

DISSERTATION

Sarah Hardin Blum

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

2006

RACE, HOUSING, AND THE MAKING OF
TWENTIETH-CENTURY LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences at the
University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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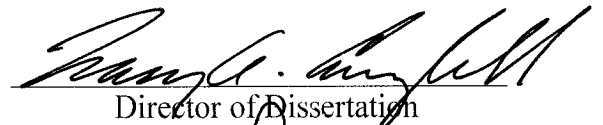
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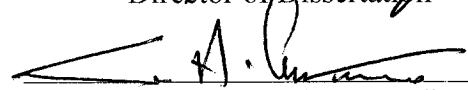
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Using oral histories, census data, newspapers, letters, diaries, and municipal records, this dissertation analyzes the creation of the predominately African American West End of Louisville, Kentucky, during the twentieth century. Praised for its racial progress by national and international observers, including Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, Louisville had a long history of racial inequality and economic oppression. At the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans and whites lived next to each other in the city's downtown business district. Over the course of sixty years, individual forms of discrimination merged with institutional discrimination as government officials and business leaders, homeowners and real estate agents, and moneylenders and mortgage brokers in Louisville deliberately kept African Americans out of white neighborhoods and isolated from economic opportunities. By the end of the twentieth century, a residential color line starkly divided Louisville with African Americans living in the West End, which was situated on a flood plain and in the path of air pollution from nearby industries, and whites living everywhere else.

This study of Louisville positions housing at the center of the movement for racial equality and economic justice. In so doing, it illustrates the complex relationship between housing and racial and class categories. Working-class whites joined with middle-class and upper-class whites to protect their neighborhoods from African American residents because housing symbolized economic mobility, social standing, and financial vitality. Examining the struggle over where African Americans should live in Louisville, this dissertation illustrates the limitations of public policy to eradicate private prejudice and structural racism. Despite the passage of federal and local legislation against discrimination, African Americans continued to be relegated to the West End of the city. In the end, Louisville remained one of the nation's most segregated cities at the end of the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Race, Housing, African Americans, Southern History, Urban History

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	iv
Introduction	
Louisville: An “All-America City”.....	v
Chapter One	
“What Right Have White Men to Decide Where Blacks May Live?”.....	1
Chapter Two	
“The Decent Comforts of Democracy”.....	39
Chapter Three	
“What Inconsistency Democracy—What Sufferance Being a Negro”.....	70
Chapter Four	
“A Few Score Wretched People”.....	108
Chapter Five	
“The Whole World is Watching Louisville”.....	143
Conclusion	174
Bibliography.....	182
Vita.....	206

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1a, Location of African American homes in 1910.....	9
Figure 1b, Location of African Americans homes in 1920s.....	32
Figure 1c, Location of African American residential zones in 1930s.....	34
Figure 2a, Louisville Flood Map 1937.....	46
Figure 3a, Number of days of reported air pollution.....	79
Figure 3b, 1940 Census of Population and Housing map.....	81
Figure 3c, 1950 Census of Population and Housing map.....	82
Figure 3d, 1960 Census of Population and Housing map.....	83
Figure 4a, Map of the General Neighborhood Renewal Program.....	118

Introduction

Louisville: An “All-America City”

One year after the historic March on Washington, President Lyndon Johnson pushed the largest civil rights legislation in history through Congress, signing the Civil Rights Act into law on July 2, 1964. Just a few months before, as the House of Representatives debated the civil rights law, the National Municipal League and *Look* magazine recognized Louisville, Kentucky, for its progress in race relations and named it an “All-America City.” According to the *Courier Journal*, the leading white newspaper in the city, Louisville had been honored because of “its progress in race relations and its efforts in cultural activities, economic development, and legislative redistricting.” From Louisville’s peaceful desegregation of schools after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision to its urban renewal efforts that endeavored to eliminate slums and foster economic development, Louisville was revered as an example for the rest of the nation, especially urban America. The city received numerous accolades, including a congratulatory telegram from President Johnson. He commended the community for helping “to set high standards of citizen participation and civic improvement which raise the quality of our nation’s life.” *Look* magazine, a photo publication circulated to middle-class white Americans, praised the city for its unceasing work on race relations and economic uplift: “Louisville, noted for being the first major city in the South to pass a public accommodations ordinance with machinery for enforcing it, is now broadening job opportunities for Negroes in local businesses.” The magazine continued: “These and

other strides toward racial equality are the result of hard work and goodwill on the part of citizens groups.”¹

In this moment of national acclaim, the *Courier Journal* remembered past glories and optimistically looked to the future. “Louisville’s reputation as an enlightened city gained enormously in September, 1956, when President Eisenhower, at a press conference, called the nation’s attention to the success of the school integration program,” it editorialized. “The kind of community effort which President Eisenhower praised has not ceased in racial relations and other fields.” The *Courier Journal*, and many other white Louisvillians, saw their city as place of racial harmony and economic prosperity. City leaders consciously cultivated an image of economic and racial progress, meaning industrial development and social harmony.²

White city leaders were exuberant over the national distinction. They plastered Louisville with “All-America City” signs to celebrate the award and to boast of their accomplishments in race relations. They posted signs on every highway entering Louisville informing newcomers that they were visiting an “All-America City.” Mayor William Cowger announced that license plates with the “All-America City” insignia were to be affixed to all of the five hundred city-owned vehicles. To top it all off, a “purple and white banner that proclaim[ed] Louisville an All-America city” was draped across the Sixth Street entrance of City Hall to be “flown daily.”³ To Louisville’s white leaders, municipal leagues, national magazines, and even the President of the United States, the city had achieved a status as a racially and economically progressive community.

¹ *Courier Journal*, March 27, 1964, March 28, 1964; *Look*, March 10, 1964.

² *Courier Journal*, March 27, 1964, A1; March 28, 1964, A6.

³ *Courier Journal*, March 27, 1964; A1. One sign still remains at the southbound entrance to Interstate 65 at Louisville International Airport. It reads “Louisville—An All-America City!”

Louisville, however, was an “All-America City” in an ironic sense as well. Praised for its racial and economic progress, the city was, in fact, home to a lengthy history of racial segregation and economic disadvantage akin to that of other major cities, such as Chicago, Detroit, and Atlanta. Informal and individual forms of discrimination, such as refusals to rent or sell to African Americans that pervaded the city in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, had been refashioned into institutionalized discrimination in the form of local laws and lending policies that functioned to keep blacks out of certain neighborhoods. By mid-century, new structures of racism, including deed restrictions and racial covenants, were rife throughout in the city.⁴

Through it all, black Louisvillians had to fight for rights and respect. Just two short months after the elaborate flag was suspended across the front of city hall, the eight-by-twelve foot purple banner was stolen on, of all days, the morning of the 1964 Kentucky Derby. While the stolen sign may have simply been a teenage prank, it also could have been an indication that some citizens disputed the city’s progressive distinction. Indeed, one African American Louisville native remembered the banner with

⁴ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crucible: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (reprint edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Georgina Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005). Sociologists define individual discrimination as one-on-one acts by members of the dominant group against members of the subordinate group or their property. Institutional discrimination is defined as the everyday practices of an organization or institution that has a harmful effect on members of the subordinate group or their property. Institutional racism can be either direct, meaning the organization has prescribed policies that intentionally discriminate, or indirect, in which the organization has policies that cause harm although there was no intent to discriminate. In Louisville, individual racism, indirect institutional racism, and direct institutional racism all functioned to maintain residential segregation and impede economic progress. See Diana Kendall, ed., *Race, Class, and Gender in Diverse Society: A Text-Reader* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1996).

disdain. “They had a sign out there that said ‘All-America City’... which to us was a joke,” she recalled. “How can you all be an all-American city if all of your citizens aren’t treated equal?” Instead of racial progress, black Louisvillians endured many forms of racial discrimination at nearly every public and private venue. Cheri Hamilton, a black woman from Louisville, recalled that “every battle had to be fought – to open golf courses, to open the parks, to open the schools, to get a college education. *Everything* was a battle.”⁵

This was especially true of housing discrimination. Hidden underneath the white community’s guise of progressivism was a structural and social racism that kept whites and blacks spatially separated and that had deprived African Americans of decent places to live throughout the twentieth century. By the time Louisville was deemed an “All-America city,” the history of informal prejudice, formal segregation, and structural racism had limited their choices to property in the West End of the segregated city for at least half a century. At the beginning of the century, most African Americans and poor whites had lived next to each other in the city’s downtown area. In the early 1900s, a growing number of middle-class black professionals had begun purchasing homes just to the west of the downtown. This was an example and reflection of the era’s emphasis on racial uplift when African Americans throughout the nation endeavored to prove themselves through financial growth and class differentiation. This movement of African Americans outside of the traditional downtown area and its symbolism of black economic uplift had alarmed both the working-class whites into whose neighborhoods black

⁵ *Courier Journal*, May 4, 1964, A1; For more on the ways subordinate classes challenge elites using pranks and sabotage, see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Cheri Bryant Hamilton, interview with author, Louisville, Kentucky, October 2002.

professionals moved and the white city leaders who feared their neighborhoods would be integrated next. To stem the tide of black advancement, white homeowners had pressured city leaders to pass legislation to prevent more African Americans from moving into neighborhoods reserved for whites. Despite the efforts of many in the black community to block the passage of the residential segregation ordinance, the mayor had signed it into law in May 1914. Not to be deterred, Louisville's newly-organized chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had taken their battle all the way to the Supreme Court, which had declared the local law unconstitutional.⁶

But white Louisvillians had been determined to keep their neighborhoods segregated and throughout the twentieth century, they actively merged private prejudice with public policy to prevent African Americans from living next door to whites. White homeowners refused to rent or sell to black families; deed restrictions kept property from passing into the hands of African Americans; federal housing guidelines disallowed lending institutions from providing financial assistance to potential black homeowners in white neighborhoods; and urban renewal policies relocated African Americans to the West End of the city. Local whites did so well preventing blacks from living in their neighborhoods, in fact, that by the end of the century, Louisville was one of the nation's

⁶ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); William B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993); August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (reprint edition, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971); and Stephanie Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers in the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

most segregated cities. According to a 2002 study by the Brookings Institution, Louisville is “‘hypersegregated’.”⁷

Residential segregation—both individual and government-sponsored—was executed in tandem with loud cries touting racial and economic progress from the city’s civic and business leaders. Historian Paul Gaston has examined how southern leaders promoted their cities at the end of the nineteenth century to attract northern capital in his influential work, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*. Gaston demonstrates how these boosters promised a repentant South complete with “industrial progress, diversified agriculture, and cooperation with the North” not only to achieve sectional reconciliation, but also to secure an economic future for the region. An additional part of the creed, Gaston finds, was a paradoxical stance on race relations: New South boosters lauded African American freedom, but actively maintained the policies of white supremacy. This was particularly the case in Louisville. Henry Watterson, one of the loudest boosters of the New South creed and editor of the *Louisville Courier Journal* between 1868 and 1919, actively promoted the city as a place of racial and economic progress to attract northern investors. In numerous articles, editorials, and speeches, Watterson preached the creed of a southern society that integrated African Americans and economic development. In *The Compromises of Life*, a collection of his speeches, Watterson described the new philosophy succinctly: “Under the old system we paid our debts and walloped our niggers. Under the new we pay our niggers and wallop our debts.” Watterson was not a voice crying in the wilderness,

⁷ Louisville ranks as the 52nd most segregated metropolitan area in the country out of 272 regions. The Brookings Institution, Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, “Beyond Merger: A Competitive Vision for the Regional City of Louisville,” (2002), 35.

though, and many white Louisvillians subscribed to and advocated the New South creed—although usually not as callously as Watterson—throughout the twentieth century.⁸

These conflicting depictions of Louisville as place of racial progress and a place of racial oppression, as a place of economic uplift and a place of economic hierarchy, suggest that two cities existed in Louisville: one constructed in the imagination of whites who were determined to create an appearance of racial accord and financial growth in order to rationalize residential segregation and impede further progress toward integration; the other lived by Louisville's blacks who sought to expose the racism that relegated African Americans to specific neighborhoods, trapped them in unfit housing, and isolated them from economic opportunities.

These competing visions of Louisville not only informed Louisvillians' understandings of their city, but also garnered national and international attention. Indeed, from presidential telegrams to judicial opinions and from anti-Apartheid propaganda to anti-Vietnam War justifications, Louisville figured prominently in twentieth-century discussions of racial and economic justice. Both of these Louisvilles were in the national and international spotlight, especially as the era of the civil rights movement altered the social and political landscape of the United States. The one Louisville was an "all-America city" lauded by two presidents for its progress; this city was considered a paragon of school integration and even a model of American progress

⁸ Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970); Joe William Trotter Jr., *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998). See also, James Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) and *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University of Press of Kentucky, 1984). Henry Watterson, *The Compromises of Life* (New York: Fox, Duffield Company, 1903), quoted in Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 147.

in cold war rhetoric. The other Louisville was a place where Martin Luther King Jr. marched, crosses were burned, and homes were bombed.

* * * *

This dissertation examines the historical process by which people of color moved—and were moved, in some cases—from the central business district to the West End of the city. It seeks to untangle the complex relationship between property in general, and housing in particular, and class and racial understandings in the city. In many respects, home ownership is the ultimate achievement of the American dream. It not only symbolizes economic security, but also liberty and independence. As geographical sites and symbols, homes signify financial vitality, societal standing, and economic stability. They also signify permanence and a claim to the area. In the early American republic, home ownership provided citizenship rights and most states allowed only property owners to vote. Throughout American history, housing has functioned as a way to reinforce racial and class categories. As geographer John Adams put it, “Americans use housing to hold onto their wealth, to state who they are, to build social bridges and fences, to join groups, and to exclude others from their groups.” Black and white Louisvillians recognized and understood these high stakes as they sought control over where and how they lived throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, housing served as the terrain by which Louisvillians struggled to define their racial and class identities.⁹

⁹ John S. Adams, “Presidential Address: The Meaning of Housing in America,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 74, no. 4 (December 1984): 517. For more on the significance of housing in America, see also: Margaret Garb, *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Live Next Door* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 2-3.

This examination of race relations in Louisville suggests that the traditional narrative of the civil rights movement as a fight for voting rights or school integration after World War II is too limited. For example, in *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Charles Payne argues that although Mississippi blacks had a long history of resistance and civil rights activity, economic changes and weakening white supremacy in the 1940s provided the catalyst for African Americans to demand racial equality, particularly the end of political discrimination, over the next few decades. In another example, William Chafe analyzes black efforts to integrate schools and public accommodations in *Civilities and Civil Rights*. Chafe conducted numerous interviews and examined newspapers, manuscript collections, and letters to demonstrate how parents in Greensboro, North Carolina, protested conditions in African American schools and lobbied for improved facilities for their children. According to Chafe, working-class and middle-class black parents regularly sought to enroll their children in all-white schools and schoolteachers encouraged their students to stand up against racial discrimination. These efforts to eliminate education discrimination encouraged African Americans to protest segregated public accommodations, as evidenced by the sit-in conducted by four North Carolina A&T students at Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960. To Chafe, activism for school desegregation paved the way for integration in other public venues. A host of other scholars, including Steven Lawson, Adam Fairclough, John Dittmer, and Aldon Morris, have studied blacks' efforts to eliminate political disfranchisement or enforce the Supreme Court's ruling against school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Emphasizing the years following World War II in their studies, these scholars conclude

that the heart of the civil rights movement lay in southern campaigns to exercise the right to vote and enforce school desegregation.¹⁰

Recently, scholars such as Robert Korstad, Nelson Lichtenstein, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, and Nell Irvin Painter have suggested a re-examination of the civil rights movement not only to lengthen its timeframe but also to broaden its focus to include issues of economic equality. Korstad, Lichtenstein, and Hall in particular focus on the moments before World War II when an alliance between the white left and African Americans could have fundamentally altered structures of America's racialized economy. This dissertation aims to address both concerns by positioning residential segregation as a central issue in the debate over racial equality with a half-century trajectory. There, from the very beginning of the twentieth century, whites and African Americans battled over where blacks should live. Time and again, whites sought to restrict African Americans from living next door and relied on federal housing policies, real estate practices, and lending institutions for assistance when individual prejudice was not enough to keep blacks out. Indeed, although white Louisvillians offered little resistance to African Americans at the ballot box or the elementary school, they vigorously and violently protested African Americans in their neighborhoods. African Americans fought back, using the judicial system and their political power to demand their right to live where they chose. When those efforts failed, black Louisvillians took to the streets not only to

¹⁰ Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Steven Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997); Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking Press, 2001); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Aldon Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Community Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

eradicate the white racism that relegated them to substandard housing in the most undesirable sections of the city, but also to dismantle the guise of progressivism that prevented substantive racial and economic change in the Louisville.¹¹

In recent years, more historians have turned their attention to issues of race and housing. In *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, Ronald Bayor illustrates how segregation influenced spatial development in the city “too busy to hate.” Examining a variety of areas of urban development, including residential patterns, transportation growth, educational opportunities, and social services, Bayor finds that white leaders in Atlanta deliberately enforced white supremacy when implementing public policy, specifically reinforcing racial hierarchies in housing and economics. Thomas Sugrue moved the discussion from the shaping of cities to their decline in *The Origins of the Urban Crucible*, in which he examined the complex relationship between deindustrialization, residential segregation, and employment discrimination. Analyzing the decline of Detroit after World War II, Sugrue demonstrates how jobs left the inner city and moved to outlying areas near white suburbs. African Americans seeking homes close to more employment opportunities encountered violent resistance from white homeowners. By examining housing and employment discrimination, Sugrue complicates William Julius Wilson’s theory in *The Truly Disadvantaged* that impersonal economic

¹¹ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” in *Journal of American History*, vol. 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 786-811; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263; Nell Irvin Painter, “America Needs to Reexamine Its Civil Rights History,” in *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (August 31, 2001): 132-134. See also Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, 2003).

and geographic changes are responsible for the concentrated areas of black poverty in inner cities.¹²

Other scholars, including Arnold Hirsch and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, have analyzed how housing discrimination created urban ghettos. Hirsch's *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* argues that the federal government and local white elites are largely responsible for creating an African American ghetto in Chicago after World War II. Federal housing policies enabled white flight to the suburbs after World War II and then local whites used federally funded urban renewal programs to displace African Americans in the inner city. As black Chicagoans attempted to move into white ethnic neighborhoods, residents used violence to keep them out, and African Americans were forced to live in the ghetto on the west and south sides of the city. Similarly, in *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton found that private action, including violence, neighborhood "improvement associations," and restrictive covenants, and public policies, particularly federal lending programs and highway construction, created and maintained residential segregation during the twentieth century. Massey and Denton argue that this convergence of private action and public policy created the black

¹² Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crucible: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (reprint edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass, and Public Policy* (reprint edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). See also, Charles E. Connerly, *"The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); Georgina Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

ghetto, which is “responsible for the perpetuation of black poverty in the United States.”¹³

Still others, such as Kevin Boyle and Andrew Wiese, have turned their attention from how housing discrimination functions in urban development resulting in the creation of the ghetto, to how African Americans have actively challenged residential segregation. Kevin Boyle’s *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in the Jazz Age* details the efforts of Ossian Sweet, an African American physician, to move into an all-white neighborhood in 1920s Detroit and the extralegal violence employed by working-class whites to maintain residential segregation. Boyle illustrates the toll such challenges to entrenched racism exact on the challengers. To defend his family and his home, Sweet amassed a large cache of weapons and enlisted a number of friends to stand guard against rioting neighbors. In the course of events, one of the white neighbors was shot and killed. Sweet and his friends stood trial for murder and through the efforts of the NAACP and the lawyering of Clarence Darrow, the jury acquitted Sweet. But he never fully recovered from the horrific events and he committed suicide in 1960.

Andrew Wiese scrutinizes another avenue of black resistance in *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. He finds that during the early twentieth century, African American migrants from the rural South created their own suburban spaces, first by buying land in unregulated areas on the outskirts of cities

¹³ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (reprint edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10.

and then by building homes. In so doing, they not only challenged residential segregation, but they also achieved economic independence and elevated their social status.¹⁴

More recently, historians Matthew Lassiter and Kevin Kruse have examined race, housing, and politics to demonstrate the complex relationship between white flight, suburbanization, and the rise of modern conservatism. In *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Lassiter analyzes the conflation of race and class during post-World War II suburbanization and court-ordered busing in the 1970s. Studying post-*Brown* Atlanta and Charlotte, Lassiter finds the roots of modern politics in the grassroots activism of white middle-class homeowners who benefited from residential segregation and battled to maintain it under the guise of consumer rights. Similarly, Kevin Kruse examines Atlanta after World War II in *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. He argues that white flight from the inner city was a deliberate effort to maintain the residential status quo and reflected a transformation of political ideologies.¹⁵

The works of Kruse and Lassiter build upon recent work done by whiteness scholars, especially George Lipsitz, who examine housing as part of the complicated web of white identity, racial ideology, and economic interests. In *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, Lipsitz moves beyond the

¹⁴ Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004); Andrew Weise, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also, Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005); See also Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

notion of race as a social construction to discuss the economic and material benefits of claiming whiteness. Analyzing real estate practices, tax codes and subsidies, judicial decisions, and financial policies, Lipsitz demonstrates how the investment in whiteness not only provides whites with a way to socially differentiate themselves from people of color, but more importantly, guarantees a means of economic mobility. Indeed, Lipsitz argues that whiteness is a means of acquiring property and protecting it from others. Legal scholars, particularly Cheryl Harris, have expanded on Lipsitz's analysis of white privilege to show how the law protects white privilege by guaranteeing legal entitlements, and in so doing, reifies racial hierarchies. Harris explains whiteness as an ideological property in which holders enjoy the rights to its use and disposition. Taken together, Lipsitz and Harris conceptualize whiteness not only as a tool by which property is accumulated and guarded, but also as property protected by law.¹⁶

This dissertation is informed by and builds on the work of these scholars by positioning housing as the central issue in the consolidation of white dominance and the struggle for civil rights in Louisville. In so doing, it complicates the geographical parameters of these earlier studies. Neither a northern city nor a southern one, Louisville's liminal status as a border community makes it an interesting reflection of the nation as a whole. It truly is an "All-America City."

¹⁶ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) and "The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 369-387; Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," in *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707-1791. For more "whiteness" studies, see also: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) and *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Become White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Additionally, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature on housing discrimination by examining race and housing *throughout* the twentieth century. Most studies concentrate on either the early part of the century or the post-World War II years. This study, however, spans the entire century to provide a comprehensive examination of how the complex relationship between race, class, and housing shifts over time.

While adding to the rich new literature on race and housing and complicating the timeframe and issues of civil rights scholarship, this analysis of Louisville also speaks to historical understandings of whites who resisted integration. Numerous scholars, especially Michael Klarman, have argued that it was the Supreme Court's ruling to desegregate public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* that sparked "massive resistance" among whites against racial integration, not merely in education, but on other fronts as well. Klarman challenges the notion that the principal significance of the decision was its role as the critical inspiration for southern blacks and the catalyst for increased desegregation in public schools, offering the controversial argument that the significance of the court's decision lies in the reaction it inspired among whites. As southern whites pushed state and local politics toward racial extremism and ripened conditions for violent suppression of civil rights demonstrations in the early 1960s, previously indifferent northern whites demanded federal intervention, galvanizing substantial civil rights legislation. To Klarman, *Brown's* most significant achievement was how it instigated massive resistance among southern whites.¹⁷

¹⁷ Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: the Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), "How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," in the *Journal of American History*, vol. 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 81-118, and "*Brown*, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Virginia Law Review*,

But what happened in Louisville challenges Klarman's argument that it was the court's decision that energized white opposition. In this city, whites did not take to the streets to violently protest school desegregation in 1954. In fact, the city received national and international recognition for peacefully desegregating schools two years after the court issued the *Brown* decision. For white Louisvillians, school desegregation was easy to swallow because residential segregation ensured that *Brown* would be ineffectual in practice. But when Andrew Wade, an African American, moved into a white neighborhood, it ignited white opposition in Louisville. And it was not simply working-class whites who protested Wade's arrival in their neighborhood. Indeed, Wade's effort to integrate housing in the city prompted a cross-class alliance of whites to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods, demonstrating how whites of all income levels had an investment in maintaining residential segregation for symbolic, psychological, and material reasons. White Louisvillians recognized that school desegregation was contingent upon the pre-existence of integrated residential districts, meaning that school desegregation would have little practical affect if housing patterns were not changed. Thus, white Louisvillians could easily accept the policy of school desegregation because, for the most part, their children would attend school with their white neighbors and not with children of color. When Andrew Wade moved into an all-white neighborhood—and

vol. 80 (1994): 7-150. For more studies suggesting that *Brown* energized opposition to the civil rights movement, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Matthew Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds., *The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Francis Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973).

later, in the 1970s, when the federal government ordered busing—the residential patterns upon which all other social and economic relationships depended were undermined.

The story of residential segregation in Louisville adds a new layer to scholarship on African American life in the twentieth century, on the vexed relationship between race and housing, and on the civil rights movement. Over the last two decades a host of scholars have scrutinized the complicated intersections of civil rights, race, class, housing, politics, public policy and economics. This dissertation seeks to enter this complex milieu to further demonstrate how civil rights are woven tightly with economic rights, how racial and class categories inform public policy and political agendas, and how codified laws and private prejudice work together to determine who has control over and the location of residential spaces.

* * * *

This study begins by surveying the residential and racial landscape in Louisville in the early twentieth century. It shows that although African Americans were concentrated in the central downtown area at the beginning of the twentieth century, residential segregation was not fixed and whites and blacks frequently lived on the same blocks. Chapter one specifically analyzes the contest over residential segregation from 1913 to 1930 through a maze of local decisions, national movements, and legal mandates to show how housing emerged as the central issue in the struggle for equality in Louisville. In 1913, working-class whites, endorsed by white elites, lobbied the city government to pass an ordinance to prevent whites and African Americans from living next to each other on the same city block. The local branch of the NAACP, with the assistance of the national organization, mounted a fierce campaign to block the

ordinance. Despite their efforts to appeal to city leaders' claims of racial tolerance, African Americans could not defeat the law. The local government unanimously approved the ordinance, and the mayor signed it into law in May 1914.

The NAACP would not be deterred, and it took the case all the way to the nation's highest court. In 1917, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the NAACP and declared Louisville's ordinance unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment. African Americans across the nation celebrated the court's decision. But, in the end, the court's proclamations had little effect on the day-to-day realities of living in Louisville. Whites found other ways to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods, including deed restrictions and federal housing policies. In so doing, people of color were relegated to cramped, often unfit housing in the central business district.

As whites found new ways to circumvent the Supreme Court's decision and enforce residential segregation, the Ohio River Flood of 1937 significantly altered housing dynamics in the city. Rain started to fall in mid-January, and the Ohio River crested at the beginning of February a full 24-feet above flood stage, destroying the exclusive neighborhoods for whites in the West End and most of the central downtown where African Americans lived. Although African Americans experienced little discrimination from relief workers during the flood, they certainly endured it after the waters receded. Chapter two examines how local whites, instead of using this natural disaster as an opportunity for substantive social and economic change for black Louisvillians, decided that the flood-ravaged West End—formerly reserved for whites only—could be “opened” to blacks who were busting at the seams of the city's downtown. Their decision was based in part on the lack of federal funding to construct

flood protection along the river. White homeowners chose to make a new start on higher ground in other parts of the city, particularly near the booming industrial areas in the post-war years, leaving their waterlogged homes for African Americans, who paid exorbitant prices to escape the crowded conditions downtown.

During the 1950s, the struggle over residential segregation gained new strength as African Americans who were fed up with the lack of available housing in the West End began to find residences in other parts of the city. Chapter three juxtaposes two crucial events during these years—the integration of public schools and the bombing of the Andrew Wade house—to demonstrate how housing lay at the heart of racial tension in the city. After the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Louisville’s leaders quickly went about the task of implementing a desegregation plan, and two years later the city’s schools opened their doors to black students without, according to the *New York Times*, “a token ripple of protest.” Because Louisville did not experience the violent protests that became the hallmark of school desegregation in other cities, national newspapers, President Dwight Eisenhower, and even South African activists trying to overturn apartheid lauded Louisville as a model of racial harmony. At the very same time, however, Andrew Wade’s attempt to move into an all-white working-class neighborhood in the southwestern part of the city, provoked more than a “ripple of protest.” Indeed, neighbors burned a cross on a lot adjoining Wade’s, and when that didn’t make him leave, they bombed his home. Their actions were condoned by white elites who framed the whole incident as a matter of property rights, not civil rights, that justified the cross-burning and the bombing.¹⁸

¹⁸ *New York Times*, September 11, 1956.

Examined comparatively, the experience with school desegregation and the Wade incident demonstrate the potency of the housing issue in Louisville. White Louisvillians could accept school desegregation, albeit with a little prodding from the federal government and a lot of prodding from local blacks, but integrated neighborhoods were a different matter altogether. Indeed, this study demonstrates that whites from all economic backgrounds rallied around the issue of housing, determined to maintain residential segregation at all costs. They understood that school desegregation would have little effect if neighborhoods weren't desegregated at the same time. Their neighborhoods, then, represented the last bastion of white supremacy.

Chapter four explores Louisville in the 1960s, when the city enacted an urban renewal program to revitalize Louisville's central downtown area. Such federally-funded programs were popular across the nation, as business and civic leaders sought to restore decaying urban areas to centers of economic growth. In so doing, these projects often relocated African Americans who lived in these areas into other crowded neighborhoods or public housing projects. This redevelopment and relocation process was implemented in Louisville in 1957, when voters approved a bond issue to allocate money to finance the revitalization projects. Redevelopment of the central business district began soon after the bond issue passed and relocation officers worked to quickly move thousands of African Americans into the already overcrowded housing available to blacks in the West End. As the blacks moved in, most of the few whites who lived in the area moved out. And when the white residents left the area, local business and city leaders largely abandoned the black residents who remained. Indeed, basic services such as police protection and sanitation were not adequately provided to the black community. By 1965, a residential

color line starkly divided Louisville's urban landscaped, separating blacks from whites and belying the city's image as a place of racial harmony.

African Americans did not complacently watch as city leaders solidified the creation of a ghetto in the West End. Indeed, middle-class blacks decried the urban renewal programs and complained about the relocation of poor blacks into their already crowded neighborhoods. They voiced their complaints to local leaders and called for open-housing legislation so that they could escape the West End and move into other parts of the city, but Louisville's white elite reprimanded them for not being satisfied with recent gains in civil rights, most notably school desegregation. Ultimately, this contest over urban renewal demonstrates the limited commitment of white Louisvillians to full-fledged racial equality. At the same time, it also reveals class divisions within the black community, further illustrating how housing symbolizes social and economic status.

Urban renewal's disastrous consequences for the black community prompted many African Americans to demand a law against housing discrimination, and they looked to the city's progressive image as a tool to integrate neighborhoods. Chapter five explores their struggle to eradicate housing discrimination in the late 1960s. Civil rights activists challenged the city to make good on its reputation and threatened to disrupt the 1967 Kentucky Derby if the city government failed again to pass an open-housing ordinance. The threat garnered black Louisvillians much-needed national attention as it dismantled the city's progressive image and unveiled white Louisville's racism for what it really was: determined, planned, coordinated and violent. Although civil rights leaders cancelled the Derby demonstration, they did not let up the pressure for open-housing

legislation city administrators applied for a Model Cities grant from the federal government to further ameliorate the slums downtown. Civil rights activists lobbied the government to deny Louisville's application until the local alderman passed a law against housing discrimination. Although the city cited other explanations for the failed Model Cities grant, the activists proudly claimed victory. A few months later, the activists targeted local elections and successfully ousted officials reluctant to support open-housing legislation. Finally, in December 1967, the board of aldermen passed a law penalizing housing discrimination.

The tactics used by local blacks to push the government to act against housing discrimination reveal a great deal about the civil rights movement in Louisville and across the nation. They demonstrate the complexity of the civil rights decision-making process in which national leaders, local leaders, and grass-roots activists and demonstrators debated and struggled over the best courses of action. The attack on the Model Cities grant and the proposed plan to disrupt the Derby exposed important intersections between a local civil rights movement and the national movement. In the spring of 1967, Louisville was wracked by racial tensions, and a study of the contest over open-housing legislation shows an important contest over leadership, struggle for power, and conflict between local and national civil rights movements.

Although the city government passed the open-housing law, it had little effect on the lived realities of black Louisvillians. Just as before, in the wake of the *Buchanan* decision at the beginning of the century, white homeowners simply found other ways to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods. Discriminatory deed restrictions, federal policies, and real estate practices worked to maintain the residential status quo. This became most

apparent in the 1970s when, in an effort to integrate schools, the federal government imposed busing on the city. This ignited racial tensions and whites took to the streets to protest reverse discrimination and the National Guard was called out to restore calm in the city. African Americans pointed out that busing would not be necessary if neighborhoods were integrated, but, again, city leaders refused to listen. Instead, few efforts were made to remedy the racial divide in the city; today, Louisville remains one of the most segregated cities in America.

Ultimately, this dissertation's examination of Louisville suggests that race, class, and housing are closely entangled in American society. It claims that promises of industrial development and economic prosperity are often intimately connected with racial oppression and residential segregation. This study shows that both working-class whites and upper-class whites initiate and actively support local, state, and federal policies that economically disadvantage people of color to protect their "possessive investment" in their whiteness, specifically when it comes to housing. While whites created cross-class alliances to maintain residential segregation, African Americans were often divided along class lines when it came to housing, revealing that economic differentiation within the black community was a flawed strategy of racial uplift. And finally, this dissertation argues that racialized housing patterns have very real consequences that reinforce America's racialized economy.

* * * *

The complex intersection between race, class, and housing analyzed in this dissertation continues to be relevant today in Louisville and many other American cities. Perhaps the clearest example is what happened when hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast

in the fall of 2005. The residents most affected by the storm and its aftermath, including the failed levees in New Orleans, were largely African American and poor. Rescue efforts broadcast live on national television revealed how unprepared the federal government was for such a natural disaster (even though forecasters had predicted the storm's path days before it actually hit), and many blamed the government's slow response on a lack of concern for African Americans. The cable networks' around-the-clock coverage provided ample opportunity to monitor the government's work in the days following the hurricane. Four days after Katrina devastated New Orleans, CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer spoke a truth about race and class in America at the same moment he displayed so much of its hidden racism and classism in this commentary on his show *Situation Room*, a daily round-up of current events: "You simply get chills every time you see these poor individuals, ... so many of them that we see, are so poor and they are so black, and this is going to raise lots of questions for people who are watching this story unfold." Indeed, the hurricane and the reconstruction efforts led many Americans to wonder about the prevalence of racism and poverty in today's society.¹⁹

One year after the storm, there are competing visions of how New Orleans should rebuild, again reflecting the centrality of race and class in issues of housing. After the storm, mayor Ray Nagin expressed his desire to rebuild a "chocolate city," while Housing and Urban Development secretary Alphonso Jackson declared that New Orleans was not "going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again." And while city leaders and federal government officials battle over the hue in which the city will be reconstructed, many of those displaced by the storm remain homeless or in overcrowded

¹⁹ Cable News Network, September 1, 2005.

trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Administration. And many simply don't have the economic means to return to the city and rebuild their homes.²⁰

Failed levee systems or inadequate disaster response may be only part of what hurricane Katrina can teach us. It also illustrates the catastrophic effects of residential segregation. As sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton argued in *American Apartheid*, “racial segregation—and its characteristic institutional form, the black ghetto—are the key structural factors responsible for the perpetuation of black poverty in the United States.” Indeed, along the Gulf Coast, housing discrimination had created a concentrated area of low-income families who had accumulated little wealth to protect and provide for them in case of an emergency. This dissertation examines Louisville as a model to examine how and why such concentrated areas have been created and sustained in the face of many formal policy initiatives and much progressive rhetoric to the contrary.²¹

²⁰ For Ray Nagin's comments, see *Washington Post*, January 18, 2006. For Alphonso Jackson's comments, see *Washington Times*, September 30, 2005. Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (William Morrow, 2006); Ronald Daniels, ed., *On Risk and Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Perseus Books, 2006); Jed Horne, *Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the New Death of a Great American City* (New York: Random House, 2006). Eric Mann, *Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* (Los Angeles: Frontlines Press, 2006).

²¹ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 9.

Chapter One

“What Right Have White Men to Decide Where Blacks May Live?”

