suburban towns with significant black populations, but unlike, say, Englewood or South Orange, Montclair is not diverse by virtue of white flight, or some quirk in the real-estate market. While there is a poor, overwhelmingly black section of Montclair, there is no easily discernible right-side/wrong-side-of-the-tracks geography. Upper Montclair, which has its own Zip Code and generally more expensive houses, is mostly white, but blacks live in every part of town. "My congregation," says Archie Hargraves, the high-profile black reverend of Trinity Presbyterian Church, "goes from six figures to hardly any figures."

Montclair is diverse because much of the population believes it should be. Old lefties, idealists, unapologetic integrationists, and people with all the right liberal credentials are attracted to this town because of its tolerance. Montclair offers a rare chance for adults—who have kids and mortgages and quality of life to worry about—to put their money where their rhetoric is.

Says Montclair High School principal Elaine Peeler Davis: "This town tests those of us who said in the sixties that we wanted a different world."

Despite—or perhaps because of—this strain of latter-day sixties utopianism, virtually every issue, every squabble, every controversy in town seems to have a racial element: taxes, school funding, downtown revitalization, police protection, and the current debate over whether pre-K classes ought to be part of the public-school program. This inevitably leaves some bruises. "Race is a part of every conversation in this town," says Town Council member Jessica de Koninck, a white woman who has a daughter at Montclair High School and a son in middle school. "We spend a lot of time beating ourselves up about it, and we are very comfortable calling each other racists." Still, De Koninck is so committed to Montclair that, rather than move, she commutes three hours a day by car to get to and from her job in southern New Jersey.

"Diversity is what makes this town so interesting, so appealing, so complex, so rich, and so vexing," says school superintendent William Librera, who is, because all issues of race seem to crystallize in the schools, always the locus of controversy. "You know the old cliché? I have some good news and some bad news about Montclair. The good news is its diversity. And the bad news is . . . its diversity."

Located about fifteen miles

north and west of midtown Manhattan, past the malls and the swamps of Secaucus, the vast openness of the Meadowlands, and such conspicuous Route 3 landmarks as the gloriously retro, silver-coated Tic Tock Diner, Montclair looks, on first inspection, like any of the other older, upscale suburbs in the metropolitan area. Its pretty streets are lined with turn-of-the-century Colonials, classic Tudors, and quirky Victorians. There are huge oak trees, lush parks, tennis courts, and all of the other aesthetic and recreational accoutrements one would expect to find in a town where the average house sells for about $300,000 (prices can go as high as $1 million).

But Montclair is not like other suburbs. In fact, the town seems, at times, almost schizophrenic about whether it is a suburb at all. On the one hand, Montclair can display typical small-town instincts, as it did recently when it restricted the use of leaf blowers to cut down on noise pollution. On the other hand, is there another upscale suburb—Basking Ridge? Chatham? Franklin Lakes?—that has an active, vocal civil-rights commission? Or one that has flirted with forming a civilian review board to assess complaints about the police?

More mini-city than typical suburb: Life in and around Montclair High School (second from left, second from right, and far right). One of Montclair's many parks (third from right).

Still, Montclair must be a suburb if it has seventeen parks and playgrounds, plenty of girls' softball, and house lots that can, in ritzier sections, run to several acres. But what other suburban town is actually divided into wards—an archaic term more likely to spark visions of Chicago's big-city machine politics than the genteel local politics of a suburban council race?

"A lot of people think of this as suburbia," says Larry Glover, a local marketing executive who serves on numerous committees in town, "but it's not. We have some of the physical attractions of suburbia, but the character is clearly urban."

