

# It's Love and Hate

## Blacks in Southold Angered at Rezoning

By JOHN RATHER

**T**HE tiny hamlet on the southern edge of the Southold Town dump in Cutchogue has endured much over the

years. Time and again, windblown trash is littered lawns and festooned seas with plastic bags. The well water is unfit to drink and tints clothes yellow. When the town began capping the dump last year, airborne debris abated but houses flooded. Debris still fill the air. Trucks and heavy equipment raise a din. Now, for some among the handful remaining residents in the small African-American community around Tuthill Lane, settled in the 20's when it was the only place in Cutchogue where blacks could buy land, a long habit of quiet forbearance is ending.

Viola Cross, 76, a retired nurse who bought land and moved into the neighborhood in the early 1980's, said she was grateful for what she had. "Maybe some people don't think it's such, but it's home," she said. "It's nice and it's paid for."

But Mrs. Cross said what she and one of her two dozen neighbors did not abide was a change the town made that rezoned the neighborhood from residential and agricultural to light industrial, a classification they said spelled doom for the only area in the town where they could afford to live.

The rezoning was in 1989 but Mrs. Cross said the community learned of the change only recently, when a local swimming pool company applied to the town to build a warehouse in an area behind the First Baptist Church of Cutchogue, the neighborhood's centerpiece.

"How could they change the zoning without even letting people know?" Mrs. Cross said. "Why would they do it in this neighborhood?"

Backed by the town's anti-bias task force, Mrs. Cross, a task force member, is asking the town to reinstate the zoning change. About 300 residents, most of them white, have signed a petition supporting the request.



Debra Reagen for The New York Times



Joshua Y. Horton, the town supervisor, said he had asked two town board members, Thomas Wickham and Craig Richter, to meet with Mrs. Cross and other residents.

"The residents have a valid concern about the intrusion of industrial uses into their neighborhood," Mr. Horton said. "For the town to knowingly invite industry into a residential area is unconscionable."

"Quite frankly, it has been one of the few affordable places for people

Tiny Martin, left, with her daughter Annie-Marie and two of her daughter's friends, Tannitia Joseph and Yolonda Aviles. Ms. Martin's neighborhood was rezoned from residential to light industrial without residents' input.

to live in this town. And this town can't afford to lose any affordable housing opportunities."

According to the 2000 census, 3.4 percent of Southold's 20,599 residents, or about 700 people, listed their heritage as African-American. Most live in the Village of Greenport.

But Mr. Horton said it was his understanding that some residents and property owners favored the light industrial zoning, which increases property values. The 1989 zoning change was part of a town master plan that designated areas around the dump for industrial uses, one of the few areas in the town where such uses are permitted.

The issue seemed clear-cut to members of the anti-bias task force. Merle Levine of East Marion, the task force vice chairwoman, said the zoning change was racist and should be redressed. "The reason we have an anti-bias task force is that there is

racism in Southold Town despite the fact that many people don't think there is," Ms. Levine said.

"It's certainly not the nicest place to live, that's for sure," said Ms. Levine, referring to the hamlet. "But I would hope that the town board members would find it in their hearts to let this very small group of people have their say and have their way."

Another task force member, Michael Domino of Southold, said the effects of the zoning change had surfaced just as the landfill capping and the arrival of public water improved conditions along Tuthill Lane.

"This community has borne a lot," Mr. Domino said. "Now the area has been improved, but they aren't going to get the benefits. They will be forced out by industry and that's not fair. The town board needs to do the right thing for these people."

Mr. Wickham, a former town supervisor from Cutchogue and one of the councilmen who will meet with the residents, said there were better solutions than restoring the former zoning, a step he said he opposed.

"I do think that it is appropriate to have an industrial zone in that area," said Mr. Wickham, a member of a family that has farmed in Southold since the 17th century. "It is definitely not an optimum site for housing."

Mr. Wickham said one solution would be to make sure that industrial uses were compatible with the remaining residences. A second approach, he said, would be to buy and demolish the houses and resettle residents elsewhere in town. He said federal financing might assist in the process.

He said industrial zoning benefited homeowners in the hamlet. "It greatly increases the value of their properties," he said.

Mrs. Cross said she had no intention of moving. "I will not sell," she said. "I am not worried about what everything is worth."

"They don't understand," she said. "This community has been here for 60-odd years. With light industry, there will be more and more things coming here. Why should we have to go through this in our old age? I don't understand people not respecting the rights of others."