

FROM POWDER SPRINGS ROAD TO MACLAND: POWDER SPRINGS DIVIDED

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NARRATOR: As the population of Powder Springs grows and diversifies, the ethnic and socioeconomic differences between residents have become more apparent.

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BERRY: There's like, two halves of Powder Springs. The neighborhoods right behind McEachern are the lower end, and then the ones up Macland Road, the other side of Macland Road, are the nicer area. I mean there are exceptions, there's nice neighborhoods behind Powder Springs but the majority...well there's two halves and it's definitely segregated.

K. BEAVERS: I've only heard that recently, I've only heard about a change in population that there was an increase in the Hispanic population and there had been some problems at the high school in relation to the change in population and there was...well people referred to 'an element' of people that were moving in that they were concerned about.

J. COCHRAN: And again, you know we always have this fear, being afraid of someone that looks different from us. And of course, as soon as they move in, there goes the neighborhood, let's get out of here as fast as we can. Which is why, again, why I said what I think is evidence to why they're building these massive, massive mansions all around Powder Springs you know, for the cost of, for an astronomical cost of \$500,000 for house, they're trying to invite rich, affluent white people to move back in.

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NARRATOR: The change in the racial and economic make up of Powder Springs has begun to cause public controversy, most recently regarding the redistricting of local high schools. By the time the press picked up the story, almost every resident of Powder Springs had heard rumors about the redistricting process.

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BERRY: Actually, McEachern has been threatened to lose the trust fund because the rich Caucasian people are not going there anymore. They built a brand new high school and redistricted Echo Mill and Oakleigh and my neighborhood and all the upper class neighborhoods to the new high school and now, all the lower end neighborhoods in Powder Springs are going to McEachern and now McEachern is a predominantly African American high school and it's not the 'right' people that McEachern wants as it's name, because the trust fund is real big about how it presents itself. It's a pride thing. And they threatened to pull the trust fund.

J. COCHRAN: What the rumor was is that the trust fund of John McEachern that he left in his will to McEachern High School was that if the African American or Latino population at McEachern High School becomes greater than the Caucasian, that his trust fund would become null and void. They created Hillgrove High School because of the overcrowding and overpopulation that was at McEachern, Powder Springs was a place that kept expanding in population and McEachern was really the only high school in that district of Powder Springs so they created Hillgrove as a way to kind of help buffer that.

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NARRATOR: As the redistricting process continued, opinions differed about which high school was best, and which high school parents wanted their children to be sent to.

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L. COCHRAN: I know that it had a lot of parents frustrated and aggravated about it and there were people – again talking to parents who had come into the office, you know, talking about relocating and moving because of the probably redistricting and where their kids were going to be going to school. And at that point they were wanting to move out of the McEachern area because of the way things were starting to change.

BERRY: Echo Mill and Oakleigh were originally still intact at McEachern because of the trust fund issue, basically if those two neighborhoods got pulled to the new high school, the trust fund was gone. And then those parents fought and took it to court and I don't know the process that you through but they did not want to be part of McEachern because all of the other Caucasian students had been pulled to the other high school and it would really just be those two neighborhoods of Caucasian kids at the lower end African America McEachern and they fought and fought and fought and finally got redistricted.

MOON: Well many people wanted their children to go to Hillgrove because they thought their property values would go down if they were not in the Hillgrove district. I never felt that way, I live in Oakleigh and if I was a teen I would prefer to go to McEachern High School even though I'm in the Hillgrove area, I've always thought McEachern was wonderful school and it has a rich history and I don't think that's ever going away.

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NARRATOR: Despite the difficult issues Powder Springs has faced, many residents are comfortable with the change in the town's ethnic makeup and want to learn from their experiences to make the town a better place for everyone in the future.

MOON: I think the people I talk to are okay with it, you know, we're just all God's children and that's the way we need to look at it.

J. COCHRAN: The stark differences between rich and poor in just two blocks is astounding and should be heartbreaking and it should cause anyone with a conscience really to think about these things and think about what this type of development does.

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