

URBAN RENEWAL IN ASHEVILLE:  
A HISTORY OF RACIAL SEGREGATION AND BLACK ACTIVISM

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## ABSTRACT

### URBAN RENEWAL IN ASHEVILLE: A HISTORY OF RACIAL SEGREGATION AND BLACK ACTIVISM

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This thesis utilizes Asheville as a case study to situate urban renewal in the broader history of housing segregation and urban race relations. In order to accomplish this objective, this study employs an expanded timeframe. This approach enables an exploration into how and why certain neighborhoods came to be designated areas for urban renewal projects. Additionally, this study illuminates on the many nuances of urban renewal. For Asheville, the desire for a strong tourist industry provided the impetus for urban renewal while previous federal housing policies and the real estate industry systematically created racially segregated neighborhoods fraught with inequalities. This resulted in the physical decay of the city's African American communities and helped justified their selection for urban renewal projects. Within in this environment, Asheville witnessed its most marginalized social group, black public housing tenants who challenged and successfully altered the political landscape of Asheville.

## INTRODUCTION

“American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”<sup>1</sup>

James Baldwin

James Baldwin understood the complexity of American history and the historical narratives that American society either forgot or, regretfully, ignored. Urban renewal programs that swept through American cities represented an historical event that “is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”<sup>2</sup> Urban renewal, as federal legislation, fundamentally altered the physical landscape of urban areas for at least twenty-five years following the Housing Act of 1949. However, the reasons why cities elected to initiate urban renewal programs resulted from earlier economic conditions and previous public policies. The program’s

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, “Color” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*, ed. James Baldwin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 332.

<sup>2</sup> According to scholar and former director of community improvement for Lincoln Park, Michigan, Emanuel Gorland, urban renewal described “a process in which communities improve themselves by eliminating slums and other substandard areas, checking blight, redesigning poorly planned or outmoded physical patterns, providing choice land for new development, and where feasible, conserving and upgrading salvable property and areas.” Gorland noted that many cities had undertaken urban renewal programs prior to federal assistance through city initiatives or private funding. However, when federal government began providing monetary assistance via the 1949 Housing Act the term urban renewal became “synonymous with the federally assisted program.” For the purpose of this thesis urban renewal refers to the federally assisted programs that began with 1949 Housing Act. See Emanuel Gorland, *Urban Renewal Administration: practices, procedures, record keeping* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1971), 15-16. The terms redevelopment, revitalization, and rehabilitation are used interchangeably to describe any type of city project regardless of the primary benefactor (i.e. local, state, and/or federal government), unless otherwise specified. Although these terms occasionally held specific definitions, namely rehabilitation during urban renewal, their general use, whether by residents, local newspapers, and/or local, state, and federal documents and officials, throughout the chronological span of this thesis, mainly 1920s to the late 1970s, appears to simply denote a project or desire to improve the physical condition of cities and Asheville.

implications for African Americans and the perpetuation of housing segregation suggest that urban renewal fits within the broader history of American race relations. Urban renewal, although a federal policy, operated under the guidance of city officials and thus, each city's trajectory demonstrated unique aspects and outcomes. Urban renewal programs emerged innately connected with the existing racial segregation, economic conditions, and municipal politics of the American cities.

This study examines Asheville as a case study for urban renewal, historicizing it within the broader trends of urban housing segregation. Thus, the chronology of the work spans from the 1920s to the late 1970s, allowing for a more evolutionary approach to understanding urban renewal. In the 1920s, Asheville initiated its first major revitalization plan under the guidance of a newly established City Planning Commission. City officials implemented a redevelopment program designed to increase Asheville's appeal as a tourist destination, expanding the city's tourist industry. Although the program came to an abrupt end due to the Great Depression, the desire to utilize government action and policies to establish Asheville as a preeminent tourist destination found new advocates among the city's political and business leaders in the decades after World War II.

At the federal level, this expansive timeline allows for the inclusion of previous federal legislation and agencies that affected the development and trajectory of housing segregation, illustrating how and why the physical decline of Asheville's African American neighborhoods occurred. Most notably, during the 1930s, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Authority (FHA) created residential security maps that outlined neighborhoods based on their potential risks for federal

monetary lending and real estate investment. HOLC and FHA appraisers marked black neighborhoods as ‘D’ (red). This meant that African Americans, regardless of economic standing, represented a high risk for lending purposes effectively rendering them ineligible for FHA mortgages. As a result, a racialized real estate market arose that abetted in the decline of African American housing throughout the nation. In Asheville, the neighborhoods marked ‘D,’ or redlined, in the 1930s were also the same neighborhoods selected for urban renewal in the late 1960s. According to historian Arnold R. Hirsh, these policies represented “the construction of the ball park within which the urban game is played.”<sup>3</sup>

Although larger societal and institutional forces may have constructed Hirsch’s ballpark, the various individuals and political and business leaders living in Asheville designed and interpreted the rules of the game. Therefore, this study examines the ways in which residents and city officials navigated through the political process of urban renewal. Utilizing a community-level approach, this study illustrates how and why city officials conducted urban renewal. Additionally, this thesis demonstrates how African Americans influenced the political process and enacted political changes. Historian Kevin M. Kruse argued that a community-level approach offers “the best perspective for bringing into focus the complex relationships between people and places.”<sup>4</sup> Using this approach, this thesis demonstrates how civic and business leaders’ devised the rules to the urban game that originated in Asheville’s 1920s revitalization plan and perpetuated the effects of federal legislation. This study also shifts “the angle of vision” to African

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold R. Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), xii.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2005), 15.

Americans to unveil “the unrecognized spaces and strains of activism in poor black communities” illustrating how Asheville’s black residents maintained their political autonomy within the constraints of the white power structure.<sup>5</sup>

An analysis of Asheville’s urban renewal program, in comparison to larger urban centers like Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Philadelphia, would appear to offer little to the historiographies of both urban renewal and housing segregation. However, Asheville’s East Riverside Urban Renewal Project represented the largest single urban renewal project in the Southeast.<sup>6</sup> The East Riverside project encompassed over 425 acres of land, 1,300 structures, 1,250 families, and over half of the city’s African American population.<sup>7</sup> In addition to East Riverside, Asheville conducted several other smaller, residential programs that directly impacted and demographically reshaped the communities of Stumptown, Hill Street, East End, and Burton Street. The neighborhoods Asheville designated for urban renewal represented the city’s segregated African American communities.

Urban renewal displaced and relocated the majority of the residents and businesses in these areas effectively dismantling almost every African American community in Asheville. City officials utilized the power of eminent domain to possess African American homes and relegated these residents to public housing complexes as

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<sup>5</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Pricilla Ndiaye, “Southside/East Riverside: Lost—In the Name of Progress,” *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth L. Mace, “Inside East Riverside,” February 1967, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Inside East Riverside.”

renters. At the time of urban renewal, Southside, arguably the poorest of Asheville's black neighborhoods, had a homeownership rate of 58 percent.<sup>8</sup> Years later, only 44.3 percent Asheville's black residents owned their homes.<sup>9</sup> In the name of progress, many black residents' lost their identities as homeowners, a symbol of "stability, financial security" as well as "social class and status."<sup>10</sup>

With 70 percent of Asheville's current public housing tenants identifying as African American, urban renewal reconfigured the details of racial segregation confining black residents within public housing complexes.<sup>11</sup> However, public housing communities failed to offer the quality of economic and educational opportunities once present in Asheville's black neighborhoods. According to historian Thomas J. Sugrue, this new form of housing segregation has had profound consequences for African Americans that include limited access to employment opportunities, racial concentration of poverty that hinders the effectiveness of public schools educating black youth, and the racial polarization of politics, ultimately affecting the distribution of public resources.<sup>12</sup> Race was the most important factor in framing Asheville's urban renewal program and its consequences still affect the lives of Asheville's black residents.

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<sup>8</sup> "Inside East Riverside."

<sup>9</sup> Buncombe County, "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study," November 2009, 30, accessed February 20, 2014, <https://www.buncombecounty.org/common/planning/HMandNA.pdf>. Hereafter cited as "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study."

<sup>10</sup> Kathy S. Kremer, "Homeowners, Renters, and Neighbors: Perceptions of Identity in a Changing Neighborhood," *Michigan Sociological Review* 24 (Fall 2010), 130.

<sup>11</sup> "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study," 30.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7-10.

Urban renewal has had a profound effect on many urban African American neighborhoods. Promoted as a legislation to remedy blighted areas and to provide families and individuals with quality housing, urban renewal initially brought hope to many African Americans living in substandard homes.<sup>13</sup> However, the application of the program illustrated that urban renewal meant improvement for the cities involved, but not necessarily for the individuals within the project areas. In the name of progress, families and individuals witnessed their homes and communities bulldozed. In their place, new homes and new neighborhoods emerged without the black residents who had previously defined those communities. Instead, urban renewal relegated many African Americans to public housing units either within the project areas or, more than often, outside. In essence, urban renewal removed African Americans from their established communities as well as perpetuated and consolidated housing segregation via public housing.

In the details of each city's history of urban renewal, competing narratives emerge. From a local perspective, individuals within each of these urban areas perceived the need for, understood the process of, and experienced urban renewal differently. However, from Chicago to New York City to Atlanta as well as Asheville every city that initiated urban renewal projects experienced broadly similar social and economic

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<sup>13</sup> Asheville resident Priscilla Ndiaye, whose family urban renewal displaced in the 1970s, remembered that at first her family "was happy to see urban renewal come through." See Mark Barrett, "Photos trace history of Asheville's Southside," *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 24, 2014. In her study on Durham, North Carolina, historian Christina Greene noted that "black residents...initially welcomed urban renewal." See Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 128.

consequences.<sup>14</sup> The causes of urban housing deterioration and the reasons cities decided to orchestrate urban renewal programs reveal broad historical trends. The ebb and flow of the national economy impacted the economic situations of urban areas. Decades of de facto and de jure residential segregation on the part of federal policies and the real estate industry rendered many African American neighborhoods in need of redevelopment.

The racial hierarchy system that developed during the course of American history and its effects upon society plagued the urban landscape during the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> During the first half of the century, many African Americans migrated from the rural south to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West in search of economic opportunities and relief from the racially oppressive Jim Crow South. However, the newly migrated African Americans quickly realized the North harbored its own white supremacist characteristics that limited their economic opportunities and political freedoms. Some historians have argued that racial discrimination during this period dictated the trajectory and development of housing segregation and slums in northern cities.<sup>16</sup> In particular, historian

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<sup>14</sup> See Robert D. Bullard, J. Eugene Grisby III, and Charles Lee, eds., *Residential Apartheid: The American Legacy* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 7.

<sup>15</sup> In his editorial work, scholar Roland Warren offers several articles that analyze how the concepts of race and institutional racism influenced the decisions of policy makers and individuals residing within urban areas. See Roland Warren, ed., *Politics and the Ghetto* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> The historians that adhered to this argument fall under the label “ghetto synthesis.” Their arguments characterized African Americans as passive actors accepting their fate to the larger societal forces. In essence, African Americans did not decide to live within segregated neighborhoods, but rather whites coerced blacks to reside in specific geographical boundaries. Their arguments often neglected to demonstrate how African Americans came to define these segregated neighborhoods under their own terms. Thus, limiting blacks as actors shaping urban history. Their purpose for this thesis, is primarily to illustrate that racial segregation existed prior to urban renewal and to contextualize the effects of larger societal forces on housing segregation prior to federal involvement. For examples of the “ghetto synthesis” see Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem, The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963);

Kenneth K. Kusmer argued that white response to the massive migration of African Americans to northern cities forced blacks to find refuge from racial discrimination with segregated neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup> In his work, *Harlem, The Making of a Ghetto*, historian Gilbert Osofsky concurred with Kusmer's assessment. He argued that, "racial antagonism of the majority made necessary the creation of segregated communities," ones fraught with "racial inequities."<sup>18</sup> According to Osofsky, African Americans passively accepted the formation of segregated neighborhoods under the terms of the white majority.

Historians have argued that segregated neighborhoods developed in the South under similar racial antagonisms. In their examination of Atlanta, Richmond, and Memphis, historians Christopher Silver and John V. Moser argued African Americans believed racial discrimination made segregated neighborhoods necessary. In contrast to Kusmer and Osofsky, they acknowledged African American participation in the creation of their own communities.<sup>19</sup> Silver and Moser argued that African American civic leaders understood that they remained politically weak as well as limited to minimal, if any, upward social mobility within the greater metropolitan areas due to residential and

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Allen H. Spear, *Black Chicago: the Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976); And Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle Class Reform, Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> See Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 3-31.

<sup>18</sup> Osofsky, *Harlem, The Making of a Ghetto*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Although Silver and Moser acknowledged African American as participants in the creation of segregated neighborhoods, they provided the following caveat to their argument that much of housing segregation's existence and its perpetuation resulted from institutional barriers in the form of neighborhood/ community development policy and later urban renewal programs. See Christopher Silver and John V. Moser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), xi.

economic discrimination. Therefore, black civil leaders facilitated the creation and perpetuation of separate communities in an effort to improve African Americans' quality of life.<sup>20</sup>

Asheville's segregated neighbors appeared constructed under similar terms or at the least, some black residents' remembered the need for segregated communities under such terms.<sup>21</sup> Referred to residents as the "Black Mayor of West Asheville," E.W. Pearson established the Burton Street Community as an African American haven in West Asheville, physically distant and separated from the white residential and business districts of downtown Asheville.<sup>22</sup> Former residents of Burton Street as well as those of Asheville's other black neighborhoods, Southside, Hill Street, Stumptown, East End, and Shiloh, remembered how their segregated communities provided economic security as "every black person who wanted to make a living could make a living."<sup>23</sup> Additionally, former residents remembered that within these neighborhoods "they formed a dynamic social network, and created...good, respectable" communities.<sup>24</sup> Even though segregation offered economic opportunities and community support, poverty and substandard housing appeared prevalent throughout Asheville's black neighborhoods.

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<sup>20</sup> Silver and Moser, *The Separate City*, 125-162.

<sup>21</sup> For the purpose of thesis, the impetus for the origins of Asheville's black segregated neighborhoods is inconsequential. Such segregation existed prior to city officials' implementation of redevelopment plans during the 1920s.

<sup>22</sup> See Asheville Design Center and Western North Carolina Alliance, "Burton Street Community Plan: A Project of Blue Ridge Blueprints," Burton Street Community Association, Summer 2010, accessed November 24, 2014, [wnca.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/burton\\_plan\\_-small.pdf](http://wnca.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/burton_plan_-small.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> See "Life in East End, Asheville, c. 1950-70," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Clara Jeter and Pat McAfee, "Stumptown: A Dramatic Disruption," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 13.

Federal policies and legislation as well as racial discriminatory practices within the real estate industry compounded the societal problems attributed to housing segregation. During the 1930s, the HOLC and the FHA established a federal presence within the housing sector. Designed to assist families and individuals during the Great Depression, their policies systematically reinforced racially segregated neighborhoods while simultaneously contributing to the deterioration of black neighborhoods. The real estate industry supported federal policies through their own practices that warned realtors against negotiating with African American renters as well as potential property buyers and sellers. Realtors and white property owners also relied on racial covenants to insure white neighborhoods remained white. Together, the federal government and the real estate industry condoned and perpetuated earlier patterns of housing segregation. In the process, they expedited the deterioration of black neighborhoods. With urban African American neighborhoods ostracized and neglected during the first half of the twentieth century, black housing units deteriorated within cities rendering them in need of redevelopment. As a result, many cities designated black neighborhoods for urban renewal projects.<sup>25</sup>

Urban renewal became “the chosen weapon” in the “fight against central city decay.”<sup>26</sup> For many cities, urban renewal represented a sound program to aid officials in the removal of blight and the replacement of substandard housing with quality homes.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Kruse, *White Flight*, 58-77; and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219-224.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Clark, “Urban Renewal Changing The City’s Face,” *The Asheville Times*, November 13, 1972.

<sup>27</sup> The term ‘blight’ appeared prevalent in political rhetoric and public policy on local, state, and federal levels throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to describe areas in

Although urban renewal's purpose and objectives seemed clear and benign, city officials and leaders' application of the legislation proved contentious among residents.

Additionally, to residents living within designated project areas, the effects of urban renewal proved contradictory to its stated purpose. The discrepancy that emerged among city officials and residents about urban renewal's function developed due to its dual, and often uneven, need to resolve the problem of substandard housing as well as stimulate the economies of most urban areas.

The assumption of urban renewal's benevolent purpose and objective developed from municipalities' use of paternalistic rhetoric to persuade residents to support urban renewal projects. This was particularly true in Asheville. Paternalism during urban renewal represented what scholar Nicholas Cornell referred to as "expressive content." According to Cornell, "actions...count as paternalist when they express the idea that the actor knows better than the person acted upon regarding something that is normally within the person's sphere of control" and "that the actor is conferring a benefit."<sup>28</sup> In Asheville, city officials addressed residents from a position of authority in regards to the

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need of urban renewal as well as the name given to encompass the various societal ills that inflicted these neighborhoods. For the purpose of this thesis, the term blight and its uses refers to Gorland's definition. He wrote, "blight is a disease manifested by poor housing and living environment, substandard buildings, and a high ratio of social and economic ills." This definition as well as the additional meaning, "blighted areas generally yield low tax revenue in contrast with the cost of public services required for such areas, such as welfare, police and fire protection, public health and sanitation. Blight is contagious," is utilized to contextualize the term when used in political rhetoric or government documents during urban renewal. Although blighted areas in Asheville yielded low tax revenue in comparison to their public service needs, local agencies often failed to sufficiently spend in accordance with resident's needs. Therefore, this part of the definition theoretical accurately defined blighted neighborhoods, but in actuality proved inaccurate for Asheville's East Riverside neighborhood. See Gorland, *Urban Renewal Administration*, 16; and "Inside East Riverside."

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Cornell, "A Third Theory of Paternalism," *Michigan Law Review* 113, Forthcoming, 17.

conditions of residents' housing and often conveyed urban renewal as legislation primarily beneficial to the neighborhoods selected for urban renewal. In similar vein to Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, city officials' language and rhetoric suggested they relied on their own social and cultural definition of a quality community and applied it to African American neighborhoods.<sup>29</sup> Although African Americans perceived their neighborhoods as culturally and economically vibrant and self-sustaining, many government officials believed these areas represented blight and decay.<sup>30</sup> Cornell argued that the existence of such a discrepancy between the governing and governed developed from government's "inherent sense of superiority." However, "reciprocity is restored" between the governing and governed when citizens view government "as a democratic collection of citizens" rather than as an asymmetrical relationship that ultimately hinders one from obtaining their desired quality of life.<sup>31</sup> Asheville's black public housing tenants began the process of dismantling the city's paternal political landscape when they refused to acknowledge the Asheville Housing Authority's (AHA) belief in its superiority over tenants' political autonomy.

The primary impetus for urban renewal remained consistent in many of the nation's cities. The Great Depression caused economic, demographic, and political decline within urban centers. The economic resurgence following War World II, ironically, hindered cities from reverting to their previous prosperous status of the 1920s. This period witnessed the migration of the white middle class and industries to suburban

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<sup>29</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

<sup>30</sup> See "Life in East End, Asheville, c. 1950-70," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Cornell, "A Third Theory of Paternalism," 31.

areas that affected the already precarious economic and physical stability of American cities. This particular migration abetted in the disintegration of the urban-industrial economy that, according to historian John F. Bauman, undermined cities' "tax base and hastened the death of the central city business district."<sup>32</sup> The effects of the economic recession and the prosperity that followed represented key components of urban decline. In his work, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Sugrue painted a dreary picture of the postindustrial urban landscape of Detroit and other cities along America's Rust Belt. He wrote,

"Factories that once provided tens of thousands of jobs now stand as hollow shells, windows broken, mute testimony to a lost industrial past...Detroit's journey from urban heyday to urban crisis has been mirrored in other cities across the nation...The urban crisis is jarringly visible in the shattered storefronts and fire-scarred apartments of Chicago's South and West Sides; the rubble-strewn lots of New York's Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and South Bronx; the surreal vistas of abandoned factories along the waterfronts and railways of Cleveland, Gary, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Saint Louis; the boarded-up and graffiti-covered houses of Camden, Baltimore, and Newark."<sup>33</sup>

Among the variety of economic and social ills urban centers endured, the physical deterioration of city infrastructure and housing appeared most conspicuous as both had perpetuated and expanding during this period. Urban renewal provided a remedy for this decay and blight as well as hope for economic progress.

Although the importance of Asheville's economy shaped city officials' decision-making, Asheville's economy differed from the majority of cities that enacted urban renewal programs. Whereas most northern centers experienced an out-migration of manufacturing industry during the decade following World War II, Asheville's

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<sup>32</sup> John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), xii.

<sup>33</sup> Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 1.

manufacturing industry increased during the same period.<sup>34</sup> In fact, in the mid 1960s, local officials and agencies credited the city's manufacturing industry with salvaging the Asheville's economy and producing economic growth for the first time in thirty years.<sup>35</sup> City officials and business leaders, however, believed a service-based economy and strong tourist industry offered more in the way of Asheville's future economic growth and prosperity. Asheville's decision to transition its manufacturing-based economy toward a service-based economy supported through tourism resulted from a position of want rather than a position of need. From this perspective, Asheville's urban renewal represented a deliberate choice to effect profound changes to the city's black neighborhoods in order to improve its physical appeal as a tourist destination.

Therefore, a study of Asheville's urban renewal program serves to illuminate on the complexities of black activism and the internal conflicts of African Americans in the movement against city officials' implementation of a program designed to facilitate economic growth at the expense of black communities. In order to achieve the study's broader goal of orienting urban renewal within the context of Asheville's local history and the national history of housing segregation, this work is comprised of three chapters

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<sup>34</sup> In his study on Charlotte's urban development during the twentieth century, historian Thomas W. Hanchett recognized a similar trend in Charlotte's manufacturing industry immediately following World War II. However, the majority of its textile mills soon closed as the cotton industry declined in the preceding years and the city transitioned to banking becoming the financial center for the entire Southeast. See Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 224-227.

<sup>35</sup> Asheville-Buncombe Metropolitan Planning Board, "A Population and Economic Analysis of the Asheville of the Asheville Metropolitan Area and the Western North Carolina Region that it Serves," May 1966, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

dedicated to different yet connected aspects of urban renewal. Chapter one demonstrates how the characteristics of Asheville 1920s city revitalization plan and federal policies as well as the real estate industry during the decades preceding urban renewal facilitated in the creation of the political, economic, and social environment during Asheville's urban renewal program. Chapter two specifically examines the development of and political campaign for the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. Chapter three illustrates how black public housing tenants reshaped the power dynamics of Asheville's political landscape and in the process, empowered other African American residents to use their political voice to amend the injustices of urban renewal. All three chapters illustrate the complex history of urban renewal and the legislation's connection to urban race relations and housing segregation.

Asheville's urban renewal extended over two decades directly affecting several African American neighborhoods and the city's economy. The nuances of this program revealed that the decision for urban renewal stemmed from several decades of housing inequality due to racial segregation and the desire to transition the city from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy. The participants ranged from the politically and economically powerful to the politically, economically, and socially marginalized. Asheville's urban renewal witnessed the pendulum of political power sway back and forth between city officials and commercial elites as well as black residents, both homeowners and public housing tenants, within the project areas. The period also illustrated the complexities of racial and class identities and consciousness. Individual's perceptions of urban renewal did not always align with their class interest or their racially defined social group. Nor did individual's perceptions of urban renewal remain static

throughout the program's progress. Additionally, as a federally funded program, urban renewal in Asheville exposed the affects national political and economic policies and trends had on the local level. The complexities presented in Asheville's urban renewal illustrate its place within the broader history of urban race relations and housing segregation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “THIS INNOCENT COUNTRY SET YOU DOWN IN A GHETTO IN WHICH, IN FACT, IT INTENDED THAT YOU PERISHED”: THE ROAD TO URBAN RENEWAL

The 1949 Housing Act enabled the federal government to allocate funds to city governments for the clearance and redevelopment of blighted areas thus ushering in the era of urban renewal. Celebrating the legislation, President Harry Truman declared that the federal government now had the “effective means for aiding cities in the vital task of clearing slums and rebuilding blighted areas.”<sup>1</sup> Five years later, an amendment to the Housing Act made land acquisitions and clearance for urban renewal easier and relatively more efficient for cities. Clearing slums and rebuilding blighted areas, however, did not necessarily translate into a higher quality of living standard for the families and individuals residing in these designated neighborhoods. Urban renewal projects and housing redevelopment efforts faced a myriad of problems, perpetuated racial separation within cities, and relegated African Americans to inferior housing units and areas reproducing many of the problems the legislation sought to remedy.<sup>2</sup> The implementation of government policies and individual actions during the process of urban renewal have,

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<sup>1</sup> Harry S. Truman: "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1949," July 15, 1949. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13246>.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to urban renewal projects, Asheville consisted of highly segregated neighborhoods. In particular, East Riverside consisted of 4,000 individuals, roughly 7 percent of the city's population, of which 98 percent identified as African American, which constituted almost half of Asheville's black population. See Ruth L. Mace, "Inside East Riverside," February 1967, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Inside East Riverside."

directly and indirectly, aided in the displacement and relocation of African Americans, resulting in an escalation of minority populations residing in public housing.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly ten years after Truman's announcement, the city of Asheville established the Asheville Redevelopment Commission (ARC) and directed an ambitious urban renewal program. The city's urban renewal projects helped facilitate and harden the city's housing segregation, then and now, with large proportions of the African American population relegated to public housing communities.<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s, Asheville began implementing city plans for two major projects; the Civic Redevelopment Project and the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. The Civic project sought to revitalize downtown. The East Riverside project introduced redevelopment to a residential section of the city adjacent to its downtown business district. The initiation of these two urban renewal

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<sup>3</sup> Buncombe County, "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study" (2009), 9-33, accessed February 20, 2012, <https://www.buncombecounty.org/common/planning/HMandNA.pdf>. Hereafter cited as "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study."

<sup>4</sup> Asheville is currently a deeply segregated city with minorities, mainly African Americans and Hispanics, relegated to the public housing communities of Asheville Terrace, Woodfin, Lee Walker Heights, Pisgah View, Hillcrest, Bartlett Arms, Deaverview, Klondyke, Livingston and Erskine-Walton, Aston Park Tower, and Altamont. As of 2009, 70 percent of public housing tenants identified as African American while only 44.3 percent of the black population own their homes. According to historian Thomas W. Hanchett this "separation by race and class has not been a constant urban affair...It came as a product of particular concerns at particular times in the past. People created that separation." Asheville current housing segregation, then, did not solely result from urban renewal policies, but developed over the course of its existence. The purpose of this chapter, as well as the thesis, is not to understand how housing segregation formed along racial lines in Asheville, but rather, illustrate how since the 1920s it remained a characteristic of the city via city initiatives, federal policies, and individual action. Urban renewal represented a means to consolidate housing segregation and perpetuated federal trends and patterns that resulted from previous policies and legislations that either directly or indirectly continued separate neighborhoods within the city of Asheville. See "Housing Needs Assessment & Market Study"; Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 8.

projects brought forth an era in Asheville's history marked by racial controversy and economic revitalization. Asheville's urban renewal program left a twin legacy of successful downtown economic growth and the loss of an African American community. However, Asheville's urban renewal projects—the objectives and goals as well as its eventual solidification of the city's housing segregation—rose from the city's earlier effort to revitalize downtown in the 1920s and the federal policies of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. During those decades, federal policies empowered local governments and the real estate industry to manipulate the housing market creating separate communities based on racial homogeneity. Asheville's urban renewal program represented the continuation of two separate, yet interconnected urban trend; first, Asheville's desire to revitalize its downtown to enhance its appeal as a major tourist destination in western North Carolina and second, the federal government's direct and indirect perpetuation of housing segregation along racial lines.