Housing, the Supreme Court, and Louisville, 1913-1930

On October 21, 1913, the *Louisville Times* printed the entire text of a proposed residential segregation ordinance that prohibited whites and African Americans from living next to each other on the same city blocks. In the editorial that followed, the newspaper’s opinion was unmistakable—Louisville desperately needed the law. As the editor of the *Times* demonstrated, many southern cities, most notably Baltimore, Richmond, Winston-Salem, and Atlanta, had recently passed their own laws to confront “the race problem.” “[W]ithout difficulty by acting in time and in good temper,” those cities settled the issue of African American homebuyers in exclusive white neighborhoods with mandated residential segregation. It was high time for Louisville, the “Gateway to the South,” to do the same. “Louisville is essentially as Southern a city in the character of its population as any of those here named,” explained the writer, and there was no “valid reason why Louisville ... should not take like action.”¹

Members of the city’s African American community disagreed. Black leaders saw plenty of valid reasons for the local government to refuse such a law in Louisville. To begin with, they feared the ordinance was merely an “attempt to revive the ill-famed ghetto.” The segregation ordinance also violated their right to live wherever they wanted,

¹ *Louisville Times*, October 21, 1913, 6. Louisville’s civic and business leaders deliberately manipulated the city’s liminal status on the border between the North and the South throughout the twentieth century to suit their economic needs. In the early part of the century, leaders promoted the city as “southern,” in the vein of the New South creed to attract northern capital. Later in the century, local leader will refer to Louisville as the “Gateway to the South” with the hopes of differentiating their city from other cities further south where more violent forms of racism were much more prevalent.

they claimed, severely limiting their housing options. Some black leaders argued, it was unnecessary because African Americans and whites in Louisville had maintained amicable, albeit tenuous, relations. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, many whites and blacks lived side-by-side in the center of the city, where as historian George C. Wright has called it, the “polite racism” of whites remained peaceful as long as African Americans kept their place.²

To many African Americans, a residential segregation ordinance was an ominous sign, a symbol that legalized segregation would soon reinforce the polite and informal racism that dictated social relations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Jim Crow segregation had not yet been solidified in the city, suggesting that C. Vann Woodward’s fluid period in race relations extended beyond the 1890s. Louisville’s African American community feared a segregation ordinance would hamper their racial uplift efforts and local black leaders mounted a fierce campaign to stop the law. The leaders tried their best to capitalize on the city’s history of cordial race relations and urged local whites who had been friendly to African Americans in the past to speak out against the ordinance. They also crafted pamphlets outlining their arguments and distributed them among the city’s white clubs and organizations. Some black leaders even visited the ministers of white churches to galvanize the support of the religious community. Yet despite these efforts, the inability of African Americans to affect public policy was clearly displayed as the city government passed the segregation ordinance. A move that was meant to end discussions on race and housing, the ordinance actually marked the beginning of the struggle. Local blacks turned to the newly formed NAACP and then the Supreme Court in their battle

² *Louisville Leader*, November 10, 1917; George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 4-5.

against the ordinance. In 1917, in a major blow to segregation *de jure*, the high court ruled against the city's ordinance. This legal success, however, did little to end housing discrimination. In the decades that followed, whites turned to more covert measures to enforce residential Jim Crow, and African Americans in turn forged new tactics of resistance.³

The complex battles over residential segregation from 1913-1930 shows how housing emerged as the central issue in the struggle for equality in Louisville. When it came to housing, whites revealed the limits of their polite racism. Voting was one thing, particularly when the Democratic machine easily dismissed the black constituency during elections through violence and intimidation, but housing was a different matter all together.⁴ Residency became the social marker and the enduring symbol of the struggle

³ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, third revised edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). The historiographical debate surrounding southern race relations is both exhaustive and engaging. For more, see Edward Ayers, *The Promise of a New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1941); John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Carl Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) and *Rage for Order*, abridged edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, revised edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

⁴ For more on white-on-black violence during local elections, see Tracy Campbell, "Machine Politics, Police Corruption, and the Persistence of Vote Fraud: The Case of the Louisville, Kentucky, Election of 1905," in *Journal of Policy History*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2003): 269-300. See also Tracy Campbell, *Deliver the Vote: A History of Election Fraud, an American Tradition 1742-2004* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005), 113-135. For more on racial violence in Kentucky, see George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

for civil rights in Louisville, one that touched on every matter of life in the city from education and finances to marriage and politics.

* * *

During the Great Migration of African Americans from the South at the beginning of the twentieth century, many blacks headed to northern cities. This mass exodus from rural areas in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and other southern states was due to increased mob violence against African Americans, the demand for labor in northern industries, and the devastation wreaked by the boll weevil in the cotton fields of the deep South. The A. M. E. Ministers' Alliance of Birmingham, Alabama, offered the following explanation for African American migration from the Deep South: "prejudice, disenfranchisement, Jim Crow [railroad] cars, lynching, bad treatment on the farms, the boll weevil, [and] the floods of 1916." Some migrants, however, only made it as far as Louisville, a border city widely known for its southern sympathies and traditions. Nevertheless, those who settled in the "Gateway to the South" hoped to find more opportunities for economic, social, and civic advancement than they had left behind.⁵

The city was attractive for a number of reasons. Central High School was an excellent high school for African Americans, and the city offered more employment

⁵ *Crisis*, 14, no. 2, (June 1917): 63-66. For more on African Americans and the Great Migration, see Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); James Gregory, *Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Carole Marks, *Farewell – We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (1976, reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986); Kimberly Phillips, *Alabama North: African American Migrants and Working Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Joe William Trotter Jr., *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

opportunities, such as teaching and barbering, than the rural communities from which most of the migrants had come. In its a few African American doctors and lawyers essentially served the professional needs of the black community. The newcomers transformed Louisville's black community and the city itself. They nearly doubled the black population from 20,905 to 39,139 between 1890 and 1900. This population influx cramped an already tight housing market and competition for the available spaces, especially between blacks and whites, intensified. Louisvillians' housing options in the first decades of the twentieth century were not fixed, and most people simply lived in areas they could afford, although African Americans, regardless of class, were concentrated in the central downtown area. This arrangement seemed to suit everyone until some African Americans began to purchase homes outside of the area where most blacks usually lived.⁶

Outraged whites viewed this change not only as a case of a few African Americans forgetting their "place," but also as a potentially dangerous harbinger of other efforts at social and economic equality. Scholars such as George Lipsitz and Cheryl Harris have illustrated how "whiteness" confers social, economic, and legal privileges, particularly when it came to acquiring and keeping property: that is, property itself is a highly charged racialized domain. To many whites in Louisville, housing was a social issue and a cultural metaphor simultaneously upholding their economic advantage and their psychological sense of superiority. Lipsitz argued in his analysis of post-World War II federal housing policy that "'white' unity rested on residential segregation and on

⁶ George C. Wright, "The NAACP and Residential Segregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1914-1917," in *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 78 (Winter 1980): 39, and *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Kentucky, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 103-106; 117-119.

shared access to housing ... largely unavailable to communities of color.” Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in response to the racial uplift efforts of African American professionals, working-class whites attempted to impose rigid residential segregation in Louisville as a means to shore up white unity and supremacy.⁷

But early efforts for legal proscriptions against interracial residential areas failed. At the turn of the twentieth century, most African Americans lived wherever their wallets allowed. Most stayed close to the city’s central business district, yet there were pockets of black residents throughout the city. In 1909, Janet Kemp, a social worker hired by the city to report on tenement houses, studied two hundred and twenty-eight houses and discovered that blacks and whites usually lived as next-door neighbors. Steward Pickett, an African American who grew up in one of those integrated neighborhoods just south of Broadway, remembered it as the “most integrated block ... in Louisville.” Pickett later likened his neighborhood to the proverbial melting pot. “We had Jewish people, ... we had Syrian people, ... we had Italian people. You didn’t stay here too long unless you learned to speak a little Hebrew or... a little Italian.”⁸

But while the blocks may have been integrated, available housing was in short supply and usually dilapidated. Kemp described in lurid detail a tenement house on Pearl Street, near the central downtown area, that housed thirty-four families, most of whom

⁷ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How Whites Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) and “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” Problem in American Studies,” in *American Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 374; Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106 (June 1993). In *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), Lizabeth Cohen explores how whites shored up their social and economic status through the location of their residences.

⁸ Janet E. Kemp, *Report of the Tenement House Commission of Louisville, under the ordinance of February 16, 1909*; Steward Pickett interview by Mary D. Bobo, May 23, 1979, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville Black Community Project.

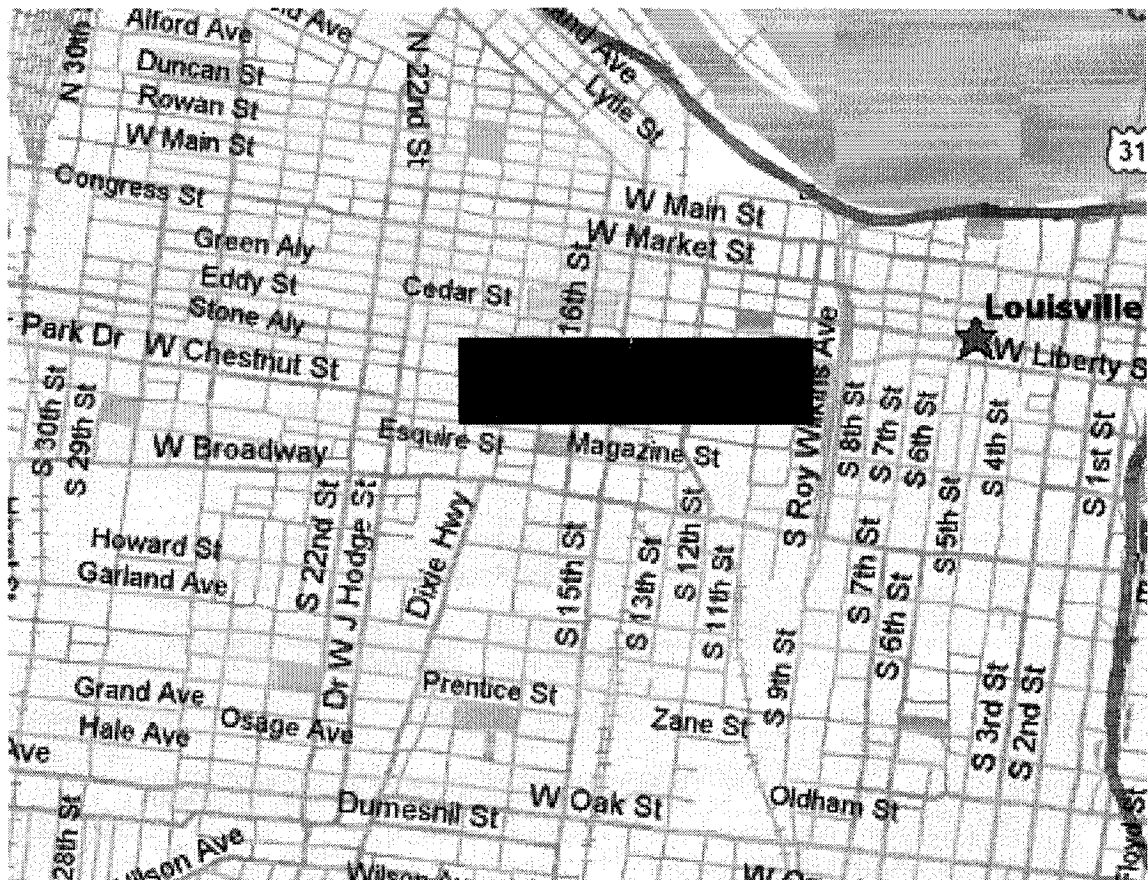
were African Americans. “At the time of inspection,” she wrote, the “only water supply available is a yard hydrant 135 feet from the apartments.” Even further, the thirty-four families shared “four ill-kept privy compartments over one common vault which was full to overflowing.” These residents, in Kemp’s assessment, endured “sanitary accommodations that can only be described as revolting and indecent.” In the report’s conclusion, Kemp quantified her findings: “two hundred and sixty-eight families, or thirty-four percent of the entire number, have to use [bathroom facilities] in common with from four to eleven families.” These crowded facilities put families at risk for many communicable diseases, and contributed to the alarmingly high death rate—particularly among small children and babies—for these areas. According to a 1910 census report, the infant mortality rate for African American children was 256.9 deaths per 1,000 children, while for whites it was 114.7 deaths, less than half of the number of black children.⁹

In 1902 Booker T. Washington visited Louisville and encouraged his audience to invest in homes and property outside the dilapidated inner city. By 1910, many black teachers, doctors, ministers, and businessmen had followed the “Wizard” of Tuskegee’s advice and owned homes or rental property—sometimes both—in several blocks west of the central downtown area. Indeed, the Indianapolis *Freeman*, a paper which routinely

⁹ Louisville Times, November 13, 1885; Janet E. Kemp, Report of the Tenement House Commission of Louisville, under the ordinance of February 16, 1909, 55; George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 103; J. M. Ragland, “Negro Housing in Louisville,” in *The Southern Workman*, vol. 58, no. 1 (January 1929), 23; “The Negro Housing Problem In Louisville,” City Planning and Zoning Commission, Louisville, Kentucky (May, 1932), 6, in Harland Bartholomew & Associates, series 2, vol. 35, part 3, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri; Bureau of the Census, *The Negro Population of the United States: 1790-1915* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1918); Jefferson County Inter-Racial Committee, *Petition, 1910*, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. For more analysis of African American mortality rates, see Benjamin D. Berry Jr., “Plymouth Settlement House and the Development of Black Louisville: 1900-1930,” Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University (1977).

noted and explored black life in Louisville, reported that Chestnut Street was very popular among African Americans: “From Tenth to Twentieth Street, Negroes are buying large three-story homes and are furnishing them in the latest style.” In a four-column-wide article, complete with photographs, the newspaper praised Louisville’s black community for the “many comfortable homes” along West Chestnut, Magazine, Walnut, Madison, and Breckinridge that showed “real progress” among the African Americans in Louisville. To the *Freeman*, homes signified racial uplift and community advancement. Housing and residential life contained the symbolic power to demonstrate black enterprise, thrift, and ability. Historian Kevin Gaines has suggested that the racial uplift ideology that the *Freeman* and many other African American professionals advocated, in which housing figured as a prominent indicator of progress, functioned as a means of class differentiation among African Americans. Even further, Michele Mitchell has argued that black middle-class efforts to keep an eye on the living conditions of poorer African Americans had as much to do with combating overcrowding and residential segregation, as it did with securing respectability for the race. This was certainly the case in Louisville as African American professionals struggled to leave the decaying inner city for better homes. Indeed, in his 1909 study of social improvement among African Americans, W. E. B. Du Bois found that middle-class black Louisvillians have made “much improvement in home life.” “The past ten years in this city,” he concluded, “has been an era for acquiring homes on the part of the Negro population.” Du Bois was clearly pleased that “[t]hey are taking pride in making their homes the center of their social and intellectual life.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 22, 1910, 3. Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North



Key: Shaded area represents the location of homes.

Figure 1a: Location of African American homes in 1910. African American professionals began buying existing homes in the area west of the central downtown, from 10th to 20th streets along West Chestnut, Magazine, Breckinridge, and Kentucky.
Source: Indianapolis *Freeman*, January 22, 1910.

The movement of black professionals out of the inner city alarmed many white Louisvillians, especially W. D. Binford, a white mechanical worker for the *Times* and *Louisville Courier Journal*, who encouraged Louisville's realtors in 1913 to support a segregation law that would prevent blacks from living on certain city blocks. In an

Carolina Press, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans: Report of a Social Study* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1909), 77; W. E. B. Du Bois, Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver, eds., *W. E. B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 234.

address before fifty members of the local real estate exchange, which oversaw all real estate practices in the city, at the Henry Watterson Hotel, Binford hammered home the importance of such a law for their city. Using the Baltimore ordinance as his guide, Binford explained to the realtors the “need of segregation of the races in the rental and sale of real estate.” He outlined how the ordinance would separate whites and African Americans from living on the same block. This was necessary, he maintained in an argument that has been used by white supremacists from the early nineteenth century to the present day, because African Americans lowered property values in white neighborhoods. The movement of local blacks into white neighborhoods, he alleged, had already “cost the city many thousands of dollars in taxes, to say nothing of the loss to property owners.”¹¹

Binford then claimed that this was a problem that crossed class lines, warning the businessmen that no one was safe from “the encroachment of the negro.” Indeed, he explained to the largely middle- and upper-class audience, some local homeowners recently “awoke to find that a Negro family had purchased and was snugly ensconced in a three-story residence in one of the best and most exclusive white squares in the city.” Even worse, Binford claimed, African Americans moved into white neighborhoods for “purely mercenary” reasons. “From the moment of his arrival,” he asserted, the new resident expects an “offer from his white neighbors large enough to induce him to leave.” Binford assured the realtors that he wasn’t against racial progress, adhering to a constant theme among white Louisvillians who praised racial justice while encouraging racial separation, saying, “No one more than I welcomes the day when the negro will be lifted

¹¹ *Louisville Times*, November 15, 1913, 9; Roger L. Rice, “Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917,” in *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (May 1968): 182-183; Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 119.

to a higher plane of citizenship and responsibility.” But if African Americans insist “in encroaching upon the white section as neighbor and resident little progress along these lines will or can be made.” Binford concluded his address with a final attempt to forge an alliance among white Louisvillians in all economic groups: “It is essential that the influence and support of your exchange be given this movement.”¹²

Binford’s urgent appeal received mixed reviews. J. D. Wright, the former president of the exchange, responded that the organization should not take any action until the community made its voice heard. He cautioned that a residential segregation ordinance “would serve to make the negro rebellious.” Moreover, he believed the ordinance would lead to “undue discrimination” and he was “strictly against this.” Other members of the exchange disagreed. J. E. Dawkins considered the law in more flattering terms. He claimed it would help African Americans and urged the exchange to endorse it immediately. C. A. Singer did not particularly care if it helped blacks or not—he only saw green. To him, the ordinance would shore up property values in white neighborhoods. In the end, though, the members voted against the resolution to make the ordinance a special order at the next meeting. Binford left the luncheon frustrated, but not defeated.¹³

The editorial staff at the *Times*, considering itself the mouthpiece for all white citizens, offered its full support for the proposed ordinance. The newspaper reprinted Binford’s comments in full, downplayed the dissent in the real estate exchange, and published a lengthy editorial reiterating his justifications for residential segregation. African American residents in white neighborhoods “undeniably has the effect of

¹² *Louisville Times*, November 15, 1913, 9.

¹³ *Louisville Courier Journal*, November 15, 1913, 4.

decreasing property values,” it echoed. Even further, and perhaps most important, the ordinance would protect the already “excellent ... feeling between the races.” “There is room enough for both to continue to dwell peaceably ... without the encroachment of the one on territory heretofore exclusively occupied by the other.” Besides, the newspaper pointed out, perhaps at its most genuine: “[i]t is a plain fact that the better class of white citizens does not want the negro as a neighbor.”¹⁴

These contradictory statements from white Louisvillians—one promoting the amiable race relations and the other illustrating the individual prejudice among white citizens from all economic groups—reflects the New South creed that many southern city leaders, especially those in Louisville, used to attract northern industry. Historian Paul Gaston has shown how this creed of a repentant South that promoted racial progress in the region preserved white supremacy from the end of Reconstruction to the middle of the twentieth century. Indeed, the *Times*, local whites, and later the courts, would insist that the main reason for the segregation ordinance in Louisville was to protect the peaceful relationship between African Americans and whites.¹⁵

After the *Times* reprinted Binford’s address, a number of readers wrote to the editor lining up behind the proposed law. If there were any letters disagreeing with Binford or the *Times*, the newspaper failed to print them, implying that all white citizens in the city backed the ordinance. The segregation ordinance, one anonymous reader wrote to the *Times*, “must be done, peaceably and harmoniously, if possible, but done it must be and the sooner the better.” The reader agreed with Binford that African Americans lowered property values, yet contended as well that “the social and moral side is of far

¹⁴ *Louisville Times*, November 15, 1913, 6.

¹⁵ Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed* (New York: Vintage, 1971).

greater importance” than the alleged economic losses. To him, segregated residential lives were foundational to maintaining his sense of social and religious community. “When we come to our homes in the evening,” he asserted, “we want to be surrounded by congenial white people.” Describing race relations in the city as “amiable,” this reader explained why he supported the ordinance: “we do not want our children to be compelled to associate with colored children,” since “as every white man and woman of ordinary common sense knows, the habits ... of most negro children are injurious and degrading to white children.”¹⁶

Other readers concurred that only the passage of a segregation ordinance could protect the social and moral fiber of the community. Invoking the rhetoric of racial fear, one used to rationalize lynch mobs and demagoguery all through the South, Brent Overstreet viewed residential life as an essential battle in racial purity. To him, housing was at the root of all other social issues, even marriage and sex. He called the “unwelcomed invasion of the negro into white districts ... an impending danger.” He asked caustically, “[i]f the negro is permitted to live with you, be your next-door neighbor, why not give him the same rights now enjoyed by white people?” He pushed the point even further: “Why not mix the children of both races in our public schools? And why not allow them to worship with us in our churches?” Like Binford, he called for the blurring of class lines and urged the city council to pass a segregation ordinance: “The future of our city depends upon your action on this movement.”¹⁷

The local government didn’t hesitate, but went quickly to work to secure the ordinance. President William Murrow of the Board of Councilmen introduced a

¹⁶ *Louisville Times*, November 22, 1913, pg. 6.

¹⁷ *Louisville Times*, November 22, 1913, 6.

segregation law to his colleagues in December 1913, and authorized City Attorney Pendleton Beckley to take it under review. The ordinance was worded carefully so as to stay within the bounds of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Louisville ordinance prevented both African Americans *and* whites from moving onto a block with a majority of the opposite race. To err on the safe side, the drafters included a line about how the ordinance would “preserve the public peace and promote the general welfare” of the city.¹⁸

The segregation ordinance also contained a provision that clearly suggested that the relationship between the proximity of African Americans and declining property values was not the only motivation for the law, despite the sentiment expressed in the *Times*. The proposed law allowed whites and blacks to live on the same city block under one circumstance: it permitted domestics to live with or near their white employers. This provision not only undermined the claims that separating African Americans from whites would maintain racial harmony, but also illustrated how race, housing, and economics were intimately connected in Louisville. Black domestic workers could live near their white employers because they did not pose a threat to white racial or economic status, nor did domestic workers symbolize the upward mobility of African American professionals. Indeed, as numerous scholars, including Tera Hunter in *To 'Joy My Freedom*, have shown, after the Civil War, one of the only jobs available to southern working-class black women was as a domestic worker, as whites sought to maintain African Americans' status as a servant class. In Louisville, it wasn't the presence of African Americans that

¹⁸ Charles H. Parrish, et. al., “The History of Louisville Segregation Case and the Decision of the Supreme Court,” (Louisville Publishing Company, 1918); George C. Wright, “NAACP and Residential Segregation,” 43; “An Ordinance for the Segregation of the Races,” Louisville General Council, Louisville, Kentucky, 1914. Pamphlet Collection, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

offended whites; rather, it was the economic advancement of African American professionals symbolized by home ownership that alarmed whites who felt their own social, economic, and racial status was in danger.¹⁹

Without waiting for Beckley's ruling on the law's constitutionality, local African Americans organized a vigorous campaign against the plan for residential segregation. On January 5, 1914, hundreds gathered at the Quinn Chapel on Walnut Street to hear Dr. M. C. B. Mason, an organizer for the NAACP in Cincinnati. Mason encouraged Louisville's black community to organize its own branch and by the end of the night, the group had elected as its chair Dr. Charles Parrish, a former slave who had risen to become a prominent educator in the city. It also appointed a steering committee to track the city council's actions on the ordinance. Black ministers also denounced the ordinance throughout the city, providing biblical explanations for their positions and belying the image of the black clergy in the early twentieth century as conservative and otherworldly. Reverend Dr. John H. Frank, pastor of Fifth Street Baptist church, looked to a passage from the Acts of the Apostles—that the Lord “hath made of one blood all nations of men,” a passage long highlighted by abolitionists and friends of civil rights—in his sermon at the Louisville Minister's and Deacon's Meeting. This doctrine led Frank to wonder: “what right have white men to decide where blacks may live?” His listeners

¹⁹ Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Dolores Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in a New South Community* (reprint edition, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

answered that white men had no right to segregate African Americans and joined the fight against the law.²⁰

The city attorney disagreed with Frank and the rest of black community, however, and he declared the ordinance constitutional. But still, local blacks persisted, acting quickly in response to stop the city government from going any further with the law. Almost immediately, NAACP chairman Charles Parrish requested a public hearing before the council made a final decision. Hundreds packed into city hall for the hearing on March 19, 1914. There, Parrish presented the concerns of the black community. He asserted that the ordinance “would prevent the blacks from improving through a betterment of their surroundings and mode of living,” cutting to the heart of the purpose of the law and the motivation of the white coalition that supported it. Even further, he called the law unconstitutional and “humiliating to the race.” Finally, he reminded the white council members that Louisville was a city with peaceful race relations. Residential segregation was “unnecessary,” he reasoned, “because of the good feeling ... between whites and blacks.”²¹

During the public meeting, white realtor J. D. Wright also spoke against the ordinance. “Segregation laws,” he maintained, were “an economic and civil failure ... because they bred ill-feeling and resulted in crime.” He also challenged the assertion that African Americans lowered property values in white neighborhoods. As Wright pointed out, other parts of the city had experienced depreciated property values even though no

²⁰ Charles H. Parrish, et. al, “The History of Louisville Segregation Case and the Decision of the Supreme Court,” (Louisville Publishing Company, 1918); *Freeman*, March 14, 1914, 1; *Acts of the Apostles* 17:26 (KJV). For more on abolitionists’ arguments, see Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²¹ *Louisville Times*, March 19, 1914, 9.

African Americans had moved there. He described Main Street as “so dead that the merchants want a steam railroad up and down it just to have a little noise.”²² Where blacks lived or didn’t, he concluded, had no bearing on the financial standing of residential areas.

Property owners in neighborhoods with newly-arrived African Americans disagreed with Wright’s opposition to the law and explained to the city council how their homes had depreciated in value once blacks had moved in next door. Patrick Savage and P. J. Downing, local attorneys, spoke on behalf of white homeowners. They described to the council how their clients’ property-values had plummeted due to black encroachers. One white worker, who refused to state his name, was more than willing to offer his opinion on his new neighbors on West Walnut Street. He claimed he had lost “a great part of his life’s earnings through the steady advancement of the negro [sic] population down the street.”²³

The arguments of Wright, Savage, and Downing reveal the economic considerations in the debate over the segregation ordinance. Despite the efforts of Binford and the *Times* to forge a class alliance among whites and present a united front in favor of the law, they did not succeed. Financial interests divided the white community, especially real estate agents. Realtors who handled rental property in lower-income areas overwhelmingly supported the ordinance, while those who sold property in more high-end neighborhoods, such as Wright, usually opposed it because there was little danger African Americans could afford to move into those neighborhoods anyway. Wright and

²² *Louisville Times*, March 19, 1914, 9; Roger L. Rice, “Residential Segregation by Law,” 182-183.

²³ *Louisville Times*, March 19, 1914, 9.

the other business elites feared the ordinance would create racial tension in the city and lead to crime, making the city less attractive to outside investors.²⁴

After the hearing, the NAACP continued to fight the ordinance, trying everything to galvanize white support and influence the city leaders to vote against it. The *Freeman* cheered the African American “citizens of Louisville” who “rolled up their sleeves and are ready to do all in their power to prevent the passage” of the law. Parrish and other black leaders visited the all-white Board of Trade and the White Ministers’ Alliance to urge their members to join the “great battle for the colored man’s rights to live in perfect peace and liberty.” And the NAACP mailed a letter to local whites to encourage them to “help defeat the ordinance which is so big with harm.”²⁵

The segregation ordinance marked a pivotal moment in the history of Louisville’s race relations. It provided an opportunity for white community leaders to make good on their proclamations of their city as a place of progressive race relations. Although social customs kept Louisville’s public spaces, including businesses and schools, segregated and black Louisvillians were relegated to domestic work and unskilled jobs, the city government had not passed any legislation to separate the races. Individual discrimination had not yet become institutionalized, illustrating C. Vann Woodward’s thesis in the *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* that the relegation of the blacks to inferior status came gradually, as the result of economic and political conflicts between their white neighbors. African Americans recognized the impact this ordinance would have on their future. In

²⁴ *Louisville Times*, March 21, 1914; Rice, “Residential Segregation by Law,” 184.

²⁵ *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 11, 1914, 2.

short, their social, economic, and civic futures hung in the balance of the vote on the segregation ordinance.²⁶

But the council wasn't interested in protecting the future of the city's black residents. On the evening of the vote, Reverend C. B. Allen, a member of the NAACP, brought a petition to the council meeting requesting that the council postpone the vote until a further investigation could be made. Valiantly, Allen threw down the gauntlet. He warned that the "colored people of Louisville will resent the passage of this ordinance and it is more than likely it will be carried to the highest courts in the land." The council paid no attention to Allen's petition or protest, though, and the members voted unanimously—twenty-one to zero—in favor of the segregation ordinance. The efforts of the African American community—and the alleged "good feelings" between whites and blacks—had not even carried one dissenting vote. George Knox, the editor of the *Freeman*, was not surprised by the outcome of the vote. But the tally concerned him. It "is alarming," he wrote, "since it speaks for a united opposition to Negroes in the particular." He went on to predict that the newly elected Mayor John Buschemeyer would soon give his stamp of approval as well. Knox was right. On May 11, 1914, the mayor signed the segregation ordinance into law.²⁷

Reaction to the ordinance cut across racial lines. The *Times* celebrated its passage and excitedly predicted how the ordinance "will divide Louisville into white and black squares." According to the editor, this checkerboard of residential squares "will prevent the deterioration of property values..." in white neighborhoods. The editor also envisaged how the new law would maintain the "amicable relations between the whites and blacks."

²⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, third edition (New York: Oxford, 1974).

²⁷ *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 9, 1914.

The newspaper, however, misjudged the reactions of many black Louisvillians who had routinely voiced their opposition to the law and had warned of a legal crusade against it. In this case, Reverend Allen had been right—the city’s African Americans resented a law restricting where they could live. In his weekly round-up of events in Louisville for the *Freeman*, Melville Purdue called the ordinance “a sure forecast of the quality of men that make up the government of our city.” To him, the councilmen and the mayor were “narrow-minded and little-souled politicians” who used the law to “impede a race that is struggling against odds to make of itself a decent people.” This particular struggle was still in its infancy, though, and Purdue promised boldly “the matter will be taken to the courts and tested.”²⁸

Throughout the summer of 1914, the NAACP worked to overturn the ordinance. In the middle of June, the local branch held a mass meeting to solicit funds and establish a plan for tackling the ordinance in the courts. Their efforts were part of a long, mostly unsuccessful legal strategy of blacks—from Dred Scott to Homer Plessy—that looked to the legal system to redress social wrongs. The NAACP hoped that this time, however, the courts would side with them. Soon after the fundraising meeting, the branch hired legal counsel and looked to initiate a test case. The black leaders were determined to take the ordinance “through all the courts of the land if necessary,” but needed the right case to challenge the law.²⁹

They had plenty of opportunities. Since the city government had passed the ordinance in the spring, several African Americans had violated it. In one case, Reverend

²⁸ *Louisville Times*, April 24, 1914, 2, May 11, 1914, 6; *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 16, 1914, 1.

²⁹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, June 13, 1914, 1, June 20, 1914, 1, June 27, 1914, 1, July 11, 1914, 1, July 25, 1914, 1; Wright, “The NAACP and Residential Segregation,” 46-47, and *Life Behind a Veil*, 121.

Johnson, pastor of the West Chestnut Baptist church, anonymously rented an apartment from a white realtor on a block designated for whites only. When the landlord discovered that Johnson was African American, he demanded that Johnson vacate the property immediately. Yet Johnson refused until he received a refund and fifty dollars in damages. He never saw any cash and was evicted. The NAACP did not select Johnson's case to challenge the law in the courts, though, and the local group continued to hold meetings to solicit funds for legal action. In the late summer, Dr. Joel E. Spingarn, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the NAACP, came to Louisville to formally recognize the local branch as an NAACP chapter and pledged the national organization's support for their cause. The hundreds of African Americans who had turned out to hear Spingarn donated more than two hundred dollars toward the legal effort. In his article for the *Freeman*, Purdue boasted of the black community's commitment to defeating the ordinance. "Rest assured," he promised, "we are in the fight to stay and there will be no backing bells rung until truth and right are vindicated."³⁰

While African Americans tirelessly fought the ordinance, some local whites tried to push the ordinance to its fullest extent. A few even tried to go beyond it to profit from the plight of black home-seekers. A group of residents on Mellwood Avenue, near the meatpacking plants on the eastern side of the city, signed a petition to stop construction on a clubhouse for blacks. There was one problem—the property had been purchased before the ordinance was passed, and the law could not be invoked retroactively. But this was a small detail to whites long accustomed to such judicial calisthenics, and they demanded the city government halt construction. They simply did not want blacks in their

³⁰ *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 13, 1914, June 20, 1914, June 27, 1914, July 11, 1914, July 25, 1914. It is not known why the local branch chose not to pursue Johnson's case to test the segregation law.

neighborhood. Other whites, however, welcomed African Americans, but with ulterior motives. The *Freeman* reported that several white property owners had requested the city attorney declare certain city blocks open to African American residency, although whites already lived there. Those requesting the change believed that more money could be made from black renters because African Americans had fewer housing options and were willing to pay higher prices.³¹

Undaunted, the local branch of the NAACP and the national office organized a test case to challenge the ordinance. In November, 1914, Charles Buchanan, a white realtor who opposed the law, sold a lot to William Warley, a black member of the NAACP, for two-hundred-and-fifty dollars. A well-educated Louisville native, Warley was an outspoken opponent of segregation and frequently used his newspaper, the *Louisville News*, to challenge racism in the city. He openly criticized blacks who tolerated segregation and, as one Louisvillian remembered, often “sent photographers to record the Negroes’ forced seating in the pigeon roost of the theater and published the pictures in his newspaper.” It was no surprise, then, that the journalist agreed to confront the segregation ordinance. The lot he agreed to purchase was located on a block with ten residences, eight of which housed whites. The NAACP drew up the contract signed by the two parties, and in a move of contractual complexity and brilliance, Buchanan and Warley decided that Warley was not “required to accept a deed to the above property ... unless [he had] the right under the laws of the State of Kentucky and the City of Louisville to occupy said property as a residence.” Warley promised to pay the final one hundred dollars only after he was assured the sale did not violate the ordinance. But since there were more whites than African Americans residing on the block, the ordinance

³¹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 11, 1914.

prohibited Warley from living on the lot. He refused to pay the final installment, and Buchanan's attorney, Clayton Blakey of Louisville's prestigious Blakey, Quin, and Lewis firm, filed a suit for breach of contract in Jefferson Circuit Court on December 1, 1914.³² The test of the ordinance had begun.

The case hinged on whether the ordinance violated the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Buchanan's attorney requested that the contract be enforced, because the ordinance deprived an owner the right to live on his property and was, thus, unconstitutional. But the circuit court ruled that the ordinance did not violate any rights and allowed the law to stand. A few months later, the Kentucky Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, confirmed the lower court's ruling. Writing for the unanimous court, Justice J. B. Hannah proclaimed the ordinance "a reasonable and expedient measure for the public welfare." He maintained that "enforced separation of the races ... is not a discrimination or denial of the constitutional guaranty," but part of "the order of Divine Providence." In a rare example of judicial clarity, he explained how the ordinance protected racial purity by keeping the races separated: "all social organizations which lead to...amalgamation are repugnant to the law of nature. ...From social amalgamation is but a step to illicit intercourse, and but another to intermarriage." Even further, Justice Hannah reasoned if the ordinance resulted in the restriction of blacks to the "less desirable portions of the city, they may render those portions more desirable through their

³² *Buchanan v. Warley* 245 U.S. 60; Parrish, et. al, "The History of the Louisville Segregation Case," 10; Wright, "The NAACP and Residential Segregation," 47; William B. Hixson, Jr., "Moorfield Storey and the Struggle for Equality," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 55, no. 3, (December 1968): 549; George C. Wright, "Black Political Insurgency in Louisville, Kentucky: The Lincoln Independent Party of 1921," in *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 68, no. 1 (Winter, 1983): 13; Dr. Charles H. Parrish, Jr., interviewed by Ms. Choski and Ms. Corsu, November 20, 1974, Oral History Center, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky. Rice, "Residential Segregation by Law," 185-186. This legal activity is twenty-five years before the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund was chartered in 1940.

own efforts, as the white race has done.” The court reminded African Americans that “economic equality is not created by statutory declaration nor guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.” In short, people of color were told to fend for themselves, rather than rely on the state government to protect their constitutional rights. Justice Hannah concluded the opinion with one final ominous point: “this State is fully committed to the principle of the separation of the races.”³³

The national NAACP appealed the court’s decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, and NAACP President Moorfield Storey joined the plaintiff’s legal team to argue the case. In 1915, Storey led the NAACP’s campaign to seek social change through the judicial system in *Guinn v. United States* (1915) in which the United States solicitor general challenged an Oklahoma statute that required a literacy test for all voters except those who had suffrage before January 1, 1866. Storey filed an *amicus curiae* brief with the solicitor general, arguing that the law violated the Fifteenth Amendment, which had granted suffrage to black men, by creating a loophole that allowed illiterate white men, but no African American men, to vote. The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that the Oklahoma law clearly violated the amendment. Storey and the rest of the organization celebrated the victory against disfranchisement and hoped for the same success against residential segregation.³⁴

³³ *Harris v. City of Louisville* (1915) 165 Ky. 559; 177 S.W. 472. Rice, “Residential Segregation by Law,” 185-188.

³⁴ William B. Hixon Jr., *Moorfield Storey and the Abolitionist Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1972); William B. Hixon Jr., “Moorfield Storey and the Struggle for Equality,” in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 55, no. 3 (Dec. 1968): 533-554; Donald G. Nieman, *Promises to Keep: African Americans and the Constitutional Order, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127-129; *Guinn v. United States*, 35 Sup. Ct. 296; and Abraham L. Davis and Barbara Luck Graham, *The Supreme Court, Race, and Civil Rights: From Marshall to Rehnquist* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 61. For more on the early days of the NAACP, see Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the*

In an argument before the court, Storey framed the *Buchanan* case as an issue of property rights. He reassured the court that Buchanan was “not complaining of discrimination against the colored race.” Rather, Buchanan was merely trying to exercise his right to sell his property to whomever he chose—a right deprived him by the ordinance. In his brief, Storey attacked the segregation law on the grounds that it “produces results which show that it is clearly unconstitutional.” He argued that the law undeniably “prevents the plaintiff from selling his property” because if Buchanan “cannot sell to a colored person, he cannot sell it all, for the lot is so situated [near African American residences] no white man would want to buy it.” Therefore, the segregation ordinance violates the constitutional rights of an owner “to sell or lease it to any person who may wish to buy.”³⁵

Even further, Storey contended, the law does not accomplish its said purpose of preventing “conflict and ill-feeling between the white and colored races.” Instead the law trapped Louisville’s black residents in “unhealthy and crowded localities” and prevented “them from moving into desirable and healthy neighborhoods.” Indeed, it confined “the colored people of Louisville, though one-fifth of its whole population, to about one-eighth of its area.” The purpose of the ordinance, as Storey and the plaintiffs saw it, was “to establish a Ghetto for the colored people of Louisville.” Storey put it to the justices in simple terms: “Nothing can show more clearly the prejudice which is the sole foundation

Advancement of Colored People (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in American, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁵ *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917).

of this enactment than the fact that the most degraded white man is considered a better neighbor than a Booker Washington.”³⁶

Storey found the idea that the ordinance was designed to maintain “amiable” race relations ridiculous, if not blatantly deceptive. It seemed obvious to him that whites simply did not want African Americans as neighbors and that they had passed a law to keep blacks out. He referred the justices to the law’s provision that exempted domestic workers. The ordinance allowed African American employees to live with their employers. The “relation of master and servant,” Storey noted, had “never assured race purity.” By alluding to the sexual interactions between white men and black female domestics, Storey turned white phobias over interracial sexuality against whites. Underscoring the acceptance of black domestics among white families, Storey undercut the racist argument that the ordinance was also to police sexual relations between whites and blacks. The ordinance, Storey concluded, did not separate the races so as to maintain municipal peace, but to discriminate against African Americans. In so doing, the law punished blacks for white prejudice by preventing people of color from living where they chose. “Such legislation,” Storey concluded, “is a mockery..., and if it can be sustained the consequences are disastrous.”³⁷

The justices were convinced. And while the justices may not have agreed that residential segregation resulted in disaster as Storey claimed, they did unanimously rule that the ordinance deprived both whites and blacks of their constitutional right to buy and sell property to whomever they chose. In delivering the opinion of the court, Justice

³⁶ *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917); *Brief for the Plaintiff in Error on Rehearing in Charles H. Buchanan v. William Warley, in the Supreme Court, October Term, 1916* (Washington, 1916), 4-22.