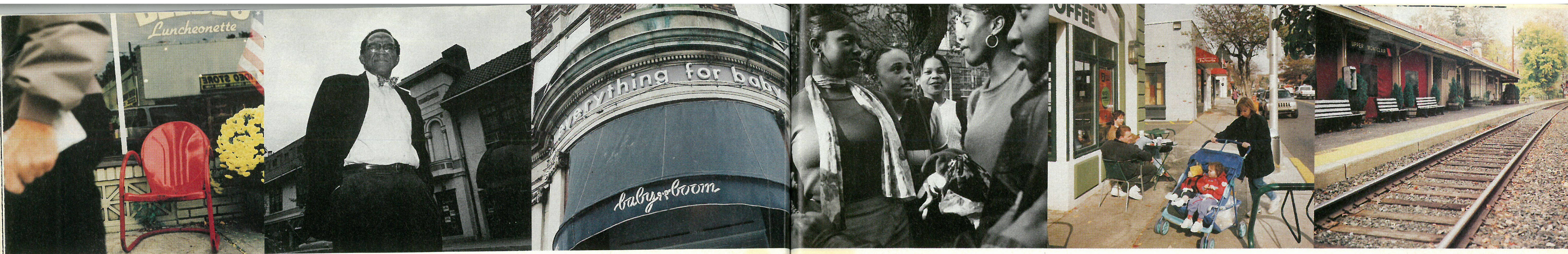
In fact, Montclair is, in many ways, more like a small city. Compared with the languorous, more bucolic burgs to its west and north, Montclair crackles with what in Manhattan is approvingly referred to as "energy."

Montclair has its own art museum, with an estimable collection of American and Native American painting, including works by John Singer Sargent, Thomas Eakins, Edward Hopper, and Thomas Hart Benton. There are four local theater companies that often employ name actors, directors, and playwrights to mount serious, controversial works. Last season, for example, Luna Stage, a storefront theater, put on *We Don't Have Enough Sugar for the Public*, a theatrical exploration of race relations past and present. This season, Luna is doing *Macbeth* with Frankie Faison, a Montclair resident and Tony nominee for *Fences*. The town is also home to Montclair State University, a jazz club, three independently owned bookstores, and not only two standard-issue triplexes but an art-movie house as well.

All of which makes Montclair enormously appealing to New Yorkers. People like the Rubins and the Curtises: smart, successful professionals who once saw themselves as umbilically connected to the city but had this tie snapped when, as Irving Kristol put it in a more charged context, they got "mugged by reality." These boomer families, a remarkable number of whom have moved to Montclair and other New York–area suburbs in the past decade, are starting to fundamentally change the character of suburban life.

Though Montclair has its share of investment bankers, CEOs, and middle-management corporate types, it is also home—again because of its tolerance—to a notable number of gay and lesbian and biracial couples. Couples who have adopted foreign babies say they moved here in the belief that the kids would be more readily accepted in a diverse

Photographs: Jean Laughton (1,3,4,6); Ernesto Bazan (2,5).



school population. And Montclair is a virtual ghetto for journalists: *Time, Newsweek, People,* the networks, and a broad spectrum of other magazines and book publishers are all heavily represented. Though no one has made a formal count, it seems as if half the staff of the New York *Times* bunks here.

There's also an extraordinary number of novelists, actors, and artists. So many local painters live here, in fact, that when the Montclair Art Museum announced that it would mount a show this spring highlighting the town's artists, a *salon des refusés* was put together almost immediately.

Like the Upper West Side, Montclair seems slightly messy, almost untidy. Some of the houses have a sad, forlorn look, as if they have gone too long without a fresh coat of paint. But for the people who live here, this slightly-frayed-around-the-edges ambience is yet one more part of the overall appeal. It makes the place seem more real, less like one of those antiseptic suburbs Montclairians all struggled so assiduously to avoid.

"This town tests those of us who said in the sixties that we wanted a different world."

Even Montclair's central downtown business district is Upper West Side–like. Running for a little more than a mile along the main artery of Bloomfield Avenue, it is really a series of connected but disparate sections, whose character and essence can change from one block to the next. While there is a Jaguar dealer and a Starbucks at one end, there is also a series of small, run-down businesses including a beeper store and a couple of chicken-shack-style takeouts along another stretch.