During the prosperous 1920s, city planners developed plans for the downtown's revitalization with tourism as a key focal point to expand its growing tourist economy. Asheville's relationship with and its burgeoning dependence on tourism had originated in the late nineteenth century. In *Creating the Land of the Sky*, historian Richard Starnes argued that tourism as a viable industry for economic growth developed in western North Carolina in the 1880s with the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad.<sup>5</sup> Historian C. Brendan Martin also asserted, "The advent of railroads ushered in a new era"

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<sup>5</sup> See Richard Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 41.

of tourism.<sup>6</sup> The 1890s, with construction of the Biltmore Estate as well as various vacation homes, set the stage for conflict between the manufacturing and tourism sectors of Asheville's economy. This conflict continued throughout the twentieth century. From the Progressive Era until the 1920s, city planners made efforts to establish accommodations and build adequate roads for travelers to enjoy the mountainous landscape of western North Carolina. Their efforts culminated in the construction of Asheville's Grove Park Inn in 1913 and helped with the establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Both projects cemented Asheville as a tourist destination.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the 'New South,' which aided in the erosion of economic differences between southern and northern urban areas. The development of the industrial, twentieth century city then followed similar trajectories and patterns regardless of geographical location albeit at varying times.<sup>8</sup> Historian Matthew Lassiter has argued against the idea of southern

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<sup>6</sup> C. Brendan Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), xix.

<sup>7</sup> See Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 41-45.

<sup>8</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, the term the 'New South' refers to both a particular era and a movement. The 'New South' movement occurred post-Reconstruction until War World II and centered around urban, commercial elites who sought to industrialize the Southern economy through business partnerships with Northern capitalists. As historian George Osborn illustrated, the 'New South' movement's business leaders "expansion and diversification of industry brought the South into the mainstream of American industrialism." See George Osborn, review of *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, by George Brown Tindall, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1968): 357-358. For more information on the development of the 'New South' see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South, Volume IX (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Sheldon Hackney, "Origins of the New South in Retrospect," *Journal of Southern History* 38 (May 1972): 191-216; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, A History of the South, Volume X (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State

exceptionalism, and thus, minimalized the regional differences of racial prejudices making it a national phenomenon. In his work, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Lassiter asserted when one removed the regional labels of the North and South, “The racial and class ideologies of white suburbanites from Atlanta and Charlotte increasingly mirrored their counterparts in metropolitan Detroit or Los Angeles.”<sup>9</sup>

In his historical narrative about Charlotte, *Sorting out the New South City*, historian Thomas W. Hanchett concurred with Lassiter about the similarities in the development of housing segregation in the North and South, but he also offered a note of caution. He contended that, “Southern urbanization by no means merely mirrored what had happened...in the North. The South brought its own heritage to the process.”<sup>10</sup>

Hanchett demonstrated how and why Charlotte’s economy aided in the development of housing segregation within the city during the first half of the twentieth century.

According to Hanchett, Charlotte’s housing segregation developed because of industrialization. He argued that the city’s government had limited influence as an impetus for housing segregation as “the city had no planning department, no traffic engineer, and no zoning laws until well into the 1940s.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Asheville’s development into a major urban center in western North Carolina was an infusion of northern and southern city planning characteristics and identities. Asheville developed

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University Press and The Littlefield Fund for Southern History of the University of Texas, 1967); Blaine Brownell and David Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press Corp., 1977), 5-22; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); And Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Hanchett, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

under the guidance of northern and other southern ‘outsiders’ to create a city depended upon a tourist economy and real estate. Moreover, Asheville’s local government established a planning department in the early 1920s and invested monies and energy into the city’s development. Asheville’s housing development, then, represented trends and patterns that occurred in both the North and the South.

Historian Kevan D. Frazier illustrated in his article, “Outsiders in the Land of the Sky,” during the 1920s city officials and business leaders “transformed Asheville from a sleepy little mountain town into a beautiful southern city.”<sup>12</sup> According to Frazier, this transformation occurred because of an influx of ‘outsiders’ or transplants that came to the area as visitors and decided to remain as permanent residents. Their presence and influence on civic affairs “took control to such a degree that in less than a decade Asheville experienced a dramatic economic and physical transformation.”<sup>13</sup> In 1930 Asheville proudly announced, “progressive city and county governments...have cooperated in the carrying out of Asheville City Plan in its major phases...Pack Square has become a reality as the civic center.”<sup>14</sup> Downtown Asheville now highlighted the Buncombe County Court House and Asheville City Building with an open plaza and park that enticed visitors to the city.

Under the advocacy of George Stephens, the movement toward civic engagement in redevelopment commenced. Stephens, who migrated to Asheville in 1919 after he

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<sup>12</sup> Kevan D. Frazier, “Outsiders in the Land of the Sky: City Planning and the Transformation of Asheville, North Carolina, 1921-1929,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1998), 313.

<sup>13</sup> Frazier, “Outsiders in the Land of the Sky,” 303.

<sup>14</sup> “Beautiful City And County Civic Center: Handsome Municipal Building and County Court House Have Fascinating Park As A Front Garden,” *The Asheville Citizen*, August 17, 1930.

bought a half interest in the *Asheville Citizen*, brought with him fervor for professional city development from his experiences in Charlotte as their secretary of the Parks and Trees Commission. According to Frazier, Stephens “single-handily brought professional planning to Asheville” through his calls for a City Planning Commission that the Asheville Board of Commission acknowledged and created in December of 1921 with Stephens as chair.<sup>15</sup> Along with other outsiders like the Vanderbilts, George W. Pack, and E.W. Grove as well as local leaders J.D. Murphy and Fred Sale, Stephens persuaded Dr. John Nolen, a Boston resident and preeminent city planner, to develop Asheville into an “urban center of the New South.”<sup>16</sup> In his work, *The Urban Ethos*, historian Blaine Brownell illustrated that a group composed of merchants, real estate agents, bankers, attorneys, journalists, and doctors, who he referred to as the commercial-civic elite came to dominate the urbanization of the southern city.<sup>17</sup> Utilizing Brownell’s argument, Frazier demonstrated how these outsiders represented this professional upper-middle class in Asheville and “provided the true leadership” through “their dominance of the economic infrastructure.”<sup>18</sup> Asheville’s civic-commercial elite, under the tutelage of Nolen, realized “both in theory and practice the economic benefits of city planning” thus bringing to the city an “acceptance of government expansion and government control over private property that was previously unknown.”<sup>19</sup>

Nolen outlined an ambitious city plan to revitalize downtown and in turn, establish Asheville as the center for tourism in western North Carolina. In early 1923, the

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<sup>15</sup> Frazier, 305.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>17</sup> Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), xix.

<sup>18</sup> Frazier, 302.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

*Asheville Citizen* published a letter and brief survey of the plans from Nolen outlining the objectives and goals that proclaimed, “Asheville has the location, climate and

environment that should lead to steady growth” and “is ready for a far-reaching development based upon sound planning.”

In the city’s published plans, three characteristics emerged in connection with revitalization that laid the foundation for how Asheville conducted and implemented its urban renewal projects. The first dealt with land acquisition for public space and presented its use as a viable and justified approach to obtain the city’s goals. The second illustrated the economic

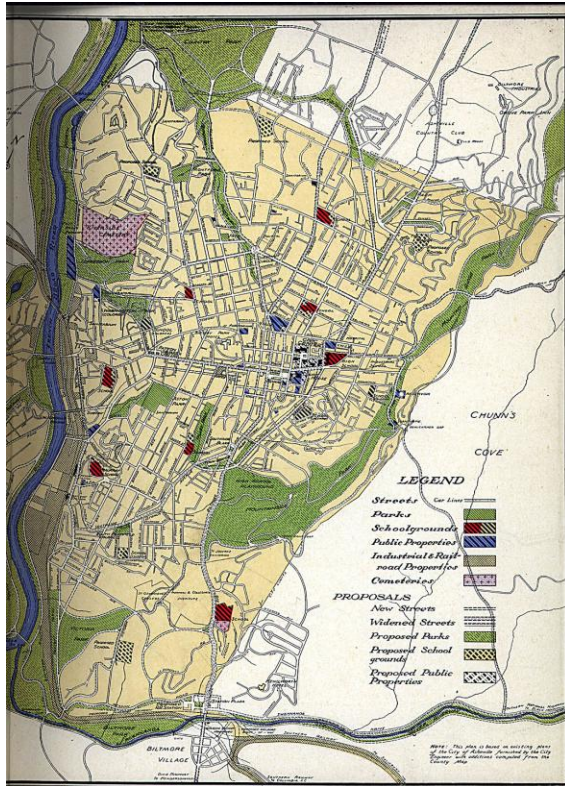


Figure 1. c. 1922. John Nolen’s ‘City Planning Map’ illustrates the physical conditions of Asheville in 1922 as well as his proposals for downtown redevelopment. See John Nolen, “Asheville City Plan, 1922,” D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

possibilities of tourism and the movement to create Asheville as a major tourist destination. The third stressed the

importance for the physical separation of black and white citizens.<sup>20</sup>

These three characteristics, though interconnected, represented separate concepts that shaped Asheville’s revitalization in the 1920s. The first two, land acquisition for public use and tourism, according to Nolen, represented a rather expected

<sup>20</sup> “Desirable Locations For Parks and Playgrounds To Serve The City Suggested: New City Plan Provides For Number of Traffic Squares To Relieve Present Congestion,” *The Asheville Citizen*, March 25, 1923.

interrelationship. Nolen believed that land, public or private, currently not used to its fullest economic potential within downtown Asheville, specifically areas near Pack Square, needed to “be acquired and developed” to benefit the city’s economy. Nolen’s advocacy for land acquisition as a positive government action for redevelopment highlighted that “the economy...to be secured by early acquisition of land for public spaces should not be lost sight of, and it should be remembered that the investment...fully justifies the use of long term bonds.” Under the 1922 city plan, land acquisition needed to occur in the areas adjacent to Pack Square in order to expand the area Nolen viewed as “the center of activity for Asheville,” an area visible to the gaze of the motorist and the traveler.<sup>21</sup>

The ‘motorists’ made their debut in the language of Asheville’s redevelopment plans at this time when Nolen asserted that the city needed to address the development of the automobile and its potential benefit to the city’s economy via tourism.<sup>22</sup> Concurrent with the rise of the automobile was North Carolina’s Good Roads Movement.<sup>23</sup> Asheville entered the movement in 1899 with the establishment of the Good Roads Movement of Asheville and Buncombe County under the leadership of Dr. Chase P. Ambler. Members

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<sup>21</sup> “Desirable Locations For Parks and Playgrounds To Serve The City Suggested: New City Plan Provides For Number of Traffic Squares To Relieve Present Congestion.”

<sup>22</sup> Nolen argued that, “It is becoming more and more evident that the radius of city life is changing, largely through the development of the automobile and good roads....These changes accompanied by intelligent organization are leading those who are interested in the western part of North Carolina to plan for the development of that entire region in such a way as to make it a more and more popular resort for tourists.” See John Nolen, “Asheville City Plan, 1922,” Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Asheville City Plan, 1922.”

<sup>23</sup> The movement began in the late nineteenth century as a political movement to improve roads for bicyclists. With the advent of the automobile, it became a political engine to increase the accessibility for automobiles to travel to more remote areas through new roads and highways. See Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 52-55.

of the association wanted better roads to help increase the amount of tourists to the area. Their argument found support from local business leaders as well as those in the neighboring counties of Haywood and Jackson.<sup>24</sup> Nolen recognized the potential of the automobile and the Good Roads Movement as an impetus “to make Western North Carolina one of the playgrounds of the Nation.” He argued that “the mountains, the climate, and the geographical location of the region produce a combination of conditions that offers unlimited possibilities for development. Because of its central relations to the mountains and other points of interest Asheville can well be the hub of the entire movement.” For Nolen, western North Carolina was primed to become a tourist destination ripe with economic potential, a potential the city of Asheville needed to explore.<sup>25</sup>

The third characteristic Nolen’s letter addressed, the physical separation of blacks and whites, revealed the government’s desire to exclude African Americans from the revitalization process. The “Negro Life in Asheville” received its own section within the new city plans. The section briefly described the city’s black population at 23,504 people, or 1/3 the total population, and the “principal sections of Asheville occupied by negroes..., the Town Branch Valley from College Street to the Southern Railroad; Buttrick Street and Possum Hollow, and blocks scatter along Broadway.”<sup>26</sup> This physical separation of blacks and whites, Nolen perceived as a “distinct advantage to the negroes...provided the areas in which they live are suitable in location and character and

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<sup>24</sup> Starnes, 54.

<sup>25</sup> “Desirable Locations For Parks and Playgrounds To Serve The City Suggested: New City Plan Provides For Number of Traffic Squares To Relieve Present Congestion.”

<sup>26</sup> “Asheville City Plan, 1922.”

provided furthermore that those areas are developed with due regard to good homes, schools, stores, and adequate facilities for recreation.”<sup>27</sup>

Unlike the revitalization of downtown that served to benefit local merchants and white residents, Nolen believed the government could not actively resolve the problems that prohibited African American neighborhoods from obtaining a ‘suitable’ character. He argued instead that, “action with regard to the neighborhood stores and home is dependent upon private initiative and we recommend that the Chamber of Commerce in consultation with representatives of the colored race endeavor to work out this problem in the best solution possible.”<sup>28</sup> The city of Asheville thus began a series of government actions that regulated African American social and economic problems to the confines of the private sector limiting the political power of the city’s black population. This established a precedent that inhibited the group’s political ability to seek redress for their grievances from the local government.<sup>29</sup>

Although Nolen did not expound on why physical separation proved advantageous to Asheville’s black residents, historian Gilbert Osofsky in his work, *Harlem, Making of a Ghetto*, argued that separation was a necessity for African Americans during the 1920s. According to Osofsky, “the racial antagonism of the majority made necessary the creation of segregated communities” one fraught with

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<sup>27</sup> Although Nolen’s claim that racial separation was “advantageous” to African Americans represented an illogical defense for racial segregation, a few of Asheville’s black communities did thrive during this period. According to historian Harlen Joel Gradin, East End “had been a vibrant black community since the 1880s” and “flourished through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” See Harlen Joel Gradin, “About ‘Twilight of a Neighborhood: Asheville’s East End, 1970’” *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 4.

<sup>28</sup> “Desirable Locations For Parks and Playgrounds To Serve The City Suggested: New City Plan Provides For Number of Traffic Squares To Relieve Present Congestion.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

“racial inequities.”<sup>30</sup> Fellow historians Allen H. Spear and Kenneth L. Kusmer concurred with Osofsky’s assessment in their respective works. Their arguments for the development of housing during the early twentieth century relied on white prejudices and black self-protection as the impetus for urban segregation.<sup>31</sup> Although their histories delved into the racial segregation that developed in the North during the early twentieth century, their understanding of how segregation occurred provides a foundation to understand the residential segregation in Asheville during the 1920s.

Under the leadership of the commercial-civic elite, the redevelopment that occurred in the 1920s operated through the finances of long-term bonds and city tax revenue. Nolen’s redevelopment and the Chamber of Commerce’s five-year “Program for Progress,” a program that developed alongside that of the City Planning Commission, and utilized 94 objectives derived from Nolen’s plan, initiated a phase of professional city planning. However, Asheville’s revitalization abruptly ended with the stock market crash in 1929, leaving both the city and the nation bankrupt. The interruption of the Great Depression and the Second World War prevented the city from completing its intended objectives.<sup>32</sup> As result, Asheville’s economy and city development remained stagnant

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<sup>30</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, Harlem, *The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 67.

<sup>31</sup> See Allen H. Spear, *Black Chicago: the Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); and Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976).

<sup>32</sup> Although the Great Depression financially bankrupted the city government rendering it unable to continue its redevelopment projects, Asheville managed to complete more than half of its objectives. These included, but not limited to, the construction of a city market, municipal garage, incinerator, high school, a reservoir and aqueduct, recreational park with swimming pool, baseball park, football stadium, municipal golf course, and a new civic center that included a city and county government complex. See Frazier, 308.

from 1930-1960.<sup>33</sup> However, during this period the federal government initiated a series of programs and enacted legislation that affected Asheville's housing and residential segregation.

Political efforts to relieve cities, and to a certain extent families, from the 'cancer' of substandard housing began in 1930s as by-products of the New Deal.<sup>34</sup> The federal government began the effort to resolve the nation's housing problem with the passage of the Homeowners Refinancing Act of 1933 that established the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC). HOLC allowed homeowners whose home mortgages were currently in default to refinance their mortgages to prevent foreclosures. The following year the federal government passed the National Housing Act of 1934 that created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation. The Act enabled the federal government, through these two agencies, to distribute and regulate the rates of interest and terms of mortgages to prospective or current homeowners.

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<sup>33</sup> See Bill Moore, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, 20 February 1993, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina; and Asheville-Buncombe County Metropolitan Planning Board, "A Population and Economic Analysis of the Asheville of the Asheville Metropolitan Area and the Western North Carolina Region that it Serves," May 1966, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>34</sup> The description of a substandard housing as a 'cancer' is in reference to James W. Greer, Executive Director of Asheville's Redevelopment Commission. In 1966 at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting, Greer compared substandard housing to cancer stating, "I can think of no better illustration for the effects of urban blight than the well-used comparison with cancer. Deterioration of housing in a neighborhood is to health of the whole community what cancer cells are to the health of a person." See "The Community Improver, June 1966 Vol. IV," Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

Four years later, the federal government amended the National Housing Act with the Housing Act of 1937. The 1937 Act created the United States Housing Authority (USHA) within the Department of Interior replacing the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration.<sup>35</sup> The USHA provided Local Public Housing Agencies (LPHAs) with low-interest, long-term loans for slum clearance and the construction of low-income housing units in order to improve the living conditions of poverty-stricken households. The USHA developed a statement of intention outlining its main objectives, “to provide financial assistance...for the elimination of unsafe and insanitary housing conditions, for the eradication of slums, for the provision of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low income, and for the reduction of unemployment and the stimulation of business activity.”<sup>36</sup> Under this pretense, the USHA delegated the clearance of slums and the construction of low-income housing to LPHAs to meet the needs of each of their respective neighborhoods through an individualized and unique public plan rather than a uniform, general policy. The USHA “assisted LPHAs by providing loans that covered up to 90 percent of the costs of constructing the public housing projects.”<sup>37</sup>

These initial Housing Acts and the federal agencies they established ultimately perpetuated what civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson referred to as a “city within

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<sup>35</sup> Within this four-year period the Public Works Administration helped facilitate the use of public housing as a viable government policy for resolving the nation’s housing problem through the construction of 21,640 public housing units in 36 separate metropolitan areas between the years of 1933 and 1937. See Katherine Shester, “The Local Economics Effects of Public Housing in the United States, 1940- 1970,” *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 4 (December 2013), 982.

<sup>36</sup> Shester, “The Local Economics Effects of Public Housing in the United States, 1940- 1970,” 982.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

a city,” or simply the separation of blacks and whites via neighborhoods.<sup>38</sup> Historians Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser identified the product of these agencies’ work as a “self-contained, racially-identifiable community separated from the larger white city,” in essence, a ‘separate city.’<sup>39</sup> Historian Kenneth T. Jackson and scholar John Kimble argued that federal agencies’ policies, specifically the FHA’s, intended to separate African Americans and whites as well as contain African Americans within public housing complexes of urban centers’ older residential areas. Jackson argued that, “the result, if not the intent, of public housing program of the United States was to segregate the races, to concentrate the disadvantaged in inner cities, and to reinforce the image of suburbia as a place of refuge for the problems of race, crime, and poverty.”<sup>40</sup> Kimble demonstrated “that the FHA went far beyond merely acquiescing to racial discrimination, and that in fact explicitly intended to isolate black urban neighborhoods.”<sup>41</sup>

In theory, the HOLC and FHA offered federal assistance for individuals and families to afford and/ or improve the standard of their housing. In practice, both federal agencies did improve the standard of housing; however, beneficiaries of these programs were almost exclusively white. As for African Americans, their housing situation improved minimally under the guidance of the HOLC and FHA. In some urban neighborhoods, African Americans’ housing situation regressed because of the policies of

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940- 1968* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Silver and Moeser, x.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219.

<sup>41</sup> John Kimble, “Insuring Inequality: The Role of the Federal Housing Administration in the Urban Ghettoization of African Americans,” *Law & Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 400.

the agencies.<sup>42</sup> Historian Carmen Teresa Whalen argued that the FHA “relied on the 1930s guidelines for the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, which appraised housing in racial and ethnic terms and had restrictions against African Americans in white areas” and in doing so, limited mortgages for new housing.<sup>43</sup> A process referred to as ‘redlining,’ this limitation to new housing, according to Whalen, created a “housing boom in the suburbs” for white individuals and families.<sup>44</sup> In his examination of post-war Philadelphia, Historian David McAllister illustrated that the FHA “expanded and rationalized the process of redlining” noting that “the areas receiving the most FHA-secured loans were those with racial restrictive covenants in place.”<sup>45</sup> The FHA’s policies and continued practice of redlining led “sociologist Charles Abrams to conclude in 1955 that the ‘FHA has set itself up as the protector of the all-white neighborhood.’”<sup>46</sup> During its initial years the HOLC and FHA perpetuated housing segregation through its policies.

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<sup>42</sup> In his study on Philadelphia, historian John F. Bauman argued that “not only did the FHA draft blatantly discriminatory racial guidelines for property appraisals (preferring to insure housing in racially homogenous neighborhoods opposed to areas of mixed occupancy), but between 1937 and 1939 the FHA, along with its sister agency, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), took steps to foreclose investment in all central-city neighborhoods where blacks lived.” See John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 95.

<sup>43</sup> Carmen Teresa Whalen, “Citizens and Workers: African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia’s Regional Economy since World War II,” in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, eds. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 109.

<sup>44</sup> Whalen, “Citizens and Workers,” 109.

<sup>45</sup> David McAllister, “Realtors and Racism in Working-Class Philadelphia, 1945-1970,” in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, eds. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 126-127.

<sup>46</sup> McAllister, “Realtors and Racism in Working-Class Philadelphia,” 127.

Moreover, their policies and their implementation, particularly ‘redlining,’ aided in the physical deterioration of many African American neighborhoods.<sup>47</sup>

Within this racialized environment the federal government helped facilitate during the 1930s and sustain in subsequent decades, operated two other factors, racial covenants and a discriminatory real estate industry. Together, federal policies, racial covenants, and the real estate industry perpetuated housing segregation and the deterioration of African American communities throughout the nation’s cities, including Asheville. White property owners and their white tenants as well as the real estate industry operating under the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB), FHA, and HOLC policies all appeared as complicit participants in the practice of racially restrictive covenants throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In their 1973 publication, “Understanding Fair Housing,” the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (CCR) argued that the current housing segregation resulted from “past discriminatory practices in which the private housing industry and Federal, State, and local governments have been active participants.”<sup>48</sup> The CCR concurred with the Commission on Race and Housing’s

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<sup>47</sup> In 1939 Homer Hoyt, who according to scholar John Kimble represented FHA’s principle economist, outlined FHA’s primary principles in a comprehensive study entitled “The Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities.” Kimble argued Hoyt’s report stressed the importance of racial segregation via the claim, “in a country settled largely by the white race, such members of other races, of course, have not been absorbed. Intermarriage between members of different races exists but is frowned upon by almost all peoples of any color.” According to Kimble, “with this official proclamation, the FHA constructed ‘blackness’ into a unique financial class, erecting race as an insurmountable barrier for African Americans on the road to integration into the financial mainstream.” Moreover, the FHA’s *Underwriting Manual*, published a year earlier in 1938, “instructed financial institutions not to lend to households in integrated or predominately African American areas.” See Kimble, “Insuring Inequality,” 299-434.

<sup>48</sup> US Commission on Civil Rights, “Understanding Fair Housing,” February 1973, accessed October 5, 2014,

assessment declaring, “it is the real estate brokers, builders, and the mortgage finance

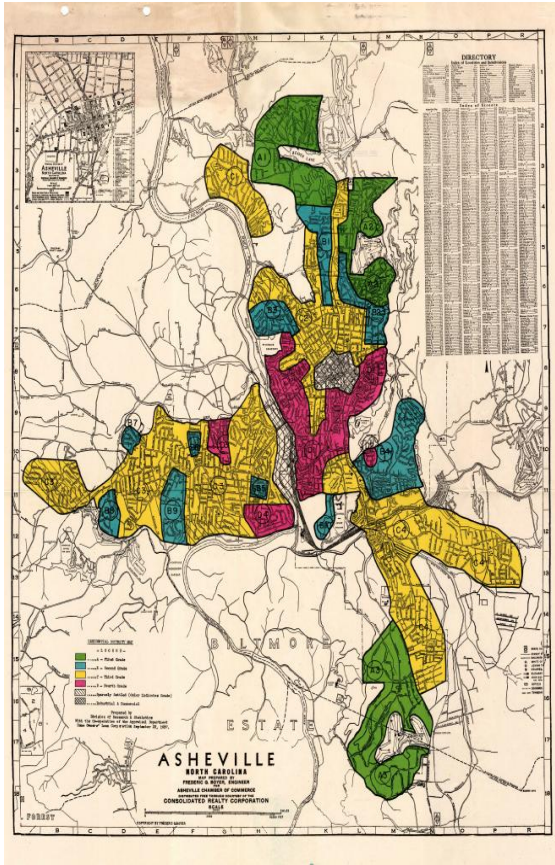


Figure 2. c. 1937. The following map is a HOLC and FHA residential security map of Asheville. The black neighborhoods of Southside, East End, Hill Street, Stumptown, and Burton Street Community were located within the ‘red’ sections of the map. Richard Marciano, “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” accessed August 18, 2014, [bighumanities.net/national-redlining-collection/mapping\\_inequality\\_in\\_new\\_deal\\_america/](http://bighumanities.net/national-redlining-collection/mapping_inequality_in_new_deal_america/).

institutions which translate prejudice into discriminatory practice.”<sup>49</sup> Conspicuously missing from their accusations for the nation’s housing situation were individual property owners. According to the report, the real estate industry and local, state, and federal governments were responsible for the housing situation that existed.<sup>50</sup>

Although removed from the CCR’s accusations, white property owners via the use of racial covenants actively participated in the development and perpetuation of housing segregation.

A typical covenant read in part,

“hereafter no part of said property or any portion thereof shall be...occupied by

any person not of the Caucasian race, it being intended hereby to restrict the use of said property...against the occupancy as owners or tenants of any portion of said property for resident or other purpose by people of the Negro of Mongolian race.”<sup>51</sup> White property

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<http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11042.pdf>. Hereafter cited as “Understanding Fair Housing.”

<sup>49</sup> “Understanding Fair Housing.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

owners responded to the massive influx of African Americans to urban sectors during the early twentieth century with the practice of racial covenants that prohibited the purchase, lease, and occupation of property by African Americans.<sup>52</sup> The consolidation of urban African American neighborhoods and the growth of a white suburbia brought forth because of FHA's policies created and reinforced irrational fears and misconceptions between whites and blacks.<sup>53</sup> Racial covenants served as a white property owner's insurance protecting them against the inclusion of African Americans into their neighborhoods. Developing prior to federal involvement in housing, racial covenants perpetuated the housing segregation between blacks and whites that took hold in many cities in the early twentieth century. The establishment of federal agencies and their subsequent policies, particularly 'redlining,' justified the use of racial covenants by white property owners and the real estate industry.