³⁷ *Brief for the Plaintiff in Error on Rehearing in Charles H. Buchanan v. William Warley, in the Supreme Court, October Term, 1916* (Washington, 1916), 4-22.

William Day, a Theodore Roosevelt appointee, noted that the segregation law was “based wholly upon color; simply that and nothing more.” Even if the ordinance did not blatantly discriminate against African Americans, Day reasoned, “[p]roperty of a person... cannot be taken without due process of law.” Therefore, the court found the ordinance in “direct violation of the fundamental law enacted by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.” The court’s decision was based solely on the legal protection of property rights in the due process clause, clearly demonstrating that the court was more concerned with property rights than racial equality. Nevertheless, the NAACP had won a dramatic victory.³⁸

African Americans across the nation celebrated the court’s decision. Storey called it “the most important decision that has been made since the *Dred Scott* case, and happily this time it is the right way.” James Weldon Johnson, a field secretary for the NAACP, deemed it a “tremendous victory for the American Negro.” The NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine printed the Supreme Court’s opinion in full, and W. E. B. Du Bois, the magazine’s editor, placed the decision at the top of his list of black advances for the year. Black-owned newspapers also printed Justice Day’s opinion under bold headlines heralding African Americans’ triumph over segregation. The *New York Age*’s banner joked “Segregation given a black eye,” while the Baltimore *Afro-American* announced that the court had not merely wounded the system of racial separation, but had killed it completely: “Segregation in U.S. is dead.”³⁹

³⁸ *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917).

³⁹ Moorfield Storey to Oswald Garrison Villard, quoted in Hixon, “Moorfield Storey and the Struggle for Equality,” 555; Press Release, November 21, 1917, by James Weldon Johnson, Acting Secretary of the NAACP, Papers of the NAACP: Part 12, Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series A: The South (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1991), microfilm;

In Louisville, hundreds of blacks joined together to rejoice at the Broadway Temple and schoolchildren assembled to sing the “Star-Spangled Banner.” In the *Louisville Leader*, the city’s all-black newspaper, Joseph Cotter, Jr., waxed poetic upon hearing the news. “My heart filled with almighty joy” when he learned of the decision, and he heard “softly the words of Sojourner Truth... ‘God is not dead yet.’” Cotter encouraged his readers to “rejoice and give thanks, rise and be clothed with a mighty strength and a godly faith.” For him, the decision showed that “at least a little glimmer of this world-wide democracy shines” on African Americans, too. “Brothers, my brothers,” he concluded, “I am happy tonight.”⁴⁰

While many African Americans believed the *Buchanan* victory would remove all legal barriers to racial advancement, the Supreme Court had limited its decision to residential segregation. As an issue of property rights, it was a more clear-cut decision than one concerning education or transportation would have been and nothing in the Supreme Court’s decision could be read to overturn *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The exuberance over the *Buchanan* decision illustrates a naïve belief that judicial actions create social change. Historians Gerald Rosenberg and Michael Klarman have demonstrated how Supreme Court decisions have little impact on our everyday experiences and should not be looked upon as harbingers of social change. Indeed, the *Buchanan* decision did little to eradicate residential segregation as whites found other ways to keep African American from living next door.⁴¹

The Crisis, December 1917, 69, January 1918, 1; *New York Age*, November 8, 1917, 1; *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 17, 1917, 1.

⁴⁰ *Louisville Leader*, November 10, 1917.

⁴¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*; Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (reprint edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Michael J. Klarman,

Although *Buchanan v. Warley* did not eliminate residential segregation, the victory came at a critical moment for the fledgling NAACP. Not only did the court's ruling effectively overturn similar segregation ordinances in other cities, such as Baltimore, St. Louis, and Birmingham, but it also demonstrated to African Americans that social change was possible. And the NAACP's membership rolls reflected their newfound hope. The "Moorfield Storey Membership Drive," held shortly after the court's ruling on the case, brought in over 35,000 new members and 32 new branches for the organization. In Louisville, the legal victory galvanized blacks to join the local chapter. Joseph Cotter wrote to a friend in Atlanta how the "N.A.A.C.P here certainly did its part in the Moorfield Storey drive for 50,000 members." Before the membership campaign, the local branch ranked 26th out of 85 branches. After the campaign, Louisville had the 5th largest branch with over 1,400 members.⁴²

Indeed, the segregation decision gave Cotter and many other people of color, not just those in Louisville, hope for the future. It seemed that the nation that had abandoned them at the end of the nineteenth century, when northern and southern whites had chosen sectional reconciliation over racial equality, had finally remembered the unfulfilled promises of long ago. To many African Americans, the blow to legalized residential segregation was a significant leap toward full citizenship rights. Now, the possibility for an integrated Louisville seemed to exist, at least if African Americans could afford it. The

From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴² Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP, A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967); Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Joseph S. Cotter Jr., letter to Louise Matthews, April 30, 1918, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Wright, "The NAACP and Residential Segregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1914-1917," 52-54; Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series A: The South. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1991), microfilm.

task now fell to Louisville's black community to accumulate the resources in order to buy homes throughout the city. As of 1917, no one would have predicted or assumed that a black ghetto in the West End was inevitable.⁴³

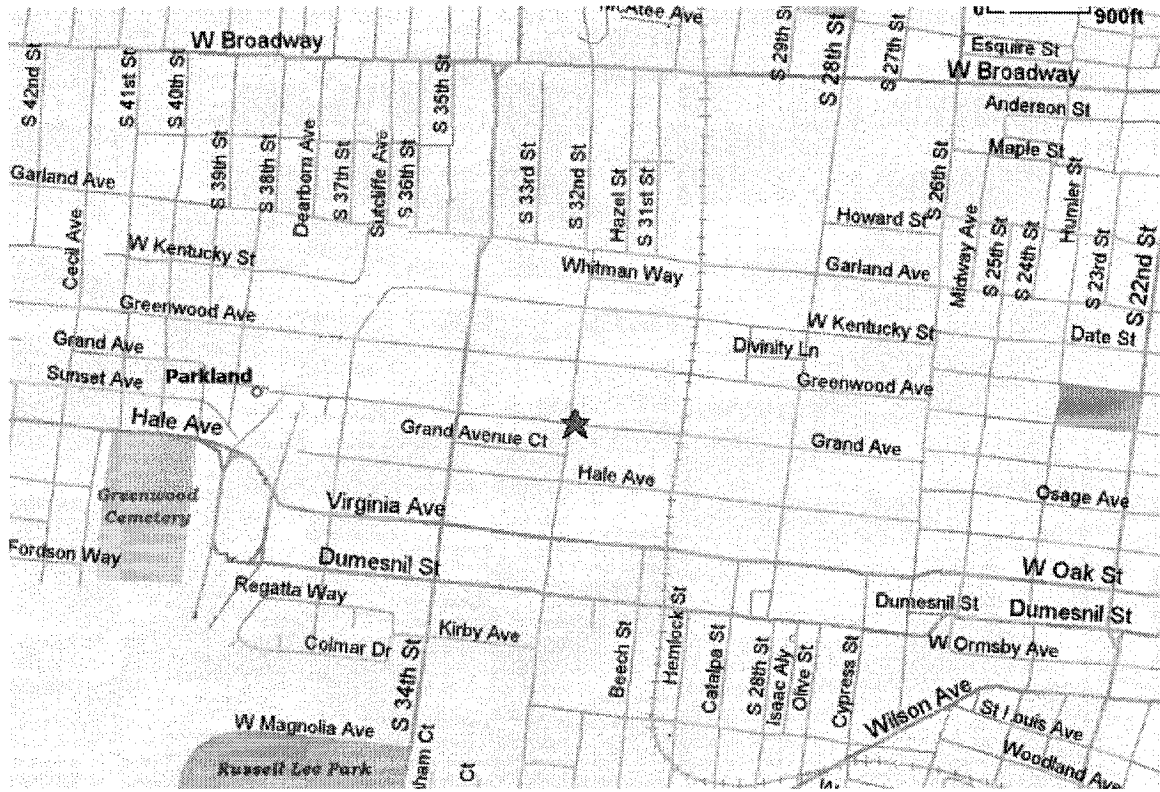
Wealthier blacks in Louisville took full advantage of the court's decision and purchased existing homes on the western blocks of Walnut, Magazine, and Chestnut Street in the fringe area between the decaying inner city that was home to low-income blacks and the West End that was home to low-income whites. In the spring of 1924, the *Louisville Leader* printed a special section to highlight the homes of African Americans in the city. The A. M. E. General Conference was being held in Louisville and the newspaper wanted to spotlight the progress of the city's black community. "We are justly proud of our homes," proclaimed the article accompanying the photos of several two-story, brick homes. "Louisville Negro homes compare most favorable with those in any city in this country," boasted the newspaper. "They are well distributed," explained the article, "sparing Louisville of that very undesirable segregation of race homes." Harkening back to the teachings of black leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, the newspaper explained the importance of home ownership: "It is an index to the character of the people. It leads to the doing of so many other things worthwhile and commendable; it improves family life and civic interest."⁴⁴

⁴³ For more on how sectional reunion after the Civil War came at the expense of civil rights for African Americans, see Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ *Louisville Leader*, May 10, 1924, 1. For more on how types of housing show the progress of African Americans, see W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro American Family* (1908; reprint, Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

Because most African Americans purchased existing homes in the area directly west of the central business district, the area was quickly becoming overcrowded. Although the *Buchanan* decision had overturned legalized residential segregation, individual discrimination flourished in the city as many white homeowners and real estate agents refused to rent or sell to African Americans outside of the inner city, the area local whites had prescribed for African American residency. The Urban League and local black businessmen persuaded the city government and real estate board to allot land for the development of homes for black residents near Grand Avenue in the southwestern part of the city. More than likely, however, the city government's action stemmed from the fact that this area was located near oil refineries, rather than from benevolence. In fact, just a few years later, a report for Louisville's planning and zoning commission by Harland Bartholomew and Associates, a powerful city-planning firm in St. Louis, found this area unattractive for residences. Bartholomew had his hand in planning virtually every major city across the country. This particular report was merely one in a long list of reports, surveys, and plans prepared for Louisville by Bartholomew's firm. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the city depended on the firm to plan the city's urban renewal projects. The report claimed that the "smoke, dust and odors" in the air from the refineries made this an undesirable residential area. The willingness of the local government and real estate board to allot land near the polluting oil refineries foreshadowed later efforts by whites to relocate all African Americans—not just the black professionals who could afford to build homes outside of the black enclave in the inner city—to the West End after more industries were built during World War II. The advent of these new industries contributed to the high levels of air pollution, making the area not only an undesirable,

but also an unhealthy, place to live. Even still, the new development along Grand Avenue managed to offer at least a little relief to the overcrowded all-black residential area near the inner city.⁴⁵



Key: The star denotes Grand Avenue. ★

Figure 1b: Location of African American homes in the 1920s. In the 1920s African American professionals built homes on Grand Avenue after the local government and real estate exchange allotted land for the construction of homes for blacks. To the west is the Parkland neighborhood, which had been an exclusive white neighborhood until a tornado destroyed most of the homes in the 1870s. In the 1920s, the area was home to many middle-class African Americans

⁴⁵ “Zoning Report,” Louisville, Kentucky (December, 1930), Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Series 1, box 6 (University Archives, Washington University Libraries, St. Louis, Missouri): 8-9; Benjamin D. Berry Jr. “Plymouth Settlement House and the Development of Black Louisville: 1900-1930,” Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University (1977), 58; J. M. Ragland, “Negro Housing in Louisville,” in *The Southern Workman*, vol. 58, no. 1 (January 1929): 22-28.

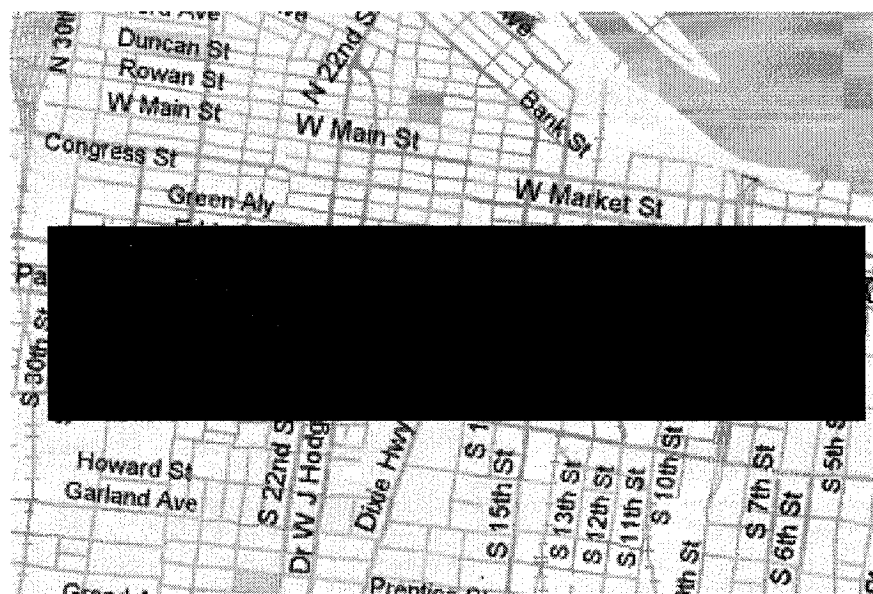
The project also provided some economic benefits for black-owned businesses. Wilson Lovett, president of the all-black First Standard Bank, organized a finance company that purchased the vacant land near the Ohio River, while William C. Bonner, a black architect, designed the homes. Members of the Urban League promoted the new neighborhood to teachers, businessmen, and medical doctors at the city's African American churches, and volunteers showed churchgoers the plan books of the new neighborhood. Many bought homes before they were even built. Each home came equipped with the modern conveniences, including basements, coal bins, automatic hot water heaters, bathrooms, fireplaces, and linen closets. The Brown Brothers construction firm, owned and operated by African Americans, built each home according to the buyer's specifications.⁴⁶

Despite this movement of the city's wealthier people of color and the victory in *Buchanan v. Warley*, the dynamics of residential life in the city did not change. The majority of Louisville's black population remained concentrated in the center of the city. Using reports compiled by a local researcher, noted African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier revealed that almost fifteen years after *Buchanan v. Warley*, most African Americans still lived just west of the central business district in an area known as "Downtown." In 1930, two-thirds of the city's black population, approximately twenty thousand people, called "Downtown" home. Frazier divided this area into three zones of residential life. The first zone, or the slum section, comprised the blocks between Sixth and Fourteenth Streets and housed the majority of the city's black residents. According to Frazier, all types of illegal activity, including drugs, alcohol, numbers running, and

⁴⁶ J. M. Ragland, "Negro Housing in Louisville," in *The Southern Workman*, vol. 58, no. 1, (January 1929): 22-28.

prostitution, were common there. Nonetheless, the area had a vibrant business community. Several black churches and Central High School, the only secondary school for blacks in Kentucky, were also located in the first zone.⁴⁷

Frazier noted that the zones improved as one traveled west. In the second zone, located between Fourteenth and Twenty-first Streets, three-fourths of the residents were people of color. Here was the largest and most prominent African American church and the junior high school for Louisville's black students. The most desirable of the three zones fell in the most western part of "Downtown," between Twenty-first and Thirty-first Streets. Because blacks had only recently moved into this zone, they comprised just a third of the population. Frazier observed that an exclusive white residential neighborhood known as "Shawneeland" prevented African Americans from any further expansion west.⁴⁸



Key: Shaded area represents the zones where most African Americans lived.

Figure 1c: This map shows the location of the "zones" from 6th to 31st streets that E. Franklin Frazier examined in *Negro Youths at the Crossways*.

⁴⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youths at the Crossways* (Washington, D.C., 1940), 14-18.

⁴⁸ Frazier, *Negro Youths at the Crossways*, 14-18.

While Frazier's analysis displayed some of the apparent redeeming qualities in African American residential life in Louisville, the results of other studies of living conditions was far from positive. In 1930, the Bartholomew city-planning firm prepared another report, this time on the "Negro Housing Program" in the city. This report revealed that "[w]hile housing as a whole is in great need of improvement, the Negro situation is particularly bad." Volunteers found that only twenty-one percent of the homes had indoor toilets, while thirty-five percent had outdoor toilets and forty-four percent had open vaults despite laws prohibiting them where sewer lines were available. This was, according to the surveyors, "a very bad situation from a sanitation standpoint." Even further, most of the residences were "very old and ... dilapidated." The report pointed out that "within the crowded Negro sections occur the highest death rates from communicable diseases, the greatest concentration of juvenile delinquency and the worst vice and criminal conditions in the city." Nevertheless, the report's authors did not exhibit much sympathy for the plight of Louisville's black population. In fact, they blamed African Americans for choosing to live in dilapidated housing. "If it were possible to create among the Negro masses a real desire for decent accommodations," the writers predicted, "the slums would automatically eliminate themselves." The authors of this survey refused to see the financial difficulties of African Americans in Louisville as part of larger racialized economic disparities across the nation. Instead, according the survey, African Americans chose to live in squalor and poverty and needed to be

convinced otherwise: their “lack of desire ... for something better” was a serious obstacle in improving housing conditions among black residents.⁴⁹

Similarly, a 1920 report of the State Inter-Racial Conference in Louisville found that African Americans lived in awful conditions, but “must be taught to desire better things.” Although the conference stated that “segregation must be condemned,” it nevertheless promoted stereotypes that black Louisvillians enjoyed living in cramped, dirty quarters. “Living in alleys should be discouraged in every possible way,” the report stated, “and all means employed to promote sanitary living.” The conference was careful to explain how improved housing would not elevate the economic status of African Americans: “a desire... for better living conditions does not in the least mean a desire for so-called social equality.”⁵⁰

Even though the separation of the races could no longer be legally enforced, white residents had found other ways to uphold the color line since the Supreme Court’s decision. To be sure, the black population did not willingly live in such conditions, but they had few options because many white neighborhoods remained closed to African American residents. While some white residents simply refused to sell or rent to people of color, others took a more proactive approach and inserted restrictive clauses into deeds. These clauses were not illegal because they were inserted into private contractual agreements, beyond the scope of legal authority. Such deed restrictions were common practice in the middle of the twentieth century, and real estate manuals openly

⁴⁹ “The Negro Housing Problem in Louisville,” City Planning and Zoning Commission, Louisville, Kentucky (May, 1932), Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Series 2, vol. 35, part 3 (University Archives Washington University Libraries, St. Louis, Missouri), 6, 7, 20, 24.

⁵⁰ “Report of Findings Committee of State Inter-Racial Conference Held on the Call of Governor Morrow in Louisville, July, 23, 1920,” in Matthew Family papers, 1912-1941, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

encouraged property owners to use deed restrictions to “protect and safeguard the interests of present owners against willful or inadvertent misuse of the land.” The authors of the manual did not have to explain that “inadvertent misuse” meant anything from industrial development to black residents. It was common knowledge that restrictive clauses could be used for such purposes and some deed writers did not even try to hide the fact that African Americans were not welcome. For example, Stratton Hammon, a Louisville real estate developer, brazenly put such a covenant in the deed for a subdivision he designed in the east end of the city: “None of the lots in said subdivision shall ever be sold or leased to or owned by, persons of negro or African descent.”⁵¹ The architect made it perfectly clear which potential homeowners he preferred on Woodfill Way.

Local blacks were very much aware of the ways whites closed off their neighborhoods to people of color and recognized that *de facto* residential segregation affected every aspect of their lives. Blyden Jackson, a novelist from Louisville, described his experiences growing up as an African American in the segregated city during the 1930s. He recalled that much of his hometown was “not accessible” to him. He invoked Du Bois’s image of a “veil”—one that not only separated whites from blacks, but also the consciousness of blacks themselves—to describe his sense of Louisville. “Through a veil,” he remembered, “I could perceive the forbidden city, the Louisville where white

⁵¹ Clement Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 4-19; 205-210. The Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that the clauses were not enforceable by the courts. *Shelley v. Kraemer* 334 U.S. 1 (1948); Nelson L. North and Alfred A. Ring, *Real Estate Principles and Practices*, Fifth Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1960) 397; Maurice Unger, *Real Estate Principles and Practices*, Second Edition (Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing Company, 1950), 237; Deed book 1002, pp. 602, Stratton Hammon papers, 1929-1960, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

folks lived.” Not only did the veil separate blacks and whites from living side by side, but it also divided the black community from the white one. “On my side of the veil, everything was black: the home, the people, the churches, the schools, the Negro park with the Negro park police,” he explained. Jackson poignantly expressed how the partitioned city “colored” his view of the world and indeed himself: “I knew that were two Louisvilles, and in America, two Americas. I knew, also, which of the two Americas was mine.... I was a Negro. An act of God had circumscribed my life.”⁵²

Jackson’s memories of growing up in the “Gateway to the South” in the 1930s and 1940s reflected the experience of many black Louisvillians despite the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Buchanan v. Warley*. Although the decision declared the ordinance unconstitutional, residential segregation was alive and well in the city. Indeed, the Supreme Court’s proclamations could not eradicate the entrenched power of white supremacy. White property owners created other ways to keep African Americans off “their” blocks and out of “their” neighborhoods. Simply put, white prejudice and deed restrictions inserted into private contracts forced many blacks to reside in cramped, substandard housing. By mid-century, it seemed that with regards to housing African Americans had won the legal battle, but had lost the residential war. The fight was not over, though, and if nothing else, the contest surrounding the segregation law set the stage for a century of struggle over housing in Louisville.

⁵² Blyden Jackson, *The Waiting Years: Essays on American Negro Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 3-4.

Chapter Two

“The Decent Comforts of Democracy”

Residential Segregation and the 1937 Ohio River Flood

For its New Year’s Day edition of 1937, the *Courier Journal* acquired the services of economist Roger Babson to conduct a survey and make a prediction about the river city’s economic prospects in the New Year. Babson was no wide-eyed optimist—six weeks before the stock market crashed in 1929, he had promised investors “sooner or later a crash is coming.” Despite the crushing impact of the Depression on Louisville, he offered a bold prophecy for the New Year. The city’s future, Babson speculated, was full of promise. He claimed that Louisville was “only beginning to realize...its possibilities.” Even further, Babson assured the newspaper’s readers that their city “will run considerably ahead of the remainder of the country.” In short, he concluded, “Louisville has one of the brightest outlooks of any American City for 1937.”¹

But Babson could not have foreseen the impact that a natural disaster would have in the Ohio Valley. In the last few weeks of December 1936, the area had been soaked by rain. The *Monthly Weather Review* reported “moderate to heavy rains” in the area and the river started to rise. The “excessive rains” continued throughout January and “developed within one month’s time into the greatest flood of record.” The swollen river pushed homes and businesses off their foundations, ripped railroad tracks from their ties, destroyed lines of communication, and knocked out electrical power in the city. Just weeks after Babson’s rosy outlook, Louisville was in a desperate situation.²

¹ William A. Sherden, *The Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Selling Predictions* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1997), 96; *Courier Journal*, January 1, 1937, 1.

² *Monthly Weather Review*, volume 65, February 1937.

By the time the floodwaters receded in early February, the West End and the downtown area of the city were almost completely destroyed. Indeed, according to the official report from the Red Cross, the Ohio River flood was “much larger than any previous disaster” in the United States, including the Mississippi River Valley Flood of 1927 and the drought of 1930-1931. Business and civic leaders began reconstruction on the hardest hit areas, especially the central business district, almost immediately. Flood protection was at the top of the list, but the United States entered World War II before any progress could be made on the proposed floodwall. Therefore, many white residents of the West End refused to take another chance against the Ohio River and began to move to other areas of the city. The unprotected and mostly unreconstructed West End was deemed acceptable by local whites for African American residency and many black Louisvillians took advantage of the relaxed housing policy resulting from the crisis. The city government, with the cooperation of federal housing policies, also constructed new public housing projects for low-income blacks in the West End. Ultimately, the flood dramatically altered housing patterns in Louisville, and precipitated the movement of African American—both of their own accord and by the deliberate policies of local and national officials—to the West End of the city.³

This chapter shows how the natural landscape became racialized, affecting the residential and economic uses of the land. In Louisville, the West End was located on a

³ *The Ohio-Mississippi Valley Flood Disaster of 1937*, Report of Relief Operations of The American Red Cross, Washington, D.C., 17-28. For more on the 1927 Mississippi River Valley Flood and the Drought, see David McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood*, Reprint edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); Pete Daniel, *Deep 'N As It Comes: The 1927 Mississippi River Flood*, reprint edition (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 1996); John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

flood plain and susceptible to crests of the Ohio River. At the beginning of the century, working-class and middle-class white residents lived in the area because they were not wealthy enough to live in the East End, which was on higher ground. After the 1937 flood and the stalled construction of flood protection along the river, many white residents chose not to rebuild in the low-lying West End. They opted to move instead to higher ground in the eastern and southern sections of the city. Local whites, including homeowners, real estate agents, and business and civil leaders, considered the area undesirable for white occupancy. As a result, many of the homes abandoned by whites fleeing the flood were made available to African Americans desperate to move out of the overcrowded, substandard downtown area. In short, white Louisvillians racialized the natural landscape, assigning blacks to the most undesirable areas.

The 1937 Ohio River flood and the reconstruction efforts that followed also demonstrate the fluidity of Jim Crow segregation and the relationship between private action and public policy. During the flood, relief efforts largely proceeded along desegregated lines as city officials and the Red Cross ignored racial distinctions to provide food and shelter to African Americans. However, Jim Crow came sharply back into focus after the floodwaters receded and rebuilding efforts began, illustrating how segregation was not fixed in times of crisis. Because African Americans—poor and professional—were largely concentrated in the central downtown area, they had few resources, financial or otherwise, outside of the flooded area on which to draw for rescue or rebuilding efforts. Many black leaders, both in Louisville and across the nation, argued that the flood offered a much-needed chance for the city of Louisville to improve the inadequate housing black residents endured. Although many African Americans were

certainly aware well before the flood how residential segregation kept them relegated to the decaying sections of the city, the catastrophe exposed both the harmful effects of segregated neighborhoods and how city leaders employed federal policies to offer token solutions to remedy the ever-present housing shortage among black residents.

* * * *

January 1937 had “started in with rain” and by the middle of the month, the Ohio River passed the flood stage of twenty-eight feet in Louisville and continued to rise. The rising water immediately affected low-lying parts of the city, but local meteorologists predicted the crest of 30.5 feet would be reached within the next couple of days. Rising water forced residents, livestock, poultry, and pets near the river to find higher ground, and reports of more rainfall escalated flood fears. City police barricaded streets along the waterfront, but water continued to creep near the West End of the city as steady rain swelled the river to 38.2 feet, a full ten feet above flood stage. Forecasters now predicted the river to crest at forty-two feet, and the city prepared for the worst.⁴

By January 22, 1937, the river had risen to 44.1 feet and one meteorologist predicted “the prospect for Louisville can certainly be termed alarming.” Indeed, officials from Louisville Gas & Electric “warned the city to expect the worst concerning electric service.” Despite the bleak forecast, Mayor Neville Miller encouraged residents to remain calm. In an address over WHAS radio, the mayor urged citizens to “take the worst flood in [the city’s] history with level hearts.” He reminded Louisvillians that the city had the necessary resources, such as telephones, radios, and automobiles, to “prevent confusion

⁴ *Courier Journal*, January 16, 1937, 1; *The Flood Relief*, Printed under quarantine during the days of the Great Flood of the Ohio Valley. Only one edition. At Louisville, Ky. (On dry land), January, 1937, Associate editors: Bob and Dorothy Nunn, in First Unitarian Church Records, 1830-1986, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, January 18, 1937, 1; January 20, 1937, 1; January 21, 1937, 1.

and disseminate information that can aid.” Mayor Miller encouraged residents who lived in danger zones to evacuate their homes before the water rose even higher. He concluded his address with an urgent appeal for volunteers and a strict order for sightseers to stay away from the flooded areas.⁵

Under the direction of Mayor Miller, the city went into high gear preparing for the worst. Officials organized rescue crews and relief teams. Two typhoid clinics were established for the two-hundred-and-fifty families who had been evacuated from the lowest-lying areas. The local office of the U.S. District Engineers deployed six motorized tugboats for rescuing those stranded by the floodwaters. The Louisville Council of Churches opened twenty-five churches near the flooded areas to house evacuees and the city government opened the state fairgrounds to shelter the victims, as well. While the National Guard supplied cots for the relief areas, the Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Association offered workers to assist in rescue and relief efforts.⁶

Even before the river reached its crest, city officials knew the flood would hit the low-lying West End, where working-class and middle-class whites lived, the hardest. The *Courier Journal* reported that once the Ohio River reached 44.5 feet, “water will rush through Broadway in the vicinity of 43d St.” and “basements will be flooded in several square miles of residential area.” The river continued to rise, and so too did the fears of residents in the West End as they scrambled to find higher ground. WAVE Radio broadcast urgent calls for boats as city workers and volunteers tried to rescue those marooned by the water. As the rain fell, the newspaper issued warnings for those living

⁵ *Courier Journal*, January 22, 1937, 1; *Lexington Leader*, January 22, 1937, 7; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 22, 1937, 1; Robert I. Kutak, “The Sociology of Crises: The Louisville Flood of 1937,” in *Social Forces*, vol. 17, no. 1 (October 1938): 67

⁶ *New York Times*, January 22, 1937; *Courier Journal*, January 22, 1937, 1-3; Kutak, “The Sociology of Crises,” 68.

west of 15th Street: if the river rose to 52 feet, it “would put virtually all of the West End under water.”⁷

According to the local newspaper, the immediate problem remained getting the residents out of the West End. On Saturday, January 23rd, the river rose to nearly fifty-two feet, with the crest expected on Sunday. The *Courier Journal* described the situation in the West End as “the gravest problem ever faced by Louisville.” Rescue efforts continued at a frantic pace, at a “rate of more than 100 persons an hour by a weary corps of oarsmen in every available boat.” Evacuees left their homes with suitcases, and many brought the family pet—dogs, cats, and even canaries in the cage. According to the newspaper, “thousands of West End homes, many of them fine and costly residences, have been flooded.”⁸

Those who were fortunate enough to stay in their homes were not without discomfort, however. Goldie Baron explained how the “greatest handicap is not having toilet facilities.” She and her family made due, though: “We use an old bucket and then throw it into the muddy old flood water.” In a letter to a friend, Lulie Henning explained that she did not have any running water: “Have not washed face and hands for nearly 2 weeks!! So you can imagine what I look like.” And finally, William Erwin Caldwell kept a daily journal during the flood. Along with reporting the misfortunes of those marooned by the floodwaters, Caldwell kept tabs on his medicine supply. On Saturday, January 30th, he complained “[n]o medicine yet but my substitutes,—prune juice, also orange

⁷ *Courier Journal*, January 22, 1937, 1, January 23, 1937, 8; *Lexington Leader*, January 22, 1937, 7, January 23, 1937, 1.

⁸ *Courier Journal*, January 24, 1937, 1; *Lexington Leader*, January 24, 1937, 1; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 24, 1937, 4.

juice are carrying me fairly well.” His wife, however, could not wait to “get back to regular hot baths.”⁹

While the media focused on the serious situation faced by the white residents in the West End, very little attention was given to the residents in the central downtown, near Broadway and Walnut Streets, where most of the city’s black population lived. The *Courier Journal* offered almost no information about the flood victims in this part of town. And while the whites in the West End certainly had their share of problems, so too did the African Americans living downtown. The NAACP’s organ, *The Crisis*, reported that “Louisville was one of the hardest hit of the cities in the path of the raging Ohio river and its Negro residential area was quickly inundated.” According to the *Atlanta Daily World*, “[v]irtually the entire colored section of Louisville, where live approximately 50,000 Negroes, was under water.”¹⁰

⁹ Goldie Baron diary, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Lulie Henning letter, February 3, 1937, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; William Erwin Caldwell, Journal 1937, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁰ *The Crisis*, March, 1937, 75; *Atlanta Daily World*, January 27, 1937, 1.

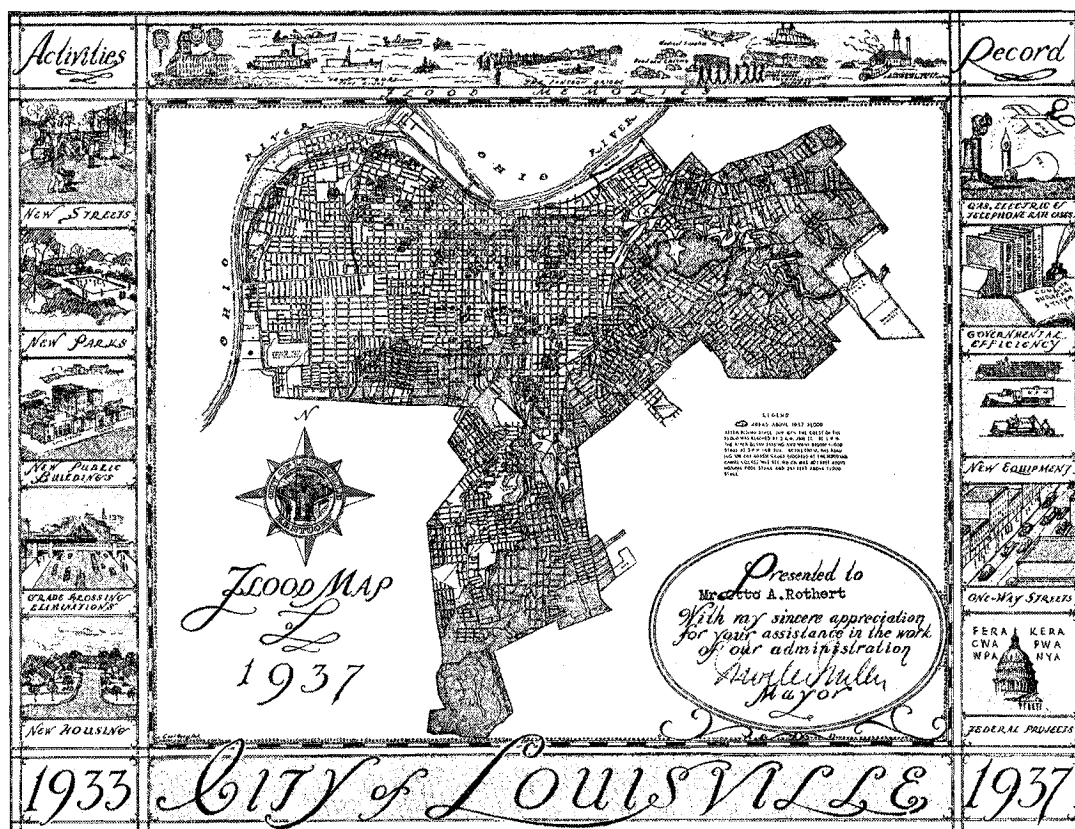


Figure 2a: Louisville Flood Map, 1937, Courtesy of the Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. The lighter areas in the central part of the city and to the west were the areas under water.

Reacting to the severity of the situation, President Franklin Roosevelt issued a special proclamation for donations to the Red Cross. “The victims of this grave disaster are dependent upon the American Red Cross for food, shelter, fuel, medical care and warm clothing,” he asserted. He asked that a “minimum relief fund of \$2,000,000 be raised as speedily as possible.” Senate Majority Leader Alben Barkley proclaimed that he would slash through all governmental red tape to ensure the flood victims received aid as quickly as possible. Senator Barkley also telegraphed the *Courier Journal* that he was seeking leeway on portions of the Federal Housing Act so that home repair could be expedited in Louisville after the floodwaters receded. Louisville’s banking authorities had requested the Senator to pursue more flexible credit extensions and government loan

guarantees. On a local level, Mayor Miller announced that his office was accepting donations for flood relief, as well. Within an hour-and-a-half, the Mayor's Flood Relief committee had collected \$5,859.42, and donations kept pouring in.¹¹

While citizens in drier areas responded favorably to Mayor Miller's request for donations, many citizens did not heed the Mayor's call to curtail unnecessary use of automobiles and telephones. Even further, sightseers continued to make their way to the flooded sections of the city and there were reports of looters preying on abandoned businesses. Having had enough, Mayor Miller issued shoot-to-kill orders for looters found in the West End. He also gave a strict warning to the sightseers: if they didn't stay off the roads, the city would "be compelled to license the use of cars during the period of the emergency." Simply put, the Mayor explained, "no one would be able to use his car unless a permit is first obtained."¹²

The situation only worsened as the rain continued to fall and the river continued to rise. On Friday morning, January 22nd, R. T. Fox, a meteorologist for the U. S. Weather Bureau, recorded 4.56 inches of rain over the past thirty-six hours. "By Saturday afternoon," Fox wrote, "conditions were desperate in the West End." They got worse. On Sunday, Fox "was awakened by heavy rain accompanied by thunder." "More than an inch of rain on top of an inch of sleet!" The meteorologist poignantly summed up the situation: "This was the coup de grace of an already unkind Fate." By Monday, January 25th, the water filled the two electric plants and left the city in total darkness. Water encroached upon the downtown section, and trains rushed evacuees from the city to higher ground in the eastern part of the city. One radio operator recorded in his diary that

¹¹ *Courier Journal*, January 24, 1937, 1; *Lexington Leader*, January 24, 1937, 1; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 27, 1937, 1.