"I'm not going to kid you," says Ed Remsen, the executive director of Catholic Big Brothers, who moved to town with his family ten years ago from Brooklyn's Sunset Park and heads a volunteer group working on downtown revitalization. "There are signs of deterioration downtown, and parts can even look a little menacing." As with everything else, what to do about downtown is a topic of fierce, racially charged debate.

Indeed, every issue—a new commuter rail link to Manhattan, a church expansion, racial balance in the schools—becomes a jihad. "One of the minuses about having all of these smart, interesting, socially committed people living here," says *Wired* columnist Jon Katz, an eight-year resident, "is that New Yorkers have one approach to dealing with issues: They fight. So every issue here just becomes impossible. It's like some kind of Kabuki nightmare of eternally warring factions.

"This is a place where I'm totally comfortable walking my dogs at one or two in the morning—which I do all the time," says Katz, who writes suburban mysteries set in a Montclair-like town. "But I'm far too frightened to go to a school-board meeting."

Katz may be in the minority. "This town embraces the struggle," Ellen Harris says proudly, her shoulders square and chin straight out. The director of the Montclair Art Museum, Harris, a former deputy director at MOMA, moved to town with her husband and two kids four and a half years ago from a loft in TriBeCa. "We're not hiding in the suburbs. We have taken diversity and the conflict that is America in 1996 and embraced it in a different setting. We don't want to be Livingston," Harris, who is white, says in her office one afternoon, referring to the quieter, more traditional suburban town fifteen minutes west of here.

There is a strain of self-righteousness that rises to the surface whenever the new transplants talk about Montclair. Again and again they tell me that they try harder, care more deeply, and are willing to sacrifice to make things better. It's not clear why they're so emphatic—does it satisfy a continuing need to rationalize their decision to leave the city?

"Hey, if you want to live in Vermont, go live in Vermont," says council member De Koninck when I ask her whether the constant battling doesn't get tedious. Similarly, when I ask Stuart Rubin one afternoon while sitting on the porch of his turn-of-the-century farmhouse whether living in Montclair is exhausting, he responds in a voice thick with condescension, "Excuse me, being a citizen takes effort. This is uplifting, not exhausting."

Rubin, a tireless Montclair booster, tells me how "fabulous" it is, as his son heads off to play basketball, that one of the kids in the game has dreadlocks. And just in case I still haven't gotten his point, he leans in and says: "As with everything in this town involving race, no place works harder, cares more deeply, or gets better results."

But is it working? Just because blacks and whites live in the same town or in the same neighborhood or even on the same block doesn't mean they have created a fully integrated community. "This town is obviously diverse," says John Curtis, whose volunteer work includes heading Million Man Montclair, a group of black men who went to the march last year and came home energized to take on projects in the community. "But I don't know how integrated it really is."

Hargraves, the reverend, goes a step further. "We're not naïve," he says. "Montclair is a human community . . . of course there's racism."

But Curtis also talks about making connections and friends with whites he meets in his role as a volunteer in the downtown-revitalization effort. Go to a backyard barbecue anywhere in town, he says, and the likelihood is there will be both blacks and whites in attendance. And there is, in fact, plenty of evidence that a bedrock level of interracial comfort does exist in Montclair.

When New Jersey Transit announced plans to tear down 29 houses in a poor black neighborhood to build a direct train link to Manhattan (commuters must now go to Hoboken and take the PATH), there was an immediate outcry. With its clearly drawn contrasts and easily exploitable stereotypes, it was an issue made for an outside agitator. And sure enough, Khalid Muhammad from the Nation of Islam came to town for a speech and a march. Twice. Both times, he was ignored by Montclair's residents, fewer than two dozen of whom showed up to each event.

"We have a process in this town that works," Curtis says of the Khalid episode. "We have black and white people here who are intelligent, capable, and logical. And these people resent that kind of outside intrusion." One black minister, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "We don't want to destroy what we have built here. We're not interested in tearing things apart, and that's what Khalid Muhammad and those folks are all about."