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<sup>52</sup> Racially restrictive covenants were often "a written agreement in which the buyer of a house promised not to sell, rent or transfer his property to families of a specific race, ethnic group, or religion." See "Understanding Fair Housing."

<sup>53</sup> Racial misconceptions between whites and blacks continues to persist in American society. Journalist Alex Kotlowitz's brilliantly illustrated this misconception in his work on Pharoah and Lafayette Rivers, two young boys growing up in Chicago's public housing complex Henry Horner Homes. Closing out his first chapter, Kotlowitz wrote, "The youngsters had heard that the suburb-bound commuters, from behind the tinted train windows, would shoot at them for trespassing on the tracks. One of the boys, certain that the commuters were crack shots, burst into tears as the train whisked by. Some of the commuters had heard similar rumors about the neighborhood children and worried that, like the cardboard lions in carnival shooting gallery, they might be the target of talented snipers. Indeed, some sat away from the windows as the train passed through Chicago's blighted core. For both the boys and the commuters, the unknown was the enemy." His words emphasize an idea that historians Osofsky, Spear, and Kusmer all touched upon; the firm belief in racial stereotypes specifically about groups one has limited contact with albeit the brief moments that lend credibility to these continued untruths. See Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 7.

Racial restrictive covenants proliferated due to their protective legal status via the ruling of *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926) that limited the legal and political reach of *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917). In the *Buchanan v. Warley* case, the Supreme Court “invalidated a Louisville ordinance that mandated housing segregation holding that ‘a colored person has the right to acquire property without state legislation discriminating against him solely because of color.’”<sup>54</sup> Under this ruling, local governments lacked the political and legal authority to enforce and maintain housing segregation, but did not prohibit private individuals from perpetuating the current housing status quo. *Corrigan v. Buckley* ensured private individuals rights’ to utilize racial covenants to maintain racially pure neighborhoods stating that “litigation to outlaw restrictive covenants that banned the sale or rental of property to racial and ethnic minorities as ‘entirely lacking in substance,’ since nothing in the Constitution ‘prohibited private individuals from entering in contracts respecting the control and disposition of their own property.’”<sup>55</sup> Lassiter has argued that the FHA, along with judicial protection of housing segregation, “under the guise of private property rights” empowered property owners to perpetuate housing

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<sup>54</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, “De Jure/ De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth,” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28. Civil Rights activist and lawyer Derrick Bell illustrated the problem with legal provisions for the protection of blacks’ civil rights through his fictional heroine Geneva. Geneva argued for a particular tax that allows for whites to discriminate against blacks within the economic sector plainly says to Bell, “...in your writing you acknowledged, albeit, reluctantly, that whatever the civil rights law of constitutional provision, blacks gain little protection against one or another form of racial discrimination unless granting a measure of relief will serve some interest of importance to whites.” Bell, via Geneva, argued that civil right laws and mandates may have created legally moral standards for Americans, but that does not mean these laws created morally sound citizens. See Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992), 53.

<sup>55</sup> Lassiter, “De Jure/ De Facto Segregation,” 28.

segregation.<sup>56</sup> According to Lassiter, FHA believed that a neighborhood's stability depended upon the continuation of properties occupied by families and individuals of the same racial and social classes.<sup>57</sup> Federal policies provided the economic justification while Supreme Court rulings provided the legal argument for the white homeowners to protect the racial 'purity' of their neighborhoods.

The real estate industry headed by the National Association Real Estate Board (NAREB) utilized racial covenants and operated under the guidance of federal policies during this period to condone and support racially segregated neighborhoods. The CCR accused NAREB of operating under the notion that the housing market consisted of two markets, one white and one black. Moreover, the CCR asserted that NAREB's "white market was cultivated and the black market ignored."<sup>58</sup> The CCR utilized various texts and textbooks from NAREB including one published in 1922 entitled "Principles of Real Estate Practice" that illustrated the explicit efforts the organization exercised to teach their "nearly all-white" members against promotion of integrated neighborhoods through the sell or renting of property to African Americans.<sup>59</sup> This particular work and another NAREB text published the following year "stated that black families were a threat to property values."<sup>60</sup> A 1943 NAREB brochure outlined the 'detrimental' effects of black occupancy on property values in an all- white neighborhood warning its realtors

"the prospective buyer might be a bootlegger who would cause considerable annoyance to his neighbors, a madame who had a number of Call Girls on her string, a gangster who wants a screen for his activities by living in a better neighborhood, a colored man of means who was giving his children a college

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<sup>56</sup> Lassiter, "De Jure/ De Facto Segregation," 28.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>58</sup> Lassiter, "De Jure/ De Facto Segregation," 8.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

education and thought they were entitled to live among whites...No matter what the motive or character of the would-be purchaser, if the deal would institute a form of blight, then certainly the well-meaning broker must work against its consummation.”<sup>61</sup>

Even into the 1950s, NAREB’s code of ethics identified racial integration as a problem realtors had to avoid and not facilitate or promote through their actions. Their code of ethics stated in part that, “the realtor should not be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood.” The CCR did find that NAREB, at the time of their report’s publication, supported the Federal Fair Housing Law through its practices.<sup>62</sup> However, their past policies inevitably facilitated two separate cities; one white and one black—separate and unequal.<sup>63</sup>

The NAREB’s primary concern for a white housing market and its discriminatory practices toward African Americans extended to even the exclusion of black ‘realists’ as members. The term ‘realist’ referred to a realtor who was not a member of NAREB. The association “prohibited the use of its copy-righted title ‘realtor’” to non-members or those

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<sup>61</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 61.

<sup>62</sup> This is in reference to the Fair Housing Act of 1968 that “forbade discrimination against minorities by real estate broker, property owners, and landlords.” See Thomas J. Sugrue, “Expert Report of Thomas J. Sugrue: Section VIII, Separate Worlds: Residential Segregation and Racial Isolation,” accessed March 7, 2014, [www.vpcomm.umich.edu/admissions/legal/expert/sugru8.html](http://www.vpcomm.umich.edu/admissions/legal/expert/sugru8.html).

<sup>63</sup> In reference to the Kerner Report, which concluded, “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” See *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: The New York Times Company, 1968), 1.

denied membership, mostly black individuals.<sup>64</sup> The distinction between the two terms made it easier for homeowner's protective associations to identify the color of the realtor and thus, the color of skin of the potential buyers or renters of a property in their neighborhood. Historian Kevin M. Kruse contends that such "occupational semantics spoke volumes about the segregated nature of the real-estate market."<sup>65</sup> Protective associations developed throughout the nation as many whites began to fear that integration meant the decrease in value of their own property.<sup>66</sup> Historian Thomas J. Sugrue argued such associations "paternalistically defended neighborhood, home, family, women, and children against the forces of social disorder" of racial integration.<sup>67</sup> Much of this white fear and insecurity developed because of NAREB literature and propaganda. Kruse asserted that NAREB's literature along with the rise of protective associations "signaled the legitimization of white resistance to residential transition."<sup>68</sup>

The practice and implementation of HOLC, FHA, and NAREB's policies created an environment that condoned housing segregation and facilitated the physical deterioration of African American neighborhoods that witnessed almost 6,000 African Americans "living in unfit shanties."<sup>69</sup> As a result, the Asheville City Council sought to resolve the city's housing situation and on June 12, 1940 established the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA). In February of that year, in response to President Franklin

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<sup>64</sup> Kruse, *White Flight*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> For information on white property-owner's fears about the devaluing of their property due to housing integration, see Kruse, 58-77.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 220.

<sup>68</sup> Kruse, 65.

<sup>69</sup> James M. Rogers, "Negro Housing: At Least 6,000 Are Living in Unfit Shanties," *The Asheville Times*.

Delano Roosevelt's Depression Recovery program that included the Federal Housing Act, Asheville began a detailed survey and analysis of the conditions of its own housing situation. The *Asheville Citizen* published an article that illustrated the degree to which many homes fell under the definition of 'substandard.'<sup>70</sup> According to the article, 41% of all homes located within in the city constituted substandard compared to the national average of 33%. The City Planning Board found that "832 homes were without running water; 1,459 homes had neither gas nor electricity; 3,531 homes had no baths; and 1,691 homes had no flush toilets."<sup>71</sup> Following these reports and at the pressure of the Asheville's citizens, the City Council called a public hearing on May 3, 1940 to discuss solutions to resolve this issue. The public hearing in the spring of 1940 established the precedent that redevelopment projects of residential neighborhoods would be a controversial issue in the city of Asheville. One that would become more complex and divisive with the added racial dynamic of relocating displaced African American residents.<sup>72</sup>

At the time of the hearing, the debate on housing redevelopment dealt with the government's role in resolving Asheville's substandard housing. Major H.P. MacDonald, A.R. Gephart, and Arthur T. Rust made statements in favor of city involvement, as many of Asheville's neighborhoods could no longer wait for private capital to restore many of

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<sup>70</sup> According to AHA's article, "Keeping the Promise," published in 1990, stated that 'substandard' at that time, "designated homes as having physical and overcrowding conditions that made them dangerous to the health of occupants." See, "Keeping the Promise: 50 years of the Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, 1940-1990," Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Keeping the Promise."

<sup>71</sup> "Keeping the Promise."

<sup>72</sup> Gradin, "About 'Twilight of a Neighborhood,'" 4.

their homes. MacDonald utilized his experiences traveling the nation to argue, “he had been in many cities, but had never seen before the abject poverty he found in the West End Section of Asheville.”<sup>73</sup> Appealing to the emotions of his fellow citizens and the City Council, Gephart argued, “this community has no more right to take the life of a citizen by bad housing than by adulterated food or by killing him some other way.”<sup>74</sup> Rust praised the FDR’s willingness to take federal action against decaying homes and neighborhoods. For Rust, “the greatest thing Roosevelt has ever done...has been to make America slum-conscious.”<sup>75</sup> Gephart as Executive Secretary of the Community Chest and Rust, the speaking representative of the building trades union, presented only one side of Asheville’s business leaders. Theodore B. Sumner and J.G. Stikeleather, members of the Asheville Board of Realtors, disagreed with MacDonald, Gephart, and Rust. For Sumner and Stikeleather, government involvement meant over-spending to resolve a problem that the private market would eventually fix on its own.<sup>76</sup>

An issue not raised during this meeting in response to Sumner and Stikeleather’s arguments or to MacDonald and Gephart was that the fact that racial discrimination within the housing market expanded because of New Deal programs. They failed to acknowledge the effects HOLC and FHA had on African Americans and the fact that NAREB policies prohibited realtors from actively integrating neighborhoods. The policy of ‘redlining’ and the practice of racial covenant fostered the physical decay of African American neighborhoods through the refusal to mortgage and refinance African

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<sup>73</sup> “Keeping the Promise.”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

American homes as well as artificially decreasing the value of their property.<sup>77</sup> The public debates that occurred during Asheville's urban renewal added this element of racial dialogue moving discourse away from the conflict of public versus private and toward one of racial discrimination.<sup>78</sup>

Persuaded by the public debate, Mayor Moore Bryson established AHA and appointed its first members comprised of A.T. Rust, Wayne Bramlett, Arthur E. Dunn, W.J. Damtoff and R.L. Ellis. Asheville's first Housing Authority, however, proved short-

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<sup>77</sup> Professor Richard Marciano's research on the 1930s HOLC and FHA residential security maps illustrated that the areas deemed blighted in Asheville during urban renewal were the same neighborhoods HOLC and FHA classified as 'D' or high-risk for mortgage approval. Journalist Antero Pietila in his work, *Not in My Neighborhood*, argued that HOLC's redlining policy created "a two-tier lending industry...Banks served well-to-do white areas; blacks had to get financing from speculators." According to Pietila, this type of economic discrimination perpetuated housing segregation as well as led to the degradation of African American neighborhoods in the city of Baltimore. See Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 70; And Professor Richard Marciano, "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America," accessed August 18, 2014, [bighumanities.net/national-redlining-collection/mapping\\_inequality\\_in\\_new\\_deal\\_america/](http://bighumanities.net/national-redlining-collection/mapping_inequality_in_new_deal_america/);

<sup>78</sup> At the Asheville Redevelopment Commission's (ARC) public hearing on the East Riverside Renewal Project, racial discrimination became an open topic of conversation albeit a relatively one-sided conversation. Specifically, resident Otis B. Michael, whom later served as a member of the Redevelopment Commission, spoke in defense of urban renewal stating that he was in "complete accord with the program which you have here. I think it is a good program." Michael, as an African American homeowner, however, also understood the flaws in urban renewal's displacement programs as well as the majority of City Council and Asheville's white population's failure to grasp why East Riverside area developed as it did and why it housed a segregated community of almost half the city's African American population. He followed his praise for urban renewal with, "However, there are many of us who would like to have better homes, not low-rent homes; would like the privilege of relocating as we are sort of boxed in and the value of the real property begins to decrease because of this and I would like to make a part of the record that a formal request to the real estate agents that some of us have talked to that said they do not buy or sell colored property be asked to reconsider." See Asheville Redevelopment Commission, "Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project Given by the Asheville Redevelopment Commission," May 1966, Asheville Urban Renewal Files, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

lived. The city deactivated the AHA on May 21, 1942 due to the United States official entry into World War II. During this two-year period, the AHA attempted to obtain property and construct a “low-rent public housing for white families.”<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the AHA tried entering into a “cooperation agreement” with the city “guaranteeing the provisions of city services for future housing projects.”<sup>80</sup> Although the housing project failed to move beyond the initial planning phases due to the agency’s deactivation, the first AHA established two precedents that continued throughout the city’s urban renewal projects. The first acknowledged AHA’s ability to construct government-funded housing based on racial exclusion. The practice of racial discrimination and segregation within public housing became a dominant theme during urban renewal. Public housing projects represented the de facto destination for many displaced African American families. The second, created the ‘Payment in Lieu of Taxes’ that provided “a yearly payment from the Housing Authority for City services as the Authority pays no property taxes.”<sup>81</sup>

The conclusion of World War II brought forth a federal activist state willing to resurrect New Deal policies concerning redeveloping blighted neighborhoods and rehabilitating substandard housing. In 1949, the U.S. Congress passed the Wagner-Ellender-Taft legislation. According to historian John F. Bauman, “the Housing Act of 1949 for the first time established a national goal of ‘a decent environment for every American.’”<sup>82</sup> Title I of the new legislation offered federal loans to local governments

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<sup>79</sup> “Housing Body Acts To Condemn Land: Brings Court Action To Acquire Title To Project Site,” *Asheville Citizen*, October 3, 1940.

<sup>80</sup> “Keeping the Promise.”

<sup>81</sup> See “Housing Body Acts To Condemn Land: Brings Court Action To Acquire Title To Project Site,” *The Asheville Citizen*, October 3, 1940; And “Keeping the Promise.”

<sup>82</sup> Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*, 94.

“for the purchase of slum land” and allowed for grants “to assist cities to write-down the purchasing, clearing, and preparing of land for private development.”<sup>83</sup> The 1949 Act placed an emphasis on new construction of public housing as “the law required cities to rehouse all families displaced by redevelopment activities in decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings.”<sup>84</sup> To accommodate this requirement, Title II of the legislation authorized the construction of 810,000 new units of public housing. Together Title I and II of the 1949 Act “revivified a dormant public housing program and created a federal-urban partnership in city rebuilding.”<sup>85</sup>

With the federal government’s passing of the Housing Act of 1949, Asheville’s City Council reactivated the AHA and renewed its interest in resolving the city’s housing situation. The AHA with the support of federal funds began the construction of low-rent public housing units. Under its first Executive Director, Henry A. Johnson, the AHA opened the city’s first public housing project, Lee Walker Heights, on May 25, 1950. The following year on February 29, 1952, Asheville’s second public housing project, Pisgah View Apartments, began accepting residents. The last of the initial first wave of public housing projects, Hillcrest Apartments, opened to residents in December of 1958.<sup>86</sup> The initial demographics of the three housing projects suggested the AHA promoted segregated communities, Pisgah View was occupied by a majority of white households, and Lee Walker and Hillcrest were inhabited by a majority of black households. Although segregated, according to a W. Neal Hanks and Associates survey conducted in

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<sup>83</sup> Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*, 94.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-95.

<sup>86</sup> “Keeping the Promise.”

1972, the AHA had met the needs of their residents for adequate, low-rent housing.<sup>87</sup>

However, in 1954, Congress revised the 1949 Act.

The state of North Carolina and the federal government passed legislation during the 1950s that empowered cities to undertake renewal projects in both residential and nonresidential areas and placed less emphasis on the need for projects to enhance housing standards. In 1951, the state of North Carolina passed the North Carolina Urban Redevelopment Law. The law enabled cities of North Carolina to expand their renewal projects “by authorizing redevelopment commissions to undertake nonresidential redevelopment in accord with sound and approved plans...where...there is clear and present danger that area will become blighted.”<sup>88</sup> Three years later the federal government passed the Housing Act of 1954. This legislation amended the previous 1949 Act. According to political scientist Richard M. Flanagan, the 1954 Act replaced the 1949 Act’s emphasis on the construction of “public housing with commercially oriented urban renewal,” weakening the requirement that areas targeted for urban renewal had to be used primarily for residential purposes.<sup>89</sup> North Carolina’s Urban Redevelopment Law minimized the priority of public housing. The effects of these laws abetted in the physical deterioration these neighborhoods and facilitated the creation of Asheville’s “second

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<sup>87</sup> W. Neal Hanks and Associates, “A Review and Evaluation of Selected Administrative Organization Procedures and Identification of Social Service Capabilities in Asheville and Buncombe County,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “A Review and Evaluation.”

<sup>88</sup> Article 22, Urban Redevelopment Law, Section 106A-501, 1951, accessed October 3, 2014, [http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/ByArticle/Chapter\\_160A/Article\\_22.html](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/ByArticle/Chapter_160A/Article_22.html).

<sup>89</sup> Richard M. Flanagan, “The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy,” *Urban Affairs Review* 33, no. 2 (November 1997), 265-286.

ghetto.”<sup>90</sup> Both laws contributed to the establishment of the ARC in 1958. Under the ARC, Asheville began planning for urban renewal resulting in two separate projects in the 1960s; the Civic Development Project and the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. Together the NC Urban Redevelopment Law and the 1954 Act empowered the municipal government to redevelop nonresidential and residential areas of Asheville.

With the establishment of the ARC, Asheville shifted priorities away from rehabilitating residential neighborhoods and to redeveloping its downtown business district.<sup>91</sup> The city’s initial effort began with assessing the central business property values of the area “bounded by the crosstown expressway, Market Street, Hilliard Avenue and French Broad Avenue” as well as the sentiments of business owners toward a downtown redevelopment project. In September of 1960, city engineer, Robert A. Herroff presented a report to the Central Association Committee of the Greater Asheville Council illustrating that “downtown business men showed the majority ‘very sympathetic toward the improvement of this area.’”<sup>92</sup> A few weeks later, the ARC’s first Executive Director William I. Cochran mailed Bruce E. Wedge, Regional Director of Urban

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<sup>90</sup> This is in reference to historian Arnold Hirsch. In his case study on Chicago from 1940-1960, Hirsch argued that, “redevelopment and renewal legislation, on both local and national levels, and a massive public housing program, explicitly designed to maintain the prevailing pattern of segregation” led to the second ghetto, “an entity now distinguished by government support and sanction.” This process developed in Asheville as well with the construction of public housing project and the policy of relocation during urban renewal that witnessed many African American families coerced into public housing units. See Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1949-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), xi-xiv.

<sup>91</sup> Limited during the early 1960s because the city redirected funds toward the ARC’s downtown projects, the AHA worked closely with the ARC on its endeavors. The two agencies eventually merged under the directorship of Ray Wheeling in 1971. See “Keeping the Promise.”

<sup>92</sup> Philip Clark, “Downtown Improvement Plans Move Step Nearer,” *The Asheville Citizen*, September 9, 1960.

Renewal Housing and Home Finance Agency, an Amendatory Survey and Planning Application for the Civic Redevelopment Project.<sup>93</sup> In 1961 with property values assessed

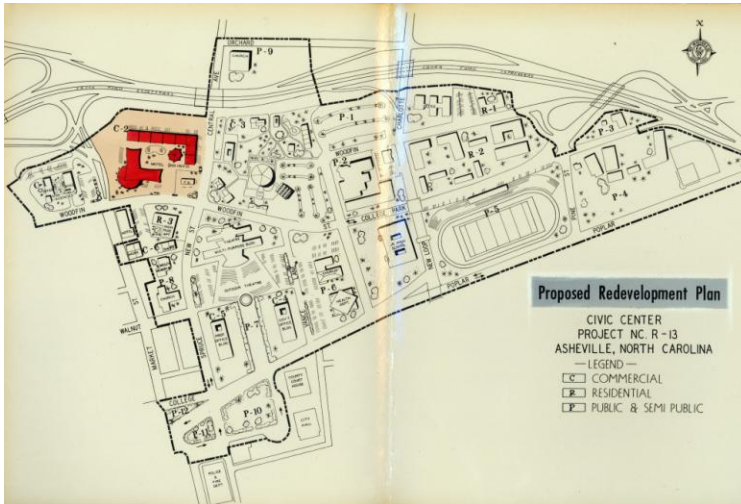


Figure 3. c. 1960. This Proposed Redevelopment Plan illustrates the earlier designs for the Civic Redevelopment Project. The highlighted red section denotes a specific commercial area designated to accommodate tourists via a proposed hotel and “small shops attractive to transient trade.” Designed specifically as a means for “attracting tourists and persuading them to extend their stays past the average 1.3 days,” this proposal represented city officials’ desire to increase Asheville’s tourist industry. See “Consultation Report Marketability Study Civic Center Project,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

and the support of local businessmen, the ARC, under Executive Director Charles M. Dent, Jr., began holding joint meetings with Asheville’s Metropolitan Planning Board and City Council to develop a Community Renewal Program to facilitate the city’s downtown urban renewal project.<sup>94</sup>

The Civic Redevelopment Project application outlined the prospective project and the reasons Asheville selected that particular area for urban renewal. The area designated for the Civic Redevelopment Project contained approximately 77 acres of land and 141

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<sup>93</sup> William I. Cochran, Jr., “Amendatory Survey and Planning Application; Amendment No.1,” September 16, 1960, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Amendatory Survey and Planning Application.”

<sup>94</sup> According to Local Public Agency Letter No. 227, a document Urban Renewal Commissioner William L. Slayton attached to his letter sent to Charles Dent on October 25, 1961, a Community Renewal Program “establishes a full-range, positive program of local urban renewal action based on the total scale of local need and utilizing the community’s resources and potential for undertaking renewal activities.” See “Amendatory Survey and Planning Application.”

structures of which the city acquired 60 acres and 128 structures and cleared for redevelopment.<sup>95</sup> Cochran stated within the Amendatory Survey “96% of the structures to be acquired within this proposed amended area are substandard” and thus constituted as a blighted area in need of clearance. Chairman of the ARC J. Alfred Miller concurred with Cochran’s assessment at the public hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project in 1962. Miller argued that the area designated for renewal was “rapidly decaying tax values...fast depreciating” and that “it is a public responsibility to remedy such a situation.”<sup>96</sup> For Cochran and Miller this area presented the “most desirable” area to conduct Asheville’s first urban renewal project.<sup>97</sup>

Within his Amendatory Survey and Planning Application, Cochran mentioned the current housing conditions of African Americans within the proposed urban renewal area and the relocation prospects for black families and individuals. According to Cochran, Asheville’s black population within the project area had representation for the city’s proposed urban renewal project via a “prominent Negro lawyer who is a Commissioner of the Redevelopment Commission and Negro members of Metropolitan Planning Board

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<sup>95</sup> See Jim Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward,” *The Asheville Times*, June 28, 1963; And “A History of Urban Renewal in Asheville, NC,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “A History of Urban Renewal in Asheville, NC.”

<sup>96</sup> “Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project, Tuesday, July 10, 1962,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project.”

<sup>97</sup> In 1972, W. Neal Hanks and Associates conducted a review of Asheville’s urban renewal projects, Civic Redevelopment and East Riverside. Their findings contradicted the sentiments of Cochran, Miller, and the majority of the ARC. Neal and Associates found “that there are other sections in the City of Asheville in worse need of renewal treatment than the above identified projects.” See “A Review and Evaluation”; And “Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project.”

and Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal.”<sup>98</sup> Although Cochran argued that African Americans had political representation, the ARC wrote and sent the Amendatory Survey and Planning Application to Wedge prior to conducting a survey of the black families and their housing situations within the proposed urban renewal project. The ARC acknowledged in the subsequent section “no actual family survey of the area has been undertaken,” however, “a tour of the area” indicated that the majority of families appeared to reside in substandard homes and because of “the apparent economic conditions” the ARC concluded that the majority of “these families would qualify for low-rent public housing.”<sup>99</sup>

Asheville’s 1960s downtown renewal plan, unlike its 1920s revitalization that relegated African American’s concerns to the private market, appeared more willing to acknowledge the government’s role as an agent for the welfare of its African American residents. Early on this role proved at best limited and at worst a ruse. The Amendatory Survey “estimated 42 Negro families within this proposed amended area” and the “total number of Negro families living within the entire project area (original and proposed).”<sup>100</sup> The survey stated that seven of the forty-two families represented homeowners. The ARC made the assumption “that at least this number would again buy homes upon relocation” and that “there would only remain approximately 35 Negro families to be relocated.”<sup>101</sup> The proposed project did not plan to build new housing for African Americans in the area. The ARC believed that “due to the small number of families being displaced it is anticipated there will be no difficulty” relocating families to

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<sup>98</sup> “Amendatory Survey and Planning Application.”

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

“existing standard housing.”<sup>102</sup> This belief, founded on local realtors who regarded “the supply of rental and sales for Negroes is...more than white housing,” amounted to forty-nine apartments and six houses available for rent as well as twenty houses built in the last two years for black ownership.<sup>103</sup> However, discriminatory practices of local realtors regulated most of the available homes that African Americans could buy or rent to the least desirable areas of the city.

The role of tourism as an impetus and justification for renewal began to resurface after almost forty years of hibernation in 1962. In January, *Asheville Citizen* published that article, “If We Can’t Go Forward Consider Going Backward,” arguing for redevelopment of downtown Asheville. As the author quaintly stated, “it’s just an idea, and restoration seems profitable.”<sup>104</sup> The author utilized several cities and locations that had already undergone revitalization projects and had profited from the endeavor to emphasize the need for redevelopment. Included in this list were Winston-Salem (Ghost Town), New Bern (Tryon Place), Williamsburg, Disneyland, Maggie Valley, and Cherokee (Indian Village) whose economies were supported by visiting tourists. According to the article, tourism benefitted directly from redevelopment projects viewing the projects as “commercial ventures that are paying off.”<sup>105</sup> Although the article never explicitly mentioned tourism as a justification for or desirable outcome of redevelopment, the examples of similar projects implied that tourism held a key role in future redevelopment projects.

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<sup>102</sup> “Amendatory Survey and Planning Application.”

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> “If We Can’t Go Forward Consider Going Backward,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 30, 1962.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

Tourism entered the conversation on urban renewal at the public hearing on the Civic Redevelopment Project in July of 1962. The purpose of the public meeting was “to afford anyone an opportunity to make recommendations, or statements, or ask questions concerning the Urban Renewal Plan.”<sup>106</sup> Prior to hearing from the public, ARC Chairman Miller spoke briefly about the desirability of the area selected for redevelopment and offered “several factors” to why this particular area was recommended.<sup>107</sup> Out of four factors, one dealt directly with tourism. Miller argued that since the area lay adjacent to the highway it caught the gaze of “many thousands of visitors.”<sup>108</sup> In conjunction with Miller’s statements Executive Director Dent stated, “the project uses allowed within the project area have been determined commercial.”<sup>109</sup> According to the ARC’s opening statements at the public hearing, the area selected for the Civic Redevelopment Project, as apparent commercial venture, was chosen because of its location near the highway, an easy vantage point for motorists and tourists.