¹² *Courier Journal*, January 24, 1937, 1.

the water lapped “at the City Hall on the North and West sides. It is ugly brown water, covered with a thick scum of oil and gasoline.” Governor A. B. Chandler declared martial law in Louisville and asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt for federal troops. Six hundred federal troops were expected to arrive in the city by Tuesday, January 26th.¹³

Trains, trucks, and airplanes brought food, medical supplies, tools, clothing, and blankets from all across the nation. A plane from Philadelphia brought typhoid serum, while a train from Knoxville brought doctors, nurses, fifty-two boats, fire extinguishers, and life preservers. A New York detective agency sent one-hundred-and-ninety-one men to operate boats for rescue efforts. Other cities, such as Chicago, sent police officers. Notre Dame University students and alumnae chartered a plane to send a half-ton of rubber boots and woolen stockings for flood victims. Hollywood legend and Kentucky’s own D. W. Griffith sent one hundred dollars after hearing radio reports of the damage done to his native city. Numerous checks to “help some of the needy veterans” arrived at the local post of the American Legion. In his thank-you letters, Commander Frank A. Ropke not only spoke of his appreciation, but also of the terrible conditions in the city: “You doubtless have heard a great deal about hell and high water, and permit me to make the observation that hell and high water in this instance are practically synonymous.” Despite the grave situation, Mayor Miller took to the radio to express the city’s gratitude for the nation’s charity. “A great deal of assistance has been rendered spontaneously from the outside,” he said, “and for all of this Louisville is most deeply grateful.”¹⁴

¹³ Letter to Richard Seebode from R. T. Fox, February 12, 1937. First Unitarian Church Records, 1830-1986. Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Johnathan Van Dyke Norman, Jr., Diary, 22 Jan. – 7 Feb. 1937, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, January 25, 1937, 1, January 26, 1937, 1.

¹⁴ Letter to Dr. C. R. Christopher, Seneca Falls, NY, from Frank A. Ropke, February 2, 1937. American Legion, Jefferson Post No. 15 (Louisville, Kentucky), papers, 1919-1988, Filson

Before meteorologists had determined whether the river had reached its crest, the *Courier Journal*, always the city's most vocal publicist, began singing the praises of the rescue and relief efforts. Even in desperate situations, the business and civic elite paid close attention to how their city was perceived by outsiders. "Unorganized but able, inexperienced for the most part but willing," volunteers came to the aid of those who were marooned by the flood waters and "accomplished a task of feeding, clothing, and housing refugees in a manner probably never approached for speed and thoroughness in any other major disaster, even in wartime." The newspaper even lavished praise on Louisville's neighbors, calling their response "an exemplification of honest Kentucky hospitality and true Christianity." Even further, "no lines of color or creed were drawn, anywhere... The brotherhood of many was proved by works, not words." Indeed, the *Courier Journal* rarely missed an opportunity to promote Louisville as a place of social harmony and amiable race relations.¹⁵

Despite the bold claims of brotherhood, the catastrophe revealed how the relief was often predicated on the color line. Relief agencies set up racially segregated bread lines and soup kitchens for evacuees. Five soup kitchens—two for whites, two for African Americans, and one for both, suggesting that Jim Crow segregation was not fixed, particularly in times of crises—opened in the downtown area, serving soup, stews, bread, and coffee. The *Courier Journal* reported that "all day, ...thousands of hungry, needy families stood in slowly-moving lines that led to food distribution centers in the central and east central islands of Louisville." The reporter commented how "they stood patiently,... like the line of 'early birds' that forms for a Derby Day at Churchill Downs."

Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, January 27, 1937, 1, January 28, 1937, 1, January 31, 1937, 1; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 27, 1937, 1.

¹⁵ *Courier Journal*, January 28, 1937, 1.

However, there was a major difference: “there was no carnival spirit” in the bread line because many of those waiting had not eaten for as much as three days. The flood victims were also segregated in relief camps. According to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, “colored refugees go to colored houses and churches, ... while the whites are being taken to white schools and white churches.”¹⁶

Because the entire black section of the city was flooded, the local government had trouble securing shelter for African Americans marooned by the rising water. Many whites simply refused to open their homes to the black flood victims. Mayor Miller made an urgent radio appeal for housing assistance for black flood victims. Lexington Mayor E. Reed Wilson volunteered to house one thousand African American evacuees in his city.¹⁷

Some of the black families sought shelter at the Presbyterian Community Center, located in the heart of the African American residential area. Founded in 1898 to provide social services to low-income black families, the mission operated as a relief station during the flood. In a letter the presbytery’s executive committee after the floodwaters receded, Reverend John Little, superintendent of the PCC, explained the desperate situation of many families housed in the center. There was “no time for preparation, people were brought out only with the clothes on their backs.” While Little offered no concrete estimate of the extent of damage, he summed up the situation in stark terms: “Thousands have lost everything. Houses, household goods, and clothing.” In another letter the next day, he recounted his visit to two homes in the area. “The havoc is beyond description,” he began. “Water from 3 to 5 feet deep over turned all furniture and soaked

¹⁶ *Courier Journal*, January 30, 1937, 1; *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 6, 1937, 19.

¹⁷ *Courier Journal*, January 28, 1937, 1.

it.” Even further, “beds and sofas were soaked with slimy mud and the steps, walks, and streets are so slippery it was almost impossible to stand.”¹⁸

After the floodwaters receded, it was apparent that the raging waters had destroyed most of the houses in the area. “The entire community was deserted,” Little reported after one trip through the neighborhood. “The district is now under quarantine,” he explained, “and sanitary inspectors are going about marking homes that are dangerous.” After another trip, he described how “the homes surrounding our buildings, for many blocks, were flooded from 4 to 6 feet in water.” “This has caused the glued joints to drop apart,” and the homes were unfit for habitation. In short, Little concluded, “the homes of the people surrounding this church have suffered losses beyond their ability to withstand.”¹⁹

The homes of white residents in the West End were not safe, either. Mayor Miller announced an “absolute quarantine” around the area after the river returned to its banks. Federal troops and the city police surrounded the area to prevent anyone, including evacuated residents, from entering the area without a permit from the health department. Dr. A. T. McCormack, State Commissioner of Health; Dr. Hugh Leavell, Director of Health; and Dr. Robert Oleson, Assistant Surgeon General of the United States, decided upon strict rules for the quarantined area before anyone could return. According to their rules, the area must have a safe water supply, a safe system of removing human waste, the reestablishment of garbage removal services, and repaired gas mains and foundations; all debris must be removed and all structures must be dry. Despite the quarantine, many

¹⁸ Flood Bulletins, February 2, 1937 and February 3, 1937. Presbyterian Community Center Records, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁹ Flood bulletins, February 3, 1937, February 23, 1937, and March 3, 1937. Presbyterian Community Center Records, UARC, Louisville, Kentucky; Kutak, “The Sociology of Crises,” 68.

flood victims tried to return to their homes. They were forbidden to enter the area. “All I ask,” Mayor Miller explained, “is a little patience.”²⁰

The American Red Cross rushed to the city to offer aid to the flood victims. The Red Cross was accustomed to providing relief on such a large scale. But according to the official report of the 1937 Ohio River flood, “this was not a repetition of the Mississippi Flood of 1927.” “This was worse,” the organization claimed. “No respecter of persons, the flood afflicted poor, middle class and rich alike.” “Only a Dante could describe in verse, or a Wagner in music, the overwhelming character of the flood at its worst and the amount of human misery it caused.” But, according to the Red Cross, there was some good that came out of the disaster. “Social problems such as poor housing... were brought to the surface, as it were, on the swirling waters where all citizens might more clearly see and understand the need for action.” It also brought an increase in Red Cross membership—over 575,000 joined, raising the national total to more than five million.²¹

African Americans across the nation closely watched the relief efforts unfold in Louisville. Reports of discrimination and injustice had filtered out of refugee camps during the 1927 Mississippi River Valley Flood, and many feared the same would happen this time around. Stories circulated in Louisville about the mistreatment of African American flood victims. One persistent rumor alleged that hundreds of black victims had been burned or buried in ditches without checking to see whether they were alive. Another rumor suggested that the local police and Red Cross officials were denying

²⁰ *The Flood Relief*, Printed under quarantine during the days of the Great Flood of the Ohio Valley. Only one edition. At Louisville, Ky. (On dry land), January, 1937. Associate Editors: Bob and Dorothy Nunn. First Unitarian Church Records, 1830-1986, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, January 31, 1937, 1, 3, February 2, 1937, 1, February 3, 1937, 2.

²¹ *The Ohio-Mississippi Valley Flood Disaster of 1937*, Report of Relief Operations of The American Red Cross, Washington, D.C., 36.

African Americans adequate medical care, and that only white refugees were transported to local hospitals. According to a third, the hundreds of African American refugees “packed like sardines” in Simmons University were offered no assistance in finding less cramped quarters.²²

Whites and blacks alike tried to quell the vicious rumors. Joseph Rauch, of the Mayor’s Relief Committee, addressed African American listeners of WAVE radio. “On the Mayor’s Committee, the colored people have representation,” he promised. He further assured them that “[n]o distinction of any kind is being made between whites and blacks.” “[T]he colored people throughout the land,” he stated, “should know that the work of salvage and rehabilitation in Louisville is being carried out on a humanitarian basis and on no other principle.” Both the NAACP and African American newspapers reported that the rumors were mostly false. *The Crisis* claimed “Louisville was doing right by her colored citizens.” After touring through the flooded area, Roy Wilkins claimed “the city had waved aside any double standard of rescue and relief based on color.” In the end, Wilkins explained that the “inexorable Ohio river taught Louisville that humanity is humanity and that what counts is the stuff inside, not the label outside.” The *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that black nurses witnessed no discrimination toward them or flood victims in Louisville. According to the newspaper, Miss Susan Freeman and Miss Ruth Carter “saw no signs of racial discrimination by the Red Cross” during their four-week stay in the city. Neither did they witness any Jim Crow treatment at the Brown Hotel, the Red Cross’s headquarters in Louisville. Miss Carter even ate dinner at the Brown Hotel, which the newspaper explained “has the reputation of being

²² *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 6, 1937, 19. For more on discrimination during the 1927 Mississippi River Valley flood, see Pete Daniel, *Deep 'N As It Comes: The 1927 Mississippi River Valley Flood* (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 1996).

very prejudiced.” William H. Jones, the local correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, suggested “a flood like this takes us back to first principles in human struggle and human relations.” “Here in Louisville,” he explained, “white and colored people, accustomed to the brutal shame of racial segregation and discrimination, found themselves leveled and crowded into common corners by the disaster.” Jones reported that during relief efforts, “they forgot to ask whether the drowning victim was white or colored.” But with trepidation, he predicted, “this will be temporary.”²³

Fearing that even this slight erasure of Jim Crow might pass without resulting in substantive change, many African Americans in other cities seized the opportunity to point out how housing discrimination had concentrated African Americans one area of the city and demand change. In the *Afro-American*, Jones showed how the flood revealed the blatant patterns of residential segregation in Louisville. “Under the shortsighted and unjust jim crow customs here,” he explained, “the bulk of colored citizens were crowded into shacks and ghettos in various sections of the city.”²⁴

In March 1937, NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins toured the area to witness firsthand the devastation wreaked on African Americans in the Ohio River valley. In an editorial published in *The Crisis*, Wilkins reported the details of the flood and showed how the catastrophe revealed fundamental inequalities in the lives of black Americans and demanded those inequalities be eradicated. “[F]or colored people,” he wrote, “the chief lesson is certain to be that there must be a change in housing plans for their race.” Explaining how the African American residential sections were “hardest hit

²³ WAVE Radio Flood Records, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *The Crisis*, March, 1937, 75, April 1937, 104; *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 20, 1937, 14, February 6, 1937, 4.

²⁴ *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 6, 1937, 4.

by the flood waters,” the editorial put the blame squarely on the city’s deference to segregation practices. “This wholesale disaster came because cities have segregated Negroes into the least desirable sections,” the editorial pointed out. Wilkins went even further, reminding readers of *Buchanan v. Warley*, the NAACP’s “second great victory.” The case, according to Wilkins, involved “the very point so tragically brought out by the 1937 flood.” Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling against segregation ordinances, Wilkins argued, “cities have continued to press Negroes into certain areas by custom and tradition, by cooperation between real estate boards, building and loan associations and banks, and by well-marshaled public sentiment, sprinkled liberally with race superiority buncombe.” In short, “the flood of 1937 is proving beyond doubt that the Negro citizen always loses by residential segregation” because “while hardship is visited upon all, almost complete disaster comes to the segregated Negro areas.” Indeed, the black community in Louisville suffered such great economic losses during the flood that there remained few resources available for rebuilding and reconstruction after the waters receded.²⁵

Reflecting the belief that housing was a proper strategy for racial uplift, several middle-class African Americans told the *Baltimore Afro-American* that the flood was a much-needed remedy for the substandard residences in the city. The high waters had destroyed most of the available housing for blacks in Louisville, and William N. Jones called it “one of the best things that could have happened.” He reported that many black leaders, although not wishing to be named, claimed that “this catastrophe was the only way in which some of the festering housing and slum conditions caused by years of segregation and racial discrimination could have been eradicated.” To many African

²⁵ *The Crisis*, March 1937, 81.

Americans, a new city could be reconstruction out of the flood's destruction, one in which residential segregation was abolished and black citizens lived wherever they chose.²⁶

But the hopes of many African Americans were short-lived because, while the Red Cross successfully kept discrimination to a minimum during the period of initial relief, the organization returned to a policy that bred discrimination during the rehabilitation stage. To determine the need of flooded families, Red Cross workers interviewed the victims in order to piece together their financial and economic histories. But according to Roy Wilkins, the Red Cross missed a crucial opportunity to provide necessary assistance to African American families. Rather than employ African American caseworkers, the relief organization employed only white caseworkers to assess the needs of black families. Wilkins explained that while not all white caseworkers were expressly racist, "it is reasonable to believe that the needs of more Negro families would be better interpreted by colored case workers than would be well handled by whites." Although Wilkins conceded that the Red Cross should not be entrusted with solving the race problem, he suggested that the organization "ought always to be seeking ways to improve the administration of relief and rehabilitation." The Red Cross defended its policy and acquiesced to local racial customs, asserting "its function was not to change prejudices or make over community customs and traditions."²⁷

Rebuilding was the main concern of many across the city. Just a few days after the flood reached its peak, the Mayor's Committee on Morale issued a broadside to bolster the spirits of Louisvillians. "Chicago Did It! San Francisco Did It! Now Watch

²⁶ *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 6, 1937, 19.

²⁷ *The Crisis*, April 1937, 105, 106.

Louisville!” the broadside proclaimed. “Has Louisville been destroyed by flood?,” it rhetorically asked. “No, of course not! We are Kentuckians!” The broadside continued, “if we are real men, if we are real Kentuckians, if we are real Louisvillians, we’ll be like the Phoenix... we’ll rise up renewed, determined, unconquerable!” And finally, the Mayor’s Committee promised: “By courage, by faith, by working together we’ll build a better and a greater Louisville!” In another pamphlet to lift spirits, the Mayor’s Committee promised “better homes, better churches, better schools, better courts, better streets, better sewers, better bridges, a better social, industrial, political and religious life.” To accomplish this tall order, the pamphlet reminded Louisvillians that God was on their side: “Let us realize that we are truly fellow-workers with God as well as with one another. The *Courier Journal* did not need much bolstering to encourage complete and total reconstruction. The newspaper demanded “thorough and permanent” reconstruction. In a preaching editorial, the newspaper issued its own plan for rebuilding the city: “slums cleared, perennially overflowed quarters protected or abandoned... The expense of rehabilitation includes some annually recurring items which might as well be eliminated while we are about it...”²⁸

Mayor Miller reassured the newspaper and the rest of the community that rehabilitation stood at the top of his priority list. “I am confident that the citizens will meet and solve” the problem of rehabilitation “with the same outstanding energy and success that has characterized their efforts of the last twelve days.” But, he warned, plans to rebuild the city “cannot be made haphazardly.” The city government must carefully study not only what is needed, but also the resources available. Mayor Miller assured all

²⁸ Mayor’s Committee on Morale, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Small pamphlet in Frances M. Ingram papers, 1874-1954, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, February 8, 1937, 6.

Louisvillians “this work will be undertaken, planned and carried out by” the city government “with the both the purpose of taking care of immediate needs and rebuilding the city along modern and permanent lines.”²⁹

Offers from outside the city arrived to assist in temporarily housing the homeless. E. J. Jocken of White Plains, New York, telegraphed the mayor that his construction firm could provide “fire, termite, lightning, earthquake, tornado, and cyclone proof dwellings” at a cost of less than four-hundred dollars per room. More importantly, he promised his “houses will not float away.” Worsham Brothers, another construction firm from Knoxville, Tennessee, offered to send “low-cost prefabricated housing for over two hundred thousand people.” The firm alleged that the homes could be sold through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).³⁰

But if Louisville’s city leaders actually wanted to provide substantive relief to the city’s low-income African American residents, the FHA would not provide it. The *Underwriting Manual* of the administration made it clear which potential homeowners the federal government preferred and it was clearly not poor blacks. The manual outlined the process by which the agency assessed the risk of properties applying for loan insurance from the federal government. It stated in no uncertain terms that restrictions guarded a neighborhood from “adverse influences” and lowered the risk of decline in property values. “Deed restrictions are apt to prove more effective than a zoning ordinance in providing protection from adverse influences,” the manual stated. Just in case insuring agencies did not understand exactly what, or who, the deeds should restrict,

²⁹ *Courier Journal*, February 3, 1937.

³⁰ Telegraph to Mayor Miller from E. J. Jocken, White Plains, New York, February 6, 1937; Telegraph to Mayor Miller from Worsham Brothers, Knoxville, Tennessee, January 30, 1937, City of Louisville Planning Commission, Metro Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

the manual listed them: “types of structures, use to which improvements may be put, and racial occupancy.” Even further, the manual suggested that in order to be “really effective,” deed restrictions should include the following provision: “Prohibition of the occupancy of properties except by the race for which they are intended.”³¹

The housing administration required lending institutions to consider African Americans a serious threat to property values, reflecting the common argument used to prevent neighborhood integration that black residents lowered property values. The manual deemed the “protection from adverse influences ... one of the most important features in the Rating of Location.” Deed restrictions were not the only defense mechanisms endorsed, either. “Natural or artificially established barriers will prove effective in ... the prevention of the infiltration of ... inharmonious racial groups,” the manual claimed. This included hills, ravines, college campuses, or a “high-speed traffic artery or a wide street parkway.” The manual directed those evaluating the property to investigate the location to assess “the possibility or probability of the location being invaded by such groups.” According to the manual, “a change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values.” If there was little or no protection against such an invasion, the manual instructed the property evaluator to “make a reject rating” of the location.³²

Despite the outside offers of short-term housing assistance and the clear guidelines from the FHA, the housing situation in Louisville reached crisis proportions

³¹ *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act.* (United States: Federal Housing Administration, 1938), Part II: Protection From Adverse Influences, paragraph 228; paragraph 284(3).

³² *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act.* (United States: Federal Housing Administration, 1938), Part II: Protection From Adverse Influences, paragraph 226; paragraph 229; paragraph 233.

after the flood. “It is probable,” Mayor Miller explained, “that many families would be unable to return to their homes, especially those that were badly damaged.” Frances Ingram, who ran a settlement house in Louisville, understood clearly the state of affairs: “The housing problem is on now, and will stay on for months to come.” Indeed, most of the homes in the worst areas—particularly the African American district—were declared “unfit for habitation” by the city’s health department. Even before the flood, though, there was an acute shortage of available housing for low-income residents. H. W. Alexander, secretary-treasurer of the Municipal Housing Commission, informed Tracy Augur of the Tennessee Valley Authority that Louisville “had a very decided shortage in decent housing accommodations for low-income groups” before the river swept through the city. “This condition,” he explained, “has been greatly intensified by the widespread destruction.” Alexander presented the grave statistics to Augur: “32,000 residential buildings of a total of 63,000 had water over the first floor and 10,000 more had water in the basement.” Even worse, “there were 500 houses destroyed and approximately that number rendered permanently uninhabitable within the corporate limits of Louisville.”³³

According to Alexander, the Municipal Housing Commission earnestly tried to combat the housing shortage and remedy the substandard accommodations in Louisville. Under the direction of Nicholas Dosker, the commission applied for and received financial assistance from the Federal Housing Administration to build low-rent housing projects for the city’s poorest residents. Rather than challenge local customs, though, the

³³ *Courier Journal* and *Louisville Times*, February 4, 1937, 7; Letter to Miss Margaret Chapman, Minneapolis, MN, February 22, 1937, from Frances Ingram in Frances Ingram papers, 1874-1954, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, February 5, 1937; Letter to Tracy B. Augur of TVA, Knoxville, from H. W. Alexander, Secretary-Treasurer, Municipal Housing Commission, March 5, 1937. City of Louisville Planning Commission, Official Correspondence and Special Project Files, 1929-1943, Metro Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

national housing agency's policy was instead to "follow community patterns and trends." In fact, most supporters of public housing lobbied Congress to keep the legislative body from changing the policy. So it was in Louisville. The federal government deferred to local leaders and housing projects were rented according to existing social mores. Even further, Alexander told Augur that the commission hoped to move flood victims, and others who lived in substandard housing, to "a more or less semi-permanent development located on the outskirts of the city." This location, Alexander explained, "is just outside the area within which the flood observations were made but it was *almost* entirely out of water."³⁴ According to the officials in charge of housing, it was acceptable if Louisville's low-income black residents lived on a floodplain because they would be only slightly inconvenienced, illustrating how the undesirable West End became a suitable location for the city's African American population.

It is not surprising, then, that adequate and affordable housing continued to be a major problem for many of Louisville's black residents. Two local ministers saw the situation in clear terms. Daniel J. Hughlett, a black minister, wrote to the editor of *The Courier Journal* to address the issue of the housing problem for African Americans. "Because of the comparatively low economic status and other reasons," he explained, "most Negroes are forced to live in the so-called blighted districts." In these districts, "taxes are high, rents are low, and consequently there is every incentive to the property

³⁴ *Race Bias in Housing*, by Charles Abrams and sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the American Council on Race Relations (July 1947), 20; James Allen Jarvis, "Intergovernmental Relations in Public Housing with Special Reference to the Experience in Louisville, Kentucky," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1949, 298-300; *Courier Journal*, May 27, 1954; Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: 1955), 229; Alexander to Augur, March 5, 1937, Metro Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. Emphasis added.

owner to avoid spending any money for improvement so long as the tenants are willing to put up with conditions.” Even further, “the very distressing economic situation among Negroes is disclosed by the fact that 90 per cent of all the families have incomes less than \$75 a month.” H. W. Jones, pastor of the Green Street Baptist Church, wrote to the *Louisville Leader*, the city’s black newspaper, about the “things that the Negro wants.” Housing stood at the top of Jones’ list. “The Negro wants the chance to live where he can buy or rent a home,” he claimed. He “wants to live where there are no discriminatory laws.”³⁵

The housing situation remained a serious problem for all Louisvillians, and the shortage was a major issue in the 1941 mayoral election. Democratic candidate Wilson Wyatt campaigned on the foundation of the previous Democratic mayors and their efforts to combat the crisis situation. In October 1941, Mrs. Peter Lee Atherton spoke on WAVE radio for Wyatt’s candidacy. “Wyatt has been for a long time an active participant in the program of social progress and reconstruction. ... That program has lifted Louisville out of the Slough of Despond and transformed it City with a social conscience.” Atherton explained to the listeners how the city had been transformed: “The worst districts—the most productive factories for bad citizenship have been replaced by modern housing projects—financed by the federal government at a cost of over sixteen million dollars, but secured through the determination and vision of local leaders without cost to the city.” Atherton went even further in praising the progressive efforts of the Democratic government: “... it is to the everlasting credit of Mayor Joseph Scholtz that in the

³⁵ *Courier Journal*, July 6, 1938, 6; *Louisville Leader*, December 4, 1937, 1. There are no surviving editions of the *Louisville Leader* during and immediately after the flood, perhaps because the paper had to shut down.

development of the enlightened project, he refused to draw the color line. 966 white families and 933 negro families enjoy the benefits of low-cost housing.”³⁶

Wyatt did not let Mrs. Atherton promote the party’s housing efforts alone. He called the slums “breeding places for crime and disease.” “Housing projects,” he claimed, “give poor people a chance to enjoy the decent comforts of a democracy.”³⁷ In a speech on housing in Louisville, Wyatt further elaborated on the severity of the problem was for the city and what he and his party had done and would do in the future to remedy the situation. “The strength of a Democracy must depend upon the quality of its citizens and fundamental factor in the growth an any people is their home life,” he told listeners. It seemed simple to him, because raising “the standard of living is a sound investment for any city to make.” Like Atherton, Wyatt told listeners that “[s]lum areas are breeding places for crime and disease.” “Not only must these be eradicated,” he claimed, “but vital to the raising of living standards are recreational facilities, community buildings and health clinics.” Even though the housing problem persisted, Wyatt proclaimed that “Louisville became ‘housing conscious’” and sought loans for public housing. According to the candidate, Louisville’s “citizens gave their approval, the Mayor and the Commissioners went after the money and obtained the grants.” The citizens also gave

³⁶ Radio Address of Mrs. Peter Lee Atherton, WAVE, October 28, 1941, 7:45pm on behalf of Wyatt for Mayor. Wilson Wyatt papers, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

³⁷ Memorandum titled “Topics To Be Stressed.’ Campaign Issues and Information, Mayoral 1941, Box 17, Wilson Wyatt papers, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

their approval to Wyatt—he carried all 12 wards, including those with a majority of African American voters, winning by almost 20,000 votes.³⁸

Mayor Wyatt was popular on the national scene, as well, and quickly became the municipal leader for civic officials in other cities on how to successfully blend low-income housing and economic development. During Wyatt's tenure as mayor, three projects for black residents housing 1,356 families, or about 9.5 percent of the city's black families had been constructed. The city had also obtained FHA approval for new housing for black war workers. According to E. E. Pruitt, the manager at the Beecher Terrace housing project for African American residents, the new units would most likely be built in the "west end of the city," near "our Negro Park," illustrating how the federal government subsidized the movement of black residents to the city's West End. Charles W. Hawkins, city planning engineer for Nashville, wrote to Wyatt to request guidance for his city. "I am very much interested in the broad approach to planning under way at Louisville," Hawkins wrote, and asked for "any report or other material" to help him in Nashville. Similarly, A. H. Mellinger, president of the Illinois Bell Telephone Company, wrote to Wyatt to discuss "some of the many worthwhile things you have been able to accomplish in Louisville." Wyatt even gained the attention of President Harry Truman, and the president named Louisville's mayor the federal housing expediter in 1945.³⁹

³⁸ "Housing in Louisville" speech, Housing Program, Box 19 Election – Mayoral 1941, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, November 5, 1941, November 6, 1941; *Louisville Times*, November 6, 1941, November 8, 1941.

³⁹ Charles W. Hawkins, letter to Wyatt, May 9, 1944, Wilson Wyatt papers, Box 3, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky; A. H. Mellinger letter to Wyatt, May 11, 1944, Wilson Wyatt papers, Box 3, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky; E.E. Pruitt letter to Wyatt, April 28, 1944. Wilson Wyatt papers, Box 3, Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

But although Louisville was in the spotlight for its low-income housing, the housing projects did not alleviate the problem. In many cases, they did not even come close. For many of the city's poorest residents, most of whom were African Americans, the rents at the federally sponsored projects were too high. The *Courier Journal* reported that almost 10,000 families in Louisville made an annual income of less than \$600. Two housing projects, Clarksdale for whites and Beecher Terrace for blacks, required prospective residents to have an annual income of between \$600 and \$1,200 to even be considered for housing. These 10,000 families simply could not afford to live there. Most could barely afford the rent to pay for the awful living conditions they already endured. One elderly black couple struggled to pay for three dark rooms with peeling paint on Prentice Street. The crippled husband told a *Courier Journal* reporter that he received "\$9 relief money for rent." "I have to scrape to up \$3 more to go with it. I'd like to move into that housing project but it's too much money."⁴⁰

The Louisville Municipal Housing Commission followed guidelines established by the federal government to determine eligibility for low-rent housing projects. According to the policies and procedures manual, all applicants had to have a low monthly income. They also had to be living in a place declared "unsafe, insanitary, or overcrowded," or about to be without housing due to a slum-clearance project or for another reason not the fault of the tenant. And finally, the applicants had to "conform to the occupancy limits for admission" and "to the standard of desirability." The last two requirements were left to the discretion of the local housing commission.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Courier Journal*, May 2, 1960, 6, 7.

⁴¹ Statements of Policies and Procedures Governing Admission to and Continued Occupancy of the PHA-Aided Projects, Section II, Conditions Governing Eligibility, City of Louisville Municipal Housing Commission Records, Metro Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

The National Housing Agency analyzed the situation in Louisville and revealed that housing continued to be a major concern throughout World War II as industries sought more workers. War-related industries expanded operations, and new industries settled in the city. Between June 1940 and July 1943, war supply contracts totaled more than \$580,000,000. By the end of the war, the total reached more than a billion dollars. Civilian workers flocked to the city, and while they found ample employment opportunities, they found a lack of available housing. Local builders constructed temporary housing units to accommodate this influx of people, but “because of material and labor shortages, new construction had to be kept to a minimum.” According to the agency, Louisville faced a “prospective severe housing shortage” at the end of the war. “Demands for housing in the next twelve to fifteen months,” the report explained, “are certain to be dominated by the urgent housing requirements of discharged veterans.” Even further, the analysis demonstrated, “the area will enter the post-reconversion period in 1947 with a housing supply more than 5,000 family units short.” The report ended with an ominous warning: “Leaders of the local home-building and financing industry, realtors, and owners of existing property, would do well to consider what measures can be taken to meet this danger and prevent its serious consequences.”⁴²

But the leaders paid little attention to the warning, and by 1949, the city’s poorest residents still endured a housing shortage. A study of housing by Elmo Roper in April of that year showed that “there is general agreement that a housing shortage of some degree exists, but it is only the respondents of low economic level who are strongly of the

⁴² Interim Report on a Housing Market Analysis of the Great Louisville, Kentucky, Area, Prepared by the Regional Office of the Administrator, National Housing Agency, Chicago, Illinois, in co-operation with the Louisville Area Development Association, Louisville, Kentucky, 1945.

opinion that it may be termed ‘serious.’” Roper found that “Negroes are the most convinced of all that that a ‘serious’ situation is presented in Louisville housing.” Indeed, 76 percent of African Americans responded to Roper’s survey that a serious shortage existed in the city.⁴³

In the end, the window of opportunity opened by the floodwaters slammed shut. As Charles Schumann, an employee of the Army Corps of Engineers, remembered “[t]o say the 1937 flood caused housing reform is stretching a point.” He recalled how during the first few days during the flood, everyone helped out. “[I]n the period of the rescue and initial response to the flood, it didn’t matter what color the arm was that pulled you out of the water.” Although blacks were housed in white churches, “it didn’t last.”⁴⁴ The hopes of many African Americans were dashed as they were still forced to live in cramped, unsanitary quarters. Even further, the city’s attempt at housing reform merely pushed many African Americans further west, into the low-lying areas by the river. Those were the areas mostly likely to be affected if the river were to flood again.

This was especially the case after plans to construct flood protection along the river were repeatedly stalled, first by government red tape and then by World War II. The legacy of the flood plagued the city over the next few decades as the city government sought funding for flood protection along the Ohio River. In June 1937, just a few months after the floodwaters receded, the U.S. House approved a flood control bill appropriating money to build a floodwall in the Ohio River valley. The Senate approved

⁴³ A Study of the Housing Situation in Louisville, Prepared for the City of Louisville by Elmo Roper, April 1949. City of Louisville Reports, Surveys, and Plans, 1948-1949, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky. The report did not indicate the percentage of white responders who thought there was a housing shortage in the city.

⁴⁴ Charles Schumann, interview by Lynn Olympia, 1987. Kentucky Oral History Commission, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

the bill in August and in December 1937, President Franklin Roosevelt signed the bill into law. Survey work began immediately and the local government was optimistic that flood control would soon be a reality in Louisville. However, the funding was caught up in bureaucratic red tape, and construction was delayed indefinitely. In 1940, with the war raging in Europe and U.S. involvement imminent, city leaders began touting the floodwall as a “vital” element for national defense. The federal government disagreed, though, and after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, flood control was put on hold until after World War II. After another serious flood in 1945, the flood control program was expedited and work began on the floodwall and levee systems in 1947. The first phase of the project, which consisted of a 17-mile floodwall around the West End, was completed in 1957. In the late sixties, a second phase began to extend the wall to protect the southwestern part of the county and construct levee systems along the river. This phase was not completed until the late 1980s.⁴⁵

As the National Housing Agency had predicted in 1945, many veterans returned to Louisville after the war and wanted to purchase homes. And while the agency made no mention of race in its report, the color of the soldiers’ skin, rather than the stripes across their arms, played a crucial role in determining the housing that would be made available to many of them. Throughout the next two decades, the local black community continued to challenge whites to open their neighborhoods. Some of these neighborhoods in the West End of Louisville did in fact become available to black residents, but only because whites moved out en masse to follow the war-related industries in the southwestern part

⁴⁵ *Courier Journal*, August 14, 1937, December 1, 1937, February 12, 1938, September 22, 1940, November 10, 1940, January 12, 1942; *New York Times*, June 29, 1937; August 13, 1937; April 25, 1948; Metropolitan Sewer District, “Louisville, Jefferson County Flood Protection System,” brochure, 2002.

of the city. When African Americans moved into the vacant homes, the white residents who remained immediately left, this time to escape their new neighbors. Soon, even the West End became cramped and African Americans had to look in other areas of the city for suitable housing. But one family's attempt to purchase a new home outside of the prescribed black area of the city and the violent reaction of whites exposed white Louisville's racism for what it really was: determined, planned, coordinated, and violent.

Chapter Three

“What Inconsistency Democracy—What Sufferance Being a Negro”

Brown v. Board of Education, Housing Discrimination, and Anti-Communism

In 1954, after the Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional in its landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, the school board in Louisville quickly went about the task of implementing the court’s decision. William Embry, city school board president, told reporters, “Our thinking and planning must start right now, even if the decision allows us five years to carry out desegregation.” The board members and local leaders, ever mindful of the city’s reputation for racial and economic progress, heeded Embry’s call to action. They held informational meetings for the parents, integrated teacher training, and distributed copies of the desegregation plan to the community. Two years later, on September 10, 1956, Louisville became the first southern city to peacefully comply with *Brown*.¹

At a press conference the day after the schools opened, President Dwight Eisenhower celebrated the city’s successful transition to racially integrated classrooms. Commenting on the behavior of Texas Rangers in Texarkana, Texas, in refusing to allow African Americans to enter schools in which they had registered, Eisenhower told the group of reporters, “[I]t contrasts very badly with what happened in Louisville,” where there had been “not the slightest trouble.” According to the President, school superintendent Omer Carmichael had successfully prepared the willing community for school integration. Eisenhower extolled Carmichael’s efforts, saying Carmichael had “pursued the policy that I believe will finally bring success in this.” Carmichael “must be

¹*Louisville Times*, May 18, 1954, A1.

a very wise man,” Eisenhower remarked: “I hope to meet him... and get some advice from him as to exactly how he did it.”²

National newspapers hailed Louisville as a haven of progressive race relations, a beacon of hope for a nation fearing the effects of integration. The *Washington Post and Times Herald* stressed the city’s “strong Southern tradition” and complimented the “Gateway to the South” for integrating its schools “without incident.” The *Nashville Tennessean* reported that “Kentucky’s largest school system was integrated peacefully,” while the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* told their readers “desegregation of all public schools in Louisville, Ky. proceeded quietly.” Emphasizing Louisville’s southern roots and traditions, the *New York Times* recounted the city’s progressive past. The University of Louisville had desegregated in 1950; city buses were integrated, as were parks, tennis courts, golf courses, and swimming pools. Even civic boards were racially mixed.³ Clearly, in the late 1950s, many white elites looked to Louisville’s community and political leaders for direction in dealing with changing race relations.

But the image of Louisville as a progressive city constructed by Carmichael and others contrasted sharply with the reality experienced by most African Americans in the city. Three days before the *Brown* decision, Andrew and Charlotte Wade moved into their new home on Rone Court, a small, working-class white neighborhood just outside the city’s limits. The next day they took their daughter to visit her grandmother in

² President’s News Conference, September 11, 1956, *Public Papers of the President: Dwight D. Eisenhower*, pp. 753.

³ *Washington Post and Herald Times*, September 11, 1956, A1; *Nashville Tennessean*, September 11, 1956, A2; *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1946, A1; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, September 11, 1956, A2; “Louisville Sets an Example of Successful Integration in the Public Schools” in *New York Times*, September 16, 1956, E13.

Louisville's West End, where many African Americans lived, and when they returned home around dusk, they found the front window of their house had been smashed in by a large rock. The rock, which landed squarely in the family's living room, had a handwritten message wrapped around it: "Nigger Get Out." The violence did not stop there, though, and the Wades endured more hostilities throughout the night. A few hours later, Wade watched from the gaping hole in his front window as a group of five white men erected and burned a tall cross in a lot adjoining the black man's home. Early Sunday morning, as Wade and his family kept vigil, at least six shots from a .22 caliber rifle were fired directly into the kitchen, barely missing them. Finally, daylight came and Wade left the damaged house to inform the police.⁴

Rather than intimidating him, the violence seemed only to make Wade more determined to stay in the house. "I will never sell, not even for \$150,000," he told reporters the next day. "I feel that as law abiding citizens of the United States of America, we are supposed to live where we can buy." Since he could afford the house on Rone Court, he intended to live there, no matter what his neighbors did to make him vacate the residence. "If our neighbors do not like our being here and feel they cannot live beside us or around us, then let them move," Wade explained. "We intend to live here or die here."⁵

The sharp contrast between the peaceful compliance with school desegregation and the violent reaction to integrated neighborhoods demonstrates how housing lay at the heart of racial tension in the city. The battle over housing in Louisville erupted just as the Supreme Court ruled that separate was *not* equal in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Many

⁴ Louisville *Defender*, May 20, 1954, 1; *Courier Journal*, May 17, 1954, 1; Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* (Prometheus Books, 1959), 66.

