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Message: BLACK COUPLE DECIDES TO LEAVE NEIGHBORHOOD
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Charles Williams and Marietta Bloxom said yesterday that they were fed up with feeling unwelcome in their Southwest Philadelphia neighborhood and had decided to trade their house for another one owned by the Veterans Administration.

The VA, in turn, said yesterday that it would do all it could to help the couple, who are the only blacks on an otherwise all-white block of South 61st Street. Last week, 400 whites demonstrated outside their house, chanting "Beat it" and "We want them out." "It's just to be safer," said Williams, 23, who is employed as a shift manager at a Wendy's restaurant. "There's no way around it. Even though this (turmoil) may die down, we'll never be sure. We'd still be watching our backs every day."

The demonstration - and another like it the following night outside the home of an interracial couple a few blocks away - prompted Mayor Goode to impose a state of emergency in a section of Southwest Philadelphia. His order bars public gatherings of more than four people until at least Dec. 6, when the state of emergency is scheduled to expire.

All was peaceful in the area south and east of Woodland Avenue yesterday, but there were these developments:

* U.S. Attorney Edward S.G. Dennis Jr. announced that he had asked the FBI to begin a "preliminary criminal investigation" of the two demonstrations last week to determine if there had been violations of the federal Fair Housing Act. The act provides jail penalties and fines for the use of force, intimidation or coercion to prevent, for racial reasons, someone from selecting a house.

* Three officials of Operation PUSH met for a half-hour with the mayor in City Hall, and later criticized what they called the city's "kid gloves" handling of white demonstrators. Philadelphia chapter president Thurman Evans said he had demanded that the demonstrators be arrested and

"prosecuted with the full force of the law."

* Four members of the International Committee Against Racism went door to door on South 61st Street and Buist Avenue yesterday, passing out leaflets that announced a demonstration on Saturday, in defiance of Goode's ban on large gatherings.

Williams and Bloxom said they were oblivious to other events that swirled around them yesterday as they dropped by their house to check on its condition. In recent days, they said, they have been living away from the home with one of Williams' relatives.

Bloxom, 24, said that her daughter, Lekeisha, 7, was afraid to be in the house. "I like the house, but I can't live in any neighborhood where my child is afraid."

The couple began a search for a new residence over the weekend, less than a month after putting down \$500 on the \$21,000 house, which the VA had come to own through a repossession from the previous owner.

Ron Veltman, VA loan guarantee officer in the Philadelphia regional office, said yesterday that he had agreed to accept the already deposited \$500 as the down payment on another house. The VA owns 200 repossessed houses in 40 eastern Pennsylvania counties and Delaware.

"They don't want to live in that house anymore," Veltman said. "They want to buy another house, possibly through the VA - the same way they bought this house. That would be OK with me."

Veltman said that the couple might "just walk away" from their current home, a two-story brick rowhouse on a narrow street lined with sycamore trees. "Technically, they would be in default of their contract," he said, but the VA would not seek penalties.

"We would have no desire to cost these people any money," he said.

Williams said that there was no certainty that the couple would select another VA house, but that they planned to look over what was available with a real estate company. He said they also would look at a private purchase "if we are unable to find a VA house."

He said that neither he nor Bloxom had paid any attention to the race of their future neighbors when they looked at the house, assuming that they were "mixed."

"We just like the house," Williams said.

But next time, he added, "I'm looking at the neighbors."

Gerald and Carol Fox, the interracial couple whose house on Buist Avenue near 64th Street was the site of the second demonstration last week, have said they do not intend to move.

State Rep. Alphonso Deal (D., Phila.) said yesterday that Philadelphia leaders of the NAACP had tried to persuade Williams and Bloxom to stay as well.

"They have definitely indicated that they are going to give up the home," Deal said. "It's a tragedy if they follow through. We have not been able to convince them that they ought to exercise their rights to stay there. . . ."

"We have assured them that the city was going to make sure that their property would be protected. And the NAACP would put people in the house or outside. We will be willing to have our people guard them, with or without the police."

U.S. Attorney Dennis said yesterday that the FBI also was involved in watching over the neighborhood. At the same time, he said, the Community Relations Service of the Justice Department was helping to ease tensions, along with city and civic groups.

Dennis said that the role of his office was not limited to a criminal investigation. He said he was prepared, if need be, to seek a court

injunction to prevent housing intimidation on the basis of race, to be enforced by U.S. marshals.

The PUSH leaders, in their meeting with Goode, urged the arrest and prosecution of the white demonstrators.

Evans, speaking to reporters after the meeting, said, "There is a perception in the community that when whites are the perpetrators of this kind of racial, violent behavior, they're treated with kid gloves.

"There's a perception that when blacks are the perpetrators, you get tough. And that perception needs to be dealt with."

Evans said the city "perhaps could have moved sooner" to quell the demonstrations, and added: "We want those who are responsible for the violent behavior . . . to be apprehended and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. . . . That kind of behavior is unacceptable and inexcusable, and must be stamped out quickly and forcibly."

PUSH officials called off a counterdemonstration planned for last weekend. Evans indicated that PUSH would not reschedule the march "as long as we can talk . . . and make progress."

Evans said his group had encouraged Williams and Bloxom not to move from the neighborhood.

"If they do not (stay)," he said, "it will be one giant step for racism, and we just cannot afford that now."

City Managing Director James S. White also said yesterday that the city had promised Williams and Bloxom that they would be protected if they chose to stay.

"We told them that there was no reason for them to move, that every guarantee that the mayor has expressed would in fact be met by the city," he said.

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