The ARC initiated the economic justification for downtown urban renewal, but political leaders and businessmen furthered this argument as they expressed their opinions in favor of the Civic Redevelopment Project.<sup>110</sup> Captain E.E. Sanders and Judge

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<sup>106</sup> “Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Prior to the public hearing on the Civic Redevelopment Project, local architectural firms began working in conjunction with Pack Square merchants to help facilitate Asheville’s revitalization of downtown. The architectural firms, Six Associates; J. Bertram King; Gudger, Baber, and Wood; William Dodge; and T. Edmund Whitmire, volunteered to assist the Metropolitan Planning Board and the Central Asheville Association “realizing that the central business district of Asheville must survive in order for the city to carry out its responsibility to its citizens and the region.” These firms met with Pack Square merchants in April, a few months before the public hearing, to discuss “basically a facelifting operation...that would practically revolutionize the personality of

Harold K. Bennett, the first president of the Civic Arts Center, supported the project as its main purpose, the construction of a civic arts center, as well as its potential boost to the service economy they believed would enhance the cultural appeal of the city to companies and visitors. Judge Bennett expressed the changing nature of industry asserting that, “company officials heed the wishes of families and employees when it comes to selecting a new plant site...they are inclined to choose the best places to live for their families. This means cultural atmosphere as much as anything else.”<sup>111</sup> Sanders concurred with Bennett arguing that such a cultural arts facility offered companies an incentive to relocate or construct new plants within or near the city of Asheville. For Sanders, “a Civic Arts Center would be the key to unlock this door” to new companies and corporations.<sup>112</sup> Sanders went further and connected the development of the Arts with the potential for increased tourism to the area.<sup>113</sup> Bennett and Sanders favored the project

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Pack Square.” According to Anthony Lord of Six Associates and E. Mack Salley Jr., executive director of the Central Asheville Association, who headed the meeting at City Hall “felt that all merchants will join in enthusiastically” and stated that “several merchants...stressed the need for immediacy.” It is unclear whether the merchants who ‘enthusiastically’ favored the plans the architectural firms outlined were designated for displacement and relocation because of urban renewal nor is it clear for what reasons, “several merchants...stressed the need for immediacy.” The newspaper articles that reported on this meeting failed to mention the explicit concerns of merchants, but implied that revitalization offered the prospects of economic stimulation. See Philip Clark, “Downtown Improvement Plans Move Step Nearer,” *The Asheville Citizen*, September 9, 1960; “Local Architects Submit Objectives For Downtown Revitalization Plan,” *The Asheville Citizen*, April 12, 1962; “Plans For Business District Revitalization Detailed,” *The Asheville Citizen*, April 13, 1962.

<sup>111</sup> To support his claim, Bennett quotes the executive director of Virginia’s industrialization group who argued that, “When we are trying to locate plants, the lack of cultural opportunity enters into decisions to pass over a city...Recreation and leisure-time opportunities will be an increasing factor.” See “Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project.”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Sanders quoted the director of New York’s Metropolitan Museum stating, “more people went to New York’s Metropolitan Museum last year than to Yankee

because of potential to entice visitors to the city as well as new companies and corporations to relocate to Asheville.

Manley E. Wright, a representative for the Tourist and Promotion Council, argued in favor of the project as a means to increase Asheville's tourist industry. She stated, "the tourist recreation industry is now America's fastest growing industry. Asheville, as the key, city of the mountain area, should and certainly must be the nucleus for this in Western North Carolina."<sup>114</sup> In addition, she made known that as the representative for the Tourist and Promotion Council her opinion was that of the directors of the council and the Chamber of Council who "voted unanimously to support the urban renewal redevelopment project."<sup>115</sup> Residents Charles Dameron, Charles C. Bailey, and Eric Fris supported Wright's connection of urban renewal and tourism growth with testimonies from nationally recognized architects, newspaper articles from Richmond, and the Hammer report—a study conducted for the Western North Carolina Planning Commission.<sup>116</sup>

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Stadium." He also read a report from the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Centre that demonstrated its annual visitations exceeds 100,000 individuals—more than twice the community's population—included visitors from every state and several foreign nations. See "Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project."

<sup>114</sup> "Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project."

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Dameron presented John Richards's, president of the American Institute of Architects, argument for redevelopment stating that, "We can have a healthy business climate only if we have a healthy community. We must strengthen the internal characteristics of the downtown business districts by the encouragement of facilities which will attract crowds, conventions and big gatherings." Bailey utilized a Richmond, VA newspaper to demonstrate that other cities viewed a connection between revitalization and tourism; "Highest priority should go to new facilities that will bring people in, by day and night...easily accessible to tourists, college visitors, and townfolk." Fris, who discussed and quoted the Hammer Report, suggested "we do everything possible to cash in on the so-called 'tourist business' because, and I quote,

Folks in favor for the Civic Redevelopment Project, as well as some members of the ARC, argued for the project because of its potential benefit to the city's tourist and the service economy rather than as a remedy to substandard housing or blighted areas. In contrast, Executive Director Dent argued that the ARC planned to "help and aid" relocated businesses and residents, as "it's one of the responsibilities of the Commission...to see that people are living in standard, safe, sanitary housing."<sup>117</sup> Dent appeared to offer the only concerns for or commentary on the residents of the project area. As others who stepped forward to speak on behalf of the project failed to mention how the project directly affected and benefitted those selected for displacement and relocation.

The majority of those who spoke at the public hearing favored the proposed urban renewal project, but there were a few dissenting voices. Residents A.G. Carver, Jr. and T.C. Treadway spoke out against the project as an endeavor that would hurt property owners within the project area rather than benefit them. Carver argued that property owners' "value of land can only go down from the planning process to actual acquisition," ultimately limiting their selling power.<sup>118</sup> Treadway, the only self-professed homeowner in the proposed project area to speak, disagreed with the relocation policy of urban renewal as one that forces residents to move against their own desires and did not guarantee a higher quality living situation. Their criticisms of the project, however, failed to sway the majority who spoke in favor of the Civic Redevelopment Project.

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'recreation is the fastest growing industry in America today.' See "Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project."

<sup>117</sup> "Hearing on Civic Redevelopment Project."

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

After several years of proposals, planning, and studies, the Civic Redevelopment Project “became a definite undertaking May 14<sup>th</sup> when the city’s voters approved four bond issues totaling \$750,000 to help finance the city’s \$1 million share of the project.”<sup>119</sup> In June of 1963, *Asheville Times* staff writer Jim Crawford published an article that outlined the Civic Redevelopment Project for the consumption of not only Asheville’s citizens, but also for residents of the entire state of North Carolina as the Associated Press reprinted the article in newspapers across the state. Crawford outlined the area selected for renewal stating that it “lies along the city’s most-traveled east—west route—the expressway—and is what the visitor first sees on entering the downtown section.”<sup>120</sup> The language Crawford utilized throughout his article implied that the Civic Redevelopment Project aimed to increase Asheville’s tourism. Crawford offered a caveat to his promotion of the project as a benefactor for tourism arguing that “it isn’t for the tourist alone that the City of Asheville is undertaking the \$3 million job of redeveloping the area. Mainly, the improvements to be carried out will benefit the homefolks.”<sup>121</sup>

According to Crawford, the benefit for the ‘homefolks’ appeared to reside indirectly through the promotion of the service industry. The land selected for government acquisition was to “be resold for various project uses” that included “banks, commercial education institutions, residence hotels, motor hotels, private clubs, a sports arena, amusement parks and high – rise and garden apartments.”<sup>122</sup> These projects,

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<sup>119</sup> Jim Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward,” *The Asheville Times*, June 28, 1963.

<sup>120</sup> Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward.”

<sup>121</sup> Throughout the article, Crawford referenced the “motorists,” “traveler,” and “visitor,” who will come to enjoy what “will be a show area for the city.” See Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward.”

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

geared toward enhancing the service economy and the appeal of Asheville to new companies and corporations, once completed “it has been estimated that...the present tax yield of \$33,000 annually from the project area will increase to more than \$100,000.”<sup>123</sup>

At the time of the article, the organizations interested in acquiring land included the Central YMCA, Civic Arts Center, and the County Health Department. Much of the potential tax revenue appeared based on possible suitors rather than prospective buyers.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the aforementioned organizations represented an urban renewal project that planned to increase the services that Asheville’s downtown offered current citizens as well as future residents and tourists.<sup>125</sup>

Asheville’s desire to revive its stagnant economy via a renewed tourist industry and the federal legislation designed to resolve the nation’s housing problem intersected in the 1960s with urban renewal. The impetus for the areas chosen for urban renewal in Asheville, however, did not primarily derive from the plans to increase the city’s service industry of the economy. The areas deemed ‘blighted’ and in need of redevelopment and revitalization represented neighborhoods previously ‘redlined’ by the HOLC in the

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<sup>123</sup> Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward.”

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> In 1964 after the federal contract had been signed and land acquisition commenced, which provided concerned residents and business with thirty days to relocate, the City of Asheville “produced \$16,266.77 in ad valorem taxes...when the project began.” The first two years proved urban renewal would be a slow process as only “94 properties in the project area” had “been purchased out of a total of 147 to be acquired. Demolition” had “been carried out on 48 per cent of the buildings to be removed.” Moreover, the “resale of land and an actual start on construction” was postponed due to a conflict over the proposed freeway whose resolution was determined via the State Highway Commission, thus outside of city’s political jurisdiction. As of January 1966, the Civic Redevelopment Project had yet to yield close to the estimated potential tax revenue or even began the reconstruction phase of the urban renewal project. See “Keeping the Promise”; And Philip Clark, “Asheville Revitalizing Through UR Projects,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 1, 1966.

1930s.<sup>126</sup> Scholar Richard Marciano along with local researcher Priscilla Ndiaye have confirmed, through their study of HOLC maps and city planning maps of urban renewal, that the areas redlined and the areas chosen for urban renewal were the same. Marciano concluded that,

“the urban renewal areas coincide precisely with the redlined areas from the 1930s. There’s absolutely no room for speculation here: it’s one policy seeping into another. Those neighborhoods that were signaled out under redlining—and labeled as areas that should not be reinvested in—come out in the 1960s...selected as candidates for putting highways through them or for eminent domain.”<sup>127</sup>

The federal policies of the first half of the twentieth century and their implementation

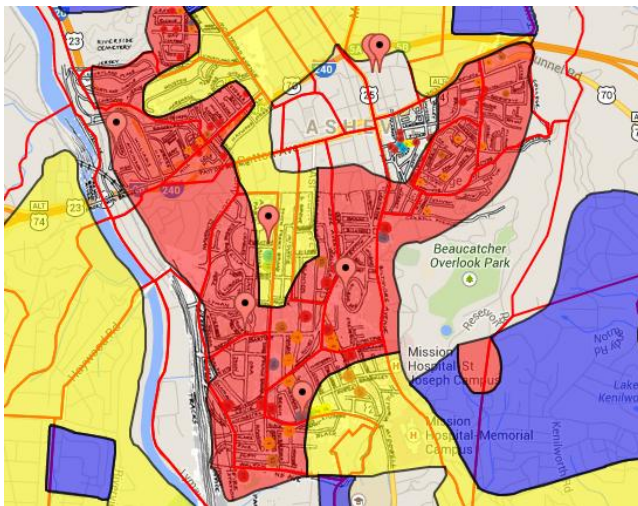


Figure 4. Professor Richard Marciano constructed this image to illustrate how the 1937 HOLC and FHA residential map overlays perfectly with the neighborhoods selected for urban renewal. East Riverside is represented in middle, East End is located to the right, and Hill Street/ Stumptown is located in the top left. The red markers indicate the locations of Asheville’s current public housing projects. See Marciano, “Mapping Inequality.”

helped foster an environment of neglect and isolation that caused the economic and physical deterioration of specific neighborhoods in Asheville. Federal and state legislation enabled and perpetuated the formation of two separate communities, one black and one white, within a majority of American cities including Asheville. By the 1960s, Asheville consisted of several segregated black

neighborhoods. These neighborhoods included Stumptown, Hillstreet, Shiloh, East End,

<sup>126</sup> See Marciano, “Mapping Inequality.”

<sup>127</sup> David Forbes, “Red Lines,” July 22, 2014, accessed July 27, 2014, <http://ashevilleblade.com/?p=241>.

Burton Street Community and Southside—referred to as East Riverside after the city designated the area for urban renewal.

Asheville’s urban renewal projects began under the terms first outlined during its 1920s revitalization plan that included tourism, land acquisition, and the physical separation of the city’s white and black residents. Asheville’s desire to increase its tourist industry early in the twentieth century interconnected with the federal housing policies of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s during urban renewal that perpetuated and consolidated racial segregation within city housing. The City of Asheville in subsequent years planned and executed the East Riverside Renewal Project like its counterpart, the Civic Redevelopment Project, to follow this pattern. As resident and development consultant George M. Stephens stated before City Council in 1967, “This is the time to begin—or begin again after a forty year hiatus....Tourists would make it a destination. They would not just ‘pass through’ Asheville. They couldn’t resist staying in the city we’re planning.”<sup>128</sup> The city of Asheville’s plan rendered many African American citizens as public housing tenants in segregated projects, thus excluding them from the economic benefits of urban renewal.

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<sup>128</sup> “Asheville’s No. 1 Task: Next On The Agenda, A New Downtown,” *The Asheville Citizen*, March 5, 1967.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “THIS PROGRAM WILL REBUILD OUR COMMUNITY”: ASHEVILLE’S CAMPAIGN FOR THE EAST RIVERSIDE URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

In the mid 1960s, the Asheville Redevelopment Commission (ARC) initiated a public relations campaign to persuade residents to support the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. The ARC presented the East Riverside project as a government funded endeavor conducted for the primary purpose of providing Southside residents with quality housing. City officials explained to residents that, “urban renewal is not designed to make money, but...to help provide better housing for our citizens.”<sup>1</sup> The proposed 425-acre urban renewal project contained, “approximately 1,300 structures, 1,250 families, and 100 businesses.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, “almost half of Asheville’s dilapidated housing” existed within the boundaries of the proposed East Riverside project.<sup>3</sup> The area also represented Asheville’s largest black segregated community as almost half of the city’s African American population resided in the proposed area.<sup>4</sup> Executive Director of the ARC James W. Greer informed East Riverside residents, “the prime consideration for the East Riverside Project is the opportunity of improving the living conditions of almost

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<sup>1</sup> “The Community Improver, April 1966 Vol. II,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, D.H. Ramsey Library, Specials Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “The Community Improver, April 1966 Vol. II.”

<sup>2</sup> J.R. Tighe and T. J. Opelt, “Collective Memory and Planning: The Continuing Legacy of Urban Renewal in Asheville, NC,” *Journal of Planning History* (November 2014), 13, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1538513214554767>.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Clark, “Asheville Revitalizing Through UR Projects,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 1, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth L. Mace, “Inside East Riverside,” February 1967, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Inside East Riverside.”

5,000 citizens.”<sup>5</sup> The ARC’s presentation of urban renewal, however, omitted the



Figure 5. c. 1960s. This map, displays the structures that existed within the boundaries of East Riverside at the time of project’s proposal. The map illustrates the structures the ARC proposed to retain as well as acquire for private and public housing development. “Illustrated Site Map,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, D.H. Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

potential negative consequences of the project. The ARC neglected to illustrate that urban renewal included the potential loss of homeownership and community for many African Americans residing in East Riverside.

In addition to urban renewal, the Asheville-Buncombe Metropolitan Planning Board (MPB) advised city officials to initiate programs to help transition the city from a manufacturing based economy to a service-based economy. Although

a residential project, the East Riverside project supplemented this transition as an impetus for change in the demographic landscape of

Southside. The MPB argued that Asheville needed to replace the substandard housing units adjacent to the city’s downtown business district in order to attract an in-migration of affluent, educated individuals. Although residents eventually perceived urban renewal as “negro removal,” the ARC’s campaign effort proved persuasive enough, particularly

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<sup>5</sup> “The Community Improver, April 1966 Vol. II.”

among black civic leaders, to gain the project's approval.<sup>6</sup> The effects of previous federal policies and racial discrimination rendered the East Riverside community in need of urban renewal. The ARC utilized present neighborhood blight and decaying homes, as justifications to implement the plans city officials for a dominant service economy and tourist industry.

The location of this neighborhood, adjacent to the proposed Interstate 26 and Interstate 240, contributed to its desirability as a prospective area for urban renewal. The ARC coordinated with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT) to construct the new interstates near areas selected for urban renewal or areas the ARC could and did designate as blighted. City officials believed the proposed interstates would increase the accessibility of Asheville to potential tourists and consumers.<sup>7</sup> To move the city toward a service economy, officials recognized that neighborhoods within eyesight of major highways and byways needed to reflect what James Howard Kunstler called

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Charles Mosley, interview by Karen Vaneman, 9 October 2009, transcript, The Karen Vaneman Oral History Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Mosley Interview.

<sup>7</sup> The construction of Interstate 26 and Interstate 240 particularly affected the African American communities of Hill Street and Burton Street. The ARC's designation of Burton Street and parts of Hill Street neighborhoods as blighted appeared motivated by their location to the proposed highways. See Sarah Judson "'I Am a Nasty Branch Kid': Women's Memories of Place in the Era of Asheville's Urban Renewal," *The North Carolina Historical Review* XCI, no. 3 (July 2014), 329-330.; Asheville Design Center and Western North Carolina Alliance, "Burton Street Community Plan: A Project of Blue Ridge Blueprints," Burton Street Community Association, Summer 2010, accessed November 24, 2014, [wnca.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/burton\\_plan\\_-small.pdf](http://wnca.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/burton_plan_-small.pdf). Hereafter cited as "Burton Street Community Plan"; And Asheville-Buncombe County Metropolitan Planning Board, "A Population and Economic Analysis of the Asheville of the Asheville Metropolitan Area and the Western North Carolina Region that it Serves," May 1966, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

“abstract fantasies.”<sup>8</sup> Kunstler argued that “because our notions about place have become so abstract, our remedies for the problems of place have tended to be equally abstract.”<sup>9</sup>

Asheville’s revitalization and urban renewal projects tended to reflect abstract resolutions for deeply institutional and societal ills.

In his article, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward,” Jim Crawford illustrated the city’s economic philosophy through his idealistic prospects for Asheville’s future. He wrote,

“Within a year, shoddy commercial buildings, ramshackle residential property and scrubby undergrowth which meets the motorists gaze as he looks south from the expressway will begin to disappear. In the space of another year the traveler will see new, modern buildings, orderly green parks and newly-paved streets where once he saw an area blighted by age and neglect. What once was an eyesore will become one of the city’s top attractions....When completed, the project will be a show area for the city.”<sup>10</sup>

Crawford’s explicit language revealed the optimism for urban renewal and illustrated that the *motorist* and the *traveler* would become admirers of this new *show area*. He conspicuously omitted Asheville’s current residents as potential admirers. Reprinted throughout North Carolina, Crawford’s article presented urban renewal as beneficial to travelers, tourists, and other sources of external revenue rather than for Asheville’s own citizens. The three years following the article’s publication, Asheville made significant strides to fulfill much of Crawford’s sentiments on urban renewal.

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<sup>8</sup> James Howard Kunstler, *Home From Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World For the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Crawford, “Asheville Will Soon Put Her Best Face Forward,” *The Asheville Times*, June 28, 1963.

Asheville City Council began this endeavor with the approval of a long-range development plan in October 1963. A federal requirement for urban renewal, the

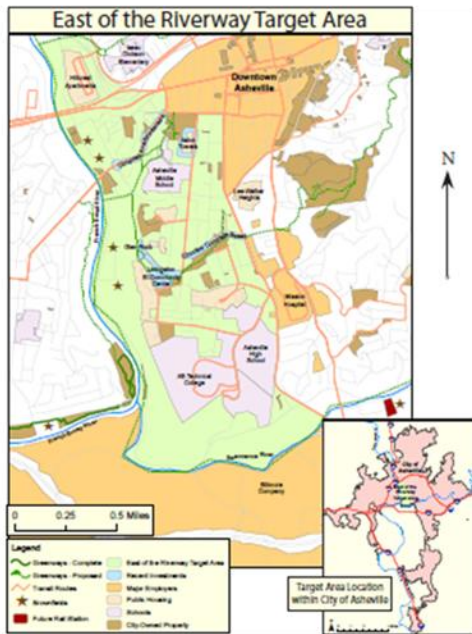


Figure 6. c. 2010. This map displays "what East Riverside looked liked after Urban Renewal." It also illustrates East Riverside's location in regards to I-26, I-240, and downtown Asheville. Tighe and Opelt, "Collective Memory and Planning," 10.

Community Facilities Plan and Public Improvement Program projected the "city's anticipated development of community facilities and services through 1980."<sup>11</sup> The Community Facilitated Plan highlighted plans to consolidate the city and county education system as a means to facilitate integration of academic facilities. This included abandoning the Burton Street and Haw Creek schools, converting "Stephens-Lee High School to an elementary school after temporary use as a junior high," the construction of "three new junior highs during the planning

period," and the completion of the "new high school now under construction to replace Stephens-Lee."<sup>12</sup> The plans affected African American schools and students more so than Asheville's white schools and students. *The Urban News* editor and former East End resident Johnnie Grant argued that this "decision...never demanded that white students step outside of their comfort zone. Black schools closed, black students were bused, black teachers and administrators lost their jobs, but whites continued as before."<sup>13</sup> City

<sup>11</sup> Philip Clark, "Long-Range Development Given Approval By City Council," *The Asheville Citizen*, October 10, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Johnnie Grant, "South French Broad Class of 1969—The End of a Valuable Heritage," *The Urban News*, July 9, 2009.

Manager J. Weldon Weir “emphasized” that the plans represented “‘guides’ in anticipating the city’s developments, and schedule financing, but did not commit the city to the programs.”<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of Weir’s caveat, these plans and programs portended the future implications of urban renewal for Asheville’s African American communities. Burton Street School and Stephens-Lee High School were instrumental to the African American neighborhoods they served. Burton Street School was the “gathering point for community life” for the Burton Street Community, an African American neighborhood founded in 1912 by civic leader E.W. Pearson.<sup>15</sup> Zani Davidson, former resident of the Burton Street Community, remembered that “they were good days because we could walk to school and it was like everything you did there, the teachers close to [unintelligible] and so they were always in contact with your parents....And they were also very strict because we had to learn...you had to know your material and they made sure we got the material...the teachers were very interested in what we were doing.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Clark, “Long-Range Development Given Approval By City Council.”

<sup>15</sup> E. W. Pearson’s legacy was not limited to the founding of Burton Street Community. “Known as the Black Mayor of West Asheville, E.W. Pearson had a profound effect on all of Asheville, founding the Asheville branch of the NAACP, starting the first business league for African Americans, and acting as a mediator between local government and organizations during times of heightened racial tension....Perhaps his biggest legacy though is the founding of the annual Buncombe County and District Colored Agricultural Fair, which was held in the Burton Street Community from 1913 to 1917. The event was one of the largest black agricultural fairs in the Southeast and drew fairgoers, both black and white, from across Western North Carolina.” See “Burton Street Community Plan.”

<sup>16</sup> Zani Davidson, interview by Karen Vaneman, 24 April 2009, transcript, The Karen Vaneman Oral History Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Davidson Interview.

Stephens-Lee High School for “blacks of East End and throughout Buncombe County...symbolized Black education achievement, independence, and culture.”<sup>17</sup> “As the only high school to serve African American students in Buncombe County and the surrounding counties, Stephens-Lee facilitated a ‘rich heritage’ of education and its significance for socio-economic improvement within Asheville’s black communities.<sup>18</sup> Asheville resident Jean Boyd acknowledged education’s significance believing that, “in the black community the one thing we held on to so firmly was to get an education. We saw education as a means, as your stepping stone in life.”<sup>19</sup> Stephens-Lee High School represented that ‘stepping stone’ for many of Asheville’s black residents.

Integration facilitated Asheville’s decision to abandon Burton Street School and initiated the process of phasing out Stephens-Lee High School. However, inclusion of African American schools into the broader urban renewal process ultimately connected the desegregation of city schools with urban renewal. According to a government survey of Asheville’s social services, “the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project was chosen primarily because of the announced plans of the Asheville City School Board to construct a one million dollar plus junior high school in that area” to help the city facilitate integration.<sup>20</sup> As a ‘non-cash credit,’ the proposed junior high school secured three

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<sup>17</sup> Pat Griffin, “Stephens-Lee High School & the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association,” *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* (Summer/ Fall 2010), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Boyd, interview by Karen Vaneman, 13 March 2008, transcript, The Karen Vaneman Oral History Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Boyd Interview.

<sup>20</sup> W. Neal Hanks and Associates, “A Review and Evaluation of Selected Administrative Organization Procedures and Identification of Social Service Capabilities in Asheville and Buncombe County,” 1972, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville

million dollars of “Federal Funds without the necessity of” the city “actually putting up any cash.”<sup>21</sup> When Stephens-Lee closed down in 1965, the city transferred their students to the new South French Broad High School built in the Southside neighborhood. South French Broad High School served as a temporary high school for black students from 1965 until the city consolidated it with Lee Edwards High School, an all-white school, to complete the desegregation of Asheville’s schools in 1969.<sup>22</sup> Resident Sarah Williams remembered desegregation working with urban renewal as “the twin phenomena that almost destroyed black community life in Asheville. When the city demolished black neighborhoods and closed the black schools in the name of progress, African Americans carried that burden.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, Asheville’s black residents questioned whether desegregation as well as urban renewal undermined rather than enhanced their education and intellectual pursuits.<sup>24</sup>

In order to persuade black residents to favor urban renewal, government officials utilized rhetoric and language to portray urban renewal as a policy “working earnestly to make metropolitan Asheville a better place to live,” particularly for those residing within

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Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “A Review and Evaluation.”

<sup>21</sup> ‘Non-Cash credits’ was a “term used to indicate that instead of the City putting up the actual cash as their one-third share” for urban renewal projects as per required by federal legislation, “community improvements such as the City Auditorium, public schools, civic centers, highways, etc. were used.” See “A Review and Evaluation.”

<sup>22</sup> After Asheville consolidated the two high schools, the city converted South French Broad High School into Asheville Middle School. See Betty Jameson Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 47; 174-179.

<sup>23</sup> Judson, “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 349.

<sup>24</sup> See Thelma Caldwell, interview by Dorothy Joynes, 18 November 1992, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina; and Judson “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 344-345.

the proposed project areas.<sup>25</sup> In October 1965, the ARC published its “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report” to “point out that urban renewal is people, and that a great deal of this commission’s effort is going not only to renew areas of blight, but also to give people living in these areas hope for a new and better future.”<sup>26</sup> Within the pamphlet, Commission Chairmen J. Alfred Miller outlined the progress of the Civic Redevelopment Project and provided a brief summary of the proposed East Riverside project. As of September 30, 1965, the ARC had “purchased 46% of the property in the Redevelopment area” and “completed demolition of 23% of the 128 structures in the Area.” Miller noted that the Commission “relocated 48 families” and “numerous individuals and businesses” whose property the ARC acquired.<sup>27</sup> Although he omitted details on the actual relocation of these families and businesses, Miller presented Civic Redevelopment Project’s progress as a success. Miller, also, provided cursory descriptions of the relocation, demolition, rehabilitation, and citizen participation aspects of urban renewal.