⁵ Louisville *Defender*, May 20, 1954, 1; *Courier Journal*, May 17, 1954, 1; Braden, *The Wall Between*, 66; Catherine Fosl, interview with Andrew Wade, transcript in possession of the author.

historians, especially Michael Klarman, have analyzed how this monumental decision sparked “massive resistance” to the growing civil rights movement in the South. Klarman suggests that the court’s decision was significant because it provoked a violent reaction among white Southerners. Other scholars, such as George Lewis and Jeff Woods, have shown that not only did *Brown* energize white resistance in the South, but it also prompted white Southerners to label civil rights activists “communists”. Lewis recently suggested in his study of the Upper South, “[f]or political leaders and their constituents alike, comparisons between *Brown* and Reconstruction were too striking to be missed, and the rhetoric of Massive Resistance reflected those similarities.” Lewis also argued that anticommunism became one of the “white South’s most efficient weapons in its struggle to adapt to the new racial order that the civil rights movement tried to impose,” especially after the *Brown* decision. Historian Jeff Woods agreed: “In the years immediately following *Brown*, the southern red scare reached full strength as part of the region massive-resistance campaign against integration.”⁶

⁶ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Klarman, “How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 81-118; George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance, 1945-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 40, 50. Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 49. See also Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963*, reprint edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); John P. Jackson, Jr., *Science for Segregation: Race, Law, and the Case Against Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizen’s Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); James T.

A study of these developments in a border city such as Louisville, however, complicates this connection between the court's decision, the increased resistance to civil rights, and the employment of anticommunism as a tool to shore up white supremacy. It also illustrates how housing as a symbol of financial vitality, economic stability, and societal standing is intimately connected to understandings of racial and class categories. For the most part, the city complied with *Brown*, as local leaders and the *Courier Journal*, the city's leading newspaper with a liberal reputation, vocally supported the decision and encouraged its white readers to accept desegregation. While other cities closed their schools to prevent integration or sent state officials to block the doors to African American students, school integration in Louisville was fairly calm. The *New York Times* remarked that black children and white children came together in Louisville "without fuss or bother, almost nonchalantly."⁷

Although the city successfully integrated its schools, and took much pride in that fact, it erupted over Wade's attempt to move into an all-white neighborhood. Indeed, his effort to integrate housing in the city prompted an alliance between working-class, middle-class, and upper-class whites to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods, demonstrating how whites of all income levels had an investment in maintaining residential segregation for material, psychological, and symbolic reasons. Segregated neighborhoods conferred social status upon white homeowners and demonstrated their economic mobility, two important designations in a consumption-driven post-World War II America. Even further, white Louisvillians recognized that school desegregation was

Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University, 2002); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁷*New York Times*, September 16, 1956, E13.

contingent upon the demographic make-up of residential districts, meaning school desegregation would have little practical affect if housing patterns were not changed. Thus, white Louisvillians could easily accept the policy of school desegregation because, for the most part, their children still would not attend school with children of color. When Andrew Wade moved into the all-white neighborhood, the residential patterns upon which all other social and economic relationships depended were undermined.⁸

* * * *

In the 1930s, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier observed that exclusive white neighborhoods dotted Louisville's West End, but over the next two decades, the area witnessed significant changes in population as working-class and middle-class whites moved to the suburbs. Indeed, many whites abandoned the area after the tremendous devastation caused by the 1937 flood. Whites in the West End found living on a flood plain highly undesirable, particularly after World War II delayed any plans to build a protective floodwall around the city, and they left permanently to settle on higher ground in suburbs surrounding the city. The *Courier Journal* explained the effects of the flood in a 1950 editorial: "Home owners did not want to repeat the unhappy experience of being driven from home and returning weeks later to their belongings ruined..." and "the attractiveness of the section diminished to the prospective buyer." Homeowners in the West End did not go to great lengths to rebuild or repair their homes, and these areas began to show signs of neglect and decline. As a result, property values dropped and

⁸ I am using "liberal" to mean in favor of federal solutions to economic problems and in support of African American civil rights, but not equality. For more on the definition of southern liberalism and the *Courier Journal* as a leading liberal newspaper, see John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 48, 251, 353-354. For more on the conflation of consumerism and citizenship in post-World War II America, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003).

African Americans took advantage of the “gulf of residences in that section on the market.” Tremendous racial turnover resulted as African Americans fled the cramped downtown and moved into the West End. Other whites in the area relocated to the southwestern part of the city in search of employment at the rubber plants and other war-related industries during World War II. Many white residents also left the West End with the assistance of the Federal Housing Administration home loan program, the GI Bill, and tax shelters from the Internal Revenue Service following World War II, as Kenneth Jackson demonstrated in *The Crabgrass Frontier*, a study of the process of American suburbanization. The movement out of the inner city into suburban neighborhoods by working-class and middle-class whites not only shored up their racial and economic status as homeowners, but it also functioned to further isolate themselves from African Americans.⁹

Most scholars have overlooked an important factor that undoubtedly played a large part in the population shift in Louisville’s West End: air pollution. While historians have sufficiently analyzed the socioeconomic reasons to explain “white flight,” most

⁹ Newspaper clipping dated 4 November 1950, found in Roy Wilson Burks scrapbook, 1930-1948, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; For more on “white flight” in other cities, see Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); David R. Goldfield, *Region, Race and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Kenneth Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Race, Redevelopment and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Silver, *Twentieth-Century Richmond: Planning, Politics and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984); and Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

have ignored how environmental concerns often motivated residents to find housing in other areas. In Louisville, “tear-producing, nose-tingling, or cough-causing pollution” most likely caused many whites to flee from the West End during the 1950s. During World War II, National Carbide, E. I. Dupont de Nemours and Company, and B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company, as well as other smaller companies, built synthetic rubber plants near the oil refineries already located along the southwestern boundary of Louisville. Even before the chemical industries arrived in the area, “obnoxious odors” from the oil refineries floated over the homes in the West End, which lay immediately north and east of the refineries. After the rubber plants were built, residents of the West End, “complained increasingly of reduction of visibility, dust settlement, eye irritation, and odors.” As mayor Charles Farnsley later remembered, “pollution from factories, especially from Rubbertown,... blew across Louisville.”¹⁰

In response to the rising number of complaints about air quality in the area, local officials decided in 1956 to conduct a study “to gain a broader understanding, generally, of the origin, causes and effects of air pollution as it affects the West End of Louisville.” The scientists used a mobile unit to collect samples during periods of unusually high pollution, or in areas that received the most complaints from residents. In addition to the unit, a “specially selected group of people was recruited and trained to recognize odors and to report their responses to odors, irritations and dusts” to the team of scientists. Apparently, industrial fumes have a distinctive smell that can only be recognized by trained olfactory senses. The group of specialists included forty-five high school students and other residents, twenty-five mail carriers, five teams of firemen, two air pollution

¹⁰ Zoning Report prepared by Harland Bartholomew, 9. Charles Farnsley, interviewed by Charles F. Harbison, April 4, 1975. Charles Farnsley Oral History Project, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

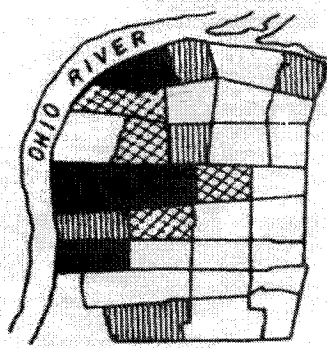
scientists, representatives from the Air Pollution Control Districts, and “six roving public health sanitarians.” The trained specialists confirmed what residents already knew—there was a high number of pollutants in the air.¹¹

The study found that, although the rubber plants contributed almost eighty-five percent of the pollutants, tobacco processing-plants, distilleries, and furniture-making plants also contributed to the “irritating dusts and gases and nuisance odors.” Even further, refuse burning from two open dumps in the area released “tons of organics, aldehydes, acids, sulfur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and ammonia” pollutants into the air and reduced visibility. Because the prevailing winds blew from the southwest, the West End was showered with the fumes, odors and dusts in the air. Tom Owen, a resident of the area in the 1950s, remembered his “mother complaining of what we called soot, just overlaying the furniture every two days.”¹²

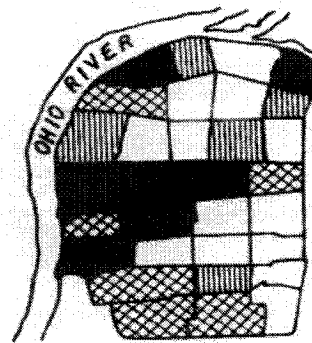
¹¹ “The Air Over Louisville: Summary of a Joint Report,” By the Special Air Pollution Study of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, 1956-1957.

¹² “The Air Over Louisville: Summary of a Joint Report,” By the Special Air Pollution Study of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, 1956-1957; “The Louisville Air Pollution Study: A Technical Report on the Joint Study of Air Pollution in Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, 1956-1957 (Cincinnati, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1961); Ronald Clinton Ryan, “Preliminary Study of Air Pollution in Western Louisville,” (master’s thesis, University of Louisville, 1950); Louis Atkins Graham, “An Economic Study of the Purification of Zirconium Tetrachloride By Distillation,” (master’s thesis, University of Louisville, 1950); *Courier Journal*, October 26, 2003.

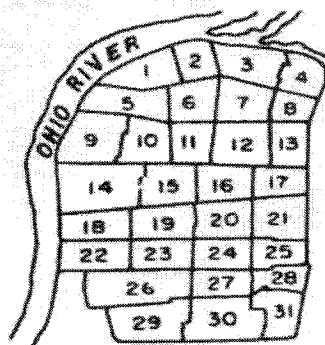
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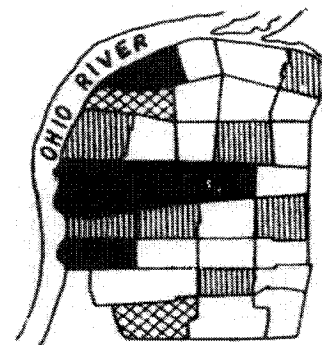
ODOR



DESIGNATION OF AREAS FOR HUMAN RESPONSE REPORTING



IRRITATION



LEGEND:

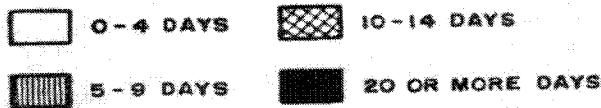


Figure 3a: These maps show the number of days on which the trained specialists reported visible dustiness, irritation, or odors over a 212-day period between November 1956 and May 1957. Source: "The Louisville Air Pollution Study: A Technical Report on the Joint Study of Air Pollution in Jefferson County, Kentucky, 1956-1957," 75.

In the face of declining job opportunities and increasingly toxic air, most white residents deserted the West End for the suburbs in the southwestern part of the city. But African Americans, desperate to escape the downtown and faced with severely limited alternatives, could not afford to regard these conditions as obstacles. They eagerly moved into the vacated homes. Most of the few remaining white residents did not want people of color living next door, and they usually picked up and left too. An analysis of census

records and segregation indices from 1940 and 1960 demonstrates the change in the area's racial composition (see figures 3b, 3c, and 3d). Almost 4,000 whites lived in census tract 15, located directly northeast of the industrial area, in 1940, while the census reported that no non-whites lived in that particular tract. In 1960, however, census tract 15 housed 3,600 whites and almost 1,500 African Americans, suggesting that whites had moved out of the area while African Americans had moved in. The census registered similar changes across the West End. Sociologists Karl Taeuber and Alma Taeuber studied the segregation index in numerous American cities, including Louisville. The segregation index measures the percentage of non-whites who would have to move to blocks occupied by whites in order to reflect the racial composition of the city at large. A high number signified a high degree of segregation present. Taeuber and Taeuber's study revealed that Louisville's segregation index had risen from 81.7 in 1940 and to 89.2 in 1960, significantly higher than that of other southern cities such as Charleston, South Carolina; Huntsville, Alabama; Fayetteville, North Carolina; and New Orleans. Indeed, by 1960, the "Gateway to the South" was one of the most residentially segregated cities in the United States.¹³

¹³ United States Census of Population and Housing, Louisville, Kentucky, census tracts, 1940, 1950, 1960; Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Adline Publishing Co, 1965).

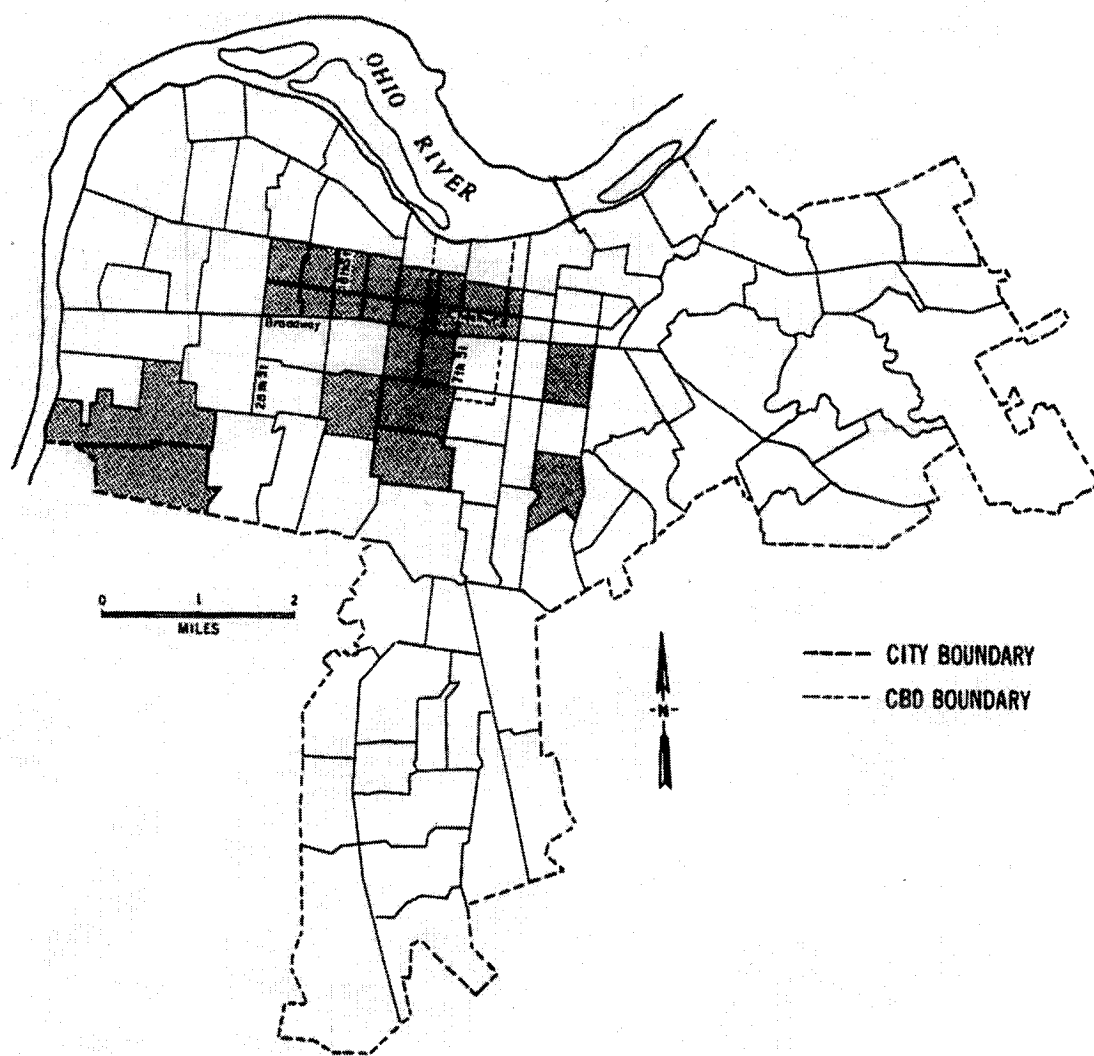


Figure 3b: This map is from the 1940 Census of Population and Housing. The shaded area shows the census tracts where the African American population is 30 percent or more. "CBD" stands for central business district. Source: Barfuor Adjei-Barwuah, "Socio-Economic Regions in the Louisville Ghetto," (Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, 1972), 47.

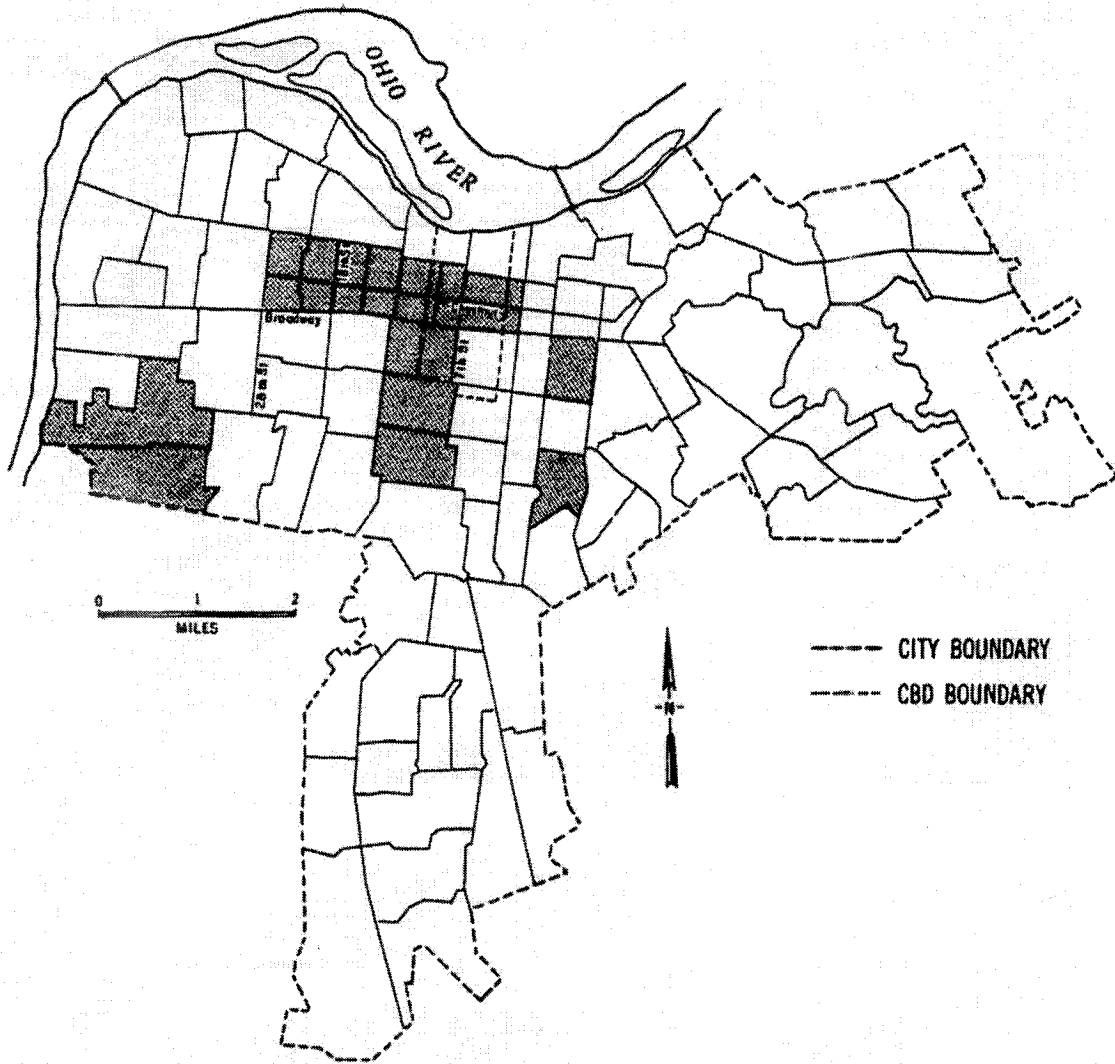


Figure 3c: This map is from the 1950 Census of Population and Housing. The shaded areas show the census tracts where the African American population is 30 percent or more. "CBD" stands for central business district. There is very little change from the 1940 census map. Source: Barfuor Adjei-Barwuah, "Socio-Economic Regions in the Louisville Ghetto," (Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, 1972), 48.

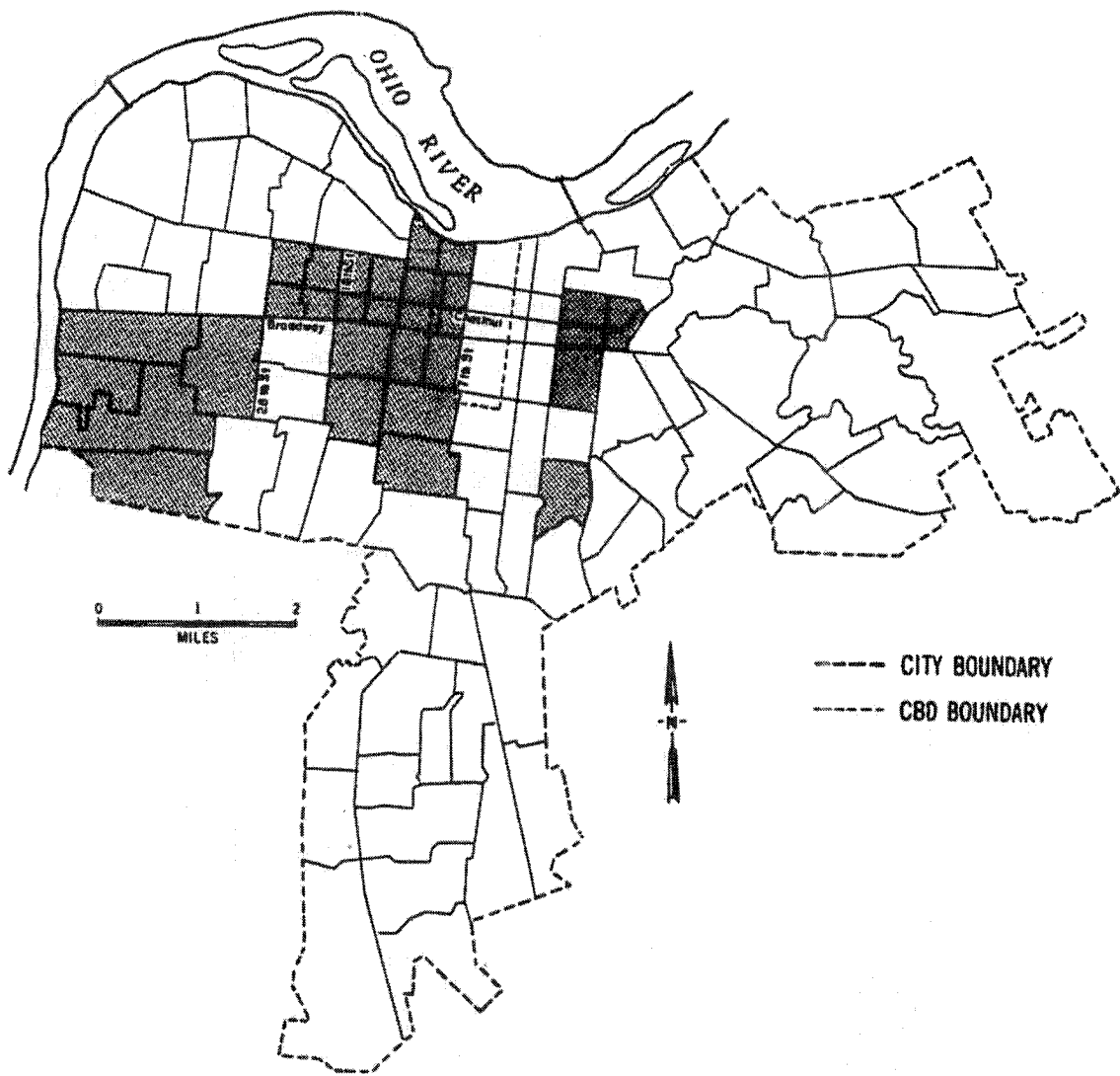


Figure 3d: This map is from the 1960 Census of Population and Housing. The shaded areas show the census tracts where the African American population is 30 percent or more. "CBD" stands for central business district. Notice how the African American population increased in the far western census tracts. Source: Barfuor Adjei-Barwuah, "Socio-Economic Regions in the Louisville Ghetto," (Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, 1972), 49.

Yet there were not enough homes for all who needed a place to live, and the West End quickly became overcrowded. As a result, many blacks sought housing in other parts of the city. But they discovered that many real estate agents and property owners would not sell or rent homes to people of color in areas outside of the West End. Wade

encountered these obstacles of institutional and individual racism in his home search, but he finally found a sympathetic white couple who agreed to purchase the house and then transfer the property to him. It did not turn out to be quite that simple, though. The black family's arrival on Rone Court, in the southwestern part of the city, not only led to violence in the immediate neighborhood, but, for many, it also came to symbolize the wider struggle of the black community for better housing and economic uplift.

An episode in the fall of 1953 suggested that opportunities for non-whites to find housing outside of the West End were improving slightly, particularly instances where the *Courier Journal* supported the move. Nina Hardman, a native of the Philippines, initially encountered resistance from whites after she purchased a house in a white working-class neighborhood just south of downtown. Although the former owner of the house "knew of no restrictions on the property," several residents on the block circulated blank petitions to "keep these people out of the neighborhood." But the *Courier Journal* rallied behind Hardman, and many of its readers did, too. The newspaper listed the names of those responsible for initiating the petition, drawing special attention to Third Ward Alderman Clifford T. Coomes, who lived next door to Hardman's new home. The newspaper editorialized that Hardman, a war veteran, should be able to live where she chose. The city had "been blessedly free of this sort of hostility among neighbors," but, the editor wrote, this incident will be "useful if it indicates to possible malcontents that most of us want it kept that way." The newspaper's readers agreed. Hardman "fought during the war, as much for those homes on Fetter Avenue as for their own," one wrote. She continued, "[i]f she should decide to move into my neighborhood, I will be happy to welcome her." Another reader called attention to the city's customary racial

discrimination toward blacks. “I knew that some Louisville citizens were still fighting the Civil War, so to speak, but why pick on the Filipinos?” asked Mrs. Joseph Roman. “I would feel honored to have them for neighbors.”¹⁴

The ground swell of support for Mrs. Hardman seemed to influence her new neighbors and most who had signed the petition quickly received her into the neighborhood, claiming it had all been “a mistake.” According to the residents, they had added their names to the petition “because of rumors that the newcomers were Negro.” But once it was determined that Hardman was Filipino, rather than African American, she was more than welcome to live on Fetter Avenue. She received “food, flowers, and magazines.” Even further, neighbors brought ice cream for her three children and “a restaurant owner invited her to try, free, his special chicken.” More importantly, the priest at St. Elizabeth’s Church issued a special message during Mass “welcoming her to the parish.”¹⁵

The controversy over Hardman’s house garnered national and international attention. She received gifts and sympathetic letters from “Tulsa and St. Louis and all over.” The story reached all the way to her native Manila, where a local newspaper commented that if Hardman had not been welcome at her home, “Vice President Nixon wouldn’t have been made to feel at home on his Philippines visit” either. Luckily, her neighbors finally accepted her and according to the Manila news, the “day was saved for Vice President Nixon, who is trying his best to sell democracy to the Asians.”¹⁶

African Americans closely watched the events surrounding Hardman’s house and many credited the *Courier Journal* for appealing to the working-class residents’

¹⁴ *Courier Journal*, November 25, 1953, 1.

¹⁵ *Courier Journal*, November 23, 1953, 1.

¹⁶ *Courier Journal*, December 1, 1953, B1.

conscience and influencing the community's acceptance of the family. Harry S. McAlpin, an African American lawyer, wrote in to "commend [the] reporters for the excellent and courageous coverage they gave" Hardman. "The forthright calling of names and persistence in follow-up, exposing the undemocratic activities of the individuals involved, had an immediate and salutary effect." He then went even further: "I trust if and whenever a similar situation arises involving Negroes and their white neighbors, that The Courier ... will be consistent in the commendable approach and treatment." Another wrote in to express appreciation for the newspaper's strong stand against the petition to keep the family out of the neighborhood. "Thank you very much for the great service ... to all of the people in Louisville," Guy Ranson wrote, "in exposing the attempt to prevent the Hardman family moving onto Fetter Ave." He closed his letter by pointing out how "[r]ace prejudice has a difficult time surviving when exposed to public attention."¹⁷

Hardman's story is important not only for revealing how understandings of race have been reconfigured throughout the twentieth century, but also for demonstrating the *Courier Journal's* influence on public sentiment in Louisville. Scholars such as Matthew Frye Jacobson and David Roediger have shown how immigrants could be "white-washed" to assimilate into American society. As Hardman's neighbors explained, they ultimately accepted Hardman because her "whiteness" had been authenticated: she wasn't black. The newspaper also contributed to the eventual welcoming reception of the Hardman family. The *Courier Journal* not only adamantly supported Hardman's right to live where she chose, but it also demanded that the people responsible for her exclusion be identified and reprimanded for their racist actions. In persistent editorials, the newspaper condemned the discrimination denying civil rights to the Hardman family and

¹⁷ *Courier Journal*, November 27, 1953, 8.

reminded readers that Louisville was a progressive, fair-minded place to live. In the end, neighbors apologized and accepted the family. A year later, the newspaper abandoned its crusading spirit when the Wade family purchased their home on Rone Court. Instead of demanding acceptance and social change, the newspaper blamed the Wades for inciting racial tension. Indeed, the *Courier Journal* rejected the opportunity to foster substantive change in the lives of African Americans, and, in fact, of all Louisvillians.¹⁸

Although Hardman's neighbors revealed they had signed the petition because they thought she was African American, black Louisvillians were not deterred and continued to seek homes outside of the West End. They usually encountered resistance from real estate agents, lenders, and homeowners. Andrew Wade remembered how "many individuals and realtors and legal advisors ... had advised [him to] buy where [he] was designated to buy." He put a down payment on a house on Kramers Lane in the southwestern section of the city, but the "next day the realtor called ... and begged [him] to take the money back and let him call the deal off." Wade recalled that his lawyer told him the realtor thought he was "Mexican or Spanish or something." Once the realtor discovered that Wade was black, the realtor wanted out of the deal. Reluctantly, Wade took the money back.¹⁹

¹⁸ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 1991) and *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Become White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

¹⁹ Andrew Wade, interviewed by Catherine Fosl, November 8, 1989. Transcript in possession of the author.

But Wade did not abandon his search for a home. In fact, he later remembered how this episode made him “more determined” to buy “in that same neighborhood.” As a veteran of the war, Wade “felt highly right in trying to buy what [he] wanted with [his] own money”—even if the house was in “the forbidden area.” When he and his wife found the ranch-style home on Rone Court, in a newly developed white working-class subdivision, Wade decided to enlist some help in buying the home for his family. He asked several white people, but they “came out point blank telling [him] they were afraid.” Finally, he decided to ask Carl and Anne Braden, a white couple “known as staunch fighters for civil rights and better conditions for any group of people,” whom he knew through his involvement in the Progressive Party, to help him purchase the home.²⁰

Many historians, most notably Catherine Fosl, have examined the Bradens’ efforts to help Wade integrate housing in Louisville and their other contributions to civil rights activity across the South; while this attention is rightly deserved, there has been little examination of the Wade incident in the context of school desegregation in Louisville. The juxtaposition of the Wade incident with school desegregation reveals how central the housing issue was to the array of racial and class tensions in Louisville. White Louisvillians from all income levels accepted school desegregation because they understood there would be little integration if housing patterns remained segregated. Housing, then, functioned as the last defense for white supremacy in the city, and many whites, working-class and elites alike, viewed the Bradens’ actions as a direct threat to the protection segregated neighborhoods provided to their economic stability and societal standing. Indeed, when the Bradens agreed to help Wade move into an all-white

²⁰ Andrew Wade, interviewed by Catherine Fosl, November 8, 1989. Transcript in possession of the author.

neighborhood, they crossed well-established racial lines to challenge the residential patterns upon which all social and economic relations in Louisville were founded.²¹

The Bradens agreed to help Wade purchase the home because, as Carl explained, they believed “that every man has a right to live where he wants to.” Wade and the Bradens agreed that Andrew would provide \$1400 for the down payment and then the Bradens would transfer the property to him. Wade would then assume the mortgage from the South End Federal Savings & Loan Association and the separate mortgage from James Rone, the builder and developer. On May 10, they closed on the house and then transferred the property to Wade. Anne later remembered, “One man wanted a house. We were helping him get it. It seemed a small thing.”²²

However, it was not a small thing to the working-class white residents on Rone Court, whose homes were much more than mere structures. To them, they were symbols of their economic and racialized social status. They immediately made it known to both the Wades and the Bradens that they did not want the black family in their neighborhood. Wade remembered how he had “tried to shame” Buster Rone, the builder’s son, into accepting him in the neighborhood. He asked Rone “how could he live in a democratic kind of society and ... keep me out of the neighborhood?” Obviously, “that didn’t work,” as Rone was part of the group of men who burned the cross not far from Wade’s home.

²¹ Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 135-174; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 231; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 221, 231; William T. Martin Riches, *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance*, second edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 51; Gardiner H. Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: University of Press of Kentucky, 2000), 73.

²² *Courier Journal*, May 17, 1954, 1; Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* (Monthly Review Press, 1958), 5, 54.

Wade also remembered how a couple of days after he had moved in, a young child had wandered onto his property. A white woman “came over and grabbed the child by the arm,... and just drug the child all the way across the road ... just cussing her.” The Bradens also endured their share of hostilities for their part in the transaction. They received angry phone calls, some with anonymous threats, others demanding they make the Wades leave. James Rone and Ben Hudson, the realtor who had negotiated the original sale to the Bradens, led a group of angry white residents to the Bradens’ home late one night. Believing the Bradens had betrayed their race, the residents shouted at Carl to “get those niggers out of there” and threatened his children.²³

The *Shively Newsweek*, the neighborhood newspaper, also attacked the Wades and Bradens, and in so doing, escalated the issue to international levels. In a front-page editorial, John Hitt claimed that the “majority of residents in this community ... do not want non-segregation.” He accused the Wades of “sneaking around” and buying the home in “a furtive fashion.” The Bradens, Hitt argued, “who thought so dearly of these negroes ... went to quite a bit of ‘finagling’ to purchase this house.” The editor did not view these actions as merely a black man’s attempt to purchase a home. Rather, it was part of a Communist plot to take over America. “To our way of thinking,” he wrote, “this is not a search for happiness or a dream home, but a means toward something much deeper and more serious.” Hitt did not just hint that the Wades’ and Bradens’ actions were Communist-inspired, but spelled it out vividly for his readers. He left his readers to decide whether the Wades and the Bradens were working for the “cause of non-segregation or the cause which made Stalin the lion of Russia ... the cause of the Communists in this county to encourage panic, chaos, and riot to lower the morale of the

²³ Andrew Wade, interviewed by Catherine Fosl; *Wall Between*, 59, 61.

American People.” To Hitt, integration was part and parcel of Communism, and both should be resisted vigorously. “Either you take a firm stand now,” he warned his readers, “or take the consequences along with your indifference!”²⁴

The accusations in Hitt’s editorial would have resonated deeply with his readers. Just a few years before, Senator Joseph McCarthy had waved his famous list of names in Wheeling, West Virginia, and although he no longer wielded much influence, his anti-Communist message did. Many historians, especially Mary Dudziak, Jeff Woods and George Lewis, have shown how segregationists capitalized on the red scare of the Cold War and often employed anti-Communist rhetoric to thwart the progress of civil rights. These scholars suggest that it was the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown* that intensified the anti-communist attacks on the civil rights movement. In Louisville, however, whites committed to segregation mounted their attack against integrated housing rather than integrated schools. Indeed, it was Wade’s arrival in the all-white neighborhood that provoked allegations that Communists were attempting to disrupt race relations in Louisville.²⁵

Although the *Courier Journal* did not accuse the Bradens of Communism, it did blame them for inciting racial tensions in the city. Two days after the attack on the black family’s home, the newspaper issued its opinion. “The real fault of judgment ... lies with Mr. and Mrs. Carl Braden,” the editorial argued, because they purchased the home “with no intention of living in it, but for the sole purpose of getting it into the hands of Negro

²⁴ *Shively Newsweek*, May 20, 1954, 1.