"My boys have had sleep-overs with kids from every part of town," says Stuart Rubin, who serves on the civil-rights commission, "and let me tell you that when the black kids and the white kids wake up in the morning in the same bed with their feet in each other's faces, it's a wonderful thing."

Unfortunately, the afterglow doesn't seem to last. As the kids get older, outside influences start to have an impact and they begin to sort themselves based on color. "The dotted line is drawn at middle school and the solid line at the high school," says Larry Glover, whose 10-year-old son is one of three black kids out of 300 who play hockey in the town program. "His focus now for birthday parties and sleepovers is, who is my friend? It's not who is black or white."

One big reason the kids begin to drift apart has little at all to do with race. It is simply the normal struggle of adolescents—especially girls—to be part of a group. As teenagers try to find their place, it is not surprising that they end up with the kids who are most like themselves. "Their social circle narrows the higher up they go," says Frankie Faison, the black character actor, whose 17-year-old daughter is a senior at the high school. Faison's wife, Jane Mandel, who owns and runs the Luna Stage theater, is white. Together since 1971 when they met in the M.F.A. program at NYU, they have three daughters in Montclair's schools.

Black and white in suburbia: John Curtis, a black marketing executive who moved his family from Bed-Stuy (second from left); girls hanging out in front of Montclair High School (third from right).

"A lot of parents don't feel quite as comfortable with a black man coming to their home as they did with a little kid," Faison says. "You know, that cute little 7- or 8-year-old black boy they were so happy their kids were playing with is now somebody who could be dating their daughter."

The truest measure of any interracial community's long-term viability—indeed, of any suburban community's viability—is the health of its schools. They become the nexus of a suburb's various and competing interests. Everyone comes together: black and white; young and old; rich and poor; Christian and Jew; progressive and conservative.

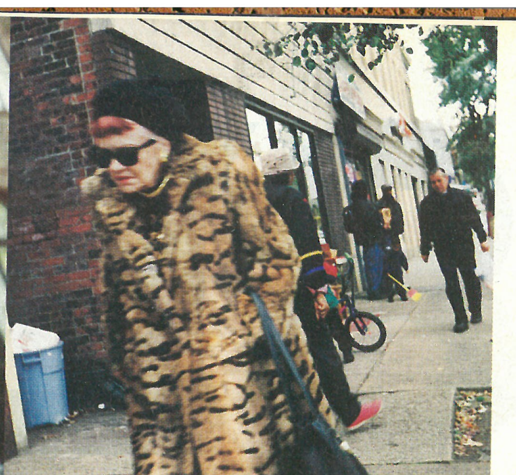
Add to this mix the obsessiveness of boomer parents for whom no detail of their children's education is too small and no aspect of their school life too pedestrian to be taken for granted. There are women in Montclair who every morning get their kids ready for school and take them outside to wait for the bus. When the bus comes, the kids get on, the women race to the garage, jump in the car, and surreptitiously follow the bus to school.

"I have to tell you," says one school official, struggling to be diplomatic, "that dealing with older parents, the transplanted urban dwellers who are in their forties and have young children, is a lot different than dealing with a 24-year-old parent. Everything becomes so complicated."

Like other towns in New Jersey and perhaps other towns everywhere, Montclair is struggling now as federal and state aid shrink at the same time its school population is growing. And Montclair's commitment to multicultural equality requires more than goodwill—it costs real money.

The recent war over pre-K education illustrates the problem. Facing budget constraints, the school board decided last month that the town could no longer afford the $1.7 million it cost to support one year of pre-kindergarten education for its kids. This even though every study indicates that kids at risk—those from poor families, single-parent homes, and the like—benefit greatly from early education and intervention. (The funding trap for Montclair is that while 17 or 18 percent of all its students are on free- or assisted-lunch programs, the cutoff to qualify for additional state aid to pay for

Photographs: Jean Laughton (1,3,6); Ernesto Bazan (2,4); Greg Miller (5).