The ARC employed vague, optimistic language in its summation of the current and proposed urban renewal projects as well as paternalistic rhetoric to illustrate the processes of relocation, demolition, rehabilitation, and citizen participation. According to the commission, “the East Riverside houses 5,000 people and 1,300 structures. Of the total number of structures in the area, approximately 85% are substandard to some degree....About 60% of these buildings must be razed; 40% can be rehabilitated.”

Following this brief account of the area, the ARC offered an idealized future for East

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<sup>25</sup> Redevelopment Commission of the City of Asheville, “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report,” 6 October 1964, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

Riverside residents stating, “better homes for a number of people will be provided along with the attendant benefits of beautification, better street plans, and new parks and playground facilities. A number of beneficial uses are foreseen for the land that will be left vacant.”<sup>28</sup> The ARC, however, failed to accompany its faultless vision with any pragmatic blueprint to obtain such a future, leaving many residents wondering what “Urban Renewal meant.” Southside resident Lawrence Gilliam argued that the ARC’s desultory description of urban renewal during the initial planning phases facilitated the hostility that developed among residents when the project entered the acquisition and relocation phases.<sup>29</sup>

The ARC’s descriptions of East Riverside housing illustrated the paternal nature of urban renewal through what scholar Nicholas Cornell called “expressive content.” According to Cornell, “what characterizes paternalism is an action’s expressive content...An action is paternalist when it will reasonably be taken to imply the actor knows better than the subject with regard to a matter within the subject’s sphere of control.”<sup>30</sup> Through their description of East Riverside housing, the ARC demonstrated an expressive form of paternalism. The ARC accepted the idea that they understood the housing conditions of residents better than the families residing in the neighborhood.

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<sup>28</sup> “‘64 ’65 Progress Report.”

<sup>29</sup> Asheville resident Lawrence Gilliam expressed that limited information and the ambiguity of government officials during urban renewal left community member unsure what “Urban Renewal meant” or “why the government was taking their house.” See Lawrence Gilliam, interview by Karen Vaneman, 6 November 2007, transcript, The Karen Vaneman Oral History Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Gilliam Interview.

<sup>30</sup> In addition, Cornell argued that a paternalistic action “also requires some sense that the actor is conferring a benefit, even if it is not a true or wanted benefit.” See Nicholas Cornell, “A Third Theory of Paternalism,” *Michigan Law Review* 113, Forthcoming, 17.

Utilizing one picture of a substandard home, the ARC depicted the housing units of the area “with an old bed, a vintage electric or coal stove, and an antique refrigerator. Needless to say, the stove is dangerously close to the bed. Furthermore, to greatly increase the fire hazard, the refrigerator is quite apt to be plugged into a frayed cord.”<sup>31</sup> The ARC referred to the pictured home as a “shack on the famous—or infamous—Death Valley (the inhabitants prefer to call it ‘Elk’s Alley’).”<sup>32</sup> The ARC’s use of such a derisive name for the area demonstrated its claim of “superiority by denying the autonomy” of the residents.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, this particular housing unit represented the worst of East Riverside. Although many East Riverside residents lived in poverty, approximately “10% of the households earned more than \$6,000 a year,” or equivalent to the national median income, and lived in quality housing.<sup>34</sup> According to Lawrence Holt, Deputy Director of the AHA during the early 1970s, this area contained “some of the worst housing you

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<sup>31</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Anthropologist Keith Basso’s examination of the meaning of place within the community of the Apache people of Cibecue led him to conclude “that attachments to places may be nothing less than profound, and that when these attachments are threatened we may feel threatened as well. Places, we realize, are as much a part of us we are part of them.” Within this dynamic relationship of place and ownership lies the importance of language. Basso argued, “The resources of a language, together with the varieties of action facilitated by their use, acquire meaning and force from the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded, and therefore...the discourse of any speech community exhibits a fundamental character...that there is very much its own.” This understanding of place and ownership developed into a significant theme throughout Asheville’s urban renewal, particularly in East Riverside project area. See Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), xiii-xiv, 103. Douglas N. Husak, “Paternalism and Autonomy,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1981), 41.

<sup>34</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

could imagine that was in Asheville at the time.”<sup>35</sup> Gilliam, explained, “now this particular—this was a blighted community....And when I say ‘blighted,’ it was substandard, tenant-type construction, apartment complex-type construction that was poorly, poorly constructed.”<sup>36</sup> The ARC concluded the section on housing pronouncing that “our goal is to see the end of this squalor, to help those who can to help themselves; and for those who are helpless, to give that all-important lift into a better way of life.”<sup>37</sup> Recognizing it’s “an inherent sense of superiority, a unique power dynamic,” in the relationship between the governing and the governed, the ARC attempted to position itself in a paternal role for East Riverside’s future.<sup>38</sup>

The ARC presented relocation, demolition, and rehabilitation with similar paternal language and rhetoric. In regards to relocation, the ARC failed to expand on the process. Instead, it attempted to empathize with potential displaced families and individuals writing, “few people enjoy moving. It is an unwelcome chore—moving furniture, appliances, arranging them in another house. And then there is the adjustment. It takes time and effort. But maybe it is worth it after all.”<sup>39</sup> The ARC, however, failed to

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<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Holt, interview by Dorothy Joynes, 27 January 1993, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Holt Interview.

<sup>36</sup> The house pictured in the Redevelopment Commission’s pamphlet stood near ‘Nasty Branch’ in East Riverside project area. The houses located in this area, according to Lawrence Gilliam, represented the prototypical substandard home that was beyond rehabilitation. The Redevelopment Commission utilized the blighted homes on ‘Elk Alley, or according to the commission ‘Death Alley,’ and surrounding ‘Nasty Branch’ to epitomize the conditions of all houses in the East Riverside project area. The housing in this area, albeit substandard, was further along in its degradation in comparison to other housing units in the East Riverside and not an accurate description of the project area. See Gilliam Interview.

<sup>37</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>38</sup> Cornell, “A Third Theory of Paternalism,” 26.

<sup>39</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

understand that physical relocation only acknowledged one aspect of displacement and relocation. Many East Riverside residents agreed with the ARC's goal to rehabilitate the neighborhood through new housing units and to assist those folks who desired to relocate.<sup>40</sup> However, few concurred with the ARC's assumption that moving material goods represented relocation's only difficulties.<sup>41</sup> Southside, like other African American neighborhoods in Asheville, "was a place where everybody knew everybody and every child reared, mentored, disciplined, protected, and taught—not only by their parents but by neighbors as well."<sup>42</sup> The potential loss of neighborhood relationships represented Southside residents' primary contention with relocation.<sup>43</sup> The language the ARC utilized illustrated the disconnection between the residents living in Southside and the government officials designated to revitalize the blighted neighborhood.

The ARC's choice of language continued to illustrate the disassociation between residents and city officials. In the section on demolition, the ARC defined progress as

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<sup>40</sup> Prior to the start of the East Riverside project, a majority of residents held a "favorable or hopeful attitude that urban renewal will make the neighborhood better." See "Inside East Riverside."

<sup>41</sup> One effect of urban renewal that occurred following the relocation of residents and the destruction of their homes and communities is what psychiatrist Dr. Mindy Thompson Fullilove referred to as "root shock: a traumatic stress reaction related to the destruction of one's emotional ecosystem." See Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 223-228. Although, this idea was not fully expressed during the East Riverside project, many residents implied 'root shock,' when they spoke of the potential loss of their homes and neighborhoods during the urban renewal process. Additionally, residents now perceive 'root shock' as one of the more damaging and lasting effects of Asheville's urban renewal program. See Sarah Judson, "A Twilight of a Neighborhood," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/ Fall 2010), 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Charles Mosley quoted in "Life in East End, Asheville c. 1950-70," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/ Fall 2010), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Residents of East Riverside felt "they would miss the people most" if they had to relocate to a new neighborhood. See "Inside East Riverside."

“another structure comes down to clear the way for progress.”<sup>44</sup> Progress for the ARC meant the destruction of the *old* to allow for the *new*. Many Southside residents perceived demolition under different terms. Priscilla Ndiaye, former Southside resident during urban renewal, noted that demolition “was in the name of economic development, that it was for the good of the city. But when it came to the people involved, well, many call it ‘urban removal.’”<sup>45</sup> Demolition represented one solution to substandard houses and blighted communities.

Rehabilitation offered another option. The ARC noted, “sometimes, indeed, it is better to start over; but often it is better to restore what already exists. This is true of many houses in the East Riverside Urban Renewal Area.”<sup>46</sup> Rehabilitation “can save neighborhoods intact and eliminate the need to uproot families. . . . With professional counsel and financial assistance in the form of long-term, low-interest government loans, homeowners can be inspired to repair and renew.”<sup>47</sup> The ARC excluded the involuntary aspect of rehabilitation from its pamphlet. Rehabilitation offered to *save* homes that the ARC deemed salvageable, but only if those property owners financially supported the cost to bring their properties up to standard.<sup>48</sup> According to ARC’s Executive Director James W. Greer, if property owners proved financially unable or “what the owner refuses to rehabilitate. . . it will be for this Commission to acquire.”<sup>49</sup> The ARC’s definition of

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<sup>44</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>45</sup> David Forbes, “Red Lines,” July 22, 2014, accessed July 27, 2014, <http://ashevilleblade.com/?p=241>.

<sup>46</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

<sup>49</sup> Asheville Redevelopment Commission, “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project Given by the Asheville Redevelopment Commission,” May 1966, Asheville Urban Renewal Files, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of

progress and demolition as well as its paternal description of rehabilitation without regard to residents' current financial situation demonstrated their disconnection from East Riverside families and individuals.

The ARC's portrayal of relocation, demolition, and rehabilitation presented urban renewal as a paternalistic venture, beneficial for the residents of East Riverside. These sections addressed tangible aspects of urban renewal, such as the project's potential financial costs and quality of housing units proposed for the area. The subsequent section on citizen participation discussed an enigmatic detail of urban renewal, the people. The ARC recognized the people and their potential relationship as "complexities of whom are not measurable, the values of whom are beyond price, and who are notoriously unpredictable. Therefore, when we approach a house for rehabilitation, we must also approach an occupant."<sup>50</sup> Government officials' recognition of the people appeared to represent a political ruse. A social welfare survey found scant evidence to support the government's claims. According to Community Research Associates, "there is little evidence that the social welfare agencies of Asheville recognize that the City housing project families have social problems which they need to help in solving."<sup>51</sup> The Community Research Associates argued city officials implemented policies that often ignored the systemic problems that perpetuated poverty within Asheville's poorer neighborhoods. The report stated that City Council leaders needed to focus "on the

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North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project."

<sup>50</sup> "'64 '65 Progress Report.'"

<sup>51</sup> See Community Research Associates, Inc., "Prelude to Planning in Buncombe County, North Carolina: A Social Welfare Survey," 1963, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Prelude to Planning in Buncombe County, North Carolina"; And "'64 '65 Progress Report.'"

prevention of social problems and the improvement of families coming to community attention.”<sup>52</sup> Instead of resolving the social and economic issues that inflicted the African American residents of East Riverside, the ARC approached the problem in East Riverside Urban Renewal Area through an understanding that demolition and relocation offered the best solution to end the perpetuating cycle of poverty and racial discrimination that hindered many East Riverside residents.

In compliance with the 1954 Housing Act’s regulation to include citizen participation and to address its apparent disassociation from low-income households, the ARC established the East Riverside Citizens Participation League. The formation of the Citizens Participation League divided the area into thirteen neighborhoods. Each neighborhood “selected its own chairman whose responsibility is to serve as a liaison between the Rehabilitation Site Office and the people in his area. He disseminates information, sparks initiative, and in general, leads his people toward rehabilitation.”<sup>53</sup> In essence, the Citizens Participation League formed “to draw the area residents themselves fully into the urban renewal activity.”<sup>54</sup> However, this did not necessarily establish urban renewal as a collaborative endeavor. In their study on Asheville’s urban renewal programs, Geographers J. R. Tighe and Timothy Opelt found “that residents did not feel that they were full and equal participants in the process.”<sup>55</sup> This asymmetrical relationship apparent during many urban renewal programs later developed as a source of

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<sup>52</sup> See “Prelude to Planning in Buncombe County, North Carolina;” And “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>53</sup> “‘64 ‘65 Progress Report.”

<sup>54</sup> Philip Clark, “Asheville Revitalizing Through UR Projects,” *The Asheville Times*, January 1, 1966.

<sup>55</sup> Tighe and Opelt, “Collective Memory and Planning,” 11.

resentment for African American residents.<sup>56</sup> Asheville's black residents, eventually, asserted their political autonomy to balance this relationship. The ARC, under its interpretation of citizen involvement, stated that "in these beginning stages, we are striving to kindle interest, to reawaken seeds of community pride, and to thus lay the groundwork for a comprehensive program of rehabilitation, both structural and human."<sup>57</sup> As a result, acknowledgement of the existing community became lost in the ARC's paternalistic desire to 'reawaken seeds' of their own understanding of community pride.

Premature optimism and adoration for urban renewal helped foster the nascent dissociation between residents and city officials. In January of 1966, *The Asheville Citizen* writer Philip Clark proclaimed, "Urban Renewal is actively changing Asheville for the better."<sup>58</sup> Clark's proclamation embellished the current situation of Asheville's urban renewal projects. At that time, the ARC had purchased 94 of the 147 properties within the Civic Redevelopment Project area. Of the acquired properties, the ARC had only removed 48 percent of the structures. In regards to the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project, Clark wrote as if City Council had already voted for urban renewal's approval stating that the project "is well along toward turning one of the city's most deteriorated areas into a good modern and decent neighborhood."<sup>59</sup> At the time, Asheville remained several months away from holding a City Council vote on East Riverside. In

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<sup>56</sup> According to political scientist P.J. Madgwick, residents in the majority of cities that underwent urban renewal projects felt similarly removed from political participation. One former member of a Citizens' Advisory Committee remembered their experience as, "I found 90 per cent of the decisions were already made anyway and we met once a month to learn what other decisions they'd been making in the agency." See P.J. Madgwick, "The Politics of Urban Renewal," *Journal of American Studies* 5, no. 3 (December 1971), 272-273.

<sup>57</sup> "'64 '65 Progress Report."

<sup>58</sup> Clark, "Asheville Revitalizing Through UR Projects."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

addition, East Riverside residents had not had the public opportunity to voice their opinions and thoughts on the project.

On May 31, 1966, East Riverside citizens received their first public opportunity to express their concerns and ask questions. Prior to the public hearing, local government agencies published studies and newsletters that portrayed urban renewal as a project designed primarily to provide residents with decent housing. Urban renewal in East Riverside adhered to a particular trajectory that formed in other industrial cities. Scholar Ralph R. Widner argued that most urban renewal programs followed a similar pattern, a policy to “reduce the amount of blighted housing in cities....But step-by-step, economic development emerged as an increasingly dominant purpose.”<sup>60</sup> With two urban renewal projects, the Civic Redevelopment Project and the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project, occurring simultaneously, Asheville appeared to promote, both, economic development and housing with equal importance. The ARC and other city officials consistently presented the Civic Redevelopment Project as a commercial venture to revitalize downtown and to spur Asheville’s service economy. Government officials touted East Riverside as an unprofitable endeavor to provide residents with “a decent home in a decent environment.”<sup>61</sup> However, East Riverside’s proximity to downtown and the need for “modern, high-quality, rental housing and apartments” conveyed a different

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<sup>60</sup> Ralph R. Widner, “Physical Renewal of the Industrial City,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 488, Revitalizing the Industrial City (November 1986), 51.

<sup>61</sup> The Asheville Redevelopment Commission, “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.”

perception of its objective.<sup>62</sup> As the ARC presented the East Riverside project as an aid to rehabilitate homes and neighborhoods, the MPB published its study on Asheville's current economic state. The MPB recommended Asheville improve the character and demographic of its citizen via provisions for high-cost rental units adjacent to downtown to lure affluent and educated workers.

As the ARC campaigned for East Riverside residential support for urban renewal, "a program designed to help cure the problems of bad housing," the MPB published their study, "A Population and Economic Analysis of the Asheville Metropolitan Area and the Western North Carolina Region That It Serves." Their analysis offered a comprehensive overview of Asheville's socio-economic situation and provided "governmental, quasi-governmental, and civic organizations with a knowledgeable foundation upon which to base decisions relating to the future" economic growth and development of the tourist industry in the area.<sup>63</sup> In their study, the MPB noted the success of Asheville's ability to attract and sustain a manufacturing industry that "provided the principal impetus for economic development" in the region during the last fifteen years. However, they contended that such a development stands "in contrast to the National economy which is becoming increasingly service oriented."<sup>64</sup> The MPB argued that "contrary to popular opinion, non-manufacturing activities can be equally as basic—i.e. bring outside money into the community—as manufacturing activity. Services are a source and reason for

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<sup>62</sup> Asheville-Buncombe Metropolitan Planning Board, "A Population and Economic Analysis of the Asheville Metropolitan Area and the Western North Carolina Region that it Serves," May 1966, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "A Population and Economic Analysis."

<sup>63</sup> "A Population and Economic Analysis," 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

growth—not just a result. In fact, generally areas which are service oriented are the fastest growing and most prosperous.”<sup>65</sup> Their conclusion detailed Asheville’s inability to maintain a healthy non-manufacturing industry. The MPB recommended that redevelopment needed to “provide the services necessary for modern businesses and the amenities necessary to attract and keep key personnel.”<sup>66</sup>

The MPB’s analysis of Asheville’s housing revealed the economic importance of the East Riverside project to the commercial endeavor of the first urban renewal project, the Civic Redevelopment Project. The study acknowledged that “approximately 30 percent” of housing “in the City of Asheville were substandard” and “that there is an insufficient quantity of decent housing for those persons engaged in non-supervisory, below-average-wage occupations.”<sup>67</sup> The MPB also recognized the concerns of businesses and industries who “reported that an insufficient number of modern, high-quality, rental housing and apartments was one of, if not the, most common problem encountered in recruiting key management and technical personnel in the area.”<sup>68</sup> The housing situation, according to the MPB, reflected the employment currently offered in Asheville. As stated in their analysis, “employment is the single most important factor in determining the...standard of living enjoyed by its citizenry.”<sup>69</sup>

The MPB broadened its understanding of employment’s significance for housing quality to include the city’s potential character and demography. Asheville’s “future will primarily be determined by the types of people living here which, in turn, will be

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<sup>65</sup> “A Population and Economic Analysis,” 22.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 110.

determined by the type of employment provided.”<sup>70</sup> In order to secure an Asheville “comprised primarily of well-educated, well-paid, and well-housed citizens,” the MPB recommended that the city “insure that new industry attracted...is predominantly modern, high-quality, capital-intensive, high-wage, high-growth industry.”<sup>71</sup> Many of these desired industries required individuals with “high levels of training and education.”<sup>72</sup> This type of employee appeared scarce in East Riverside as “people with limited and low or no skills” made “up almost three-fourths of the...labor force” in the area.<sup>73</sup> The MPB acknowledged this fact and stressed that the city needed to maintain employment for low- or unskilled laborers. However, rather than assist residents in improving their quality of life, the MPB simply wanted, “to keep these people off welfare and unemployment.”<sup>74</sup> MPB argued that Asheville needed to attract an in-migration of educated, affluent residents and only accommodate for, rather than elevate, their current residents’ quality of life. With an abundance of substandard homes located adjacent to downtown, East Riverside presented an optimal area for city officials to implement the MPB’s recommendations for higher cost homes to attract desired industries and “key management and technical personnel.”<sup>75</sup>

The MPB concluded that “Asheville is not what it could or should be,” because “it has not sufficiently promoted or taken advantage of the opportunities offered by non-manufacturing industry.”<sup>76</sup> The MPB made clear that their position was “not to infer that

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<sup>70</sup> “A Population and Economic Analysis,” 110.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>73</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

<sup>74</sup> “A Population and Economic Analysis,” 110.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

Metropolitan Asheville...should not continue to encourage and promote the development of manufacturing industry,” but rather “intent has been to put manufacturing in the proper prospective.”<sup>77</sup> From 1950 to 1966, the manufacturing sector increased its labor force from 22.3 percent to 32.5 percent of Metropolitan Asheville’s employment. Although, the increase in manufacturing industry provided Asheville with economic and population growth during the 1950s, economic problems continued to plague the city. According to the MPB, income and wages remained “far below the national averages” and in comparison to non-manufacturing economies, ones dependent upon manufacturing remained more susceptible to the “ups and downs of the national economic barometer.”<sup>78</sup> The MPB noted that other urban centers and “the Nation are far more prosperous and economically healthy...yet relatively speaking, manufacturing is of less importance to them.”<sup>79</sup> As a result, the MPB recommended that Asheville “do all that is humanly and financially possible” to redevelop downtown and its surrounding areas to increase “tourist and convention business, attract new industry” as well as to “provide a favorable environment for recruiting personnel from other localities.”<sup>80</sup>

Gilliam and a few other residents correctly interpreted the ARC’s false portrayal of urban renewal as a tactic to gain residential support. They believed city and business leaders wanted to implement the MPB’s plan to establish a city of developers and affluent households in order to support downtown revitalization and the tourist industry.<sup>81</sup> As Widner demonstrated in his study on urban renewal, the Asheville’s urban renewal

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<sup>77</sup> “A Population and Economic Analysis,” 36.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Gilliam Interview.

followed the pattern as a policy for slum clearance and the reduction of blighted homes that ultimately developed into a policy for economic growth and purposes.<sup>82</sup>

In order to persuade public opinion to the contrary, the ARC published *The Community Improver* and “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.,” to elicit residential support for the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. In “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.,” the ARC stated, “the urban renewal plan for East Riverside proposes to retain the existing residential character of the neighborhood. The objective will be to significantly upgrade the quality of housing.”<sup>83</sup> In their April newsletter, the ARC outlined a brief description of urban renewal under a section entitled, ‘What Is Urban Renewal?’ The newsletter articulated that the proposed project “is not designed to make money, but to...improve our city and to help provide better housing for our citizens.”<sup>84</sup> The ARC, also, warned its residences that:

“Urban renewal is neither all good nor all bad...This is not profitable...Urban renewal is not a ‘gift.’ It will cost some people money. In some cases, it causes people a certain amount of inconvenience. It is not a program which will help everyone, but it will help almost everyone. It is the only way to turn our run-down neighborhoods into communities that once again offer the citizens a decent...place in which to live and work.”<sup>85</sup>

The ARC presented urban renewal to their citizens as the *only* solution to revitalize and rehabilitate their neighborhoods and communities.

The ARC’s *The Community Improver* and the “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.” utilized a ‘fable’ in their attempt to persuade East Riverside residents to support the project. The May issue of *The Community Improver* included ‘The Fable of a City Called

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<sup>82</sup> See Widner, “Physical Renewal of the Industrial City,” 47-57.

<sup>83</sup> “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.”

<sup>84</sup> “The Community Improver, April 1966 Vol. II.”

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Asheville’ that told the tale of a city “long, long ago, in a high enchanting valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains” whose “climate, location, and scenic beauty made it famous as a tourist attraction the world over.”<sup>86</sup> The narrative explained how the industrial revolution “brought its share of problems, hodgepodge land use, industrial stench, air pollution, besides contributing to the crowded and unsanitary living conditions” resulting in the deterioration of downtown and the surrounding residential area.<sup>87</sup> However, “in 1963, the City Fathers decided to investigate the possibility of using the urban renewal program in the hope of renewing the vitality of older and worn-out neighborhoods.”<sup>88</sup> Such language in civic texts attempted to produce a collective identity among Asheville residents and to promote citizen “consent to the constituted political authorities and a sense of mutual obligation.”<sup>89</sup>

With the East Riverside public hearing approaching on May 31, 1966, volume IV of *The Community Improver* offered the ARC a final opportunity to persuade East Riverside citizens to support the project. The ARC explained to East Riverside residents “this is your opportunity to see first-hand exactly what is being proposed and to be heard on the matter.”<sup>90</sup> They noted that all federal requirements for urban renewal “will be accomplished by December...if the citizens of East Riverside...join in support of this

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<sup>86</sup> “The Community Improver, May 1966 Vol. III,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “The Community Improver, May 1966 Vol. III.”

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Francois Furstenburg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2006), 21.

<sup>90</sup> “The Community Improver, June 1966 Vol. IV,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “The Community Improver, June 1966 Vol. IV.”

program. More than any other single group of citizens in Asheville, the East Riverside families will benefit from this program.”<sup>91</sup> James W. Greer, ARC’s Executive Director, explained to the Chamber of Congress that, “the prime consideration for the East Riverside Project is the opportunity of improving the living conditions of almost 5,000 citizens of the City of Asheville.”<sup>92</sup> Greer relied on patronizing rhetoric to lobby for citizen support. Speaking to the Chamber of Commerce he stated, “I know that in East Riverside there is a nucleus of proud and intelligent citizens...who seize the opportunity of transforming their neighborhood, if it were offered. The Urban Renewal plan offers East Riverside this opportunity.”<sup>93</sup> In “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.,” the ARC pointedly stated that “the time to begin rebuilding and revitalizing East Riverside is now. Asheville is a city in progress. The success of the project in East Riverside depends upon the continuation of this spirit of progress. But, ultimately, the success of the project will depend on...the citizen. Study the plan, discuss it, support it.”<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to the ARC’s arguments presented in *The Community Improver* and “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.,” the MPB’s recommendations implied that the proposed East Riverside project planned to complement the commercial Civic Redevelopment Project as a means to strengthen the tourist industry and service economy. However, the MPB’s analysis provided information primarily for civic and economic leaders, rather than for East Riverside residents. As a result, the ARC’s interpretation of urban renewal disseminated via *The Community Improver* and other ARC materials dominated the discourse at the public hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. East

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<sup>91</sup> “The Community Improver, June 1966 Vol. IV.”

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.”

Riverside residents' addressed the policies of displacement and relocation as well as the proposed housing units, rather than the entire scope of urban renewal including its implications on the service economy and in-migration. At the time of the public hearing, the ARC's public relations campaign proved successful as seven out of ten East Riverside residents held "a favorable or hopeful attitude that renewal will make a better neighborhood."<sup>95</sup>

The public hearing served as the ARC's platform to dispel misconceptions about home ownership, rent, and public housing, rather than as a public forum for East Riverside residents to express apprehensions about urban renewal. The majority of residents preferred home ownership to renting, and few found comfort in the possibility of relocating to public housing.<sup>96</sup> ARC members and other local officials utilized the majority of the meeting to reiterate urban renewal's direct benefit to the current community. Only a few East Riverside residents stated their opinions about urban renewal and the majority of the residents who spoke did so in response to the ARC's clarification of relocation and housing.<sup>97</sup> Political scientist P.J. Madgwick observed similar situations during other urban renewal programs. He argued that urban renewal amounted to "a minor revolution brought about by the community and threatening its own stability."<sup>98</sup> Madgwick's 'communities' consisted of every aspect of the city including government, businesses, and residents within and outside the proposed urban renewal area. This relationship dynamic created a spectrum of political power that left

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<sup>95</sup> "Inside East Riverside."

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> "Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project."

<sup>98</sup> Madgwick, "The Politics of Urban Renewal," 265-267; quote on 266.

“the blacks and the poor...weak.”<sup>99</sup> Within such an environment, Madgwick found that “citizen participation is rarely spontaneous, and is difficult to elicit” as many viewed government as an obstacle rather than an instrument.<sup>100</sup> As Madgwick noted, and what occurred in Asheville, insufficient information, or biased interpretations, coupled with the asymmetrical power dynamic between government and residents hindered East Riverside residents during the public hearing.