²⁵ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance, 1945-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

owners.” He charged that the Bradens “gave poor service to idealism in forcing an issue of race relations in this artificial and contrived way.” While the *Courier Journal* had rallied behind Nina Hardman six months earlier and demanded that her neighbors accept her, the newspaper had a much different reaction to Wade’s attempt to move into an all-white neighborhood. The paper asserted that the white residents were “entirely within their rights ... in protesting the purchase of property in their subdivision by Negroes.” According to the editor, “there is no use denying that the value of their property will decrease as a result of the sale.” In short, this was a matter of property rights, not civil rights. In an example of the limitations of public policy in the face of private prejudice, he stated that African Americans would have to wait for civil rights until whites changed their attitudes toward people of color: “The forces of law cannot ... compel a change in the mental patterns of a neighborhood, or save a Negro family from the unhappy ostracism that will be their fate there.”²⁶

The editorial, it should be noted, came from one of the South’s leading liberal newspapers, which advocated racial progress but not racial equality. Another editorial ran right next to the one chastising the Wades and the Bradens, only this one addressed the Supreme Court’s decision the day before in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In a flagrant act of inconsistency, the newspaper hailed the decision as one “marked by reason and restraint.” The editor encouraged his readers to support the “doctrine of morality” handed down by the court. Moreover, the editorial provided a brief history lesson, explaining how *Brown* overturned the court’s earlier decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that had made separate accommodations constitutional as long as they were equal. The newspaper emphasized the point that it had been Justice John Marshall Harlan of Kentucky who had

²⁶ *Courier Journal*, May 18, 1954, 8.

been the lone dissenter in *Plessy*. The editorial even reprinted snippets of Harlan's opinion, stressing one particular part: "Our constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens."²⁷

Whites and African Americans reacted strongly and swiftly to the newspaper's contradictory editorials. Larue Spiker wrote to the editor to "take exception" to the editorial regarding the Wades. It "is unworthy of the Courier-Journal and contradicts the fine principles you support in your editorial on the Supreme Court decision." Comparing the city to Detroit and Cicero, Illinois, which had witnessed violent riots that required federal intervention to restore order in 1943 and 1951, respectively, J. A. Hess expressed "amazement on reading [the newspaper's] editorial." Hess feared the violence on Rone Court would taint the city's racially progressive image. With sadness, he wrote, "the satisfaction felt at the Supreme Court's decision, outlawing segregation in the schools, is tempered by dismay at the outburst of bigotry and hatred in our midst." Some readers attacked the newspaper for making false claims about declining property values. "An economically unsound white purchaser depreciates property value just as surely as the same type Negro purchaser," Hortense Young pointed out. She carried the point even further, drawing the connection between racial injustice and economic oppression: "That there may be more in our group than in other groups merely highlights the inequities in the business opportunities given Negroes in America."²⁸

Others in the community questioned why the newspaper had supported Hardman, but attacked Wade. "What happened to the crusading spirit your paper exhibited in the

²⁷ Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 251; *Courier Journal*, May 18, 1954, 8.

²⁸ *Courier Journal*, May 21, 1954, 8; May 24, 1954, 8; May 25, 1954, 6; May 26, 1954, 9; and May 28, 1954, 8. For more information on the riots in Detroit and Cicero, see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 42-44, 53, 62.

case of the Filipino family who moved into a certain section of the city?” wrote Mildred Neal. Andrew Wade’s father wanted to know the answer to that question, too. “How anyone could be so cruel and destructive as your article exemplified, is beyond my imagination, remembering particularly how you so nobly supported Mrs. Hardman, a foreigner who faced the same situation my son now faces,” he remarked. Frank Stanley, the editor of the city’s black newspaper the *Louisville Defender*, summed up the situation this way: “Mrs. Hardman was accepted. But Wade, surrounded by hostile neighbors, has to have a 24-hour police watch just to exercise his natural American right.... What inconsistency Democracy—what sufferance being a Negro.”²⁹

The *Courier Journal*’s tacit approval of the violent protest only made the situation worse for the Wades and signified that neighborhood segregation was more than an issue around which working-class whites could rally. Because the local media—with the exception of the *Defender*—refused to demand justice, the police relaxed their investigation of the attacks on the home. The *Courier Journal* had condoned the hostilities, justifying the whole incident as a matter of property rights, not civil rights, and as a result, none of the neighbors came forward with any evidence. There was no need for them to do so. In contrast to its vocal support for school integration and for Nina Hardman’s right to reside in a working-class neighborhood in another part of town, the newspaper accepted and approved of the neighbors’ efforts to force the Wade family out of their home. All of these factors gave license to the perpetrators to continue their fight to make the Wades move. And they did. At the end of June, when the authorities still had not made any arrests for the events of the month before, a group of angry whites bombed the home. The explosives had been placed in a ventilation hole almost directly

²⁹ *Ibid.*; *Louisville Defender*, May 27, 1954.

under the bathroom, destroying the tile floor and blowing up the bottom of a metal tub. The powerful blast of dynamite also “ripped stone veneer from the outside walls, ... practically demolished two bedrooms, ... [and] shattered five windows in the home.” Wade estimated the damage between \$5,000 and \$7,000. Yet, according to Police Captain Carlos Johns, only the Wades and the police officer patrolling the area reported hearing the explosion. The neighbors told the police they hadn’t heard the blast.³⁰

The bombing on Rone Court obliterated the facade of peaceful race relations in Louisville and divided the community even further along racial lines. The Wade Defense Committee, an ad hoc committee organized by local blacks “to aid the Wades in promoting their peaceful residence and maintenance” of their home, demanded that the Federal Bureau of Investigation come to the city and bring the perpetrators to justice. The *Defender*, however, already knew where to place the blame and boldly announced it on the front page. “[S]egregationists have run rampant against the Wades,” wrote the editor. “It was easy ... for the forces of hate to stoop to bombing in an atmosphere of total resentment aided and abetted by indifferent policing, anti-press and belligerent whites.” Although the *Courier Journal* managed to express some sympathy for the Wades, the newspaper seemed to be more concerned about how the criminal activity would affect the city’s image and assumed a “we told you so” attitude about the whole situation. “We regretted at the time their decision was made... to challenge the prejudices of white neighbors who would not welcome them,” wrote the editor. “It had been our hope, ... that the problems of racial integration in Louisville would never bring the sort of corrosive

³⁰ *Courier Journal*, June 28, 1954, 1.

violence that afflict [sic] other communities.” The editor concluded with dismay: “That hope is disappointed.”³¹

The Wade Defense Committee, pressured local authorities to conduct a thorough investigation, and in late August, A. Scott Hamilton, the Commonwealth’s Attorney, finally agreed to ask the grand jury to look into the bombing. He offered two theories to the jury when it convened in September. Hamilton suggested first that angry whites who wanted to force Wade and his family to move out of the neighborhood could have committed the attacks. While this seemed to be the most plausible theory, Hamilton submitted another to the jury for consideration. The bombing, he alleged, could have been the work of Communists who had exploited the Wades to further a subversive plot to stir up trouble between the races in Louisville. According to this theory, Wade had been perfectly content with his inability to purchase a home outside of the West End. Rather, it had been the Bradens’ idea to buy and then transfer to Wade the home in the all-white neighborhood so as to incite racial tension in the city. It was clear from the beginning which theory Hamilton preferred. He immediately set out to brand the Bradens as subversives. Both were indicted for sedition and charged with conspiring to dynamite the house for seditious purposes. It only took a few days for the all-white jury to return a guilty conviction.³²

³¹ *Louisville Defender*, July 1, 1954, 1; *Courier Journal*, June 29, 1954, 6.

³² Anne Braden, *The Wall Between*, 168, 183, 212-13, 252. For more on the trial, see *Court of Appeals of Kentucky, Carl Braden Appellant v. the Commonwealth of Kentucky Appellee, Appeal from Jefferson Circuit Court, Criminal Branch, Second Division, Brief of Appellant. Louis Lusky, Robert W. Zollinger, Attorneys for Appellant*, Carl and Anne Braden Papers, 1954-1964, M. I. King Library, University of Kentucky. See also Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 135-174.

African Americans were not willing to allow charges of a Communist conspiracy to mask the reality that blacks were denied equal housing in Louisville. The *Louisville Defender* repeatedly drew attention to the fact that “the issues at stake are being confused.” The editor reminded all Louisvillians that “trouble never would have occurred if ‘private agreements to keep out Negroes’ had not existed.” Even further, the editor pointed out that “[r]egardless of Braden’s guilt or innocence the fact remains that Negroes cannot buy where they choose in spite of the Supreme Court decision” against restrictive covenants. The Wade Defense Committee was even more emphatic in their response to the trial and its outcome. In a pamphlet describing how an unwritten law kept African Americans out of certain neighborhoods in the city, the committee charged Scott Hamilton with “stirring up a red scare as a smokescreen for his failure to bring to justice the people who blew up the house.” Even further, the pamphlet pointed out how “the Ku Kluxers who blew up the house roam the Louisville community free and the real estate and banking interests who enforce the *unwritten law* think they have done their duty.” For the black community, the conviction did nothing to combat the racism and discrimination that kept them relegated to the West End of the city.³³

In stark contrast, however, the conviction eased the white community’s conscience and the city’s leaders quickly resumed promoting Louisville as a place of racial progress. Liberal and moderate whites repackaged the whole ordeal as the work of subversives rather than local blacks. Indeed, the conviction enabled whites to justify

³³ *Louisville Defender*, October 14, 1954; December 9, 1954. The newspaper was referring to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* 334 US 1 (1948), which held that courts could not legally enforce racially restrictive covenants. Although the decision did not outlaw restrictive covenants, it nevertheless reinforced the protection provided by the Fourteenth Amendment of the rights to acquire, own, and dispose of property; “They Broke the Unwritten Law,” A Fact Sheet on the Bombing of the Wade Home at Louisville, Kentucky. Issued By the Wade Defense Committee, Reverend C. Ewbank Tucker, Chairman. (No date). Emphasis in original.

Wade's behavior as the work of radical incendiaries, rather than as the result of Wade's own frustration with the housing situation. Many whites viewed local blacks just as their ancestors had—as happy and contented subordinates. By pointing the finger at the Bradens, they could continue to do so. The Bradens' conviction also protected the city's racially progressive image by blaming the red menace rather than the lack of adequate housing for African Americans as the root of racial tension. In the city that prided itself on its peaceful race relations, white Louisvillians could tolerate Communists lurking in the community. It was quite another matter, however, to host discontented African Americans. As Anne Braden put it: "white Louisville went home to its beds that night [of the conviction] to sleep quietly—its duty done, its heart cleansed, and its evil exorcised."³⁴ The Wade incident resolved in the minds of many whites, local leaders seized on the city's success at school integration and vigorously promoted Louisville as a place of racial tolerance.

Indeed, the success of school integration catapulted the city into national prominence. The national media regularly congratulated the city for its peaceful compliance and described to readers across the nation the city's unmatched progress in race relations. In bold print, the *Atlanta Daily World*, the city's African American newspaper, reported on its front page "12,500 NEGRO PUPILS ARE INTEGRATED INTO LOUISVILLE'S SCHOOLS." The article described how "the biggest test of all apparently passed without strife as about 12,500 Negroes attended classes."³⁵ The *New*

³⁴ Anne Braden, *The Wall Between*, 253.

³⁵ *Atlanta Daily World*, September 11, 1956, A1.

York Times wrote that the integration of Louisville's schools "created no more than a token ripple of protest."³⁶

While the national media lionized Louisville as the leader in racial justice and black equality, many came to consider the superintendent of city schools, Omer Carmichael, to be the prime force behind integration. An Alabama native, Carmichael was heralded as "Louisville's integrator" who had led a "quiet social revolution." And his newfound fame made Carmichael a national star. He toured the northeast, giving interviews for magazines and television shows and making public appearances. After hearing how President Eisenhower had requested to meet him, Carmichael went to the White House to explain the city's success. His tour of the northeast concluded with a visit to Harvard University, which awarded Carmichael an honorary degree and proclaimed, "Under this able leader an enlightened community moved forward in education." He refused to take all of the credit, though. "The respect of Louisville citizens for law and order and their recognition of the human rights involved make the firm foundation on which all else has been built," Carmichael explained.³⁷

After his trip to Harvard, Carmichael's star continued to ascend. In 1957, he published *The Louisville Story*, an account of the city's plan for desegregation that served as a guide for other towns planning to desegregate. The plan called for gradual integration, giving parents the option of transferring their children out of newly integrated schools. In the end, Carmichael concluded school integration was a "community achievement... which would have come to naught had it not been for the firm foundation

³⁶ "Louisville Quiet as its Schools End Segregation" in *New York Times*, September 11, 1956, A1.

³⁷ "Louisville's Integrator" in *New York Times*, September 11, 1956, A8; August 25, 1957, 278; "A Quiet Social Revolution in a Gateway to the South" in *New York Times*, August 25, 1957, 278; "The Louisville Story – Told by Carmichael," in *New York Times*, October 7, 1956, 277.

of the respects of Louisville's citizens for law and order and their recognition of the human rights involved."³⁸ Two years later, the Georgia Council on Human Relations invited Carmichael to Atlanta to help that city integrate its schools. On WAGA-TV, Carmichael explained that part of Louisville's success was due in part to his "general understanding of the Negro and his problems and our problems." A southerner himself, Carmichael clearly understood his audience. He explained that he wasn't there to force them to integrate, but to show them how to do it and discuss the problems they could expect, especially "vile, ugly talk by Negro children." In the end, Carmichael repeated that "a fundamental respect for law" made integration happen in Louisville.³⁹

But the President and national newspapers were not the only ones interested in the "Gateway to the South." Many contemporary sociologists also considered Louisville a prime example of peaceful integration. For example, in his analysis of race relations in Louisville, sociologist James W. Vander Zanden argued "the unequivocal, firm policy pursued by authorities in carrying through the actual desegregation plan" was the decisive factor in the city's successful integration. Others encouraged southern cities to follow Louisville's lead.⁴⁰ In many ways, these scholars looked upon Louisville as a model for ending Jim Crow segregation across the South.

Moreover, the federal government relied on Louisville's desegregation story to help win the war against communism around the world. The United States Information

³⁸ Omer Carmichael and Weldon James, *The Louisville Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 113.

³⁹ "The Louisville School Story – Transcript of an Atlanta Television Program Featuring Mr. Omer Carmichael," Sponsored by the Georgia Council on Human Relations on WAGA-TV, September 13, 1959, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁰ See Guy B. Johnson, "A Sociologist Looks at Racial Desegregation," in *Social Forces*, vol. 33, no. 1 (October, 1954): 1-10; and James W. Vander Zanden, "Turbulence Accompanying School Desegregation," in *Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 2 (October, 1958): 68-75.

Agency published reports and pamphlets detailing the peaceful process of integration in Louisville to combat the negative image of the nation's race relations provided by other southern cities, especially Little Rock, Arkansas. John D. Tomlinson, American Consul in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, found the information on Louisville "most welcome" in his fight "to illustrate the great progress which has been made in race relations in the United States." Tomlinson distributed the pamphlets to the local media and one newspaper, the *Evening Post*, published a story comparing Louisville to Little Rock. "[W]hat a contrast between the Louisville way of doing things," the special correspondent wrote, "and the Little Rock way!" According to the correspondent, "every day now more children of Louisville, Kentucky, ... are coming to know one another and to treat one another as individuals, classmates and playmates." The correspondent venerated "the Louisville Story because it is a success story. It shows what can be done in human relations."⁴¹

Despite the worldwide recognition Louisville received for school desegregation, integration often occurred at the expense of black educators. When the Louisville Municipal College, primarily an African American school, merged with the College of Arts and Sciences at the already integrated University of Louisville in the late 1950s, the university refused to integrate its faculty and did not hire the teachers from the black college. A report to the University's Board of Trustees pointed out the potential danger in this decision. Not only did the Louisville Municipal College's faculty have good cause for legal action, but in a section of the report titled, "What Will Be the Publicity Consequences From Action on the LMC Faculty?," trustees were warned of the threat to

⁴¹ American Consulate, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, to Department of State, October 10, 1957, RG 59, 811.411/11-1357, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

the school's and the community's progressive reputation. The report reminded them that the university had achieved "considerable national publicity and prestige as a result of its decision to admit Negro students without being forced to do so through court action." Even further, the university "was widely remarked upon as a leading example of how Border and Southern states can take the initiative in eliminating inequities in their educational systems." Integrating its faculty would give the university "a national prominence and a position of leadership in the South which it has never before enjoyed." But if it did not hire African American professors, the report cautioned, "the loss to our prestige would be considerable."⁴² In the end, the trustees opted to protect the school's prestige, rather than give in to racial prejudices, and "integrated" its faculty—the university hired one African American professor from the Louisville Municipal College. All the others had to find employment elsewhere.⁴³ This token integration illustrated how white community leaders preached racial equality, but practiced racial exclusion.

Although the city's leaders promoted Louisville's school desegregation as a way to deflect attention away from the housing situation, African Americans understood that school integration would not bring about substantive changes in their socioeconomic situation. The Wade Defense Committee boldly asserted that the "end of school segregation will mean little if housing remains segregated." Indeed, despite legal desegregation in 1956, residential segregation and school availability kept many black and white students from learning together. A transfer option allowed parents to move

⁴² "Towards A Change in the Policy of the Board of Trustees of the University of Louisville Municipal College Faculty," Arthur S. Kling papers, Box 2, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁴³ George C. Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, vol. 2: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890 – 1980* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 196. Charles Henry Parrish, who earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, was the professor hired by the University of Louisville to teach in the Sociology department.

their children out of undesirable schools into the schools of their choice. In fact, while Louisville basked in the glory of its school desegregation and Omer Carmichael advised President Eisenhower on how to successfully implement the court's decision, less than three thousand of the school system's 12,500 African American students were enrolled in white schools during the first year of integration.⁴⁴

The next year saw little improvement and many schools were far from integrated, despite claims by Carmichael and other school officials that classrooms would be more racially mixed than the previous year. For example, on September 29, 1957, over nine hundred white students attended Atherton High School, in the eastern part of the city, but no African American students took classes there. At Central High School, located in the West End, the opposite was the case. Over one thousand black pupils filled chairs, while no whites did. Other schools saw only token integration. More than nine hundred white students attended Shawnee High School, while only forty-five black pupils were enrolled. In 1963, the numbers had barely improved. Central High was still all black and Atherton had only enrolled eleven black students. The situation remained the same throughout the 1960s. No white students had enrolled at Central High School as of 1966. The Newburg school, built only a few years before the *Brown* decision in order to accommodate the growing number of black students who could not attend the white schools, continued to have a single-race student body after the city implemented its integration plan. The school had nine grades, all of which consisted of African American students. In his explanation of Newburg's monochrome racial composition, a county official acknowledged the relationship between residential segregation and school integration:

⁴⁴ Wade Defense Committee Pamphlet, 1954. Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

“Well, anybody in the Newburg school district is eligible to go to the school. It just happens that no white families with children live there.”⁴⁵

But rather than remedy the housing patterns that maintained segregation in all other public venues, local whites continued to tirelessly promote Louisville’s race relations on the national and international scene. Ten years before school integration, *Courier Journal* editor Mark Ethridge reported to sociologist Charles S. Johnson that “[t]he Negro is better off as to civil rights in Louisville than in most other places in the South. He exercises his franchise here in about the same proportion that the white population does.” After the schools integrated, Ethridge’s boosterism only increased. In an interview for an article on the Supreme Court’s decision in *U.S. News & World Report*, Ethridge claimed that Louisville was unlike other places in the South. He boasted of the integration six years before at the University of Louisville and spoke of the “great many other advances made here—a good deal of lifting of segregation in transportation [and] public meeting [places].” As he described the city’s peaceful and willing compliance to the court’s decision to the national magazine, Ethridge pointed out that Louisville schools had partially desegregated without trouble, and predicted future accomplishments: “the public-school system here has announced full integration as of next September, both in city and county schools.”⁴⁶ No mention was made, however, of the turbulence in Louisville caused by attempts to integrate the city’s neighborhoods.

⁴⁵ Report to Members of the Board of Education from Omer Carmicheal, Superintendent, Oct. 1, 1957, and Report to Members of the Board of Education from Samuel Noe, Superintendent, Oct. 21, 1963. Charles Henry Parrish papers, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky; *Courier Journal*, September 11, 1966, D2.

⁴⁶ Charles S. Johnson, *Into the Main Stream: A Survey of the Best Practices in Race Relations in the South* (Chapel Hill, 1947), 42; *U.S. News and World Report*, February 24, 1956. Mark F. Ethridge papers, Folder 218, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Ethridge was not always so enthusiastic about mixed classrooms, however. When he addressed journalism students at the University of Florida in 1956, he tailored his comments to fit the largely southern audience. Ethridge encouraged southern whites to move toward integration at their own pace, reminding them that the Supreme Court had issued no timeframe for desegregation. He attempted to assuage whites' concerns over the use of force by the federal government by assuring them "nobody desires to hurry the transition which the Supreme Court decreed to be the law of land." Even further, he reminded them that the high court had "returned enforcement to the local courts" to administer desegregation however they deemed appropriate.⁴⁷ He called on the South to move slowly, but firmly, so as to prevent the eruption of violence.

Ethridge's comments reveal a great deal about the attitude of many whites in Louisville. For example, Barry Bingham, publisher of the *Courier Journal* and the *Louisville Times*, was another Louisville liberal who espoused visions of racial tolerance but advocated and practiced gradual integration. When readers wrote to Bingham during the Wade incident to demand the newspaper take action against the red scare in the community, the newspaper failed to intervene. In response to William Harber, one concerned reader, the publisher accused the Bradens of hurting the cause of civil rights: "Gains so steadily made over recent years have been arrested, at least for the time being." He also reminded Harber that Louisville had been the first to integrate its university. Years later, noted civil rights activist Virginia Durr took issue with the way the newspaper branded the Bradens as subversives. Durr wrote to Bingham that Carl "never dissembled or used subterfuge" in the property transaction. Bingham again defended

⁴⁷ Speech at the University of Florida, February 20, 1956. Mark F. Ethridge papers, Folder 153, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

himself and his newspaper, claiming the Bradens' actions "actually created a serious backlash which many of us feel delayed the process of integration in the community. ... I think it also had a deleterious effect on the battles our newspapers have continued to make through the years for the same cause."⁴⁸

To Bingham, Ethridge, and many other white liberals of Louisville, gradual integration, rather than rapid desegregation, worked best to placate disgruntled African Americans. It also weakened the possibilities of a white backlash of violence, which could make their city less appealing to outside investors. Alleviating public protests of any kind by blacks or whites was of central importance to Louisville's white leaders who struggled to promote their city as a place of social harmony ripe for economic development. Such activity would draw negative attention to the city, damaging Louisville's reputation. These advocates of racial moderation encouraged community leaders to move toward integration at their own pace, not at a speed dictated by either the federal government or protesting African Americans. This policy of moderation frustrated many African Americans, including Martin Luther King Jr., who saw it as an impediment to substantive racial and economic change. In *Why We Can't Wait*, King defined southern whites like Bingham in clear terms: the progressive liberal is one "who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; ... who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more

⁴⁸ Letter to William Harber, March 18, 1955. Letter from Virginia Durr, April 4, 1975. Letter to Virginia Durr, April 7, 1975. George Barry Bingham papers, 1861-1989. Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky, Folder 276. For more on the progressive image in other cities, see William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

convenient season.”” According to the civil rights leader, these so-called friends of African Americans, rather than rabid racists like Bull Connor or Orval Faubus, were the “Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom....”⁴⁹

Although local whites might have been successful at selling the city’s progressive image to the rest of the nation, Louisville’s African American community knew this image masked a deep-seated structural racism that relegated them to the West End of Louisville. When the housing conflict came to a head in 1967, Louisville’s liberal voices, especially Bingham, called for an immediate solution—not because of a genuine concern over human rights, but because of a genuine concern over Louisville’s national image as a place of progressive race relations. In the early 1960s, African Americans challenged whites to make good on their progressive rhetoric and open their neighborhoods to people of color. But the structural racism that kept blacks in the West End would be made manifest in the city’s urban renewal campaign, and discrimination would become institutionalized all over again as local planning policy.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther King Jr. *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 84.

Chapter Four

“A Few Score Wretched People”

Race, Urban Renewal, and Housing

Even after the negative publicity surrounding the Wade incident, Louisville’s leaders continued to promote the city’s “progressive” attitude toward race relations. The heated debate surrounding national civil rights legislation in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1964 provided a perfect opportunity. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Mayor William Cowger advanced “some of the principles and approaches which we feel must be applied to the whole nation and which we have found to work in Louisville.” One of the chief obstacles to civil rights progress, he claimed, was the belief by the “majority group that civil rights are bestowed on some of the people... a little at a time.” In the mayor’s assessment, however, “civil rights are inalienable, or built into our democratic forms of government.” Cowger went on and declared civil rights to be “personal, especially if you happen to be one of those to whom such rights have been denied.” He implored Congress to “support the Constitution and protect the rights it grants to all of us,” and encouraged the legislators and his readers “to be more creative and effective in dealing with really urgent problems, such as poverty, alternatives to war and delinquent youth.” The mayor closed his letter with one last appeal, urging Congress to “consider... that human values and economic values are two sides of the same coin and... [to] enact an effective civil rights law as an authoritative guideline for local responsibility in every city in America.”¹

¹ *New York Herald Tribune*, April 1, 1964, A20.

The tone of Cowger's letter suggested that Louisville had already assumed local responsibility to ensure racial justice for all of its citizens. Indeed, there had been some progress in the city, especially in education. In 1955, the city's housing policies also received recognition when *Southeastern Housing News* praised the city for "one of the best planned and managed housing programs in the nation." The editor was "greatly impressed" by the "liberal use of evergreen screening, the alertness and politeness of the project managers, and the friendliness of the administrative staff." Now, in 1964, the city maintained integrated parks, golf courses, swimming pools, and tennis courts. Under the direction of Mayor Cowger, the Board of Aldermen had taken integration one step further and had recently passed a public accommodations ordinance that criminalized racial discrimination in restaurants, department stores, and entertainment facilities. This, too, stoked the city's reputation as a leader in race relations. To many, Louisville was at the forefront of peaceful racial progress.²

But this progressive image was not reflected in actual practice, as the city's African American community knew all too well. Department stores and restaurants may have abandoned Jim Crow customs, but white neighborhoods remained tightly closed to blacks. Homeowners, lending institutions, and real estate agents refused to rent or sell property to African Americans, even though many could afford to move into neighborhoods reserved for whites only and earnestly sought to do so. Abandoned by the city government and its municipal services, African Americans in the West End, the area of town that white Louisvillians—from homeowners to lenders, from realtors to elected officials—had assigned to African Americans, often endured cramped, rundown housing

² *New York Times*, September 11, 1956, E13; *Southeastern Housing News*, vol. 4, no. 2, July-August, 1955.

and deteriorating neighborhoods. In short, their reality seriously contradicted the city's national reputation.

The city's racism went deeper than just a handful of bigoted realtors and bankers, though. The progressive image so carefully constructed by Mayor Cowger and other community leaders masked a deep-seated structural racism that manifested itself in many forms, especially urban planning. Indeed, the informal discrimination of the beginning of the twentieth century that had been maintained by homeowners and real estate agents who had refused to rent or sell to African Americans had merged with institutional discrimination in the form of federal lending and development policies to create a more rigid segregation that relegated African Americans to the West End.

Beginning in 1957, the city government implemented a massive urban renewal program to revitalize Louisville's downtown area. Slum clearance was the first order of business; relocating the black residents was the second. Louisville's urban renewal agency gave little thought to where the displaced would be moved—most of the community understood that African Americans could be relocated only in one part of town and the predominately white city agency did not want to disrupt well-established social customs. Many African Americans, especially ministers, disagreed. Influenced by the racial uplift ideology of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois that viewed housing as a symbol of racial and economic progress, African American professionals encouraged the city's leaders to use urban renewal funds to improve living conditions for all members of the black community. They recognized the chance to challenge the existing residential segregation that trapped blacks who could afford to move in the West End. Even further, African American ministers and business people saw in urban renewal

an opportunity for the poorer members of the black community to gain better housing. To them, urban renewal offered a suitable arena for the city government to put into effect the principles of civil rights promoted by Mayor Cowger.

Yet when the bulldozers razed the ramshackle buildings, Louisville's urban renewal agency, under the auspices of the city government, abdicated its chance to bring about much-needed social change, and the black community's cries for integrated neighborhoods fell on deaf ears. Instead, relocation officers successfully moved thousands of African Americans into the already overcrowded housing available to blacks in the West End. As the blacks moved in, most of the few whites who remained in the area moved out. Black community leaders became increasingly alarmed about this relocation process. They feared it would "ghettoize" the West End and strengthen residential segregation in the city. The Louisville Ministerial Association openly questioned the city's renewal program and its underlying motivations, even taking its complaints to the state coordinator on urban renewal projects. Despite these criticisms, the urban renewal agency, under the direction of Jack Leeth, continued with renewal projects in the southwestern and central parts of the city. By 1965, Louisville's urban landscape belied its image as a place of racial harmony—indeed, a residential color line starkly divided the city, separating blacks from whites.

Even though residential segregation was not unique to Louisville, the city maintained a reputation that, while it may have not been unique, was certainly extraordinary for any city that advertised its southern characteristics during this turbulent period in race relations. Indeed, the city leaders portrayed Louisville as a bastion of white liberalism. This examination of progressivism in Louisville is informed by William

Chafe's examination of Greensboro, North Carolina, city that shared many similar traits to Louisville. Chafe finds that Greensboro's white leaders maintained a "progressive mystique" that stunted racial and economic progress. Similarly, Louisville's white community leaders struggled to balance the city's national reputation as a place of progress with the local racism that spatially separated blacks from whites. In the end, the urban renewal policies that strengthened residential segregation were carried out under the guise of white progressivism. This chapter shows how private prejudice and public policy worked in tandem to maintain and encourage residential segregation and to economically disadvantage people of color.³

* * * *

In order to sustain economic growth in the post-war period, Louisville's leaders decided the city needed to clean up the central downtown area to attract even more economic development. Traffic congestion plagued the downtown business district and there was very little parking available to the patrons of the area's business establishments. Decaying buildings and slum housing dotted the city blocks. The city's leaders issued repeated warnings that other cities, especially St. Louis, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh, that "already [had] splendid new downtown sections" would surpass Louisville, especially in terms of economic progress. "There is a danger," the *Courier Journal* cautioned, "that Louisville will be undermined as a city if its old central area is permitted to stagnate and disintegrate." So, in February 1957, Mayor Andrew Broaddus went before the city's Board of Aldermen to encourage them to place a \$5 million bond issue for urban renewal

³ William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

on November's ballot. Kentucky legislators had recently amended the state's statutes to allow cities to implement such projects, but the voters had to approve the funding before Louisville's urban renewal could begin.⁴

Broadus wasted no time galvanizing the community's support. He held a "marathon series of informational meetings," in which he revealed the tentative plans for renewal: revitalization of the business district, "a civic center, completion of the medical center, and renovation of General Hospital." He explained how the Federal Housing Act of 1954 guaranteed that the federal government would augment the city's share of the funding and "put up two-thirds of the money for clearing and redeveloping the slum areas." Broadus even established a "citizens committee" of local real estate agents and businessmen to campaign for the bond issue. The mayor and his band of crusaders told their audiences that Louisville desperately needed urban redevelopment to encourage more economic growth. They explained how slum clearance would "relieve the City of the heavy expenditures it has to make in these areas for police, fire, health, and welfare services." Even further, the slums should be removed because they did "not carry anywhere near their share of the tax burden." New buildings constructed with the money from the bond issue, however, would "produce much more revenue." Most importantly, "the redevelopment program would result in new industries, new jobs and new investments."⁵ In short, the mayor and urban renewal supporters saw the revitalization of the central business district in terms of dollars and cents. To them, it was the only way to attract outside investors to the city.

⁴ *Courier Journal*, October 17, 1957, A10; *Courier Journal*, October 11, 1957, A8; *Courier Journal*, March 13, 1957, B18; "Urban Renewal Agency (1962-1980)," Louisville Urban Renewal Agency papers, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁵ *Courier Journal*, August 16, 1957, A13, August 9, 1957, B1, September 18, 1957, B1, September 21, 1957, B1, November 3, 1957, D1.

By autumn, Broaddus had enlisted a large army of supporters. Numerous local organizations, including the Louisville Chamber of Commerce, the Louisville Real Estate Board, the Louisville Urban League, and the Louisville Federation of Labor, publicly supported the bond issue for urban renewal. The Democratic mayor had even reached across party lines: Broaddus had solicited and obtained a joint endorsement from both parties. “One of Louisville’s most pressing needs,” the statement read, “is an urban renewal program.” It did more than simply offer its strong approval of the bond issue—it issued a warning that not having such a program could lead to dire circumstances: “Without an immediate and effective approach to property-renewal programs, Louisville cannot maintain its competitive position with other cities.” The local Democratic Party chairman had gone so far as to instruct the Democratic precinct captains “to promote the bond issue as vigorously as they support the party’s candidates.”⁶

While Broaddus worked to rally the white community around urban renewal, the *Louisville Defender* called on its readers to support the bond issue because it would “provide funds that are sorely needed... for civic improvement, building, and the redevelopment of the blighted areas of the community.” The bond issue was a much different remedy for the plight of blacks than the one advocated by the newspaper earlier that year, however. In January 1957, the *Defender* had openly attacked residential discrimination in the city, telling its readers “DECENT HOUSING FOR LOU. NEGROES IS IMPEDED BY SEGREGATION PRACTICES.” In the report that followed, the newspaper claimed that city officials practiced discrimination when doling out public housing assignments to poor blacks and whites. Because public housing

⁶ *Louisville Defender*, October 31, 1957, A3, *Courier Journal*, August 2, 1957, B1, October 28, 1957, A6, October 29, 1957, B1.

projects were segregated and because African Americans needed housing assistance more than whites, those projects reserved for whites stood empty while blacks were left with no place to live. “Whites have access to far better and cheaper private housing on a nondiscriminatory basis,” the newspaper charged. “Segregation has fostered inferior and unsafe housing here for years, but as discrimination is falling apart around the nation, it is only fitting that it should occur here in Louisville where housing for Negroes is sorely needed.”⁷

By the time of the election, the black newspaper had backed off. The *Defender* began to champion renewal, rather than focus exclusively on integrated housing. In “a series of articles designed to acquaint the reading public with the purpose and importance of the proposed \$5 million bond issue,” columnist Clarence Matthews urged blacks to support the measure. “Negroes, especially, should lend their support to the passing of the bond issue,” he wrote, because the areas slated for renewal “are of predominately Negro populations.” In an editorial shortly before the election, the *Defender* bluntly told its readers, “Negro voters are obligated to support the proposed Civic Improvement and Urban Renewal Bond Issue.” According to the newspaper, the bond issue would provide better housing for the poorer members of the black community. “Two of its major purposes,” the editor pointed out, “are designed to particularly benefit us—the elimination of two of our worse slum areas.”⁸ The elimination of these slums, the editorial implied, would mean new and improved housing for the black community.

Matthews had made similar promises in a previous article. Under the headline “Bond Issue Is Important to Louisville’s Negro Citizens,” the columnist had explained to

⁷ *Louisville Defender*, October 24, 1957, A3, January 31, 1957, A3.

⁸ *Louisville Defender*, October 17, 1957, A1, October 31, 1957, A1, October 31, 1957, A6.

readers that “[i]f approved—and it certainly should be—by Louisville citizens,... the bond issue would create a revolving fund that would permit city officials to go ahead... and provide decent homes.” Matthews went on to suggest that the funds “will pay for ‘block busting’ for specific run down areas... for redevelopment as decent housing.”⁹ Essentially, the reporter assured black voters that the bond issue was a safe ticket out of the slums.

Unfortunately, neither Broaddus nor his citizens committee ever confirmed the *Defender*’s sweeping statements. Even further, the week before the election, the *Courier Journal*, a fairly accurate gauge of Louisville’s racial climate, criticized the black community’s protests for open public accommodations. The editorial did not even mention open housing. It did not have to, though, because the message was clear: “We urge them [African Americans] to consider the gains they have made since the war, and to resist the urge to press so hard in the field of private business that they may lose some of their dearly-won victories.”¹⁰ While open housing clearly was beneath the civil rights radar of most white Louisvillians, African Americans wanted the city government to use the money to provide better housing for blacks and “bust the block.” Urban renewal, they hoped, would improve and integrate Louisville’s housing.

Despite the differing agendas of white civic and economic leaders and African American professionals, the votes revealed that a great majority of Louisvillians wanted urban renewal: the bond issue passed by a four-to-one margin. The *Defender* praised its readers for their support, claiming “Negroes, especially, have gained by the passing of the bond issue.” The *Courier Journal* also applauded the voters. “It is great to see a

⁹ *Louisville Defender*, October 17, 1957, A1.