Montclair, 07042: Ed Remson, who is leading efforts to revitalize Monclair's downtown business district, with his family (second from left); girls in the Montclair High School band (third from right).

pre-K classes is 20 percent.)

"For the first time," says Mayor Bill Farlie, who was elected last spring on a platform of fiscal responsibility, "there is a real gap between what we want to do and what we can afford to do." Farlie, who has lived in town for 28 years, is a good example of Montclair's tax problem. The town's budget is $100 million, 52 percent of which goes to the schools. Most comes from real-estate taxes. Farlie's tab—he owns a beautiful redbrick colonial in the heart of town, a big house but certainly not a mansion—is $26,000 a year.

So when Montclair High School came in ninety-fourth out of 259 schools in *New Jersey Monthly's* latest statewide school rankings, homeowners worried about their property values were not exactly glowing with pride. Though the top schools—judged essentially by test scores—were predictably those in upscale, homogeneous communities, Montclair's poor showing still riles.

"I will never apologize for not being No. 1 or 2 by the criteria they use," says an obviously frustrated Davis, the Montclair High principal. "It represents a linear way of thinking about achievement. It doesn't provide the layperson with any idea about what those schools do to engage their students," says Davis, a spirited black woman. "It basically just says that if you have students coming from middle- and upper-middle-class families where education is valued and they provide a lot of enrichment activities, the achievement will be high. It just perpetuates a gene-pool theory."

Stand outside the high school in the morning or the afternoon, and the divide is obvious—the black kids are on one side of the building and the whites are on the other. White parents see something else as well: The large congregation of black kids decked out in their street gear is, they say (usually off the record), frightening.

"I know there are a lot of people who are uncomfortable with what they see in student dress, who find it menacing," says Davis. "They come up to me at PTA meetings or wherever and tell me the kids look like thugs. But I tell them the baggy pants and all that kind of thing is just a style, you know, MTV and all of that. I ask them if they feel as threatened by what they see on Midland Avenue, where it's predominantly the white kids hanging out, smoking or whatever. And they tell me they don't. So the real issue is, are they threatened because the kids are dressed like thugs or are they threatened by race?"

Race may have something to do with the fact that more and more white students leave the public school system as they get older. Montclair High is 52 percent black (for different reasons, increasing numbers of upper-class blacks also seem to be taking the private-school route). To the dismay of many residents, this arithmetic raises the possibility that Montclair could, with a nudge in the wrong direction, become another Englewood, a splintered town in which whites and upper-middle-class blacks abandoned the public schools. When that happens, a town slowly begins to wither.

"I think if that fear exists," says Margot Sage-EL, who moved to town six years ago from Brooklyn's Clinton Hill and co-owns Watchung Booksellers, "it's based more on perception than reality. It's the kind of fear that someone talks about during one of those whispered, backdoor driveway conversations you have with someone who's similar to yourself."

"The tipping-point concern is bogus, it's simplistic, it's silly, and it doesn't apply here at all," superintendent Librera says emphatically. "We're already 12 to 15 percentage points beyond what is normally considered the so-called tipping point. The places where it was a problem didn't respond to changes in their community. This town has not only remained viable but gotten stronger and more attractive to people coming out of the city." Then comes the Montclair peroration: "This is the healthiest place I know. I tell parents what a great laboratory for the future this town is for their children because they live in a world that the country is becoming."

It is an hour of the morning when perhaps only cops and cabbies ought to feel like their day is in full swing, but at Montclair High School, a large Federal-style brick building in the center of town, activity in the first-floor office hums along at what appears to be midday pitch. Though it is not quite 7:30, teachers arrive, check for messages, drop off paperwork, and head to their classrooms. A few linger to catch up on bits of gossip. Students, weighed down by their backpacks like infantrymen on a long march, drift in, ask a question, and drift out again. Behind the counter, several secretaries busily work the phones, the copy machine, and the file cabinets. Meanwhile, in a small, spare conference room with a round table and mismatched chairs, a group of Montclair High School seniors has gathered to talk to me about the issues they face living in a town that values diversity.