The ARC’s Chairman J. Alfred Miller and Executive Director James W. Greer gave the opening remarks and perpetuated the narrative offered in *The Community Improver*. They portrayed urban renewal as a product of the people for the benefit of the people as well as mitigating residential concerns over public housing and home ownership. Greer stated,

“in carrying out the project, the East Riverside Urban renewal Project, a great deal of emphasis is being given to the side of the people. This is not a program designed in this particular instance where we are only concerned with land and buildings. We have done a great many things to date and will be continuing to do them in the future that are concerned one hundred per cent with the people of the area, their thoughts, their considerations, their recommendations, their problems and their needs.”<sup>101</sup>

Executive Director of the Buncombe County Planning Council, Eleanor Pickard commended the ARC’s effort to adhere to the social concerns of the East Riverside residents. “It is for this reason,” Pickard stated, “that we favor so much this contemplated redevelopment project.”<sup>102</sup>

Other city officials attempted to allay the fears of East Riverside residents about urban renewal with paternalistic rhetoric and trust in the ARC. Former Commission

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<sup>99</sup> Madgwick, 266.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

member, Ruben Dailey offered, “some homespun philosophy” to his “worthy citizens...particularly the negro people.”<sup>103</sup> Dailey pleaded with the audience to heed government officials and “be governed by the advice and instructions they give you.”<sup>104</sup> He cautioned citizens from relying on “street lawyers” arguing that,

“The hawks are setting for you right now. They know the people whose properties are going to be bought. I use that term. And you will be approached by the hawks in a friendly manner tell you, ‘You better get out of this place now, you better start looking for you a place to live, and I have got a place to sell you.’ And here you go in with a panic, and that’s what we call hardship cases, and you create them yourselves in the panic...if you want to mess yourself up, you listen to that kind of advice.”<sup>105</sup>

Dailey also discussed concerns about urban renewal perpetuating segregation. African Americans represented 98 percent of East Riverside’s residents and contained almost half of Asheville’s black population.<sup>106</sup> According to Dailey, “you own property there. Now if you want to lift yourself up above by your bootstraps, and get out of there, that’s your privilege...and if you don’t like it down in the East Riverside project, we can move out.”<sup>107</sup> City Councilman W.F Algary added to Dailey’s ‘homespun philosophy’ stating, “you people have the opportunity to prove to yourselves, to the city of Asheville and the State of North Carolina, that you can really make this project worthwhile...one where anyone, regardless of race, creed, or color, will be damn glad to live.”<sup>108</sup> Both Dailey and Algary argued that East Riverside residents would benefit from urban renewal if they followed the ARC’s leadership and advice.

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<sup>103</sup> “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

<sup>107</sup> “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Officials understood that many residents questioned the benefits of public housing and that a majority of them “simply... ‘don’t like’ public housing.”<sup>109</sup> Early that year when Carl Vaughn accepted Asheville’s Public Housing Program’s directorship, he acknowledged citizens apprehensions over public housing and promised to “build...public housing that will blend into the community...make them more attractive.”<sup>110</sup> Greer approached the issue in a similar fashion at the public hearing. He expressed that the proposed public housing units offered “are designed to be a family type ordinary neighborhood type unit rather than barracks type as we are used to in Asheville.”<sup>111</sup> Dr. Joseph Schandler, Chairman of the Housing Committee of the City of Asheville, supported Greer’s assessment. He spoke of “an age of new public housing” that included houses with “a front yard and a back yard and a play area.”<sup>112</sup> In regards to relocation, he mentioned the federal funds allocated to assist individuals, families, and businesses designated for displacement and relocation. Assuaging fears over forced displacement and relocation, Greer noted that the federal and state governments required “that all the families and individuals be offered a decent, safe and sanitary place before they are required to move.”<sup>113</sup>

The arguments of Greer and other city officials in favor of urban renewal failed to relieve concerns over home ownership within East Riverside. At the time of the public

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<sup>109</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

<sup>110</sup> “Carl Vaughn Appointed to Housing Post,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 1, 1966.

<sup>111</sup> The public housing projects Greer referred were to Hillcrest, Lee-Walker, and Pisgah View. Specifically, Hillcrest held a particularly negative view among East Riverside residents. With major roads surrounding the complex on all sides and with only one entrance and exit, the project was physically isolated from much of Asheville. See “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

hearing, 58 percent of East Riverside residents owned their property and eight out of ten residents' preferred home ownership to renting.<sup>114</sup> Home ownership represented a main priority and concern for the few residents who spoke at the public hearing. This issue revealed a divisive problem. The idea of homeownership plagued much of Asheville's urban renewal program that later caused a schism between East Riverside residents. Even for residents who favored the East Riverside project, the loss of home ownership seemed an unfair trade for redevelopment. Otis B. Michael, a Southside resident in favor of the project, held reservations because of discrimination in real estate. He argued that, "there are many of us who would like to have better homes, not low-rent homes," but because some "real estate agents...said they do not buy and sell colored property" they are forced to consider losing their economic independence as homeowners.<sup>115</sup> Apparent in Asheville, racial discrimination within the real estate industry hindered many African Americans, regardless of economic status. One bank informed Lacy Haith, an affluent African American, that they "would not loan him the money because...no Black man should have a house that size."<sup>116</sup> The East Riverside project threatened homeowner status of many African Americans as discrimination limited the possibility of acquiring new property.

Reverend Wesley Grant and Talulah Rogers questioned the ARC's propensity for provisions of low-rent units in favor of units for ownership. Grant inquired, "will redevelopment build houses and sell to them to individuals?" Greer's response failed to answer the question and instead deflected responsibility for the construction of housing

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<sup>114</sup> "Inside East Riverside."

<sup>115</sup> "Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project."

<sup>116</sup> Gilliam Interviewed.

units to the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA). According to Greer, “the Redevelopment Commission is not empowered by either Federal or State law to construct any type of building. The construction of the low-rent public housing will be by the Asheville Housing Authority, and...private construction will be by private individuals and companies.”<sup>117</sup> Rogers’ criticisms addressed the apparent omission of potential units current East Residents could purchase to remain within the neighborhood after urban renewal. She argued, “these homes you all are talking about, they are all for rent it seems to me, and I am not for rent. I got my own right now and I ain’t in for no renting.”<sup>118</sup> Greer attempted to sympathize with Rogers’ concern stating that, “I don’t believe in renting either.”<sup>119</sup> As with Grant’s question, however, Greer redirected responsibility. He restated that the ARC only sold land, but assumed that “there will be ample opportunity for anyone who wants to buy or own a home to do so in the East Riverside area.”<sup>120</sup> However, his assumption neglected the financial situation of current residents. Additionally, Greer disregarded the potential increase in property values after urban renewal that rendered many properties economically unattainable for current East Riverside residents.

East Riverside urban renewal proposed to “retain the existing residential character of the neighborhood,” however, the ARC failed to recognize the economic restrictions it imposed on residents desiring to remain within East Riverside as homeowners.<sup>121</sup>

According to a 1966 “diagnostic study” conducted on the East Riverside area, “almost

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<sup>117</sup> “Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> “East Riverside Asheville, n.c.”

two-thirds of the households...take in less than \$3,000 a year” designating those households as ‘living in poverty.’<sup>122</sup> Moreover, residents who attempted to improve their job status and wage income “felt discrimination worked against them.”<sup>123</sup> Through his own experience, James Harrison noted that some employers hired blacks “just because they had a quota...but they wouldn’t make it likeable enough so that you’d want to stay. If anything, they’d discourage you more.”<sup>124</sup> Former Citizen Advisory Committee member, Dr. Charles Mosley connected this problem with the reimbursements homeowners received from the ARC for acquisition of their property. He believed people did not receive “market price for their homes. Many of them had to resort to complexes...because what they got from the developer would not be enough to let them buy another house. Housing prices now are through the roof; so these people who were homeowners...had to resort to renting again or leasing.”<sup>125</sup>

Although the ARC failed to ease residents’ apprehension over homeownership, they declared, via *The Community Improver*, “there was a response of wholehearted approval from the people of East Riverside.”<sup>126</sup> With that declaration, the ARC ignored the dissenting voices of residents, but paradoxically, resumed their campaign to attract residential support. *The Community Improver* highlighted several individuals who spoke in favor of urban renewal including East Riverside resident, W.C. Allen, noting that he

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<sup>122</sup> “Inside East Riverside.”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> James Harrison, interviewed by Karen Vaneman, 19 November 2007, transcript, The Karen Vaneman, Oral History Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>125</sup> Mosley Interview.

<sup>126</sup> “The Community Improver, July 1966 Vol. V,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “The Community Improver, July 1966 Vol. V.”

“is one of those property owners to be displaced.”<sup>127</sup> Additionally, the July edition reemphasized Dailey’s plea, “to get your answers at the Rehab office instead of the street.”<sup>128</sup> With a second and final public hearing, the ARC wanted to verify citizens understood the ARC’s interpretation of urban renewal as a government legislation conducted solely for the benefit of East Riverside residents. *The Community Improver* illustrated the benign nature of the project to articulate this perception. In a section entitled, “A New Place to Live,” the ARC narrated a successful example of acquisition and relocation for a resident unable to maintain her home due to blindness. The ARC stated, “it will be a pleasure to see her receive a fair price for an old house that she would probably not be able to sell otherwise and to see her moved from that dangerous old house to a safe, much newer place.”<sup>129</sup> Needing public approval for the East Riverside project, city officials utilized any resource to secure residential support.

On June 23, 1966, the ARC held the final public hearing on the East Riverside project. Immediately after the hearing, the City Council voted five to one to approve the \$8.7 million East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. According to the *Asheville Citizen*, City Councilman Theodore B. Sumner provided the only dissenting opinion on urban renewal. Sumner’s concerns dealt with accepting federal funds and hassle of the “federal government coming in and telling us what to do.”<sup>130</sup> He also accused the ARC of “deliberately” keeping “the place (East Riverside) looking bad so people will do what

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<sup>127</sup> “The Community Improver, July 1966 Vol. V.”

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> “City Council Approves Urban Renewal Project,” *The Asheville Citizen*, June 24, 1966.

they want.”<sup>131</sup> Council members Clarence E. Morgan and William F. Algary refuted his claims. Algary argued against Sumner’s counterarguments for urban renewal stating, “Asheville has ‘stood still since 1929, and we have to do something if we’re ever going to have any progress’” and that “housing conditions in the East Riverside area ‘demand drastic measures.’”<sup>132</sup> Although approximately seventy-five East Riverside residents attended the public hearing, their voices remained silent as local coverage neglected to print their concerns on urban renewal.<sup>133</sup> City Council’s approval moved Asheville closer to implementing the proposed East Riverside project.

North Carolina state law required cities to hold bond referendums on urban renewal projects. Due to several delays, city officials set March 7, 1967 as the date to vote on the \$1.4 million dollar bond issue to supplement the \$63 million dollars the federal government granted Asheville to conduct the project.<sup>134</sup> To gain public support, the ARC renewed its *Community Improver* campaign to espouse the benefits of the program. The ARC quoted several East Riverside residents who favored urban renewal and urged others to vote in favor of the bond issue. J.A. Dusenbury, a teacher at South French Broad High School, argued that, “the people must know the benefits that will be derived from this program. The people who have the facts will support it. This is one way

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<sup>131</sup> “City Council Approves Urban Renewal Project.”

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> In order to pay for the city’s portion of urban renewal, the bond issue passed “a tax increase of \$1 per hundred dollar tax valuation...if your property taxes are now \$100 a year your tax increase would be would be only \$2.30.” See “The Community Improver, February 1967 Vol. X,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “The Community Improver, February 1967 Vol. X.”

we can show our interest in improving our community.”<sup>135</sup> Thelma Caldwell, Executive Director of the YWCA, stated, “I heartily approve of the East Riverside renewal plan.”<sup>136</sup>

Paternalistic rhetoric remained one of the ARC’s favorite tools to persuade residents. Ruben Dailey expressed, “it would be a great disappointment...if the bond issue did not go through.”<sup>137</sup> *The Community Improver* observed that “for many years a lot of people have been asking the question: ‘Why doesn’t the city do something about the bad conditions in the south area of town?’” The ARC provided an answer laden with rhetoric of expressive paternalism,

“There is now a plan—a very good plan—to ‘do something’ in this area. It is an urban renewal plan, and it will widen and repave streets, put in street lights, provide storm and sanitary sewerage, clean up Nasty Branch, remove junk yards, clear run-down shacks, and provide for a large number of modern, attractive houses. This urban renewal is our best chance to see East Riverside become one of the best neighborhoods in town...if we don’t get it, we will have nobody to blame but ourselves.”<sup>138</sup>

Greer wrote a letter to East Riverside residents expressing that “this program will rebuild our community and make it a better place to live and work.” He also warned residents, “if we sit back and do not support the bond issue, we may never see change for the better in East Riverside.”<sup>139</sup> The campaign, however, failed to secure residential support as citizens voted against the bond referendum.

The decision of citizens to vote against the bond referendum left the future of the East Riverside project in doubt. City officials attributed several reasons for the referendum’s defeat that included “public apathy, a lack of understanding of the

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<sup>135</sup> “The Community Improver, February 1967 Vol. X.”

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

program... , fear of increased taxes, as well as a general unfavorable attitude toward the first Urban Renewal project.”<sup>140</sup> Citizen Participation League Chairman Allen believed that “the residents of East Riverside were... misled” about the project’s intentions and previous delays for voting on the referendum “caused much bad feeling.”<sup>141</sup> Arthur Eddington, Livingston Street School principal, concurred with Allen’s assessment arguing, “the delay in the urban renewal program... caused the people much anxiety.”<sup>142</sup> However, enthusiasm for the urban renewal project remained considerably strong among some of Asheville’s populace. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) acknowledged this enthusiasm and granted a continuation of eligibility for urban renewal. City officials decided to hold a second referendum on December 5, 1967.

City officials and community leaders carried out a more inclusive and organized campaign following the first referendum to persuade voters in favor of urban renewal that included the support of religious leaders. Churches represented an integral component to many neighborhoods, particularly black neighborhoods. Dr. Mosley emphasized churches’ significance in African American communities commenting that they operated “as a sort of organizing principle of the area, and their pastors would be important members and spokespersons for the neighborhoods.”<sup>143</sup> A collaboration of religious

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<sup>140</sup> At the time of the bond referendum, the Civic Redevelopment Project experienced several delays in acquisition and demolition. Many citizens came to understand Civic Redevelopment Project, and urban renewal in general, as overly funded government blunder. See “A Review and Evaluation of Selected Administrative Organization Procedures and Identification of Social Service Capabilities in Asheville and Buncombe County,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Specials Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>141</sup> “The Community Improver, February 1967 Vol. X.”

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Mosley Interview.

leaders from thirty-five of Asheville's churches and synagogues including two influential African American churches, the Hopkins Chapel AME Zion Church and the Barry Temple Methodist Church, formed the Interfaith Committee on Housing. The Interfaith Committee believed "intolerably widespread bad housing" represented "one of the most pervasive social ills" inflicting Asheville.<sup>144</sup> To resolve this social injustice, the Interfaith Committee created a Church Contact-Urban Renewal Task Group to execute "an intensive campaign among the churches."<sup>145</sup> Their campaign promoted the East Riverside project through several educational programs and a Speakers Bureau comprised of several pastors to "carry the message to the churches."<sup>146</sup> City officials, community leaders and church organizations led a successful campaign. On December 5, 1967, voters passed the bond referendum and the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project became an official city endeavor.

The ARC's campaign effort with the assistance of black community and religious leaders successfully persuaded to support the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project. For a brief moment, the ARC and city officials believed they had established a cooperative relationship with African American residents.<sup>147</sup> Their effort to portray East Riverside primarily as a residential project proved successful among black civic leaders and

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<sup>144</sup> Asheville Area Human Relations Council, "Newsletter of the Interfaith Committee on Housing," July 1967, League of Women Voters Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Newsletter of the Interfaith Committee on Housing."

<sup>145</sup> "Newsletter of the Interfaith Committee on Housing."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> In the summer of 1966, the ARC hired Ruth L. Mace and associates to interview East Riverside residents "to find out as much as possible...about the people of East Riverside." The data collected from their interviews and surveys suggested that residents held a "favorable or hopeful attitude that renewal will make a better neighborhood" with the majority of their knowledge on urban renewal coming from the ARC's *The Community Improver*. See "Inside East Riverside."

members of the middle class. The ARC collaborated with black civic leaders during the planning phase of the East Riverside project that established a temporary political alliance. Their political alliance persuaded residents to support and vote in favor of urban renewal. African American community leaders and organizations collaboration with the ARC, however, later proved an exceptional experience. The ARC's public relations campaign utilized the ill effects of previous federal policies and racial discrimination to justify the need for urban renewal while they simultaneously calculated the project's economic benefits for Asheville's tourist industry. Moreover, the ARC attempted to construct urban renewal through the vision of civic and business leaders that marginalized African American residents from the political process.

The ARC and AHA's urban renewal program soon proved problematic for African American public housing tenants. Black residents of Hillcrest Apartments and Lee Walker Heights realized that their black leaders failed to understand "the needs and desires of the African American community's more marginalized members."<sup>148</sup> The ARC's paternal benevolence for the housing conditions of African Americans that concealed their economic intentions to increase Asheville's service industry capitulated when black tenants asserted their political autonomy. Immediately following the referendum, African Americans altered the relationship dynamics of urban renewal that the ARC and AHA attempted to construct within a paternal framework during the years leading up to Asheville's official approval of the East Riverside project.

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<sup>148</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 234.

## CHAPTER THREE

“WE’RE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT,  
NO! WE AIN’T GOING TO TAKE IT,  
WE’RE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANYMORE”:  
THE RISE OF THE BLACK TENANTS AND THE CHANGING OF ASHEVILLE’S  
POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The Asheville Redevelopment Commission’s (ARC) attempt to establish urban renewal through paternalistic rhetoric proved sufficient enough to gain residential support. Many black residents within East Riverside appeared hopeful that urban renewal would provide quality homes.<sup>1</sup> As a result, African Americans appeared in favor of, or at least willing to accept, urban renewal as the ARC and other civic leaders had described the project. However, residents soon realized that the cost for standard homes meant the loss of community and homeownership as well as the possibility of becoming a tenant in one of Asheville Housing Authority’s (AHA) public housing complexes. Many East Riverside residents understood public housing as apartments for less than reputable citizens. Additionally, the geographical isolation of Asheville’s current three projects, Hillcrest, Lee Walker, and Pisgah View, disconcerted many in East Riverside.<sup>2</sup> For the families forced to relocate, a potential life in public housing proved contrary to the post-urban renewal future that the ARC had promised. With fears mounting about displacement and relocation, East Riverside residents soon found public housing tenants as a source of inspiration to challenge the displacement policy of urban renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> Asheville resident Priscilla Ndiaye, whose family urban renewal displaced in the 1970s, remembered that at first her family as well as other families seemed “happy to see urban renewal come through.” See Mark Barrett, “Photos trace history of Asheville’s Southside,” *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, February, 24 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See Ruth L. Mace, “Inside East Riverside,” February 1967, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

The rise of African American public housing tenants as political actors challenged the power dynamics of the political relationship between city officials and black residents. The Hillcrest and Lee Walker tenant rent strike that erupted in December of 1967 temporarily shifted political power away from the AHA and in favor of black tenants. In the process, African American public housing tenants altered the political landscape of Asheville. Although physically located outside the boundaries of East Riverside, the political actions and victory of the Hillcrest and Lee Walker tenants empowered East Riverside residents to exert their political voice and autonomy. During the 1970s, East Riverside residents collectively challenged the ARC, AHA, and City Council's perceived role for black residents as passive 'beneficiaries' to their paternal role of benefactor. The political victories of black residents proved few and limited. Urban renewal dismantled the existing community of East Riverside, as well as Asheville's other black neighborhoods. However, their political activity and voices forced Asheville's white power structure to listen and occasionally adhere to their political demands. African American resistance failed to change urban renewal, but black residents did successfully render the ARC and AHA's paternalism ineffective forcing city officials to recognize their political autonomy.

The tenants of Hillcrest and Lee Walker represented a marginalized socio-economic and racial group whose physical isolation from the majority of Asheville often mitigated their voices within the political arena. City officials often noted Hillcrest's isolation and their rhetoric on the housing project suggested that officials rarely considered the opinions of the tenants during their discussions about the social problems

occurring within the public housing complex. In regards to Hillcrest and possible plans city officials should implement, the Metropolitan Planning Board (MPB) wrote,

“The Hillcrest Project, isolated on an island surrounded by a cliff and a system of encircling highways, presents a formidable problem difficult of solution. Here the matter of social costs should enter the picture. It has been suggested that the entire project should be abandoned and the buildings converted to other uses. Another suggestion is that buildings be razed and the site used for a high-rise motor inn. If we can ever get to the point where we being to catch up a little with our housing needs, serious consideration should be given to removing this ghetto eyesore from the community.”<sup>3</sup>

Due to Hillcrest’s physical isolation, city officials often omitted its tenants from political discussion.

However, in her study on the political activity of black public housing tenants in Baltimore, historian Rhonda Y. Williams observed that the physical isolation of public housing complexes served as an impetus to connect residents through which a political and social identity emerged. Williams argued that as tenants unified under a collective identity they utilized their resident councils, designed originally to facilitate community involvement, as “outlets for more oppositional forms of political engagement.”<sup>4</sup>

Asheville’s public housing residents treaded a similar path in their effort to unshackle themselves from societal restraints to determine the course of their own lives.

Acknowledging the racial and socio-economic obstacles that hindered them individually, public housing tenants utilized their resident councils to form a unified political entity to oppose the AHA.

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<sup>3</sup> See Asheville-Buncombe County Metropolitan Planning Board, “How Shall We Grow?”, 1970, Asheville Urban Renewal Files, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>4</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggle Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

Black tenants of the Asheville's public housing complexes, Hillcrest Apartments

and Lee Walker Heights, had experienced the AHA abuse their power and failure to uphold their obligations as proprietor. City officials and community leaders' campaign for the proposed East Riverside project heralded the future of Asheville's public housing. However, they neglected to acknowledge the city's current public housing complexes and address how they planned to meet their needs. Hillcrest residents witnessed their housing units deteriorate and



Figure 7. c. 2002. This map displays an aerial view of Montford. The Hillcrest apartments are located in the map's bottom left corner. Although this is a more contemporary map, it adequately illustrates the project's physical isolation as Hillcrest and its adjacent physical surroundings have remained relatively the same since 1967. Many of the structures and roads have changed during the forty years that passed as redevelopment affected the neighborhood closest to the apartments. These were the black neighborhoods of Hill Street and Stumptown. Hillcrest is located approximately a half mile north of the then East Riverside project area. "Historic Development, Montford Community, Asheville, N.C., Buncombe County 2002 Aerial Photography," 2006, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

their requests ignored while ARC and AHA officials glorified the proposed public housing projects.

Moreover, Community Organizer for the Opportunity Corporation of Madison and Buncombe Counties

Robert Brunk remembered that some AHA officials often used racial slurs to reference Hillcrest and Lee

Walker residents during public hearings. Tired of

verbal degradation and AHA's incompetence, Hillcrest residents decided to assert their political autonomy and

demanded that the AHA recognize and respect their rights as citizens.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Brunk, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, 2 February 1993, tape recording, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Brunk Interview.

On December 4, 1967, the Hillcrest Community Organization (HCO) proposed a rent strike and Hillcrest residents voted to initiate the boycott. Lee Walker residents subsequently joined the rent strike. Historian Sarah Judson has argued that the renters' strike ultimately "challenged the deeply ingrained system of paternalism that determined race relations, employment, and resource distribution."<sup>6</sup> Their initial demands dealt with unresolved maintenance issues and undocumented utility bills, but expanded their demands to include the removal of AHA Executive Director Carl Vaughn. They also demanded a revised lease that recognized their constitutional rights of tenants, namely the protection against the invasion of privacy and unjust eviction.<sup>7</sup> The HCO's proposed rent strike to hold the AHA accountable for its obligations to its tenants illustrated residents' desire to exercise their political autonomy and demonstrated their political power.

The HCO published a press release following their decision to boycott rent payments that warned both the black and white power structures "we're the new BLACK JOES" proclaiming, "We all want freedom and now, for ourselves and our neighbors."<sup>8</sup> The African American residents that collaborated with the ARC in campaigning for urban renewal and the constructions of new public housing projects represented a different economic class than the majority of public housing residents. African American civic leaders, like Ruben Dailey and A.C. Allen, as well as middle-class blacks, like Otis

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Judson, "The Civil Rights Movement in WNC," (lecture at African Americans in WNC Conference, Asheville, North Carolina, October 24, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> See "L.M.V Observer's Report at Meetings of Housing Comm. Of Human Relations Council," December 9, 1967, League of Women Voters Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "L.M.V. Observer's Report of Housing Comm. Of Human Relations Council."

<sup>8</sup> "The 34," League of Women Voters Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

Michael and Lacy Haith, held a different opinion of the ARC and AHA's role in African American lives. Michael and Haith both experienced racial discrimination from private and government entities, but because of their economic standing, they understood public housing and the AHA from an outsider's perspective.<sup>9</sup> They viewed urban renewal and public housing as beneficiary programs for African Americans in need of quality housing. Dailey and Allen believed providing "decent, safe, and sanitary housing for people who cannot afford...a month rent, or...a month house payment" represented the AHA's primary obligations.<sup>10</sup>

However, their emphasis on housing failed to grasp the realities of life within public housing and the asymmetrical relationship between tenants and the AHA. Williams argued that this type of relationship facilitated government officials and staff to combine "race, gender, class, and politics...in insidious ways to engender unequal citizenship status" among tenants.<sup>11</sup> Under the direct authority of the AHA and city officials, tenants endured the societal discriminations more severely than African Americans residing outside public housing. Public housing also represented the only affordable housing for many tenants. Residents had to accept the conditions under the AHA's terms or faced possible eviction. According to HCO president Carl Johnson, the

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<sup>9</sup> Michael and Haith's opinion of public housing and urban renewal appeared prevalent among middle class African Americans across the nation's cities. As a caveat, such opinions often occurred during the planning process of urban renewal and prior to the knowledge of public housing's perpetuation of racial economic and social disparity becoming widespread and accepted among the general populace. See John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 123-140.

<sup>10</sup> Asheville Redevelopment Commission, "Public Hearing on the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project Given by the Asheville Redevelopment Commission," May 1966, Asheville Urban Renewal Files, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*, 8.

AHA evicted individuals without justification and often without notice. As result, Johnson noted that AHA officials and staff routinely disregarded the rights of tenants, because disagreement on the part of the resident potentially led to eviction.<sup>12</sup> Different experiences among Asheville's black population with the ARC and AHA ultimately created separate perspectives and understandings about the two agencies. Due to this discrepancy, the Hillcrest rent strikers refused to accept that "black residents with more wealth and social status" represented "the interest for a black population that was...divided along class lines."<sup>13</sup> Hillcrest residents' experience living within public housing informed their distinct political consciousness within the African American community.

The Hillcrest rent strikers' campaign against the AHA's incompetence appeared on the surface to stem primarily from the AHA's neglect of maintenance issues. However, the impetus for the rent strike arose from years of the AHA either superficially responding to or blatantly ignoring the attempts of tenants to work with AHA officials.<sup>14</sup> Since its establishment in 1966, the HCO sought to collaborate with the AHA "to improve the total community life of the residents of Hillcrest, and to share in solving the problems of poor people in the Asheville area."<sup>15</sup> The HCO held numerous meetings with the AHA to illustrate the needs of residents and express tenant complaints about the deterioration of their housing. However, they found AHA officials unwilling to help

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<sup>12</sup> See "L.M.V Observer's Report at Meetings of Housing Comm. Of Human Relations Council."

