RACISM IN THE STRUCTURE: BRIEF HISTORY OF 20TH CENTURY BALTIMORE

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Which Structure?

- How were these structures created and upheld over time?
- How have they impacted generations of citizens?
- How can we ensure that planning is inclusive and equitable today?
Baltimore originally was 3 separate towns in Baltimore County: Baltimore Town, Jonestown, Fell’s Point.

In 1851, Baltimore City became its own jurisdiction, separate from the surrounding County.

1867 Map of Baltimore

Source: “Map of Baltimore, 1867” by Samuel Augustus Mitchell. Wikimedia Commons
Circa 1860 Plat Map

Aerial view of same block today
1893 “Slum” Criteria

Considerations:

Ethnic Background
Employment Pattern
Housing Conditions
Health
Rent
Crime Rate
“We did not move up there because we wished to force our way among the whites; association with them in a social way would be just as distasteful to us as it would be to them. We merely desired to live in more commodious and comfortable quarters...

As for property deteriorating on account of our advent into that neighborhood, I know it cannot be so, because all of us are paying higher rentals than the white occupants who immediately preceded us, and there is no better criterion of value than the rent a property brings.”

- George W. McMechen, quoted in NY Times, December 25, 1910
1937 FHA Residential Security Map

KEY
- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
Restrictive Housing Covenants

Illustration from Gardens, Houses and People, Vol. XII, No. 4, April 1937, published by The Roland Park Company.

Baltimore City Department of Planning
Fighting Restrictive Housing Covenants

For Sale! For Sale!

ANOTHER BIG DEVELOPMENT IN

..Wilson Park..

Open to our race. Nineteen acres, 200 lots, 6 new cottages with all conveniences; hot water heat, electric lights; large porch fronts. The smallest lots are 25 ft x 112 ft; owned by one of our Leading Business Men of Baltimore City, MR. HARRY O. WILSON.

This beautiful site is located 3 squares east of the beautiful Guilford on the York Road. There is no low or marsh land on this magnificent site; it, 400 feet above sea level overlooking Baltimore City. Five-cent carfare, 10 minutes’ ride from City Hall. The prices of lots range from $300 up; Cottages from $1600 up.

Take York Road Car and get off at Arlington Avenue and York Road; go east 3 squares and you will find the beautiful site on the left upon the hills. You may secure any of these lots or cottages on easy terms from the following agents authorized by Mr. Harry O. Wilson:

1917 Ad in the Afro-American for Wilson Park.
Blockbusting

Fighting Blockbusting
1949 Zoning Map

**KEY**
- First Commercial
- Second Commercial
- Industrial
1940s Slum Clearance

The conclusions of this study confirmed the opinions of the Authority regarding principal causes for concentration of bad housing in Baltimore.

The identified causes were:

- Migrations within the city.
- Great concentrations of dwelling structures obsolete or undesirable for pleasant and convenient modern living.
- System of irredeemable ground rents.
- Concentrations of low-income Negroes who could rarely buy a house and were segregated in rental districts.
Slum Clearance for Public Housing

Perkins Homes. Source: Mark Steiner Show.
Slum Clearance as Urban Renewal

**Figure 4**

- **CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**
- **PUBLIC HOUSING**
- **URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS**

**PROJECT STATUS**

1. Waverly completed
2. Broadway completed
3. Broadway Extension completed
4. Harlem Park I completed
5. Mount Royal - Fremont II completed
6. University of Maryland I completed
7. 34th Demonstration Project executed
8. Mount Royal Plaza executed
9. Shot Tower Industrial Park executed
10. Charles Center executed
11. Harlem Park II executed
12. Madison-Park South executed
13. Camden Industrial Park executed
14. University of Maryland II executed
15. Madison-Park North executed
16. Mount Vernon executed
17. University of Maryland III executed
18. Mount Vernon II planning

October 1964
Highways as Slum Clearance

Citizens in South Baltimore stopped a highway through downtown and the waterfront...

Source: Baltimore City Department of Planning
But the “Highway To Nowhere” went through the heart of West Baltimore.

Construction of I-170 destroyed 970 homes.
"The final stage [of urban blight] ... is equivalent to the death of part of the city’s tissue. Human existence and economic activity in such areas become moribund. Subsequently, the affected locales become breeding places for crime, disease, pestilence, poverty and human despair. Transference of these ill-effects to other parts of the city is swift and deadly.

“When this stage of physical degradation is reached, surgery or removal of slums constitutes only part of the cure for urban decay. Substandard social and economic circumstances of the people who live in such slums do not disappear when decayed slum structures are removed. Unless “human renewal” - improvement of the social and economic conditions of people - is achieved, the conditioning factors...are merely shifted to other areas...”

- Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Agency (BURHA) Community Renewal Program report, 1964
Community-led Revitalization
Discussion