"Let me tell you about a defining moment," says Hillary, a pretty black honors student with big hoop earings and denim shorts who is headed to Georgetown and then, she hopes, to medical school (the students agreed to speak on the condition that their full names not be used). "Last year when the O.J. verdict was announced . . . several classes had televisions, and when they said not guilty, all the black kids jumped up and down and went crazy and all the white kids just groaned in disgust. For several weeks around here, everything was very touchy."

"It's sad," says David, a tall, wiry black kid with a sixties-style Afro who is shooting for Princeton, "that even in this town, we can remember where we were when the verdict came down. It's sad, because it shows how deep the racial divide still is."

"Diversity for me means that I sit next to a black kid in homeroom," says one of the two white girls in the room. "It's really an aberration when I have any meaningful contact with a black kid."

"Sometimes," says the other white girl, "I find myself wanting to be friends with someone just because they're black. I know it's weird." The girl's parents are progressives who've always told her that Montclair is a unique place. Nonetheless, she says, "you learn in middle school, which is, like, the worst time for kids, what happens if you like a black guy. All these ugly rumors start. . . . You know how many times I had 'jungle fever' screamed at me? You just don't want to subject yourself to those pressures."

"That cute 8-year-old black boy they were so happy their kids were playing with is now somebody who could be dating their daughter."

"Interracial dating?" asks Hillary. "No way."

Some of the separation is caused by tracking, which puts students of different abilities in different classrooms, so learning can be paced more effectively. Many blacks in town and around the country believe that this practice is racist. They think it not only stigmatizes some kids but that many—particularly blacks—are characterized as low achievers through the use of yardsticks that are themselves racist. Tracking can, opponents argue, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fiercest ideological opponents of the practice believe the goal of racial diversity in the classroom should take precedence over everything else—including the pace at which kids learn.

David and Hillary both bemoan the fact that in their advanced-placement classes, there are few if any other blacks. The fact that honors classes are nearly 80 percent white is a problem recognized by the town, which is in the sixth year of a ten-year plan to level the playing field. Progress is slow.

"You do need to separate people—you know, people who can do calculus from people who add two plus two and get three," David says. "But the school needs to examine the way the chips fall."

Three years ago, this issue blew up when ninth-grade English classes were untracked, and devoted to a curriculum called World Lit. Nearly 100 families pulled their kids out of the public schools, seeing portents of a coming p.c. hell in which diversity would take precedence over achievement. "I told my dad," says one of the white girls, "that all I had to do was write a twelve-page paper on how evil white people are and I'd get an A. And that's what happened." Montclair ultimately finessed the entire tracking issue—the school now has a flexible honors program in which parents can ask to have their kids placed in an honors class even if their performance doesn't seem up to it. The World Lit curriculum remains.

Amid all the carping in our discussion group, the kids turn against me when I suggest that it sounds as if they could just as well have gone to school in a segregated community. "The best experience is to live with people who are different," David, the black senior, insists. "It's the way I learn the most about myself."

"I know that anywhere I go in life I'll be okay," Hillary chimes in, "whether I'm the only black person or one of many. I know I'll always be all right. Growing up in this town has given me a foundation. It has helped prepare me for the real world, and I'm confident that I know who I am."

Though the very idea of integration seems almost quaint now, it is both hopeful and heartening to find a place where people are at least trying. In New York, blacks and whites are forced together every day on the streets, in the subways, in (some) neighborhoods. But proximity rarely produces real contact. Blacks and whites lead completely separate lives. It's ironic that in the suburbs, which are most often associated with escape and separation, Montclair has managed to get blacks and whites to talk to one another.

"The best thing we've done here," says Faison, the actor, offering *his* peroration, "is to put people in a community together. Is it working perfectly? Of course not. But we're trying to deal with the issues. And for that alone, I can't think of any place I'd rather be." ■

Photographs: Jean Laughton (1,3,4,5,6); Greg Miller (2).