<sup>13</sup> Judson, "The Civil Rights Movement in WNC."

<sup>14</sup> "Hillcrest Teens Newsletter," January 31, 1968, League of Women Voters Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina, 4. Hereafter cited as "Hillcrest Teens Newsletter."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

tenants ameliorate their living conditions. Additionally, the HCO felt the AHA refused to recognize tenants as equal parties in the tenant-landlord relationship.<sup>16</sup>

The AHA's rejection of tenants as anything akin to mutual partners created an environment in which officials believed that the tenants had no authority to hold the AHA accountable for its obligations as proprietor. As a result, Hillcrest tenants witnessed AHA officials and employees abuse their positions that led to unjust evictions and maintenance neglect. The HCO believed manager Magnolia Whiteside, the Hillcrest property manager, often evicted tenants without cause or under false pretenses.<sup>17</sup> This included one resident the AHA and Whiteside evicted because they wrongly assumed that her evening work included prostitution.<sup>18</sup> Without any accountability, the maintenance staff's negligence resulted in hazardous living conditions. The HCO documented several cases of hot water heaters that exploded causing water damage to the surrounding apartments. In another case the HCO documented, a tenant's stove malfunctioned that produced flames burning the individual's head and face. Along with these serious maintenance problems were numerous routine repairs that included broken windows, loose cabinets, and leaky faucets that went unfixed.<sup>19</sup> When the AHA did address maintenance requests, some tenants endured sexual harassment from the maintenance workers while others had AHA staff enter their apartments without permission.<sup>20</sup> Within this environment, the HCO and Hillcrest tenants initiated their rent strike to force the AHA to acknowledge their obligations and responsibilities to public housing tenants.

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<sup>16</sup> "Hillcrest Teens Newsletter," 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Judson, "The Civil Rights Movement in WNC."

<sup>19</sup> "Hillcrest Teens Newsletter," 5.

<sup>20</sup> Judson, "The Civil Rights Movement in WNC."

In order to strengthen their cause, the HCO's president Carl Johnson sought assistance from organizations and individuals within and outside Asheville. With the help of the Opportunity Corporation's Robert Brunk and the Asheville Area Human Relations Council, the HCO compiled a list of complaints and demands. Their complaints and demands emphasized the importance that the AHA fulfill their obligations as proprietor and provide adequate maintenance in a timely manner.<sup>21</sup> The Opportunity Corporation's role in assisting the HCO proved contentious. As a federally funded initiative, via Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty program, the Opportunity Corporation's primary objective was to empower citizens to organize themselves as a collective to address the social and economic ills that perpetuated poverty. In particular, Robert Brunk, as a neighborhood service organizer, helped the HCO develop and facilitate strategies to solve their economic problems.<sup>22</sup>

Brunk's auxiliary role in assisting the HCO led AHA members to accuse the Opportunity Corporation of initiating the rent strike. Dr. Joseph Schandler "contended the Opportunity Corp. had 'organized the tenants to complain without giving them sufficient guidance as to the proper channels to make their complaints known. Prior to the organization of the Opportunity Corp... we had a good relationship between the tenants and the authority.'"<sup>23</sup> Vaughn accused the Opportunity Corporation of providing Johnson with "an expense account," paying him "to run here and there to find out how to create

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<sup>21</sup> "League of Women Voters Observer's Report at Meeting of Housing Committee of Human Relations, January 1968," League of Women Voters Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "League of Women Voters Observer's Report at Meeting of Housing Committee of Human Relations, January 1968."

<sup>22</sup> Brunk Interview.

<sup>23</sup> Laurens Irby, "AHA Chairman Quits; Rent Strike Growing," *The Asheville Citizen*, December 9, 1967.

this type of difficulty.”<sup>24</sup> Ora A. Spaid, the Executive Director of the Opportunity Corporation, released a press statement countering the AHA’s accusations. Spaid stated that the Opportunity Corporation “did not suggest or start the strike. We did not suggest or decide the demands made by the tenants. These decisions and actions are entirely those of the Hillcrest Community Organization.”<sup>25</sup> The AHA’s accusations against the Opportunity Corporation portrayed city officials’ devaluation of black tenants’ political independence.

The HCO enlisted advisors with experience in civil rights activism to help tenants wield their political power. In particular, Howard Fuller, whose experience with the Foundation for Community Development in Durham provided invaluable knowledge, supported the strikers as advisors leading workshops and assisting with strategy planning. A few days after the strike began, Fuller addressed an audience of over 100 individuals at the South French Board High School. He stated that he only “came to give assistance” in mobilizing public support not to lead the rent strikers.<sup>26</sup> Through his experience assisting black tenants in Durham, Fuller understood that tenants needed public support in order for their strike to succeed. However, he recognized that public support had to adhere to the tenants’ leadership in order to force government agencies to accept the tenants’ legitimacy as political actors.<sup>27</sup> According to historian Christina Greene, when low-income African Americans orchestrated their own grassroots movements against racial

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<sup>24</sup> Irby, “AHA Chairman Quits; Rent Strike Growing.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on Howard Fuller’s community activism in the realm of public housing see Christine Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 109-137.

discrimination they demonstrated that they “were critical players not simply in numbers, but in setting the agenda of the African American freedom movement.”<sup>28</sup> In her study on Durham’s black freedom movement, she found that when such movements occurred white city officials’ responded to low-income blacks’ legitimacy as political actors by enacting political and legal reforms. In particular, conceding to the demands of public housing tenants, Durham’s public housing officials issued a new lease that stipulated a requirement that officials had to provide a written reason and justification for eviction.<sup>29</sup> Fuller’s acceptance and affirmation of his advisory role illustrated to Asheville city officials and black leaders that the rent strike was a movement by and for black public housing tenants.

According to Judson, the decision of the tenants to ask Fuller to advise their rent strike represented a warning “to both the black and white power structures.”<sup>30</sup> Historian Williams noted that African American public housing tenants in Baltimore expressed similar sentiments in their own fight to resolve housing and economic inequality. Williams illustrated that when African Americans ascended to positions within Baltimore’s Housing Authority and failed to address the concerns of black tenants sufficiently, residents charged them with continuing the oppressive nature of public housing. According to Williams, when black tenants ostracized black power brokers it solidified their group as a separate political entity created for the betterment of tenants, one opposed to those, regardless of race, that hindered their rights as citizens.<sup>31</sup> Asheville’s public housing tenants adhered to a similar philosophy. They refused to

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<sup>28</sup> Greene, *Our Separate Way*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> See Greene, 110-113.

<sup>30</sup> Judson, “The Civil Rights Movement in WNC.”

<sup>31</sup> See Williams, 233-234.

accept their marginalized position within the African American population and Asheville. In their study on the North Carolina Fund and its battle against poverty, historians Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis illustrated that when given the opportunity impoverished black residents “stepped forward and insisted on serving as officers, not just foot soldiers, in an ever-broadening battle for economic justice and political equality.”<sup>32</sup> Asheville’s black tenants developed a similar mentality and took the leadership role in the fight for housing equality.

Although the actual number of rent strikers remained static at thirty-four, during the first week of the strike upwards to 150 public housing tenants participated in the HCO’s meetings demonstrating solidarity among tenants for the strike.<sup>33</sup> The AHA acknowledged rent strikers’ increasing political influence among tenants and began accommodating their demands. The AHA hired eleven additional employees to address its previously neglected maintenance issues.<sup>34</sup> Schandler noted that the AHA planned to conduct “‘apartment-by-apartment’ inspections to correct deficiencies” and “to correct a drainage problem at Lee Walker apartments and at the Hillcrest project.”<sup>35</sup> However, Schandler refused to credit the improved maintenance to the demands of the rent strikers. Instead, he “pointed out that the Housing Authority has been requesting permission to hire additional maintenance men for over a year and has just now received permission.”<sup>36</sup> Schandler also informed the tenants “since we’re placing so much stress on maintenance,

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<sup>32</sup> Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>33</sup> “Hillcrest Teens Newsletter,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> “AHA to Employ 11 New People for Maintenance,” *The Asheville Citizen*, December 7, 1967.

<sup>35</sup> “AHA to Employ 11 New People for Maintenance.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

we'll have to de-emphasize some other parts of the budget.”<sup>37</sup> Although Schandler neglected to elaborate on this point, his statement implied that the AHA’s failure to handle previous maintenance resulted from budget restraints and not because the AHA refused to adhere to its responsibilities as proprietor. Schandler’s explanation of the AHA’s decision to hire more maintenance workers attempted to debase the tenant’s need to strike while simultaneously refuting their claims that the AHA purposefully neglected their request.

The rent strikers, however, viewed the AHA’s hirings as a token gesture. Johnson believed, “this is merely a way of satisfying people as far as complaints are concerned,” rather than a genuine effort to resolve maintenance problems within the public housing projects.<sup>38</sup> Johnson argued that the fact the AHA hired these workers for three to six week stints represented a perfunctory fix rather than a sustainable solution. As a result, Johnson stated that the tenants did not “regard this as any step toward getting what we are asking for.”<sup>39</sup> Vaughn acknowledged, “that the remedial repair program is based on a six-weeks effort,” but “added that he feels all the tenants’ complaints can be satisfied in six weeks.”<sup>40</sup> Vaughn reiterated Schandler’s previous argument about the financial repercussions of resolving the tenants’ maintenance problems. He stated, “the cost of making these repairs is not an extra amount of money we’re receiving from some place. We’re just diverting funds from other categories of our budget” and that this may affect other aspects of public housing.<sup>41</sup> With the AHA’s decision to hire only temporary

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<sup>37</sup> “AHA to Employ 11 New People for Maintenance.”

<sup>38</sup> Irby, “AHA Chairman Quits; Rent Strike Growing.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Irby, “AHA Chairman Quits; Rent Strike Growing.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

maintenance employees, Hillcrest residents continued their strike until the AHA agreed to make permanent reforms.

The rent strikers' power derived from withholding their rents, thus, depriving the AHA of its primary source of income. Within two weeks of the start of the strike, the AHA recognized that the tenants had created a potential financial crisis. AHA members decided they had to accept the maintenance demands of the rent strikers, albeit with a temporary rather than a permanent solution. Recognizing the power shift, Hillcrest residents decided to increase their demands. The rent strikers' requested revisions to the rental contract "to ease the burden of rent payments for those out of work" as well as a balance to the discrepancy between "the requirements of tenants" and "the responsibilities of the housing authority."<sup>42</sup> The tenants, also, demanded a reassessment of the method in which the AHA bills residents for excess utility usage. The AHA provided verbal confirmation that they were discussing a new rental contract that addressed tenant concerns and noted "steps had already been taken to put the new billing system into effect before the rent strike started."<sup>43</sup> However, the AHA's response to the rent strikers constituted mere lip service that resulted in some tenants demanding "for Vaughn's dismissal."<sup>44</sup>

The new tenant demands incensed Vaughn as well as provoked the ire of residents from Pisgah View, the white public housing project in Asheville. Vaughn felt his importance to the AHA outweighed the demands of the rent strikers and requested a pay

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<sup>42</sup> Luther Thigpen, "AHA Lauds Vaughn's Work; Delays Pay Hike Approval," *The Asheville Citizen*, December 22, 1967.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Thigpen, "AHA Lauds Vaughn's Work; Delays Pay Hike Approval."

raise for his work as AHA's Director.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Vaughn sought "protection for his job."<sup>46</sup> He argued that, "'I've done my best for this authority'...adding that implications have been made that have resulted in 'a totally unfair situation for me.'"<sup>47</sup> In essence, Vaughn's request represented an attempt to demonstrate that he carried more political power and influence than the rent strikers.

Although the AHA praised Vaughn for his efforts, they denied him his request and in the process, affirmed the political influence Hillcrest residents wielded. W.L. Crisp, president of the Pisgah View Tenant Association, Asheville's all-white public housing project, supported Vaughn and accused the Opportunity Corporation of forcing Hillcrest residents to conduct a rent strike. Additionally, Crisp stated that the Opportunity Corporation threatened the Pisgah View residents remarking that they "had 'better get on the bandwagon' with other groups" and "if concessions are made, Crisp's group would be left out."<sup>48</sup> Crisp and the Pisgah View Tenants Association circulated a petition calling for Ora A. Spaid's dismissal from the Opportunity Corporation. For Crisp and the Pisgah View tenants, Vaughn and the AHA adequately fulfilled their obligations and responsibilities. Crisp believed that the problems arising from Hillcrest and Lee Walker developed, not from the tenants' agitation with the AHA, but rather due to the Opportunity Corporation's meddling with the tenants and the AHA's relationship.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Thigpen, "AHA Lauds Vaughn's Work; Delays Pay Hike Approval."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The separation of black and whites within public housing politics appeared commonplace. Historian Rhonda Y. Williams noted that although whites protested against housing authority policies, and occasionally for similar demands as black tenants, they rarely aligned themselves with African Americans. According to Williams, white public housing tenants believed such a coalition threatened "the stability of white

To reiterate the seriousness of their accusations and claim ownership for the rent strike, the Hillcrest Community Organization held a press conference to announce their Five-Point Program. The Five-Point Program outlined the complaints and demands of the tenants. The first point called for the dismissal of Vaughn and Magnolia Whiteside, manager of the Hillcrest apartments. According to the Hillcrest residents, Vaughn and Whiteside had “not treated us with the respect and dignity that we as tenants and human beings deserved.”<sup>50</sup> The accusations against Vaughn and Whiteside included refusal to address tenant complaints, eviction of tenants without investigations, and the displaying of favoritism among the public housing tenants. Two of the points dealt with the need for the AHA to work directly with the tenant associations and for at least one representative from each of the public housing projects to serve on the AHA board. The fourth point outlined the need to reach an agreement on short-term and long-term resolutions to the maintenance problems. The last point demanded “that leases...be made more constitutional.”<sup>51</sup> For tenants this meant a lease that protected their rights to privacy and against unjust eviction.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, the tenants refused to apologize for the rent strike. In their Five-Point plan, HCO members stated that they previously met and provided a tour of Hillcrest apartments to Schandler and several other members of the AHA in October of 1967. At that time, Schandler responded favorably to the tenants’ maintenance request. However, forty-two days had passed since the AHA’s visit and maintenance problems remained

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working-class citizenship.” Moreover she argued that white tenants believed “Black people...were harbingers of danger, crime, and social disruption.” See Williams, 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> “Hillcrest Teens Newsletter,” 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See “L.M.V Observer’s Report at Meetings of Housing Comm. Of Human Relations Council.”

unresolved. Schandler eventually resorted to fabrication to explain the AHA's slow response stating, "that the complaint level was very low," for maintenance issues at the time of his visit.<sup>53</sup> Tired of the "insulting, arrogant, and belligerent attitude" of the AHA, residents felt a rent strike offered the only opportunity to exert their political power within the tenant and AHA relationship and enact changes to public housing policy.<sup>54</sup> They simply demanded "better living conditions."<sup>55</sup>

In January of 1968, the rent strikers achieved one of their five points when Vaughn gave the AHA notice of his impending resignation.<sup>56</sup> Vaughn joined Schandler, who had resigned from his duties as AHA Chairman a few days prior.<sup>57</sup> Although their resignations did not take effect until the end of February, the initiation of the resignations reassured rent strikers of their political power. Vaughn's resignation, in particular, demonstrated the political influence of Hillcrest residents. His resignation, also, provoked a response from W.L. Crisp and the Pisgah View Tenants Association. Crisp believed Vaughn's resignation represented "minority rule" which went against "the process of 'majority rule' ... an important part of the American way of life."<sup>58</sup>

In response, Crisp and the Pisgah View Tenants Association initiated their own rent strike to protest Vaughn's resignation. Pisgah View tenants had an amicable relationship with Vaughn. With his office located at Pisgah View, Vaughn had daily

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<sup>53</sup> "Hillcrest Teens Newsletter," 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "AHA Accepts Director's Resignation," *The Asheville Citizen*, February 2, 1968.

<sup>57</sup> "Schandler Resigns; Don Moore Is Named AHA Chairman," *The Asheville Citizen*.

<sup>58</sup> Luther Thigpen, "HUD Promises Aid In Improving Housing Projects Here," *The Asheville Citizen*, January 26, 1968.

interactions with the tenants, who viewed him as a great landlord as opposed to Hillcrest residents who saw Vaughn as a “petty tyrant.”<sup>59</sup> For Pisgah View tenants, the AHA fulfilled their responsibilities. According to Crisp, Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents’ conflict with the AHA developed because the Opportunity Corporation and a few agitators in Hillcrest, rather than any actual fault on the part of Vaughn and the AHA.<sup>60</sup> The decision of Pisgah View residents’ to fault Hillcrest tenants for the AHA’s shortcomings reflected racial tensions within Asheville. According to Judson, Crisp and the Pisgah View Tenants Association’s actions “demonstrated a commitment to their racial identity...against their own interest.”<sup>61</sup> Williams noted similar tendencies in Baltimore’s public housing, arguing that white tenants believed political alignment with black tenants threatened “the stability of white working-class citizenship.”<sup>62</sup> Race, not class interest, dictated the politics of public housing in Asheville.

Ironically, the Pisgah View tenants’ rent strike provided the Hillcrest and Lee Walker strikers with more leverage in their fight against the AHA. Although Pisgah View residents protested against their black counterparts in public housing, their decision to forego rent payment added another economic burden to the AHA’s already precarious financial situation. Crisp and the Pisgah rent strikers supported Vaughn, but not necessarily the AHA. The AHA decided not to press charges against the tenants who refused to pay January’s rent, but the AHA did warn residents that “if rents aren’t paid then we have no choice but to take action.”<sup>63</sup> Crisp responded, “This does not scare us at

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<sup>59</sup> Judson, “The Civil Rights Movement in WNC.”

<sup>60</sup> Thigpen, “HUD Promises Aid In Improving Housing Projects Here.”

<sup>61</sup> Judson, “The Civil Rights Movement in WNC.”

<sup>62</sup> Williams, 15-16.

<sup>63</sup> Thigpen, “HUD Promises Aid In Improving Housing Projects Here.”

all. We are aware of our rights and have talked to an attorney.”<sup>64</sup> The Pisgah rent strikers informed the AHA that if they refused to reinstate Vaughn then they wanted “a voice in who takes his place.”<sup>65</sup> Schandler and AHA member Robert D. Barbour denied their request stating that the AHA board “will choose a new executive director.” Schandler stated, “This is one of the prime functions of the board...and we don’t plan to turn our responsibilities over to any other group.”<sup>66</sup> The Pisgah View Tenant Association countered their claim with “a resolution calling for the resignation of Dr. Schandler and Robert Barbour.”<sup>67</sup> This resolution occurred days after Schandler had already informed the AHA of his resignation. The Pisgah View tenants initiated their strike to have a political voice within the AHA in order to counter the demands of the black tenants. However, their tactic applied further financial burden on the AHA as well as demonstrated the political power of the tenant, thus aiding the Hillcrest and Lee Walker rent strikers.

The AHA recognized their weaker position and the political legitimacy of the black tenant strikers. However, the AHA refused to credit the Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents. Schandler argued that Vaughn and his resignation happened to coincide with the rent strikes and not the “result of pressure from another group.”<sup>68</sup> He stated, “that both were made voluntarily.”<sup>69</sup> The rent strikers understood the restraints their actions placed on the AHA’s finances and responded to Schandler’s statements simply with the

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<sup>64</sup> Thigpen, “HUD Promises Aid In Improving Housing Projects Here.”

<sup>65</sup> “Anti-Poverty Workers Ousted From Meeting,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 31, 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Thigpen, “HUD Promises Aid In Improving Housing Projects Here.”

<sup>67</sup> “Schandler Resigns; Don Moore Is Named AHA Chairman,” *The Asheville Citizen*, February 1, 1968.

<sup>68</sup> “Schandler Resigns; Don Moore Is Named AHA Chairman.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

truth, “our money got rid of Carl Vaughn.”<sup>70</sup> The AHA even accused the Hillcrest and Lee Walker strikers of hindering their ability to adhere to meet their demands. They argued that the residents needed to “end their rent strikes so the board can get on with the job of dealing their complaints.”<sup>71</sup>

Hillcrest and Lee Walker strikers responded to the AHA’s accusations by writing letters to national leaders to increase their political strength. The rent strikers informed Floyd McKissick, director of CORE and former Asheville resident, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Secretary of HUD Robert Weaver, Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and President Lyndon B. Johnson of the AHA’s failures to meet their obligations and responsibilities to their tenants. In response to their letters, E.J. Moyle and John B. Sams of the Housing Assistance Administration arrived in Asheville to investigate the claims of the rent strikers against the AHA. Moyle and Sams promised to comply with tenant demands and if necessary, “bring about a revision of the budget if needed to finance some of the more urgent projects.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Moyle and Sams presented public housing residents with an amended lease that adhere to their entitled rights as tenants that included protections privacy and against unjust eviction. Sams had agreed with the tenants stating, “that portions of the old lease are unenforceable in the courts.”<sup>73</sup> Johnson and the rent strikers felt their efforts vindicated stating, we “feel that...we will be able to end the rent strike.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Housing Authority Hires New Director,” *The Asheville Citizen*, February 27, 1968.

<sup>71</sup> Thigpen, “HUD Promises Aid in Improving Housing Projects Here.”

<sup>72</sup> “Quick Action Pledged on Housing Problems,” *The Asheville Citizen*, February 8, 1968.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

The AHA, however, proved unwilling to cede their position of power in the tenant-landlord relationship to the residents of Hillcrest and Lee Walker. Shortly after Moyle and Sams arrived, the AHA demanded that the strikers pay their past due rents. The AHA also reaffirmed their belief that the tenants did not need to boycott their rent payments in order to receive the AHA's compliance in resolving their maintenance requests. AHA Chairman Robert Barbour argued, "that the rent strike was not necessary for the tenants to get their complaints across to us. It was a device they used...But we are all aware of the problems now and it is time to end it."<sup>75</sup> Barbour and the AHA's continued attempts to dictate their authority over the rent strikers forced the tenants to illustrate the fact that they held the "city accountable...and not the other way around."<sup>76</sup> The rent strikers responded with a threat to send letters to major cities' Chamber of Commerce "saying don't spend your tourist dollars here."<sup>77</sup>

The tenants' threat potentially wielded serious economic implications. The rent strikers understood the power of their strategy. In the early 1960s, Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE) utilized "white business community's fear of bad publicity" to desegregate downtown Asheville.<sup>78</sup> According to former ASCORE member Willette Burton, "the business community had decided we could not afford not to do this. If it is found out we are having this hoopla then no one would come here. That

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<sup>75</sup> "Housing Authority Warns Rent Strikers to Pay Up," *The Asheville Citizen*, February 15, 1968.

<sup>76</sup> Judson, "The Civil Rights Movement in WNC."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Willette Burton quoted in Sarah Judson, "'I Am a Nasty Brach Kid': Women's Memories of Place in the Era of Asheville's Urban Renewal," *The North Carolina Historical Review* XCI, no. 3 (July 1014), 342.

was the sword we held.”<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the summer of 1967 witnessed race riots throughout the nation’s urban centers. According to historian Thomas J. Sugrue, urban riots “reflected a popular consciousness that black communities were insensitively ruled by white outsiders....Facing what they saw as illegitimate white rule,” Africans Americans “began to fashion an alternative politics of resistance and rebellion.”<sup>80</sup> As African Americans utilized rioting as a political tool, “white America looked on in horror.”<sup>81</sup> Sugrue argued that many “political changes resulted from...the threat” of such actions.<sup>82</sup> Although Asheville appeared relatively stable in regards to racially induced rioting, a city in the midst of a racial confrontation between black tenants and a white majority AHA presented a potential reason to avoid Asheville as one’s tourist destination.<sup>83</sup> The rent strikers’ threat posed a serious problem for Asheville’s civic and business leaders attempting to improve the city’s service economy.

The AHA acknowledged that Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents had effectively altered the power dynamics of the relationship in the tenants favor.<sup>84</sup> When the AHA announced W. Jennings Groome as its new Executive Director, Groome publicly informed Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents that he “pledged to do all he could to correct

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<sup>79</sup> Judson, “I Am a Nasty Brach Kid,” 342.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 350.

<sup>81</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 302.

<sup>82</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 541.

<sup>83</sup> According to Executive Director of the Opportunity Corporation of Madison-Buncombe Counties Ora A. Spaid, Asheville’s black residents refused to “join the national tendency to violence” in response to racial discrimination. See Ora A. Spaid to A. Allen Gardner, August 10, 1967, A. Allen Gardner Papers, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>84</sup> William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 208.

tenant complaints.”<sup>85</sup> A few days later, Johnson and members of the Hillcrest and Lee Walker tenants’ association met with Groome and other AHA members to discuss issues that the AHA needed to address. The meeting resulted in the AHA’s written agreement to comply with tenant demands and “to improve the conditions in each of the city’s three housing projects.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, the agreement permitted selected members from the three tenants’ associations to appear before the AHA to address future grievances tenants may have with the AHA. On March 7, satisfied with the AHA’s proposal Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents concluded their strike and began paying their rents.<sup>87</sup> By the end of the summer, Johnson believed Groome was “doing everything in his power to satisfy complaints that were raised during the rent strike.”<sup>88</sup> Public housing residents felt the AHA understood its obligations and responsibilities to its tenants.

Hillcrest and Lee Walker residents’ rent strike illustrated a “new voice in community activism.”<sup>89</sup> Vaughn’s resignation and the revised tenant lease offered substantial gains. However, the residents’ affirmation of their political autonomy “against societal marginalization and dehumanization” profoundly altered the political structure of Asheville.<sup>90</sup> The rent strikers represented an African American political presence outside the leadership of Asheville’s black civic leaders and churches. Rather than fractionalize African Americans during urban renewal, the rent strike empowered other black residents

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<sup>85</sup> “Housing Authority Hires New Director,” *The Asheville Citizen*, February 27, 1968.

<sup>86</sup> “AHA Lists Improvements Planned at 3 Projects,” *The Asheville Citizen*, March 7, 1968.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Tenant Leaders Indicate Public Housing Conditions are Improving,” *The Asheville Citizen*, August 4, 1968.

<sup>89</sup> Judson, “The Civil Rights Movement in WNC.”

<sup>90</sup> Williams, 229.

to realize their own political power. The Tenant Council established because of the rent strike continued to pressure the AHA to fulfill their obligations to public housing tenants. Minnie Jones credited the Hillcrest rent strikers and Carl Johnson with inspiring her efforts with the Opportunity Corporation to integrate Pisgah View housing projects.<sup>91</sup> East Riverside residents utilized the HCO as a successful model of the democratic process. Through HCO's example, East Riverside residents used the neighborhood's Project Advisory Committee (PAC) as a means to protect residents from the ARC's attempts to conduct urban renewal policies unilaterally.

The Hillcrest and Lee Walker rent strike challenged the nature of the ARC and AHA's relationship with African Americans and in the process effectively altered the course the ARC and AHA designed for urban renewal. Urban renewal continued resulting in much demolition and displacement of black communities, however, the nature of paternalism that pervaded the rhetoric of ARC materials failed to establish its societal restraint on African Americans. Although political success proved limited during the subsequent years as city officials began implementing the approved plans for East Riverside, African Americans relentlessly demonstrated their political consciousness and autonomy throughout urban renewal.