¹⁰ *Courier Journal*, October 31, 1957, A8.

community grasp hold of its own destiny in this positive way,” it editorialized. To the *Courier Journal*, Louisville “is a city that is ready for a rousing future.” It was also a city that wasted no time in putting the money to work. The new Democratic mayor, Bruce Hoblitzell (Broaddus did not seek reelection), quickly established an interim committee to make recommendations for redevelopment and revitalization. He assigned Broaddus to the chair and appointed several local businessmen, including Michael O’Dea, president of the Louisville Real Estate Board, and Barry Bingham, publisher of the *Courier Journal* and the *Louisville Times*, to serve on the committee. They made several suggestions for spending the \$5 million, including the expansion of the Department of Building and Housing Inspection to include urban renewal and the hiring of a consultant for redevelopment projects. In a report to Mayor Hoblitzell, Broaddus described the plan of attack: “It is recommended that the city, through an authorized department or official, proceed as soon as possible to request a Federal capital grant reservation to cover... urban renewal projects.”¹¹

By 1960, the committee had made plans for slum clearance in the Southwick area. Bounded by Dumesnil Avenue, Shawnee Park, 34th Street, and Bohne Avenue, the project contained approximately 149 acres in the southwestern part of the city that had been “redirected for residential and industrial reuse.” According to the development program, this site provided numerous employment opportunities for the area. “A large concentration of industry is within 10 to 15 minutes of this site... DuPont Neoprene, B. F. Goodrich Company, Aetna Oil Company, [and] Louisville Refinery Company.” The

¹¹ *Louisville Defender*, November 7, 1957, A2; *Courier Journal*, November 7, 1957, A6, December 10, 1957, B1; Letter to Hoblitzell from Broaddus, January 28, 1958. Box 2, Folder: Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal, Urban Renewal Agency Records, Louisville City Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. *Louisville Times*, January 28, 1958, A1.

program did not mention, however, that these industries also produced massive quantities of air pollution that would be carried over the proposed housing project by the prevailing winds.¹²

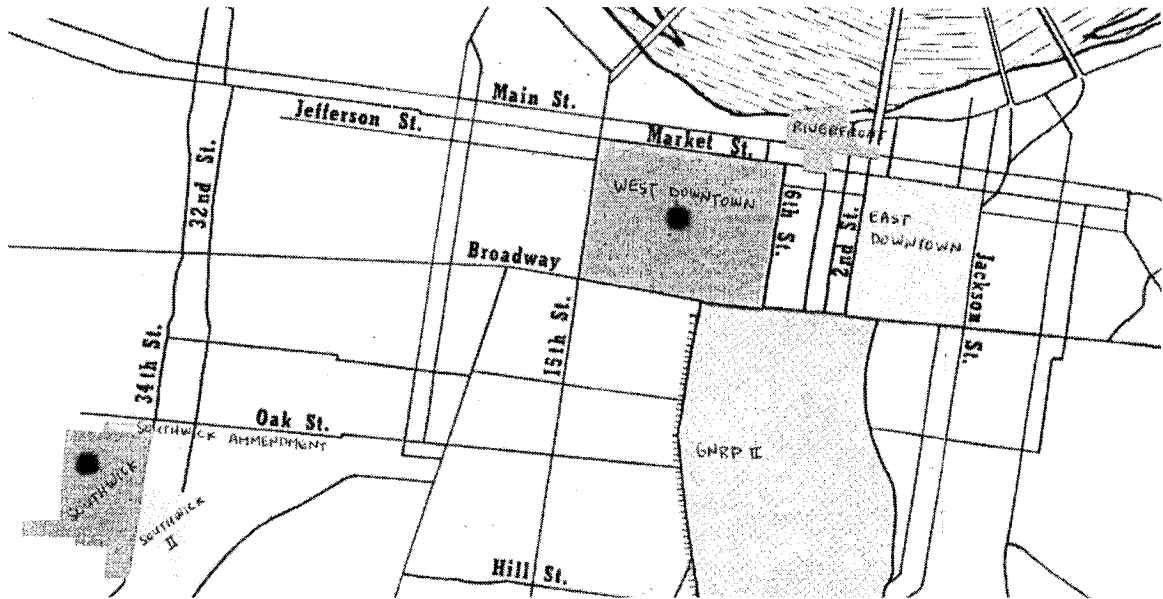


Figure 4a: Map of the General Neighborhood Renewal Program. "Report '62-63," The Urban Renewal and Community Development Agency, Louisville, Kentucky. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

The agency opened a relocation office to “help [the residents] with [their] moving problems” and Mayor Hoblitzell established an “officially appointed Advisory Committee on Relocation for the occupants of the Southwick Redevelopment Project.” He named several prominent African Americans to the committee, including Dr. Charles T. Steele, executive director of the Louisville Urban League, Murray T. Walls, the wife

¹² “Urban Renewal Agency (1962-1980),” Louisville Urban Renewal Agency papers. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky; Municipal Housing Commission, 1956-1961, City of Louisville Municipal Housing Commission Records, Metro Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

of a local doctor, and Reverend W. J. Hodge, a member of the Louisville branch of the NAACP.¹³

Because the advisory committee considered Southwick the location of “some of the worst slums in the City of Louisville,” it took immediate action to remove the blight. The committee mailed an “Informational Statement” to the “site occupants” that read in part: “The house in which you live has been bought by the City of Louisville. It and other houses in this area are on land that has been purchased for the Southwick Redevelopment Project.” The statement informed the residents that “[t]he purpose of the Southwick Redevelopment Project is to correct the substandard housing conditions that exist in the area.” “This will take time,” it cautioned, so the residents “should, therefore, start looking at once for another place to live outside the Project Area.” It went on to list specific guidelines for the residents to follow when shopping for their new home. “Your new location should be ‘decent, safe and sanitary’ in accordance with the City’s fire, health and building codes,” it stated. Further, “It must be large enough for you and your family; it must have hot and cold running water; it must have a private, inside flush toilet and bath facilities, at a rent which you can afford to pay.” Finally, the informational statement issued one last directive: “You should not move into any house which does not meet these standards.”¹⁴

¹³ Letter from Mayor Hoblitzell to Charles T. Steele, Executive Director of Louisville Urban League, May 16, 1960. Conservation – General Files; Box 2: Citizen’s and Mayor’s Advisory Commission. Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁴ “Urban Renewal Agency (1962-1980),” Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky; Conservation – General Files, Box 2: Citizen’s and Mayor’s Advisory Commission. Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

This was a tall order for the African American residents. Housing for black Louisvillians was already in short supply, especially the kind that fulfilled the renewal agency's requirements. But the residents did not have to go house hunting alone. The renewal agency assured the residents that they would be relocated with assistance from local city officials. The City of Louisville even offered to pay "reasonable and necessary moving expenses." The residents of the Southwick project area were strongly encouraged, even subtly threatened, to use these relocation services provided to them by the city: "You will only be evicted if you reject the City's relocation service or available accommodations within reason."¹⁵

Hundreds of poor black families needed homes while they awaited the project's completion, and most heeded the renewal agency's warnings and relied on the relocation office for help. The city's strict neighborhood segregation practices, based in large part on deed restrictions, public sentiment, and the actions of racist realtors, severely restricted the housing opportunities available to those displaced by the Southwick project. Their own financial concerns worked to limit their choices further. Many parents had to feed several hungry mouths as well as provide housing on a low monthly income, such as Claude and Mary Sewell, who raised thirteen children on Claude's paycheck as a car man for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the relocation officers moved the Sewells, and many other families like them, into houses in the West End.

¹⁵ "Informational Statement to Site Occupants," in Conservation – General Files, Box 2: Citizen's and Mayor's Advisory Commission. Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky

¹⁶ Relocation Reports, Project K-12 Southwick Redevelopment I, Box 1: 27 Individual Relocation Files; Miscellaneous Relocation files and plans, (1963-1965). Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. *Caron's Louisville (Jefferson County, Kentucky) City Directory, 1962*. Carson Directory Co. Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1962, pp.

The relocation officers were concerned about more than finding evicted residents a new home, though. “Successful relocation,” wrote the Metro United Way’s Family Relocation Committee, “is dealing with the human factor that put people in the slums in the first place.” According to the relocation committee, the ‘human factor’ seemed to be the families themselves. The committee issued a grave warning to the renewal agency: “unless their [the families] behavior and standards are modified, they will carry with them the seeds of future neighborhood deterioration and blight.” To combat the “spread of slums and blight,” the committee recommended an “intensive community program to rehabilitate disorganized, troubled families.” No mention was made, however, of rehabilitating the white power structure that economically and socially suppressed these “troubled families.” Two years before the publication of Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s controversial *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, the relocation committee expressed Moynihan’s concern about the nature of the African American family. To them, substantive transformation in the socioeconomic status of African Americans could only occur if the black family was remade. The relocation committee feared that if the black family was not rehabilitated, it would carry blight with them into other areas of the city.¹⁷

Although redevelopment progressed steadily in Southwick, little progress was made on the proposed renewal areas surrounding the central business district. To some white Louisvillians, this slow progress in the West Downtown project area threatened the

1071. King Library, Special Collections Reading Room, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁷ Prospectus: Family Relocation Study and Service Project, First Draft, July 1963. Box 6, Folder 2, Metro United Way of Louisville, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965).

economic welfare of their community. Indeed, in the 1961 city elections, urban planning played a prominent role. Both parties made slum clearance part of their platforms: the Democratic candidates promised city beautification and “continued slum clearance,” while the Republicans pledged “urban renewal to bring about the elimination of blight, disease, danger, and filth.” The GOP candidates viscerally attacked the Democrats for their lack of progress in this area. A week before the election, Republican mayoralty candidate William O. Cowger blamed the current administration for the slow pace of urban renewal, maintaining that the planning and zoning commission “does not have an adequate staff to do a good job.” He promised to strengthen the commission’s power if elected. The Republicans linked slow-moving renewal to sluggish industrial growth. At a campaign rally for Cowger and his running mates, United States Senator John Sherman Cooper told over 1,500 Republicans that their candidate would bring new jobs to the city. “Louisville and Jefferson County have not made the industrial growth and made jobs for their people for their people that they had the capacity to do,” he claimed. The Democrats “have not furnished a product that the people want.” Cowger took up the charge, asserting that while Democrats “promised more jobs when they ran four years ago... nothing has been done except... painting the light poles baby blue and installing artificial flowers.”¹⁸

While local candidates tried to avoid the issue of civil rights, middle-class African Americans forced both parties to confront racial injustice in Louisville. The *Defender* recognized the relationship between racial equality and economic progress and demanded that the candidates endorse integration. “In spite of the rosy picture which has been

¹⁸ *Louisville Defender*, November 2, 1961; *Courier Journal*, October 30, 1961, B1, November 3, 1961, B1.

presented during the campaign that Louisville is making tremendous progress not only industrially and economically, but also in the area of human rights,” it editorialized, “our community seems to stand at the crossroads in the journey toward social, political, and economic development.” The newspaper went even further and declared “there can be no genuine and lasting progress in this community until the last vestiges of segregation and discrimination are outlawed.” But the candidates ignored the newspaper’s call for racial justice. And while they traded barbs about urban renewal and economic progress, the candidates definitely agreed on the issue of civil rights—neither one supported forced integration. While Republican Cowger asserted that he was “unalterably opposed to enforced integration,” Democratic candidate William S. Milburn was, as Reverend W. J. Hodge later recalled, “an outright, first class, super-segregationist.” Indeed, before the election Milburn bluntly stated, “If I owned a business and felt that it was in my best interest to keep segregation, I would keep segregation.” Lyman Johnson, who had integrated the University of Kentucky in 1949, remembered that Milburn didn’t even try to court black voters. Johnson recalled that the candidate informed a group of African Americans “... you can’t help me and you sure can’t hurt me.”¹⁹

Even before the adding machines had finished tallying the votes on Election Day, it was clear that Milburn was wrong. Cowger won all of the predominately African American precincts in the city, swinging the election his way. Milburn conceded the loss to Cowger and told reporters “Evidently the people were ready for a change.” Nat Tillman, a reporter for the *Defender*, summed up the results more incisively: “The slogan

¹⁹ *Louisville Defender*, October 26, 1961, A5, A1; *Louisville Times*, October 23, 1961, A1; W. J. Hodge, interviewed by Charles Staiger, December 14, 1977, Louisville Black Community Project, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky; Lyman Johnson, interviewed by Regina Monsour, March 15 and March 25, 1977, Louisville Black Community Project, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

'It's Time for a Change' and the callous attitude maintained by the Democratic organization toward the Negro aspirations for first class citizenship combined to push the Republican party into a long-sought victory." Cowger received 16,500 more votes than his opponent, not only scoring the largest majority in twenty years, but also becoming Louisville's first Republican mayor since 1929. Following the election, *Defender* publisher Frank Stanley, who had refused to support either candidate, made some observations about the recent campaign. He argued that "each mayoralty candidate had set on a course of appealing mainly to the white conservative voters in this community [because] there are more prejudiced and conservative people in Louisville and Jefferson County than there are liberals and Negroes." "In spite of the outcome of Tuesday's election," he wrote, "the task is now to put the pieces together and go forward with the candidates who have been chosen." The *Courier Journal* issued similar statements. Although the newspaper had endorsed Milburn and the Democratic ticket, it rallied behind the new mayor and encouraged its readers to do so as well: "Any officeholder who demonstrates that he is using his best and most unselfish efforts to promote the public welfare must win the respect of the great mass of our citizens, no matter what party label he wears."²⁰

Mayor Cowger quickly went to work fulfilling his campaign promises. By the end of December, he had completely revamped the bureaucratic structure of the city's urban renewal program. While Cowger retained Richard Beck as the city's urban renewal consultant, he appointed three new members to the renewal advisory committee and expanded the committee's powers. The new chairman, Paul Semonin, Jr., a real estate

²⁰ *Louisville Defender*, November 9, 1961; *Courier Journal*, November 8, 1961, A16, November 9, 1961, A10.

agent who had served on the advisory committee under Hoblitzell, expressed his willingness for the “committee to have greater control over policies affecting the local renewal program.” In the past, Semonin explained, the advisory committee did “not always [have] all the information and details it needed to make proper recommendations to the mayor.” Cowger also named John Carpenter, another realtor, to the committee. Carpenter was a vocal opponent of the city’s renewal policies. He told reporters that he was “worried that we are making haste too fast. We are buying, tearing down, pushing people out of their homes and places of business, and where they’re going nobody knows.” The third new member was Kenneth Schmied, the president of the Board of Aldermen and partner in the American Home Supply Company and Congress Realty Company. Cowger retained five members from Hoblitzell’s advisory committee: Deroy Scott and Innes Dobbins, both bankers; Daniel J. Sullivan, a general contractor; and Reuel Hemdahl, a professor at the University of Louisville.²¹

In January 1962, the city’s Board of Aldermen approved the creation of the Urban Renewal and Community Redevelopment Agency. The new agency was charged with administering and overseeing redevelopment in Louisville. The mayor appointed the members to the committee, but the aldermen had the final say. Once approved by the aldermen, the committee members hired their own director. By April, Mayor Cowger had prepared his recommendations: Deroy Scott, Daniel J. Sullivan, Dr. Reuel Hemdahl, and Kenneth Schmied. The aldermen approved of all of them. It was not until May, however, before the aldermen approved of a fifth nominee and D. Irving Long, a local businessman and subdivision developer, took a place on the committee. Three other men were named to ex officio membership: Semonin, Carpenter, and Dobbins. Carpenter declined the

²¹ *Courier Journal*, December 29, 1961, A1.

nomination, though, because of personal reasons. Although the areas to be renewed housed mostly black residents, Cowger did not appoint an African American to the committee until forced to do so by the protests of the black community. Even then, it was only a token position—Cowger named Jesse Warders, a black real estate agent, to the committee as a non-voting member with no real influence over the commission’s policies or procedures.²²

In June, the committee members hired Jack Leeth of Mobile, Alabama, to serve as executive director. Leeth had worked in urban renewal for several years, both in Alabama and in Atlanta, Georgia. His first responsibility in his new job was to get the “West Downtown renewal [project] underway.” Progress on the renewal project had been slow and by 1962, the newly formed urban renewal agency had a lot of work on their hands. In a project report for the West Downtown area, the agency described the decay that plagued the area. “The deterioration is so pronounced and extreme in the residential areas,” the report claimed, “that whatever part conversion to incompatible uses played in deteriorating this neighborhood has long since been swallowed up in hopeless dilapidation.” The report revealed the substandard housing in the project area: “Neglect of proper repair, maintenance and upkeep of yards and buildings pervades the area, and accurately portrays the low standard of living of the area’s residents.” According to the agency, these slums had to be eliminated, not for the well-being of the residents, but for the economic health of Louisville. “Blighted, substandard areas are expensive luxuries which no city or its businessmen can possibly afford,” Richard Beck, the city’s urban renewal consultant, explained to a group of Louisville businessmen. Therefore, 847 of the

²² *Courier Journal*, January 2, 1962, A8; April 10, 1962, B1; May 1, 1962, B1; April 10, 1962, B1.

1,295 structures in the West Downtown project area, or the sixty-five percent that been classified as substandard, had to be “rehabilitated or cleared away for redevelopment.” Many of these were residential buildings.²³

The slums were not urban blight to the people who lived there. As Lyman Johnson remembered, “Surely enough, the houses were not much above hovels, but it was home for those people.” A large number of African Americans resided within the boundaries of the 322-acre project area. Relocation reports reveal that of the 925 families relocated by the renewal agency, a mere forty were white. The 885 remaining families were black. The urban renewal agency relocated most of these families to the West End because that was the area reserved for African Americans. Lyman Johnson explained the process in stark terms: “When they were uprooted, the lending agencies would not provide, and the real estate agencies would not provide homes outside of the West End...” so African American residents were relocated “...further into the West End of Louisville.” Indeed, Jack Leeth put in plain words that his agency did not require whites to rent to relocated African Americans, nor did it “try to control the bargaining over individual sales or rental.” Instead, the relocation agents found homes in the neighborhoods designated for people of color. Rather than using urban renewal as an opportunity to galvanize social change in Louisville, city officials contributed to the housing discrimination already practiced by lending institutions, real estate agents, and local property-owners by relocating blacks into the West End. Leeth denied this,

²³*Courier Journal*, June 26, 1962, A1; Relocation Reports (Statistical and Resident Reports) Final Project Reports, R-10 General (West Downtown) June 1, 1961; Revised February 13, 1962. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. *Courier Journal*, July 7, 1960, A7; August 18, 1960, A1; Carson’s *Louisville (Jefferson County, Kentucky) City Directory, 1962*. Carson Directory Co. Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1962, King Library, Special Collections Reading Room, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

however, claiming that the agency and real estate agents were not “unconsciously working together to push Negroes out of the downtown.”²⁴ To be sure, though, urban renewal functioned as a tool with which white Louisvillians could separate themselves from people of color because they used it to move African Americans out of the business district and into the West End.

Indeed, in 1955, Charles Abrams, a housing analyst from New York City, described in glaring terms how urban renewal affected those it claimed to help most. He charged that “urban development ... was deflected from its original social reform course and pointed toward ousting minorities.” Abrams compared urban renewal to restrictive covenants and argued that the implications of urban renewal had a more damaging effect on African Americans. He reasoned that while racial zoning ordinances “sought mainly to bar minorities from new housing,” renewal programs, like the one in Louisville, “evicted them from housing they already had.” Moreover, “land on which minorities lived and the homes they owned could be taken from them by forced sale in the name of slum clearance without so much as a solatium [sic] for their discomfort.” Lyman Johnson later offered this explanation of slum clearance in Louisville: “urban renewal went through that section and tore down the old shacks and houses the blacks had been living in—were just completely demolished, and no provision was made for the people who inhabited the area.” Even further, Abrams explained that urban redevelopment was often “publicly subsidized and backed by official power.” Abrams was describing no particular

²⁴ West Downtown Project Family and Individual Master-Sheet Relocation Report, December 31, 1965. Relocation Reports (Statistical and Resident Reports) Final Project Reports (project R-10). Louisville Urban Renewal Agency records, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. Lyman T. Johnson interviewed by Regina Monsour, November 9, 1977, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky; *Louisville Times*, January 7, 1963, A3.

urban renewal program, but his words resonated deeply with many in Louisville's African American community.²⁵

In addition to housing, the city's urban renewal program significantly affected black-owned businesses. Goldie Winstead-Bickett, who was married to a funeral home director, remembered how "there were many small business by Negroes" before urban renewal, including a filling station, drug store, and restaurants. She compared the area to Beale Street in Memphis and 125th Street in Harlem, but once urban renewal was implemented "everything was being torn down around me and the situation was so horrible looking." Joseph Hammond, a black business owner, remembered how it affected him. He was fortunate enough to secure a loan when an urban renewal project tore down his restaurant, but others were not so lucky. Some African American entrepreneurs, according to Hammond, "were displaced by urban renewal and not able to relocate their businesses either because of lack of funds, or not being able to find the proper locations, or because [they were unable to secure] enough funding." Hammond scornfully summed up the urban renewal process: "go through and wholesale, just clear out the whole area, and displace everybody at one time."²⁶

While the proposal for the West Downtown project called for a new residential development, the project also included a civic center, transportation center, office district, and an industrial zone. But an elevated parkway along Ninth Street remained the impetus for the project. Louisville's city government had been dreaming about this parkway for a

²⁵ Lyman T. Johnson, interviewed by Regina Monsour, November 9, 1977, Louisville Black Community, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky; Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Housing Discrimination* (New York, 1955), 245.

²⁶ Goldie Winstead-Bickett, interviewed by Kenneth Chumbley, September 12, 1978, Louisville Black Community, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky; Joseph Hammond, interview with Mary Bobo, April 16, 1979. University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky. Tape number 04/16/79 743.

long time. In the summer of 1955, Harland Bartholomew and Associates, the planning and design firm that had prepared the zoning reports for the city in the 1930s, presented the Louisville and Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Commission with a “Report Upon Major Streets.” This report, the sixth part of the “Louisville-Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan,” proposed a system of roads for the urban area. Specifically, the plan recommended that the city build an expressway on Seventh Street to serve as a loop around the central business district to alleviate congestion in the area.²⁷

Two years later, the city held public hearings on the reports presented in the comprehensive plan. In the hearing for the report on major streets, Michael J. O’Dea, president of the Louisville Board of Realtors, suggested that the Seventh Street Expressway be moved two blocks west, to Ninth Street, to allow the business district “more breathing space.” The aldermen agreed and by 1962, urban renewal plans recommended that the Ninth Street Expressway, or Southwestern Radial Expressway as it was also called, run “along the west side of Ninth” and “serve the southwest section of the Louisville Metropolitan Area.” The expressway was to “to provide an avenue for ‘through’ traffic off the local downtown streets and to route traffic bound for downtown to the desired quadrants.” Almost in passing, the proposal stated that the construction of the expressway would require “the removal of four apartment buildings in the Beecher Terrace housing project.” It failed to mention, however, that this would displace hundreds of poor African Americans. As Lillian Hudson, a black woman who worked closely with

²⁷ “A Report Upon Major Streets.” A Part of the Louisville – Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan, August 1955. Prepared for The Louisville and Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Commission by Harland Bartholomew and Associates, St. Louis, Missouri, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

public housing in the 1960s, remembered, “the projects were segregated.... If they built one for whites, they built one for blacks.... Beecher Terrace [was] for blacks.”²⁸

There were also certain stipulations regulating the redevelopment around the proposed expressway. While the plan called for a “low cost housing development” to be constructed west of the expressway, the area east of Ninth Street was a different matter. Indeed, on this side of the street, city officials wanted to encourage economic development. “Restoration of the Central Business District to economic health as a flourishing metropolitan trade center necessitates the restoration of this blighted fringe,” the plan reasoned. Therefore, “nothing short of complete clearance of the major portion of the area will make its restoration possible.” The proposal continued to drive the point home: “Because of its high land value potential, the new uses for cleared areas must be more intensive than those proposed for the rest of the Project area, located west of the Expressway. The uses selected must be those which will compliment [sic] the Business District.” The proposal reflected the zoning policies employed by many city planners in the twentieth century. Zoning laws were commonly used to regulate the land use, especially housing and industrial uses. Because many of these laws were designed to protect single-family homes, in which African Americans could rarely live, and promote economic development for white businesses, the zoning policies often functioned to

²⁸ *Courier Journal*, August 18, 1960, A1; Program of Competition for the design of an urban neighborhood complex for the Urban Renewal and Community Development Agency for the city of Louisville (Louisville, Kentucky: Louisville Urban Renewal Agency, 1962); A Report on a Governmental-Civic Center for Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky (February 1964), pp. 15. Planning and Zoning file – Urban Renewal, University of Louisville Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky; R-10 General (West Downtown) June 1, 1961; Revised February 13, 1962, Summary of Project Data. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky; Lillian Williamson Hudson interview with Betsy Brinson, February 19, 1999. Kentucky Oral History Commission, Frankfort, Kentucky.

constrict where blacks could live.²⁹ In Louisville, the proposal for the West Downtown project sought to protect the economic potential of the business district from the squalor represented by the homes of poor blacks. To urban renewal planners, the Ninth Street Expressway would do just that. It would stand high in the Louisville sky, a symbol of progress in the urban landscape.

The Ninth Street Expressway's construction would not only displace blacks, it would also serve as a physical and visual barrier between the West End and the rest of the city. As far back as 1938, the Federal Housing Administration had recommended using "a high-speed traffic artery ... to prevent the expansion of inharmonious uses to the location on the opposite side of the street." And the proposed elevated highway would do just what the administration had recommended—it would effectively separate blacks from whites, further containing blacks in the west side while whites lived to the east. Although pedestrians and automobiles could move freely underneath the elevated parkway, the imposing structure would certainly act as a concrete dividing line between the part of town assigned to whites and the one assigned to African Americans. Historian Jerrold M. Packard has argued that in the early twentieth century, railroad tracks served a similar purpose. Just as people can move freely under elevated expressways, railroad tracks are not impassable. But, as Packard maintained, "African American neighborhoods tended to be located... [in] places often neatly (and unmistakably) separated from white districts by railroad tracks." The tracks were "the frontier that separated race from race." Similarly, geographer John Kellogg found that major arterials, railroads, and street-car

²⁹ R-10 General (West Downtown) June 1, 1961; Revised February 13, 1962, Summary of Project Data. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky; Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996) 54-58; Anne B. Shlay and Peter H. Rossi, "Keeping Up the Neighborhood: Estimating the Net Effects of Zoning," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 46, no. 6 (December 1981): 703-706.

lines functioned to keep the homes of African Americans and whites separated in nineteenth-century Lexington, Kentucky. To white urban planners in Louisville, the Ninth Street Expressway would have a similar effect. It would not completely isolate African Americans in the West End, but it would function as an unmistakable barrier between the black district and the white one.³⁰

Middle-class black Louisvillians recognized this, and it did not take long before they accused the urban renewal agency of ghettoizing the West End. At a meeting with Jack Leeth, the Louisville Ministerial Association blasted relocation policies that forced African Americans into “already compressed Negro neighborhoods.” They complained that the city’s blacks were “confined by custom if not by law to certain areas of Louisville through written and unofficial agreements among real-estate dealers and lending institutions.” Reverend Daniel J. Hughlett of the Taylortown A.M.E Zion Church accused the urban renewal agency of “pushing everybody down on us.... We’re down to the river now and the only thing we can do is go to Indiana.” The ministers were not just concerned about housing discrimination. They also complained about the kind of people being relocated into their neighborhoods, revealing class divisions within the black community. One clergyman called the newcomers, “suitcase people, transients who have little regard for property or proper behavior.” He continued, revealing the full extent of

³⁰ *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act.* (United States: Federal Housing Administrations, 1938), Part II: Protection From Adverse Influences, paragraph 229; Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 103,146. John Kellogg, “The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865-1887,” *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 48, no. 1 (February 1982): 34-39.

his disdain for the new residents: "It has gotten so I hold my pockets when I walk on the street in front of my church."³¹

Other ministers aired their criticisms of urban renewal at the Governor's Conference on Human Rights in Frankfort. Reverend Aurelius D. Pinckney explained how 1,000 families needed housing due to urban renewal, but "because of a gentlemen's agreement between real estate men and financing institutions,... they can only go one way and they are coming down on us." He added, "We are getting the lowest type of people." Rev. E. Deedom Alston charged that "residents are given no voice in renewal programs which affect them." "Unless the affected minority is part of the deliberative sessions," he warned, "hidden motives are likely to creep in." Such motives may lead to "even more drastic segregation." While Elbert Hines, Kentucky's urban renewal coordinator, conceded that some projects might lead to more residential segregation, he nevertheless maintained "this may be better than leaving Negroes in substandard homes." To him, "the ideal of open-occupancy housing everywhere may be quite a few years away."³² In other words, black Louisvillians had to endure cramped housing in the West End because they were not going to be welcomed into white neighborhoods anytime soon.

There were some white citizens, however, who also expressed concerns about housing for African Americans and the effects of the renewal policies. As early as October 1962, the Housing Committee of the Louisville Human Relations Commission reported that "certain citizens of this city, especially Negroes, do not have free choice of making purchases of property any place in the city, plus mortgage lending institutions are

³¹ *Courier Journal*, October 10, 1962, A22.

³² *Louisville Times*, June 7, 1962, A15.

unwilling to loan money for such purposes.” The Committee, made up of local whites and blacks, also began “looking into the effect of the City’s urban renewal program in increasing the Negro ghetto problem.”³³ The following year, J. Mansir Tydings, the director of the commission, publicly criticized the Louisville Urban Renewal Agency for ghettoizing the West End. In Tydings’ estimation, urban renewal was “going to create the need for another urban-renewal project down the street.” He called on the agency to establish “an open-occupancy policy in urban renewal.” Dr. Maurice Rabb, an African American Commission member, told the *Courier Journal* that Tydings’ statement to the press “is something I have been wanting to say and couldn’t say better.” Rabb, reflecting the class prejudices within the black community, was concerned that the poor blacks moving into the West End were depreciating the property values and the social fabric of the black neighborhood.³⁴

The *Courier Journal* swiftly defended the urban renewal program against attacks of practicing overt racism. “People who live in areas marked for renewal,” it claimed, “belong to the lowest income group and can only afford minimal rents.” The newspaper acknowledged that “most of these people are Negroes” and further explained that “as more and more land is cleared for redevelopment, the crowding in available low-rent quarters *available to Negroes* is intensified.” Certainly, but the *Courier Journal* saw no need to engage in the “the battle for equal housing” at this time. In fact, the newspaper offered a more lengthy and revealing explanation for why such a battle “must be carefully planned and prepared for”:

³³ *First Annual Report of the Louisville Human Relations Commission to the Board of Aldermen and to Mayor William O. Cowger*, for the year beginning June 1, 1962; Minutes of Commission Meetings, October 5, 1962. Louisville and Jefferson County Human Relations Commission, Minutes of Commission Meetings, 1962-1965. City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

³⁴ *Courier Journal*, March 1, 1963, A13; March 5, 1963, B1.

It is open knowledge that racial covenants, although legally outlawed, remain operative with most property owners and real estate dealers.... A bull-dozing operation, aimed at forcing a few score wretched people into neighborhoods which will not welcome them, which indeed would refuse to rent them property and make their lives miserable, would not aid the eventual, orderly breakdown of housing segregation here. Nor are the types of people who need housing now the types of people who should be pushed into the forefront and made to bear the effects of an impulsive effort.³⁵

This passage unmistakably exposed the limitations of white progressivism in Louisville. First, it clearly suggested that the white community knew that racial discrimination, especially in housing, not only existed in the city, but also was very common—so common, in fact, that it could be frankly discussed in the daily newspaper as “open knowledge.” In the city that had received national praise for its racial tolerance, racial discrimination was still accepted social behavior. Because the editorial was written to defend discriminatory urban policies, rather than to expose such policies, it clearly hinted toward complicity on the part of influential white liberals within the community, especially when the editorial invoked the rhetoric of gradualism. The passage also revealed how far these liberals were willing to go in terms of racial justice and equality. They could accept the integration of schools, albeit with a little prodding from the federal government and a lot of prodding from local blacks, but neighborhoods were an entirely different matter. They refused to accept African Americans as their neighbors. The editorial indicated that only “wretched people” needed housing—presumably “undesirable” African Americans—and ignored the many middle-class black Louisvillians who wanted, and could afford, homes in areas outside of the West End. To the *Courier Journal*, and most of the rest of the white community, only one thing mattered when it came to their black neighbors—race. Ultimately, the *Courier Journal*'s

³⁵ *Courier Journal*, March 4, 1963, A6.

defense of urban renewal policies serves as an example of the entrenched racism of the city's white community.

But the city's white racism did not only surface in the local newspaper. It also became apparent in the treatment of African Americans relocated to the West End. In May 1962, Mrs. Louise Parker and a delegation of nine other women "protested lack of shopping facilities, inadequate police protection, and insufficient play areas." The grocery and drugstores torn down by urban renewal construction had not been replaced and the renewal agency had not built the shopping center it had promised. According to Parker, she and her neighbors had to walk seven blocks to the closest grocer. When Cowger discovered that the women represented 496 families and 2,000 children, he jokingly responded that he "might want to open a store in the area himself." While he may have found humor in the situation, the women did not. Parker accused the city of refusing to provide adequate police protection and charged that "that only one police officer has been regularly assigned to the area" even though "two were promised." Even further, she explained "the children have no place to play but the streets and four children have been hurt recently while chasing ice cream trucks." There were holes in the streets and "hard rains" flooded the area because of inadequate sewers.³⁶

But African Americans persistently fought the deterioration of their community. Rather than watch a neglected neighborhood fall further into shambles, Ruth Bryant, a homemaker and a local activist, went to city hall to complain about the poor conditions in a neighborhood near her daughter's school. A member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on community development, Bryant suggested that the group fix up the neighborhood. But the committee failed to remedy the situation. She refused to stop,

³⁶ *Courier Journal*, May 27, 1962, A1.

though, and she went to the West End Community Council, a neighborhood improvement organization to which Bryant belonged, and encouraged it to either restore or remove the houses and pick up the garbage surrounding the school. “We got a little action subcommittee started and we got that [neighborhood] cleaned up,” she remembered proudly.³⁷

Although Cowger promised an investigation of the complaints, a survey of the Southwick project area conducted by the Housing Committee of the Louisville Human Relations Commission in 1965 found that little had improved. “The concern of most residents,” the study reported, is “that there is a concerted effort by the power structure to force all Negroes into the West End.” Not only were they trapped, they were still not receiving essential municipal services. Committee members reported that “there are complaints about the lack of enforcement of zoning laws” which led to the construction of taverns and bars in the same blocks with schools and churches. Residents also noted “the continuation of sub-standard dwellings by absentee landlords” and explained their reluctance to “venture out after dark because of the loitering that is prevalent in the area.”³⁸ To put it mildly, they had been abandoned.

Despite the protests from the black community and the warnings from the Human Relations Commission, the redevelopment agency continued to move blacks out of the downtown area and relocate them in the West End. As more blacks moved in, more whites moved out. The 1960 and 1970 Censuses of Population and Housing confirm this shift in population. In 1960, 3,218 whites lived in census tract nine, in the heart of the

³⁷ Ruth Bryant, interview with Kenneth Chumbley, July 24, 1977, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky, Tape number 592 and 593.

³⁸ Minutes of Commission Meetings, October 1, 1965. Louisville and Jefferson County Human Relations Commission, Minutes of Commission Meetings, 1962-1965, City of Louisville Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

West End, compared to two African Americans. At the end of the decade, however, only 409 white residents remained, while 3,130 blacks, approximately 88.3 percent of the population for that particular census tract, now called the area home. As one woman put it, “the blacks kept coming in and my mother did not like that. Finally we moved out to the southern part of town.”³⁹

So did many others, but the West End Community Council strongly encouraged white residents to stay in their homes. The group implemented a “NOT FOR SALE” sign campaign in order to “stem the tide of panic selling in the West End.” They distributed yard signs to white residents who were instructed to put the placards in their front yards to send a message to their neighbors that it was safe to stay put.⁴⁰ But the *Defender* reported in November 1964 that whites continued to sell their homes and move further away from the city.⁴¹ Census records confirmed what most observers already knew; despite the West End Community Council’s efforts to sustain racially integrated neighborhoods, whites were leaving the area in droves. In fact, a housing survey conducted by the League of Women Voters in 1965 revealed that, while more African Americans lived in the West End than in 1960, fewer whites lived there.⁴²

In an effort to stem the tide of “white flight,” the Human Relations Commission’s Home Visitation Committee created “Occupation Experience,” a program designed to foster racial harmony and acceptance through “face to face interracial contacts.” The plan

³⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960. Census tracts. Final Report PHC(1)-83.* U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1962; U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1970.* PHC(1)-118 Louisville, Ky. – Ind. SMSA. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1972; Carolyn Hall, conversation with author, Bardstown, Kentucky, May 7, 2003.

⁴⁰ *West Louisville Star*, December 5, 1963.

⁴¹ *Louisville Defender*, November 5, 1964.

⁴² League of Women Voters records, Box 31 University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

called for 1,000 interracial “home visitation experiences” before January 1, 1964. The members of two churches, the Meadowview Presbyterian Church, an all-white congregation, and the Peace Presbyterian Church, an all-black congregation, agreed to exchange memberships. Although the “Occupation Experience” program did not meet its goal for January, the Home Visitation Committee reported preparations for more visits in the spring of 1964. “Over 500 intervisits are expected,” the committee proudly reported. More than that, though, “the mayor [Cowger] and his wife... accepted an invitation to participate.” There is no record indicating whether Cowger and his wife enjoyed their visit to the black church, or even if any of the expected 500 “intervisits” took place. Census records do reveal, however, that “Occupation Experience” did not produce the intended results. Whites continued to flee the area.⁴³

“Occupation Experience” was just another example of how Louisville’s white liberals provided token solutions rather than substantial structural change to combat the housing problem in their city. They could have pushed for an open housing ordinance that would have criminalized housing discrimination and allowed blacks to move out of the West End. Instead, they chose to arrange peaceful visits between blacks and whites. Here, blacks and whites would gradually come to know each other, and perhaps, in the end, become friends. But black Louisvillians did not need new friends; they needed better homes. But mingling with white liberals around a church potluck supper was not going to break down the structural racism that kept African Americans from living in the

⁴³ Meeting Minutes, November 5, 1963; April 3, 1964, Louisville Human Relations Commission. City of Louisville, Archives, Louisville, Kentucky. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960. Census tracts*. Final Report PHC(1)-83. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1962. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1962; U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1970*. PHC(1)-118 Louisville, Ky. – Ind. SMSA. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1972.

neighborhood of their choice. In short, “Occupation Experience” did very little to alleviate the plight of the black community.

In the end, Louisville’s white leaders balked at the chance to use urban renewal to eliminate housing discrimination and residential segregation. Instead, the Southwick and West Downtown projects created more racial injustice for the black community. While the city government celebrated revitalization and redevelopment, many African Americans lamented the loss of their homes. The projects forced thousands of families into the already overcrowded black neighborhoods in the West End. Most of the few whites that lived in the West End left the area, but the black residents who could afford to move were kept out of white neighborhoods by real estate agents, lending institutions, and white property owners. Many African Americans complained to city and state officials, arguing that urban renewal strengthened residential segregation and ghettoized the West End.

Despite the protests of the black community, Louisville’s urban renewal agency continued to relocate African Americans into the West End. The agency did nothing to combat the housing situation or challenge existing residential discrimination. Instead, they kept clearing away homes and moving the black residents farther west. The city government, state officials, and the *Courier Journal* defended the redevelopment projects, claiming that the health of the city depended on them. Besides, according to urban renewal’s defenders, it was not the appropriate time to engage in a battle for open housing. It was the time to revitalize the city, though, and the Southwick and West Downtown urban renewal projects fostered the development of a new Louisville—one where blacks lived on the west side of town, while whites lived everywhere else. But in

the late 1960s, African Americans united to protest this racialized urban landscape. In so doing, they exposed the deep-seated white racism that lay hidden beneath the city's progressive reputation.