The Tenant Council of the AHA, created as the result of the rent strike, initiated a new series of political conflicts between African American residents and city officials during urban renewal. In December of 1969, the AHA accepted to listen and "give consideration to the views of prospective tenants and residents of areas in which public

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<sup>91</sup> Minnie Jones, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, 2 August 1994, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

housing is proposed.”<sup>92</sup> AHA Chairman Jack Stewart cautioned residents, however, “it must not be expected that you will have the ultimate decision. It must be remembered that you are not members of the board.”<sup>93</sup> The Tenant Council rejected Stewart’s caution and attempted to exert their limited voice within the AHA to influence the AHA board members. The Tenant Council requested City Council to remove Rev. P.F. DeSaix and Robert Mathison from their positions on the AHA’s board. Betty Smith, spokesperson for the Tenant Council, read a statement that charged DeSaix and Mathison with “planting seeds of mistrust throughout the citizenry of the total community” as well as being “‘insensitive to the poor’ and the tenants.”<sup>94</sup> The Tenant Council also suggested current or former tenants replace DeSaix and Mathison on the AHA board. Councilman Henry Colton argued that the Tenant Council made “very serious charges” albeit “with very few facts to substantiate them.”<sup>95</sup> Even still, Colton recognized the importance of the tenants’ request and “didn’t believe Council could ‘pass this over.’”<sup>96</sup>

The Tenant Council’s request for DeSaix and Mathison’s removal resulted in an unexpected consequence. Under unfavorable circumstances, Groome resigned as the AHA Director in September of 1970. Groome “had been accused of having ‘had something to do with passing a petition’ asking for the ouster of the Rev. P.F. DeSaix and Robert Mathison from the AHA board.”<sup>97</sup> Although Groome denied the allegations, he criticized the AHA board for failing to “have confidence in” their director and challenged

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<sup>92</sup> “AHA To Consult Public On Housing Projects,” *The Asheville Citizen*, December 16, 1969.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Ed Seitz, *The Asheville Citizen*, July 31, 1970.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> “Groome Resigns As AHA Director,” *The Asheville Citizen*, September 22, 1970.

the board to ““come out and see what has been going on instead of meeting once a month and criticizing.””<sup>98</sup>

The Tenant Council responded to Groome’s resignation the following month at an AHA meeting. Edward Myers, President of the Tenant Council, made clear that the AHA and the Tenant Council faced “two issues and two issues only; one action to remove two members from the board and the other concerning the resignation of the executive director.”<sup>99</sup> Carl Johnson, former Hillcrest rent striker and now vice chairman of the tenant council, submitted a written proposal that included “reinstatement of Groome ‘with no strings attached.’”<sup>100</sup> Johnson also criticized the efforts of DeSaix and Mathison, accusing them of feeling “no responsibility toward us who pay for operating the housing projects.”<sup>101</sup> Numerous tenants attending the meeting spoke in favor of Groome. Many believed “Groome was the best director since public housing was opened here” and the “only director who really tried.”<sup>102</sup> The Tenant Council also requested that “all staff who work directly with the tenants be screened by the tenant’s council, and that the council be able to review all site plans of future housing projects.”<sup>103</sup> Although, the Tenant Council failed to gain Groome’s reinstatement, the AHA recognized the need to work closer with the Tenant Council. The AHA agreed to have a separate meeting with the Tenant Council to resolve the communication gap between city officials and public housing tenants that led to a tenuous political partnership.

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<sup>98</sup> “Groome Resigns As AHA Director.”

<sup>99</sup> Mary Cowles, “Tenants Ask Reinstatement Of Groome As Director,” *The Asheville Citizen*, October 6, 1970.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Cowles, “Tenants Ask Reinstatement Of Groome As Director.”

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

The Tenant Council and the AHA collaborated in the following months to try to prevent the merger of the AHA and the ARC. This political alliance represented the AHA's official recognition of public housing tenants as legitimate actors in city politics. The AHA acknowledged the political influence and power that the public housing tenants wielded during the rent strike, however, they had rarely considered these residents as legitimate political actors until now. In October of 1970, Mathison, the recently appointed chairman of the AHA, stated his desire to achieve four goals. The goals dealt with improving "the quality and quantity of public housing" as well as "establish a better understanding between the commissioners, personnel of the AHA, tenants and their elected Tenants' Council."<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Mathison addressed the proposed merger of the AHA and the ARC as a potential city department. Mathison and other AHA members "called for a referendum on the part of the tenants and the Housing Authority employees on the question of abolishing the Housing Authority as it now exists and placing housing directly under the authority of the city administration."<sup>105</sup> The decision of Mathison and the AHA's to call for the referendum developed because of the opinion of public housing tenants. Speaking on behalf of public housing tenants, Myers and Johnson "assured the commissioners that the tenants are 100 per cent against the merger as proposed."<sup>106</sup> Public housing tenants and the AHA feared "that housing and urban renewal projects

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<sup>104</sup> Mary Cowles, "Mathison Named AHA Chairman," *The Asheville Citizen*, October 20, 1970.

<sup>105</sup> Cowles, "Mathison Named AHA Chairman."

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

might become ‘political footballs’ if housing, redevelopment and related functions were taken over by a proposed new department of the city government.”<sup>107</sup>

The Tenant Council quickly benefitted from their decision to align with the AHA against the proposed merger. The AHA accepted several demands of the Tenant Council’s proposal that Johnson had submitted at an earlier meeting. The AHA refused to accept their first demand of reinstating Groome as Executive Director. However, Johnson, along with other tenants, remained adamant in their demand for Groome’s reinstatement. Johnson even read a letter from Groome detailing the many telephone calls “he had received...from tenants, businessmen of the community and people generally interested in the Housing Authority asking that he reconsider his resignation” in an effort to convince the AHA to reconsider their stance on the matter.<sup>108</sup> The AHA, however, remained steadfast in their refusal. Vice Chairman of the Board Rev. J. David Armstrong argued that Groome ““was not capable of doing the entire job.””<sup>109</sup> The Tenant Council did persuade the AHA to allow the Tenant Council to nominate two representatives via a tenant election “to serve with the AHA board in a non-voting advisory capacity.”<sup>110</sup> The primary functions of the representatives consisted of channeling “problems and proposals from the tenants to the AHA board” and provided “the Tenant Council with full information on board matters.”<sup>111</sup> Although the tenant representatives lacked voting power within the AHA, the tenants continued victories to earn a voice within city

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<sup>107</sup> Ed Seitz, “AHA Members Ask Caution In Uniting City Agencies,” *The Asheville Citizen*, October 23, 1970.

<sup>108</sup> Mary Cowles, “AHA, Tenants Unite On Some Points,” *The Asheville Citizen*, October 28, 1970.

<sup>109</sup> Cowles, “AHA, Tenants Unite On Some Points.”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

agencies proved that their political influence appeared to remain a mainstay in Asheville politics.

The political alliance between the AHA and the Tenant Council concluded when City Council voted to abolish the ARC and transfer its “authority, responsibilities, obligations, personnel, and properties,” to the AHA.<sup>112</sup> Councilmen Luke Atkinson and Ruben Dailey dissented from the majority. Their dissension resulted from housing tenants’ decision to vote “overwhelmingly against creating a new city Department of Housing and Redevelopment.”<sup>113</sup> In the November referendum, 462 tenants voted against with only sixty in favor.<sup>114</sup> Mayor Wayne Montgomery argued that the tenants voted against the creation of a city department as the referendum “made no mention of any other method of merging housing and redevelopment functions.”<sup>115</sup> Clydell Johnson, President of the Asheville chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and several spokesmen for the tenants refuted Montgomery’s claim. They believed the tenants had “voted against any kind of merger.”<sup>116</sup> Johnson even asked if the tenants’ would have the ability to “to express their ‘for-or-against’ on the proposition.”<sup>117</sup> Montgomery responded that the City Council had already accepted the tenants’ voice in the matter and decided to retain the AHA for the “psychological” comfort of the tenants.<sup>118</sup> Montgomery and City Council recognized that “most involved—public housing tenants, members and staffs of the two agencies...have

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<sup>112</sup> Ed Seitz, “Agency Gets Final Ok,” *The Asheville Citizen*, December 1970.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Ed Seitz, “Redevelopment Agency Abolished,” *The Asheville Citizen*, November 13, 1970.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Seitz, “Redevelopment Agency Abolished.”

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

expressed the fear that housing might” succumb to political persuasions and regime changes “if it were brought under the control of an elected body.”<sup>119</sup>

The City Council’s decision to merge the ARC’s “authority, responsibilities, obligations, personnel, and properties” within the AHA proved significant for African Americans as political actors during urban renewal. The City Council’s decision to retain the AHA, rather than create a new department, left many of the Tenant Council’s political victories within the AHA intact. In January of 1971, Mathison reminded ARC and AHA members of this fact when Ray Wheeling became Executive Director of the ARC with the understanding that “he will head the merger of the two agencies.”<sup>120</sup> Mathison read to the two agencies a motion adopted in October of 1970 that stated, “in the future all staff members working with the tenants would be screened by the Tenants’ Council before being employed.”<sup>121</sup> Lawrence Holt, former Deputy Director of the AHA during the 1970s, remembered Asheville’s decision to merge the separate housing and redevelopment entities proved beneficial when the Housing and Redevelopment Act of 1974 “put all of the categorical grant programs, model cities, urban renewal...just the whole gambit of federal programs” under one federal umbrella.<sup>122</sup> According to Holt, with housing and redevelopment already together within one entity, Asheville easily transitioned.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the East Riverside Project Advisory Committee (PAC) that

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<sup>119</sup> Seitz, “Agency Gets Final Ok.”

<sup>120</sup> Mary Cowles, “Wheeling Will Head Commission,” *The Asheville Citizen*, January 13, 1971.

<sup>121</sup> Cowles, “Wheeling Will Head Commission.”

<sup>122</sup> Lawrence Holt, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, 27 January 1993, transcript, *The Voices of Asheville Collection*, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Holt Interview.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

formed under the Model Cities program integrated into the AHA's urban renewal program. This merger granted African American residents political access to the decision making process of urban renewal as well as the benefits public housing tenants gained within the AHA.

Initially, the East Riverside PAC appeared no more valuable than simply as a political ploy for the ARC to present urban renewal as an inclusive endeavor. In January of 1970, the ARC's Project Director Dave Jones, informed the public of the ARC's intentions to create an advisory committee among East Riverside residents. However, he added the caveat that the committee "won't be able to change the urban renewal program" and that it "will act as a liaison between area residents and the commission."<sup>124</sup> The original PAC consisted of twenty-seven individuals from East Riverside that the AHA nominated and selected to help facilitate property acquisition and relocation. In his study on New Haven, Connecticut's urban renewal program, journalist Fred Powledge noted New Haven's Redevelopment Agency employed a similar method. New Haven's Mayor Richard C. Lee and the Redevelopment Agency selected individuals that served on the city's Citizens Action Committee (CAC). According to Powledge, the CAC served as the government's political puppet to portray public participation and support for the city's renewal program. However, as more black residents involved themselves in the political process, they refused to accept the CAC as the legitimate voice of the individuals affected during the redevelopment process. Powledge argued that black residents, through their own version of citizen participation, altered New Haven's false

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<sup>124</sup> Henry Robinson, "Big Gains Made In Slum Clearance And Low Cost Housing," *The Asheville Times*, January 25, 1970.

perception of citizen participation.<sup>125</sup> East Riverside residents felt the same about the AHA's individually selected PAC and acted swiftly to remedied the political problem.

In October of 1971, East Riverside residents Talulah Rogers, Roy Rogers, and Rev. Welsey Grant met with AHA member W.C. King to discuss the PAC members the AHA selected. Their concerns not only revealed residents' desire to select their own PAC members, but also the class divide among African Americans in Asheville. Talulah Rogers disagreed with the composition of the current PAC as "they were handpicked by" the AHA.<sup>126</sup> Rogers believed "some dirty work was going on somewhere" because of the AHA's direct involvement in the selection of the committee and the fact that "there was not a single person from Blanton Street on the PAC committee."<sup>127</sup> Blanton Street represented not only one of the more affluent African American streets in East Riverside, but also in entire city of Asheville.<sup>128</sup> Although Rogers's concern for the inclusion of Blanton St. residents appeared legitimate, it also implied a class schism within the African American neighborhood of East Riverside. Roy Rogers and Rev. Grant comments left little doubt about the class division. Rogers argued that public housing

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<sup>125</sup> See Fred Powledge, *Model City: A Test of American Liberalism: One Town's Efforts to Rebuild Itself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 36-44, 151-159.

<sup>126</sup> "Mr. W.C. King and Mr. Pete Connet, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, Rev. Welsey Grant, Mrs. Hammons, and Mrs. Davis Meeting Minutes," 8 October 1971, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as "Mr. W.C. King and Mr. Pete Connet, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, Rev. Welsey Grant, Mrs. Hammons, and Mrs. Davis Meeting Minutes."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> See Lawrence Gilliam, interviewed by Karen Vaneman, 6 November 2007, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

tenants and other renters “had no business making decisions for home-owners.”<sup>129</sup> Grant concurred with Rogers’ assessment and “felt the people who were tax payers should be considered” for the PAC. Grant then proceeded to list those currently serving as PAC members “who were not home owners and said they couldn’t make plans for those who did own homes.”<sup>130</sup>

The PAC eventually became the political voice of East Riverside homeowners in a similar vein as the Hillcrest Community Organization and the Tenant Council did for public housing residents. However, the inability of East Riverside homeowners and non-homeowners to collaborate effectively for similar interests as well as an overall general apathy of the East Riverside derailed many of the PAC’s earlier efforts to shape urban renewal. During a 1972 PAC meeting, Macie Harrison and Clarence Shivers questioned the efficacy of homeowners’ decision not to accept renters and tenants as political partners. They contended that “they are...just as important as that of homeowners” to the community and deserve an equal voice in the PAC’s decision-making.<sup>131</sup> According to PAC meeting minutes during 1972 and 1973, this conflict continued to plague the PAC committee members’ effort to initiate support among the general East Riverside populace.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> “Mr. W.C. King and Mr. Pete Connet, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, Rev. Welsey Grant, Mrs. Hammons, and Mrs. Davis Meeting Minutes.”

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 1 March 1972, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>132</sup> During this period, PAC meetings often fell short of the quorum necessary to validate the meeting while several other PAC meetings seemed to focus on ways to increase community involvement. Additionally, the meeting minutes during this time suggest that most PAC meetings consisted of only PAC members. Whereas during 1974 and on, meeting minutes show numerous non-PAC members in attendance. See “Project

However, when the Housing and Redevelopment Act of 1974 became law and brought the various federal housing programs under one umbrella, many African American organizations and leaders began having more communication with one another as government agencies consolidated.<sup>133</sup> In particular, during the mid 1970s, Carl Johnson began attending PAC meetings and assisted PAC members in increasing community involvement as well as advice in political activism.<sup>134</sup> Scholars William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell noted that, following the Hillcrest rent strike city officials and residents acknowledged Johnson “as a powerful and important leader in Asheville.”<sup>135</sup> His presence alone increased the political influence of the PAC. With Johnson’s assistance, PAC members operated a more inclusive, effective political entity in their efforts to shape urban renewal via their own vision.

The PAC often confronted the AHA on the matter of acquisition, particularly of elderly folks who had resided in East Riverside for the majority of their lives. These types of political confrontations often ended with the PAC preventing the AHA’s acquisition for only several months. According to James Harrison, whose parents temporarily fought off the AHA’s advances, “once the people, the high ups in the area decide they want to purchase property to achieve what they would like, sometime the little person just doesn’t

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Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>133</sup> See Holt Interview.

<sup>134</sup> See “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 January 1975, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>135</sup> Turner and Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia*, 208.

have the means to really fight it.”<sup>136</sup> Harrison admitted that many property owners won “a little delay, maybe three months, six months, a year, something like that, but” the AHA never gave “up that idea that we’re gonna’ get this property.”<sup>137</sup> However, despite the improbability of success, the PAC did occasionally protect homeowners from the AHA.

The PAC, with Johnson’s help, assisted in protecting the homes of two elderly couples’, the Andersons and the Youngs. Sam and Estelle Anderson as well as E.R. and Mary Young had refused the AHA’s attempts to acquire their property since the late 1960s. However, their refusal to cooperate with the AHA forced the city agency to utilize eminent domain to acquire their properties. Holt explained to PAC members that the AHA “instructed the filling of a petition in accordance with State law. There was no response from the Andersons or Youngs and they did not appear for the hearing.”<sup>138</sup> As a result, the AHA acquired the property. Holt also expressed the importance of their properties, as both “are located in a priority area in which public housing will be built.”<sup>139</sup> In response to Holt’s explanation, Johnson suggested that the PAC hire a civil rights lawyer to identify possible legal avenues the Andersons and Youngs could pursue.<sup>140</sup> Although the PAC did not act on Johnson’s suggestion, his response illustrated black residents’ commitment to challenge the political power structure through any means.

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<sup>136</sup> James Harrison, interviewed by Karen Vaneman, 19 November 2007, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 January 1975, *Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records*, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 January 1975.

<sup>139</sup> “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 January 1975.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

At a later PAC meeting, Rogers suggested the PAC draft a letter on behalf of the Andersons and Youngs and send copies to the AHA Board of Commissioners, the City Council, and HUD. Additionally, Johnson, Ray Lyles, and Logan Delany offered several solutions including a grandfather clause for the two households as well as the possibility of the AHA “selling the property back to the Andersons and Youngs.”<sup>141</sup> The PAC decided to pass a motion to draft a letter that listed Johnson, Lyles, and Delany’s suggestions as possible solutions. The PAC’s defense of the Andersons and the Youngs lasted almost two years and concluded when City Council decided to “allow the Anderson and Young families to remain on Beech Street.”<sup>142</sup>

The PAC’s political victory and protection of the properties belonging to the Andersons and the Youngs represented the continuation of black Asheville’s political effort against the city’s federally supported white power structure. The paternalistic environment of the ARC and the AHA ultimately collapsed because black public housing tenants, one of Asheville’s most marginalized demographic groups, exerted their political autonomy and restructured the city’s political landscape during the 1970s. The Tenant Council, whose creation the rent strikers demanded, facilitated political conversations between public housing tenants and the AHA. The Tenant Council continued to increase the political influence of public housing tenants when they persuaded the AHA to accept representatives from the three original public housing projects to serve advisory positions within the AHA. Their political actions empowered East Riverside residents to participate

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<sup>141</sup> “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 November 1976, *Housing Authority of the City of Asheville Records*, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as “Project Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes,” 16 November 1976.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

in the urban renewal process thus granting themselves some political control in the matter. Although political victories within East Riverside seemed insignificant in comparison to the profound effect urban renewal had on the community, African American residents' decision to participate in the political activities of the 1970s challenged and successfully altered the ARC's initial plan for urban renewal.

## CONCLUSION

On January 21, 1977, *The Asheville Times* reported on the “the often criticized program called urban renewal.” Asheville’s urban renewal program began as a “good idea” almost twenty years prior. By 1977, Asheville informed residents that urban renewal “is all but completed now...and officials are calling it a huge success.” Deputy Director of the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA) Lawrence Holt noted that urban renewal had offered the “best solution” to the physical deterioration of Asheville and finally, he felt the problem was now resolved.<sup>1</sup> However, individuals, then and now, felt urban renewal, “the chosen weapon” to cure the city’s decay and blight, failed to deliver on its promise to improve the quality of life in Asheville.<sup>2</sup>

Two years prior to the ‘successful conclusion’ of urban renewal, *The Asheville Citizen* reporter Mary Cowles interviewed former engineering consultant to Asheville’s City Council Reginald C. Smith, who helped facilitate the city’s urban renewal program. Her article illustrated the discrepancy among city officials in regards to urban renewal’s success. Cowles wrote, “Smith has an unobstructed view of downtown Asheville from which life and vigor are slowly departing. And he wishes, he says, that someone besides himself had an interest enough to do something to the area’s value and usefulness.”<sup>3</sup> During the same month Asheville declared urban renewal a ‘huge success,’ *The Asheville*

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<sup>1</sup> Billy Pritchard, “Urban Renewal Called ‘Huge Success’ In Asheville Area,” *The Asheville Times*, January 27, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Urban renewal as “the chosen weapon” is a reference to Asheville journalist Philip Clark’s description of the legislation. See Philip Clark, “Urban Renewal Changing The City’s Face,” *The Asheville Times*, November 11, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Cowles, “An Idea (Updated) to Revive Downtown,” *The Asheville Citizen*, February 6, 1975.

*Citizen*'s associate editor Bill Moore wrote an article on urban renewal concurring with Smith's assessment. He argued that downtown exemplified "what a city planner might call Maximum Erosion of Social Satisfaction or M.E.S.S."<sup>4</sup> Within the same article, however, Moore contradicted this sentiment expressing that the AHA "was capable of clearing an area" and "has done a good job over the years in providing low-income housing" for residents in need of quality homes.<sup>5</sup> In essence, urban renewal failed to reinvigorate Asheville as many civic and commercial leaders had hoped, but they believed that the program did benefit the individuals who had resided in substandard housing.

However, the residents affected through the displacement and relocation policies of urban renewal perceived and remember the program as one detrimental to their families and communities. East Riverside resident James Harrison remembered how the program caused much anxiety and stress for his parents. Harrison described the displacement and relocation process as "painful. It really hurt....It's not like, y'know, you can take an aspirin and it'll go away. This is a twenty-four hour problem."<sup>6</sup> Minnie Jones explained that during urban renewal, she "was worried about the children having a decent place to live and being able to get a good education and get some good jobs."<sup>7</sup> She believed at that time urban renewal offered hope in improving the lives of African

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Moore, "Plan That Might Spark Downtown Redevelopment," *The Asheville Citizen*, January 21, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> James Harrison, interviewed by Karen Vaneman, 19 November 2007, transcript, The Karen Vaneman Oral History Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> Minnie Jones, interviewed by Dorothy Joynes, 2 August 1994, transcript, The Voices of Asheville Collection, Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina. Hereafter cited as Jones Interview.

American residents. However, as the program progressed and concluded with the removal of Asheville's black communities, she realized city officials and residents understood the purpose of urban renewal under different terms. Jones eventually came to the understanding that urban renewal "wasn't good and there is a lot of us still living that has some bad wounds from that...with knowing what I know now that would never have happened."<sup>8</sup> According to East End resident Johnnie Grant, "the separation inflicted by urban renewal still haunts many people."<sup>9</sup> Rather than improve the quality of life for Asheville's residents, urban renewal caused what Dr. Mindy Fullilove defined as "root shock: the traumatic stress reaction to the loss of some or all of one's emotional ecosystem."<sup>10</sup>

Not all residents remember urban renewal with such despair and regret. One former resident stated that "[I]t's easy to get misty-eyed about...all the great collegiality and social networks...in these neighborhoods but a lot of people that lived [there]...were happy to get out of them."<sup>11</sup> The legacy of urban renewal in Asheville represents one of complexity and contradiction. As former Director of the AHA David Jones adequately expressed, "Different People saw different things....because they were speaking from their own perspectives and experiences. This was the case with the people who felt that so many things meant something to them had been destroyed. They were all right, based

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<sup>8</sup> Jones Interview.

<sup>9</sup> Johnnie Grant quoted in Ken Betsalel and Harry Harrison, "Re-Storying Community: Lessons from African American Stories of Urban Renewal in Asheville," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 7.

<sup>10</sup> See Mindy Thompson Fullilove, M.D., *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurt America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, Inc., 2004).

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Sarah Judson, "Twilight of a Neighborhood," *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 3.

on their own experiences and perspectives.”<sup>12</sup> As time passes, urban renewal continues to exude the complexities and differences that affected Asheville residents during the 1960s and 1970s.

The contemporary discussion on urban renewal reflects discrepancies within Asheville’s memory of the program as well as about the program itself. One perspective “sees families uprooted, relocated, and scattered; a community destroyed” with many African American residents relegated to public housing units. Thus, perpetuating racial segregation in Asheville’s housing. While another perspective “sees economic benefits for the whole city and better living conditions for neighborhood residents.”<sup>13</sup> However, lost within the discussion on urban renewal is why city officials designated these specific areas for redevelopment. As many individuals have noted then and now, much of the housing in the project areas were indeed dilapidated and in need of rehabilitation or removal. Forgotten is the reason how Asheville’s African American communities deteriorated to such a need. Systematically, racial discrimination on the part of federal policies and the real estate industry rendered black communities in a physical state of decay and blight. Moreover, these communities did not fit within civic and commercial leaders’ image of Asheville’s future as a premiere tourist destination. The current discourse on urban renewal removes the legislation and its application from the broader history of housing segregation and race relations rendering the program as an isolated event in Asheville’s history.

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Williams, “Housing, Revisited: A discussion with former Asheville Housing Authority Director David Jones,” *The Urban News*, April 20, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Pricilla Ndiaye, “Southside/East Riverside: Lost—In the Name of Progress,” *Crossroads: A Publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* 14, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2010), 11.

Worse, current discussions on Asheville's urban renewal omit the actions of black residents who exerted their voices into the political conversation and decision-making of the program. Their political efforts reshaped the trajectory of urban renewal and the plan civic and commercial leaders had designed at the program's inception. Black activism in the realm of public housing facilitated a new relationship between tenants and the AHA, one that witnessed tenants dictate their needs to the AHA and allowed them to hold AHA officials accountable for their responsibilities as the tenants' proprietor. East Riverside residents did not sit idly as passive victims to the larger forces of urban renewal. Black residents fought and won political battles to retain some of the residential character that defined East Riverside prior to the start of the project. The failure of Asheville's contemporary residents to acknowledge black activism and protests assists in rendering the contributions of these individuals to housing equality inconsequential.

The recognition of African Americans as political actors during Asheville's urban renewal does not negate the remembrances of residents who feel the program represented "negro removal" and a "top-down program that ignored the needs of the neighborhood, displaced and dismantled the community, and the made the area more attractive for outsiders."<sup>14</sup> Nor does acknowledging their political involvement negate the fact that urban renewal removed "more than 1,100 homes, six beauty parlors, five barber shops, five filling stations, fourteen grocery stores, three laundromats, eight apartment houses, seven churches, three shoe shops, two cabinet shops, two auto body shops, one hotel, five

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<sup>14</sup> J.R. Tighe and T. J. Opelt, "Collective Memory and Planning: The Continuing Legacy of Urban Renewal in Asheville, NC," *Journal of Planning History* (November 2014), 4, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1538513214554767>.

funeral homes, one hospital, and three doctor's offices.”<sup>15</sup> However, acknowledging black residents as political actors does alter the narrative of Asheville's urban renewal. Their actions and efforts illustrate the complexity of the legislation's application and illuminates on the differences within the African American community about urban renewal at the time of the program. Departing from a vantage point that demonstrates the actions of the political and business leaders, one that appears to dominate contemporary discourse, and taking a vantage point on the community level, reveals a more multifaceted understanding of how urban renewal transpired in Asheville.

This study begins the process of placing urban renewal within the broader history of housing segregation and revealing the nuances of Asheville's urban renewal program. Through its demonstration of Asheville's 1920s revitalization plan as well as the effects of federal housing policies and the real estate industry during the decades preceding urban renewal, this work illustrates how Asheville's black neighborhoods became blighted communities and why city officials designated these areas for urban renewal. Although justified as a means for housing redevelopment, city officials believed urban renewal held the key to economic prosperity and growth via a prominent tourist industry. In addition, this thesis illuminates the forgotten voices of black activists during urban renewal and their successful effort to redefine the political relationship between public housing tenants and the AHA as well as the course of urban renewal and its effects on East Riverside residents. However, Asheville's urban renewal program “is longer, larger,

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<sup>15</sup> Ndiaye, “Southside/East Riverside: Lost—In the Name of Progress,” 11.

more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”<sup>16</sup> This thesis only expands the narrative; it does not complete the story.

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<sup>16</sup> James Baldwin, “Color” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*, ed. James Baldwin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 332.

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