Chapter Five

“The Whole World is Watching Louisville”

Civil Rights Activism and the Struggle for Open Housing Legislation

After urban renewal relocated most of the black residents from the central downtown area to the West End, African Americans were more determined than ever to end housing discrimination. They were fed up with the substandard, overcrowded living conditions. It would be a tough fight, though, because many white homeowners were invested in maintaining segregated neighborhoods. Indeed, in the spring of 1966, two years after the failed “Occupation Experience” program, four hundred college students from various Louisville universities volunteered to help the Intercollegiate Council on Human Relations survey the attitudes of the city’s white homeowners about residential integration. The council assigned the students randomly selected streets from approximately two-hundred-and-fifty neighborhoods, told them to speak to fifteen homeowners on each street, and gave the students a pledge card for the homeowners to sign. The pledge card read in part: “I will welcome as my neighbor any law-abiding, responsible person, or family; and should I myself sell, rent, or buy property, I will deal fairly with all those interested without reference to their race [or] color...”¹

The response to the pledge card was anything but positive—most homeowners refused to sign the cards. Patricia Bond, one of the volunteers, described how residents “pretended they weren’t home” or “watched to see if neighbors signed” the ‘welcome

¹ *Courier Journal*, March 24, 1966, B1.

neighbor' cards. Other students received more straightforward answers. "Residents who are strongly opposed to integrated housing say 'goodbye' pretty fast," explained student Jo Ann Lenaham. They certainly did. On average, only three out of the fifteen homeowners polled on each street signed the card. One student concluded, "It was depressing... the number of 'no's' and those not signing."²

Most African American Louisvillians could have predicted these results. They knew firsthand that the city's white community barred people of color from their neighborhoods and denied African Americans better housing in areas reserved for whites only. In the wake of the federal Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965), black Louisvillians garnered an ally they had never had before—the federal government—and were anxious for an immediate end to racial oppression, especially when it came to housing. James Farmer, national director of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), recalled that all across the nation, "This was an era when most civil rights activists sought not to improve conditions in the ghetto but to wipe out the ghetto itself." This was certainly true in Louisville. African American ministers and homemakers, teachers and students insisted that the aldermen pass a strict ordinance to criminalize discrimination by realtors and homeowners.³

Just as they had done fifty years before, when they had appealed to the city's alleged "amiable" race relations to prevent the segregation ordinance from being passed, civil rights activists called on Louisville's white community to make good on the city's progressive image. They urged white women and religious leaders to support open

² *Courier Journal*, March 24, 1966, B1.

³ James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1998), 196.

housing legislation. Such legislation, they argued, would be an economic benefit for the entire city because it would attract professional men and women to Louisville. When appeals to economics failed, the open-housing activists were willing to take the insurgency to the next level: they targeted the Kentucky Derby. They threatened to demonstrate at the famous horserace if the aldermen failed to pass a strict open-housing law. Although the demonstration was cancelled, civil rights activists were successful in calling attention to the housing situation in Louisville. No longer could local whites call their city a place of racial progress. Because the city government continued to refuse to pass an open-housing law, activists stepped up their efforts and lobbied the federal government to deny the city urban redevelopment funding. In letters and phone calls, they informed Vice President Hubert Humphrey and other national officials that Louisville should not engage in further redevelopment until the local government enacted a law to protect African American homeseekers from discrimination. They complained that urban renewal funds had been used to relocate African Americans to the West End and they wanted to prevent further relocation until those who could afford to move out of the overcrowded area were allowed to do so. Although the activists successfully diverted federal funds from the city, they did not secure the passage of the open-housing law, so they turned their attention to removing the local leaders from office. In November 1967, civil rights activists took to the ballot box and soundly turned out the politicians who had refused to pass open-housing legislation. And in the end, they gained a law to criminalize housing discrimination.

Once again, Louisville was in the national spotlight, only this time it was for racial oppression, not racial progress. Across the country, from New Jersey to

Mississippi, people turned their attention to the plight of black Louisvillians who lived in overcrowded, substandard conditions in the West End. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the city several times to lead marches, give sermons, and meet with local leaders to coordinate the attack on housing discrimination. Louisville's own Muhammad Ali returned to join the struggle, telling the world that he would not fight communism abroad while his people at home were denied full equality, a decision that would ultimately cost the boxing champion his title. Ultimately, the national attention energized black Louisvillians to take to the streets to end residential segregation, and it undermined the city's image as place of peaceful of race relations.

The intensified civil rights activity in Louisville during the late 1960s came as the national civil rights movement reached its zenith. Federal laws had not eradicated the structural racism that impeded social and economic progress for African Americans and civil rights activists continued their efforts. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had begun to move the crusade for racial equality and economic justice out of the South and into Northern cities, where African Americans were growing increasingly frustrated with racial oppression and economic inequality. In places such as Watts, Detroit, and Newark, African Americans took to the streets to demand change. The rise of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, under the leadership of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, frightened many white Americans and excited many black Americans, who welcomed the Panthers's activism for self-reliance and self-defense against white violence. The calls for racial justice and economic

opportunity reverberated across the county in the late 1960s, and black Louisvillians were galvanized by and active participants in this national movement for civil rights.⁴

This chapter examines how civil rights activists in Louisville challenged the informal discrimination of homeowners who refused to rent or sell to them and the institutional discrimination of lending institutions and real estate agents who denied them the opportunity to secure housing outside of the West End. In so doing, it reveals how activism cut across racial lines, as white professors and religious leaders joined black ministers, students, and laborers to protest racial oppression in Louisville. It also shows how African Americans came together, regardless of class, to fight for open occupancy in Louisville. At the same time, however, this chapter reveals how local civil rights movements were rife with internal conflicts, particularly over strategy, and analyzes the intersection between Louisville's local movement and the national movement for civil rights. This chapter also explores the violent reaction of many white Louisvillians to the open-housing law, demonstrating even further that housing—not school integration, voting rights, or public accommodations—was at the root of racial conflict in Louisville. White homeowners and black homeseekers understood that housing provided societal standing, economic mobility, and financial vitality. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the

⁴ James Ralph Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Steven Estes, *I Am A Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Michael Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, (reprint edition, Black Classic Press, 1997); Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (reprint edition, Delta press, 1999); Phillip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: 1970); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

limitations of the law for bringing about social change. Although the Board of Aldermen eventually passed an open-housing ordinance, the lived realities of many black Louisvillians did not change. Ultimately, an examination of the battle over open-housing legislation illustrates the complex relationship between race, class, and housing, as well as the inability of public policy to affect private prejudice.

* * * *

In the late 1960s, civil rights activists began a deliberate campaign to integrate Louisville's neighborhoods. Not satisfied with token desegregation in schools and public spaces, black Louisvillians united across class lines to eliminate the informal and institutionalized discrimination that kept them trapped in the West End. They joined with sympathetic whites to speak out against discriminatory lending institutions and real estate brokers, exposing another layer of the white community's racism toward African Americans. In fact, the interracial Louisville Human Rights Commission, established in 1962 by the Board of Aldermen, urged churches and concerned individuals to deposit and invest their funds only with banks and lending institutions that did not discriminate against qualified African American buyers. The Commission's Real Estate Transactions Subcommittee went even further and established a "Clearing Housing" project to lend support to real estate agents committed to working for open occupancy.⁵

In a speech before the League of Women Voters, Bill Woolsey, a white member of the Human Relations Commission, argued that residential integration would be a solid step toward economic progress for all Louisvillians, not just the city's black citizens. He also described the situation many African Americans faced when trying to find a place to

⁵ League of Women Voters, Box 31, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

live. Woolsey appealed to the women's maternal instincts when he asked, "Do not all of us, when we approach that momentous time when we contemplate buying a new home, take into consideration the needs and desires of the children in the family?" But not all of Louisville's citizens were able to do that, Woolsey told them. "In Louisville, Kentucky, a Negro citizen enjoys no such consideration." He continued: "Perhaps he can afford to buy a new house in the \$15,000 to \$18,000 range. How many, do you think, are available to him? Perhaps he works in the rapidly expanding industrial section in the South End of Jefferson County. How many homes within easy access are available to him?" Undoubtedly, many of the women in Woolsey's audience were surprised to hear the answer to these questions. "Not many, in either case," he bluntly stated. "And perhaps none at all that he likes." These white women could no longer claim ignorance to the plight of Louisville's black community. Woolsey showed them that African Americans could afford and wanted to move out of the West End, but white racism kept them from doing so. Whites should be concerned about this unfortunate situation, he warned. "I don't think of Open Occupancy as a Negro problem. I think it is everybody's problem. When it is solved, it will not be just a Negro success. It will be everybody's success."⁶

The Louisville Urban League conducted a study of the quality and amount of housing available to well-employed African American workers that confirmed Woolsey's point. The study showed that the lack of an open-housing law hurt the city economically because it kept many professional African Americans from relocating to Louisville. According to the report, local employers "had trouble convincing [African Americans] to come here because they were unable or hard-pressed to find desirable housing." In one

⁶ League of Women Voters, Box 34, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

case, the local Urban League found a qualified worker at the request of a local plant, but the worker had to resign after two weeks because he could not find suitable housing. Other cases similar to this one illustrated that local leaders' refusal to remedy the housing dilemma made it unappealing to qualified professional men and women whose money could help bolster the city's economy.⁷

While some activists used community organizations to struggle against housing discrimination, others used the political arena to fight this racial injustice. Elected in 1963 as the alderperson for the predominately black twelfth ward, Louise Reynolds, an African American, used her political power to push for an open-occupancy ordinance. "It wasn't important to me to live in a neighborhood with anybody," she explained. "My reason was to be able to live wherever you can afford." Reynolds described the social dynamics of the city during the early sixties: there was "an unwritten law... you couldn't borrow money to... bust the block then." Even further, she recalled that "it was in the deed that they were not supposed to sell to Negroes." Reynolds remembered that she "tried very hard to get [the other] aldermen to go along with [the open-housing ordinance] because... we had opened up the doors and we had to continue to make progress." However, she "didn't get the support... that [she] wanted and hoped for." This was not surprising, since the other aldermen were white. The alderwoman continued to battle for a strong ordinance, though, and she did not compromise. When a weakened version of the ordinance came up for vote in 1966, she voted against it. She later explained, "it wasn't an enforceable ordinance.... It was a watered-down thing."⁸

⁷ *Louisville Times*, April 11, 1967.

⁸ Louise Reynolds, interview with Mary D. BoBo, June 13, 1979, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

Most open-occupancy supporters agreed and they increased their efforts to secure a tough law that abolished housing discrimination. Ray Bixler, a professor at the University of Louisville, urged religious leaders to speak out on behalf of a stronger open-housing law. In a paper presented to Louisville's Council on Religion and Race, the sociologist criticized city officials for their inaction on passing a new ordinance. The "Aldermen would like for us to believe that the West End is one large mixture of whites and happy contented blacks living in fine spacious homes," he derided. Bixler did not isolate the blame to city officials only: "The realtors claim that they are merely agents of the seller doing his bidding; they do not fear economic reprisals if they sell to a Negro." Mocking them, he said, "[W]hy, they are all in favor of open housing." He insisted, "Negroes and whites of good will must unite to achieve our goal of equality of opportunity. We are not to be scoffed at numerically. We definitely hold the balance of power and we must exploit it." By the end of 1967, African Americans would do just that and unseat politicians reluctant to support open housing.⁹

Bixler extended his passionate pleas for racial tolerance to influential religious leaders in more personal ways, too. He wrote to the Reverend Robert Estill at Christ Church Cathedral: "I am of the impression that now is an extremely desirable time for a group of community leaders to speak out in support of open housing." Bixler believed that such a group could lend much needed credibility to the cause. "If they were to speak out for an ordinance, broad in coverage with enforcement provisions, including injunctions," he penned, "I think the scale might well be tipped." Finally, he directly asked Estill to make a move to support open housing. "If you agree with me and feel that

⁹ Ray Bixler papers, Box 5, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

you could bring a group together for the purpose of considering this action, I hope very much you will do so.” Religious leaders like Estill heeded Bixler’s call and joined the fight for an open-housing law.¹⁰

Open-occupancy advocates were optimistic that in the spring of 1967 the city’s Board of Aldermen would vote in favor of an open-housing ordinance. Reverend Leo Lesser, one of the most vocal supporters against housing discrimination, pronounced that “Open housing will be a fact soon in the city of Louisville.” He and A. D. Williams King, Martin Luther King Jr.’s brother, encouraged the black community to take direct action to show the local government that they would not be satisfied until a law had passed to end housing discrimination. Ministers and business owners, homemakers and laborers, teachers and students rallied and marched to demonstrate their support for fair housing and to encourage the aldermen to pass the ordinance. As one participant remembered, “I felt I was doing something that I might not have been able to see the fruit of it, but...my children would. And I marched for that because I was tired of substandard housing.”¹¹

Many whites refused to admit that black Louisvillians were restricted from living where they chose and resented the Board of Aldermen for even considering a proposal to open up housing in the city. These angry whites initiated a letter-writing campaign to the *Courier Journal* to voice their opposition to the ordinance. The newspaper was happy to oblige, and as usual, echoed the mantra of gradual integration. One man wrote to the *Courier Journal*, “It seems sort of stupid to me, all this talk, demonstrations, etc. about an open-housing ordinance, when it is perfectly clear that anyone who is able to afford a

¹⁰ Ray Bixler papers, Box 5, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹¹ *Courier Journal*, April 1, 1967, B1; Jesse Irvin, interview with Kenneth Chumbley, June 28, 1997. University of Louisville Archives and Records. Tape number 461:06/28/97.

house in any section of this city can buy one now.” This letter voiced the attitudes of many white liberals in Louisville. To them, housing discrimination did not exist in their progressive community. But even in the event that housing discrimination against blacks was confirmed and the ordinance passed, the letter writer still refused to have the city dictate to him: “[c]ertainly any ordinance passed by the aldermen would not cause me to sell to someone to whom I did not wish to sell, for this is a free choice that is not the alderman’s to take from me.”¹²

Other open-housing opponents called the ordinance unconstitutional because it violated a homeowner’s right to dispose of property to whomever he wanted. “It seems the mayor and his puppets [the aldermen] could put their meetings to a more constructive use than the ridiculous battle with the Negro preachers and their imported riot technicians over the stupid ordinance that could put a white man in jail if he insisted on selling or renting his property to a white person,” wrote one white: “The ordinance is unconstitutional and could never become law, so the mayor is foolishly wasting a lot of taxpayers’ money.” Another asserted that “[a]ny law or ordinance or statute that deprives any person of the inalienable right to rent and sell their property to whomsoever they please is, in my opinion, the destruction of civil rights rather than their enhancement.” Finally, one white asked “[w]hat exactly does the Negro want? He got his civil-rights bill passed. Isn’t that enough? It isn’t the Negro who is being discriminated against any more at all; it’s the white man. And, frankly, I find it calamitous.”¹³

Other Louisville whites expressed the common notion that “outside” agitators and white clergymen were encouraging discontent among local blacks and unnecessarily

¹² *Courier Journal*, March 31, 1967, A8.

¹³ *Courier Journal*, March 31, 1967, A8; April 6, 1967, E1; April 9, 1967.

disrupting the city's peace. This was a charge issued all across the South, as white segregationists and white liberals alike blamed outsiders for increased civil rights activity. Southerners had always been fiercely protective of "home rule" and they insisted that they knew better than anyone how to deal with "their" African Americans. In March 1967, open-housing advocates had started to campaign aggressively for the ordinance's passage by demonstrating and marching in the South End of the city. Hulbert James, director of the West End Community Council, a neighborhood improvement association formed in 1963, explained, "We have no alternative but to take to the streets." According to some whites, however, they did. "It seems to me that they have the preferable alternative of remaining home and behaving themselves as decent people should," wrote one opponent. But they did not "behave" themselves and some whites accused outsiders of inciting local blacks. To them, Louisville's blacks had been content with the current housing situation until civil rights agitators had come to town to stir them up. One *Courier-Journal* reader wrote, "all this alleged open-housing should be dropped. I am of the opinion that there are a few agitators who would stop in one minute if it were not for the money that they can get out of it. I think the welfare of both white and colored would be best served by dropping the whole thing." Others chastised the white clergymen who participated in the demonstrations: "For the most part, these people live apart from everyday life and certainly cannot comprehend all the complexities involved in this matter. If church-going people would cut off contributions, I am sure these clergymen would not only be willing, but be forced to resume the role in life for which they were originally intended."¹⁴

¹⁴ *Courier Journal*, March 8, 1967, A4; March 31, 1967, A8; May 3, 1967, A8.

Criticisms of the open-housing movement were not confined to newsprint, and white supremacist organizations openly protested against integrated neighborhoods. The Concerned Citizens Committee, led by Joseph Krieger, often held their own rallies and demonstrations. According to Krieger, the CCC would “do anything and everything that may be necessary to protect our rights and freedoms.” Louisville’s CCC was modeled after the Whites Citizens’ Councils in the Deep South. Organized in 1954, just two months after *Brown v. Board of Education*, in Indianola, Mississippi, by business and civic leaders, the WCC sought to preserve segregation through legal means. WCC members used economic and social intimidation to maintain the racialized status quo in the South. By 1956, there were 80,000 members in Mississippi alone, including Senator James O. Eastland. The WCC spread across the south as upper-middle-class whites, who frowned upon the violent tactics used by the Klan, organized in other southern states, including Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas.¹⁵

The CCC was not alone in its efforts to prevent racial integration in Louisville’s neighborhoods. In 1967, a second Jefferson County unit of the Ku Klux Klan was established. According to Kleagle Charles Purlee, both units had at least “1,000 men.” The new unit was celebrated with a motorcade through Louisville, in which cars were adorned with KKK flags and signs that read “King says ‘We Shall Overcome’; Klan says ‘Like Hell You Will.’” The motorcade stopped just south of Louisville, in Bullitt County,

¹⁵ *Courier Journal*, March 31, 1967, B1; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 45-46; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 82-83; Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 84-85.

where Hanlee's Restaurant entertained a group of fifty hooded men and women at a spaghetti dinner.¹⁶

Civil rights opponents did not simply parade through the city with anti-open housing banners. Many whites openly protested against integrated neighborhoods and sometimes as many as eight hundred whites at a time took to the streets in violent opposition to the black demonstrators. "It was vicious," one newspaper reporter recalled: "The crowd of whites were waiting for the blacks to arrive, so they could tell them to go back to Africa or whatever they were going to tell them. But it was not kind." Even the *Courier Journal*, concerned with the affect of such ugly confrontations on the city's public image, scorned the behavior of the white hecklers. In an editorial, the newspaper accused them of making "an ugly spring ritual out of harassing and attempting to inflict bodily harm on peaceful open-housing marchers." Reverend Charles Tachau, a white civil rights activist, remembered that "a good deal of Louisville... was horrified by" the behavior of certain whites, suggesting that the white community was divided over the appropriate response to the civil rights activists. "Some certainly were opposed to the black aspirations, but some were, certainly lots of people, were horrified by the extent of the violence of the counter demonstrations," Tachau explained. Indeed, they understood that just as school desegregation had little effect, so too would an open-housing law, and they feared the effect racial violence would have on the community's reputation for social harmony. When the open-housing demonstrations began, whites merely heckled the marchers, yelling epithets such as "I'd rather be homosexual than black." As the tensions mounted, so too did the violence against the open-housing demonstrators.

¹⁶ *Courier Journal*, March 31, 1967, B1; *Courier Journal*, October 9, 1967, B1; October 16, 1967, B1.

Protesting whites sometimes spit on the marchers, or threw objects at them. “We was thrown at, we was heckled, they threw bottles, eggs, and then they actually came out and physically abused us,” one demonstrator later remembered.¹⁷

Tensions increased as the date for the Board of Aldermen’s vote on the ordinance approached. Blacks continued their mass meetings, rallies, and demonstrations. The *Courier Journal* attempted to assuage white concerns over the ordinance. One editorial argued that the ordinance was “hardly a revolutionary document” and explained that it would not “force anyone to sell his house if he didn’t want to.” Instead, the function of the ordinance was to prevent discrimination on the part of real estate agents and lending institutions. Thus, it was “absurd to assert that it would take away individual property rights, or to declare that such legislation is unconstitutional.” Even further, and perhaps most important to the *Courier Journal* and most whites, “white neighborhoods would not be inundated with Negroes”; rather, the process would be “a gradual one.”¹⁸

Restoring peace in the city was the newspaper’s main concern, not racial justice: “We are on the edge of violence over this issue now, and the longer the Board of Aldermen stalls, the graver the threat becomes. If City Hall wants racial peace in Louisville, the best way to get it is to move quickly to pass an open-housing ordinance.” The editor urged the Board of Aldermen to pass the ordinance, assuring both city officials and readers that it “would not lead to a great movement of Negroes from one area to another.” In other words, the ordinance was safe. White homeowners could still

¹⁷ *New York Times*, April 19, 1967, April 20, 1967; Interview with Kenneth Rowland by Ethel White, Kentucky Oral History Commission, Frankfort, Kentucky, June 30, 2001. Tape number 6; *Courier Journal*, April 22, 1967; Charles B. Tachau, interview with author, Louisville, Kentucky, September, 2002; *Courier Journal*, April 13, 1967, A1; Jesse Irvin, interview with Kenneth Chumbley, June 28, 1997. University of Louisville Archives and Records. Tape number 461:06/28/97.

¹⁸ *Courier Journal*, April 2, 1967, B2.

protect their neighborhoods from African Americans, for even with the ordinance, they could sell their homes to whomever they wished. Moreover, the racial turmoil was tarnishing the city's image. "Further delay," the newspaper editorialized, "can only make it more difficult still for Louisville to hold its reputation as a city of calm, reasoned progress in race relations." To the *Courier Journal*, passage of the law would reaffirm the Louisville's progressive image. Because it did not create an independent council to investigate complaints, the law as proposed was unenforceable. Even further, the law did not apply to homeowners, nor to multi-family homes, so it would not lead to a significant change in the city's segregated housing patterns.¹⁹

But the Board of Aldermen did not listen to the cries of the black community or heed the newspaper's plea for moderation. The ordinance failed decisively by a vote of 9 to 3. According to a statement issued by the board, the "ordinance was rejected because of the demonstrations by open-housing advocates, 'premeditated widespread disorders' and outside 'agitators.'" One alderperson told a television audience that there would be "no further action until the community regains composure and the outsiders go home." Apparently, most of the aldermen rejected the notion that Louisville's blacks disliked housing discrimination. Instead, these aldermen held fast to Louisville's image of racial progress and they announced, "our Negro community is better housed and better employed than in any city of comparable size in the country." Rather than attempting to alleviate racial tensions, the board of aldermen had drawn the battle lines even starker.²⁰

¹⁹ *Courier Journal*, April 2, 1967, B2; March 31, 1967, A8. For the full text of the proposed law, see *Courier Journal*, March 2, 1967, A17.

²⁰ *Courier Journal*, April 12, 1967, A1; April 13, 1967, B1; WAVE 3 News, April 11, 1967. Canister 27, reel 2, University of Kentucky Audio Visual Archives.

If city leaders and the white community had been concerned about Louisville's national reputation before the aldermanic meeting, their fears only increased after it. On Tuesday, May 2, 1967, five black teenagers dashed onto the track at Churchill Downs in Louisville, into an oncoming field of ten charging horses. As the crowd booed, the young men ran along the rail as the thoroughbreds stampeded past them. Sprinting back into the infield, they were chased by police and arrested for disorderly conduct, malicious mischief, trespassing, and banding together to commit an unlawful act. The jockeys aboard the racing horses responded with the same bitterness shown by the crowd. One told reporters, "If anyone else gets in front of me, I'll run 'em down." Another boldly claimed that "if they want to get out there again, I'm going to nail them. If they want to play games, we'll play games." But to some, the young men were heroes. A group of open-housing supporters congregated at the track's main gate and sang freedom songs to protest the arrest of the horse-chasers and the ejection of other African Americans from the track on petty charges. That night about two hundred demonstrators marched around the block of 22nd and Walnut in support of the young men. Hosea Williams, the project director of the SCLC, told the marchers and reporters, "Those children did a great thing. They brought to light on a national arena our problems here in Louisville."²¹

Although leaders of the Committee on Open Housing, an hoc group recently organized to push for an open-housing ordinance in the city, denied responsibility for the actions of the five teenagers, they nonetheless warned white Louisvillians that if city leaders did not pass an open-housing ordinance, they would disrupt the community's most prized event: the Kentucky Derby. "No housing, no Derby!" they exclaimed.

²¹ *Courier Journal*, May 3, 1967, B1.

Canceling the Derby would have been disastrous for city leaders, Derby festival organizers, and the city's white business owners, and they grew alarmed at the impending threat to the famous race. Not only could a civil rights demonstration at the track on Derby Day lead to injured spectators and horses, but it could also damage Louisville's progressive reputation as television cameras would broadcast the debacle to the nation. While whites struggled to protect *their* Derby and their progressive reputation, open-housing advocates continued to issue "no open housing, no derby" warnings. Their pronouncements left whites and blacks across the nation wondering what would happen in Louisville on the first Saturday of May.²²

The *Courier Journal* called on the open-housing advocates to cancel the protest. "Any scenes of strife would be recorded by the television cameras for a nation-wide audience. Such an episode could only harden the minds of Louisville aldermen and give the majority of that group a fresh excuse for refusing to act," the editor wrote. He went further, warning that a protest at the track would cause "civil rights measures in other cities and states and in Congress...to suffer." In short, "open housing ha[d] nothing to gain and a great deal to lose" by disrupting the Kentucky Derby. The newspaper was in effect warning the leaders of the open-housing movement that they would lose crucial white support, both in Louisville and across the country, if they followed through with plans to disrupt the race.²³

Across the nation, Derby fans kept a watchful eye on the open-housing situation in Louisville, and some wrote to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to voice their displeasure at the SCLC's threat to the famous horserace. One spectator from East Orange, New Jersey,

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Courier Journal*, May 4, 1967, A16.

wrote: "I am an active worker in the cause of fair treatment to Negroes and have been an admirer of your fine leadership. Your recent actions, however, have disappointed me, especially your threats to the city of Louisville via the racing meet." Apparently, the horse race was more important than racial justice. In other cases, locals kept those out-of-state apprised of civil rights activity in Louisville. Mrs. Gladys Allen informed the director of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a group formed to maintain segregation and African American inferiority, of the campaign for open housing in Louisville. She sent him several newspaper clippings from the *Courier Journal* about the open-housing demonstrations.²⁴

The city of Louisville, not knowing exactly what the black community was planning to do, took precautions. The Kentucky Derby Festival committee cancelled their Pegasus Parade, at a loss of an estimated loss of \$300,000, "to protect the best interest of the participants and spectators." The theme of the parade had been "Great Moments in American History." City leaders attempted to negotiate with open-housing leaders to call off the protest. A.D. Williams King told reporters, "We hope we are able to make some concessions in order to call it [the Derby demonstration] off." City officials implemented a moratorium on marches and demonstrations, but the civil rights leaders did not give in. Suddenly, just forty-eight hours before the Derby, Eugene Alvey, city law director, announced the discovery of three existing laws that prevented housing discrimination. He claimed that the laws were "much broader than the proposed ordinance rejected...by the Louisville Board of Aldermen." The city was optimistic, but not for long. Rev. A.D. King

²⁴ Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office, Reel 17, microfilm; Records of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Folder 3-27A-0: Kentucky Incidents, Newspaper Clippings, Etc. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

announced that the Committee on Open Housing “would have to study the laws before deciding what to do.”²⁵ He did not mention canceling the Derby.

Anxiety increased as Churchill Downs and city leaders prepared for the big day. The track increased security for the race, although officials refused offers of assistance from members of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan. Mayor Kenneth Schmied called on Governor Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt for help. Breathitt was no Orval Faubus, and he prided himself on Kentucky’s passage of a Civil Rights Act in 1966. The governor answered Schmied’s call for assistance and promptly issued a statement that the “race will be run.” He also telephoned Martin Luther King Jr., whom he had met when King led the 1964 March on Frankfort, in order to convince the civil rights leader to stop the demonstration. Breathitt remembers telling him “this is not an issue of the Derby and you’ll have 130,000 people there and an infield full of college students, two dollar bettors that are out on both sides of the track and if they hold up the Derby, your young people will probably get hurt. You must not do that. There are other ways...But this is the wrong place. It’s Kentucky’s showcase event and we’ll protect it.” But King “held firm.” So, on race day, Breathitt called out the National Guard and “had all the state police in the state” stationed at the track.²⁶ In short, nothing was going to stop Louisville from having its Derby.

A breaking story in the *New York Times* on Friday, May 5th, offered some relief to concerned Kentuckians. An insider had leaked information regarding about at an all-

²⁵ *Louisville Defender*, May 4, 1967, B6; *Courier Journal*, May 2, 1967, A7, May 4, 1967, A32, B1.

²⁶ *Lexington Leader*, May 2, 1967, 2; Kenneth E. Harrell, ed., *The Public Papers of Governor Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt, 1963-1967*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997; Governor Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt, interview with author, Lexington, Kentucky, October 2002.

night meeting of the movement's leaders. The article asserted that Martin Luther King, Jr., "has been opposed to any action at the Derby that might possibly cause riot or panic." According to the newspaper, SCLC workers had encouraged a protest at the well-known horse race to "bring the housing problems of Louisville's Negroes to the nation's attention." "Reliable sources" had even disclosed that these same workers had coordinated the efforts of the five teenagers who had run into the path of oncoming horses earlier in the week. The inside sources had divulged even more shocking information: the Derby demonstration was cancelled.²⁷

The *New York Times* report sent open-housing leaders into an uproar. After learning of the report, A.D. King angrily promised to "mount demonstrations" again. Police arrested protestors at the track on Friday for holding a sit-down at the ticket window. Others were detained for marching on Central Avenue beside Church Downs. That evening, police arrested demonstrators beginning a march in the South End, near the track. They would not be deterred, though. "We will have action centered around Churchill Downs tomorrow," A.D. King vowed.²⁸

But at 10:30 AM on Derby day, Martin Luther King Jr., officially called off the demonstration, much to the disappointment of some of the rank-and-file members of the local movement. Fearing a race riot, he announced that he had "advised the local leadership to withhold direct action around the Derby. And they have agreed." Instead, they paraded through downtown Louisville. But King made it clear that the battle for open housing was not over. In the coming weeks, he promised, "we will be working more vigorously and actively." King's decision earned praise from the *Courier Journal*. Two

²⁷ *New York Times*, May 5, 1967; Lucretia Ward interview. University of Louisville Oral History Center, Archives and Records Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁸ *Courier Journal*, May 6, 1967, A1.

days after the race, the newspaper editorialized that the “good judgment” of the open-housing leaders warranted “the gratitude of all thoughtful citizens of Louisville.” It warned, however, that the issue would not be settled until city leaders endorsed and passed an ordinance. One of the foot soldiers who was unhappy with King’s announcement and the alternate plan told a newspaper reporter, “I don’t see any point in this [the downtown march]. I wanted to go to the Derby. I personally would have laid down on the track.”²⁹

Although open-housing advocates did not protest at the Derby, their threat polarized Louisville. Civil rights demonstrations had gained the attention of the nation, and whites could no longer claim their city as progressive. In the heat of the open-housing battle, Clarence Matthews, a columnist for the *Louisville Defender*, wrote that “in terms of general progress, Kentuckians have often ‘thanked God for Mississippi’ which has prevented the state from being at the bottom of the list.” But, he went on, “this time honored standard may not be true anymore in the wake of disorders accompanying open housing demonstrations in the South End of Louisville.” Newsmen who came to the border city compared the civil rights “action with the worst deep south anti civil rights activity [sic].” Once praised by reporters, two American presidents, and anti-apartheid activists in South Africa as a place of racial progress, Louisville could no longer represent itself to the nation as tolerant. Finally, the city’s long history of racial oppression had been exposed to a national audience.³⁰

Now that they had gained national attention, civil rights activists used financial leverage to force social change by challenging Louisville’s application to the federal

²⁹ *Courier Journal*, May 7, 1967, A1, A28; May 8, 1967, A10.

³⁰ *Louisville Defender*, April 20, 1967, A1.

Model Cities program. In their campaign to block the city's application to the federal program, open-housing advocates further exposed on a national level the racism hidden beneath the city's progressive image. Funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Model Cities program was part of President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty and sought to develop and improve inner-city ghettos. But black Louisvillians did not only want to renovate the ghetto, they wanted to move out of it. Because local white leaders were largely unresponsive to their demands, they decided to voice their complaints on a national stage. They began a campaign to stop the granting of federal funds until the housing situation was remedied.³¹

Using the offices of a local church, the open-housing advocates started making phone calls to federal officials across the country to urge them to deny Louisville's application. "We had all the telephones in the office," Ruth Bryant, an activist who played a vital role in the plan's implementation, remembered. "We were calling Washington,... the HUD office in Atlanta,... calling [Hubert] Humphrey, everybody,... asking them for support." According to Bryant, they were "trying to get the open housing law here [by] telling them that Louisville was not complying with the guidelines for model cities." The federal program was designed to ensure "maximum opportunities in the choice of housing accommodations for all citizens of all income levels." The activists

³¹Charles E. Olken, "Economic Development in the Model Cities Program," in *Law and Contemporary Problems*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 205-226; H. Ralph Taylor and George A. Williams Jr., "Housing in Model Cities," in *Law and Contemporary Problems*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 397-408. For model cities programs in other cities, see Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

stated that rather providing “maximum” housing opportunities, Louisville’s proposed program “was aimed at further concentrating Negroes in the West End.”³²

The open-housing advocates also wrote letters to federal and local officials stating that funding should be denied until the city passed a law to prevent housing discrimination. The activists informed the federal government that, despite claims that Louisville was a place of racial tolerance, African Americans were denied housing solely on the basis of race. Residential segregation plagued the city and forced African Americans to live in unfit housing in the West End when many could afford to live in other areas of Louisville. In a memo circulated throughout the community, open-housing activists charged that “the politicians, planning consultants and the real estate industry—agents, mortgage bankers and developers—who will prosper” from the model cities program. The activists also voiced their disapproval of the program to local leaders. The Ad Hoc Committee on Open Housing, a community organization comprised of thirty local civic groups, sent a letter to Mayor Schmied in opposition to Louisville’s participation in the Model Cities program. The committee voted “to go on record as opposed to the granting of Model Cities funds until a proper open-housing ordinance is enacted.” In short, activists demanded that the federal government refuse to fund redevelopment projects that could lead to more relocation to the already cramped West End.³³

³² Ruth Bryant, interview with Kenneth Chumbley, July 24, 1977, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky; 103 (a)(3), 42 U.S.C., section 3303(a)(3) (Supp. II, 1965-1966); *Courier Journal*, November 17, 1967.

³³ Ad Hoc Committee on Open Housing meeting minutes, March 14, 1967. Jewish Community Federation papers, University of Louisville Archives and Records, Louisville, Kentucky; *Louisville Times*, April 4, 1967.

Although city leaders told reporters that the debate over open occupancy would not damage the application for funding, civil rights activists claimed a victory. William T. Warner, city-county urban program coordinator, remained optimistic about the city's chances to receive the Model Cities grant in spite of the uproar caused by open-housing supporters. He confidently stated that "the announcement of the Model Cities selections is imminent and... Louisville is included." But HUD turned down Louisville's model cities funding and the open-occupancy supporters celebrated their efforts. "It seems logical to suppose that the... opposition could have been one factor" in HUD's denial, insisted one civil rights leader. However, city leaders claimed the federal department had denied the application because it lacked innovation, not because of the negative attention drawn to the city by the smoldering housing controversy. They repeatedly stressed that HUD rejected the bid because the proposal was too broad and not because of the racial tension in the city, but civil rights activists had their suspicions to the contrary. Mayor Schmied did finally admit, however, that it "could be this pressure had some effect." Former mayor William Cowger, who had been elected to Congress in 1964, expressed little doubt that the open-housing activists had persuaded the government to deny the city's application. He had written to President Johnson to ignore the protests when making his selections for model cities grants. "Evidently my appeal didn't impress him," Cowger told the *Courier Journal*.³⁴

After successfully diverting federal funds for the city, civil rights activists turned their attention to the more peaceful and highly-sanctioned activity of the ballot box to ensure the passage of an enforceable open-occupancy law. In the November elections,

³⁴ *Courier Journal*, November 4, 1967, A1, November 17, 1967, A9. "Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a grant to plan a Comprehensive City Demonstration Program," Office of the Mayor, Louisville, Kentucky, 1967.

housing supporters targeted the all-Republican board of aldermen that had voted against the ordinance in the spring. Although the Democratic candidates never publicly stated that they would vote in favor of the ordinance, local media strongly endorsed them. The *Louisville Defender* encouraged its readers to “defeat your enemies with the ballot” and predicted, “Negro votes could decide November elections.” More concerned with the city’s national image than with the housing available to African Americans, the *Courier Journal* also supported the Democratic candidates. The newspaper hoped they could restore order by passing a law to appease activists while at the same time maintaining residential segregation, and it went on record stating, “it would be better for Louisville at this time for the Democrats to win control of the Board of Aldermen this November.” At the same time, the Committee on Open Housing and the NAACP sponsored massive voter registration drives. In early August, Martin Luther King Jr. returned to the city to urge African Americans to “vote, baby, vote” and by September, activists had registered twelve hundred new black voters, primarily from wards in the West End.³⁵

Open housing remained a burning political issue throughout autumn, and as the election drew closer, it took on a central importance. Recognizing that their failure to pass a strong ordinance in favor of open housing could lead to their defeat at the polls, the Republican Board of Aldermen began to boast of their accomplishments in the last four years. The worried Aldermen tried to sugarcoat their actions regarding the housing issue by citing municipal improvements and new jobs. “We have stated repeatedly that our law department has advised us that the existing laws of this community guarantee open

³⁵ In the 1963 election, Republicans won all of the seats on the Board of Aldermen. *Courier Journal*, November 6, 1963, B1; November 7, 1963, B1; *Louisville Defender*, May 18, 1967; May 25, 1967; *Courier Journal*, October 17, A8; *Louisville Defender*, June 29, 1967; *Louisville Defender*, August 10, 1967.

housing to all our citizens,” claimed Aldermanic president J .W. Young. If the endorsement of the law department did not placate housing advocates, Young hoped that the endorsement of prominent African Americans would. “We have been supported in this stand by some of the most able leaders of the Negro community.” Young offered no names, however. Republican mayor Kenneth Schmied put it more succinctly: “Let the record speak for itself.”³⁶

Voters obviously disagreed with what the record said. The only alderperson reelected was Louise Reynolds, who had pushed open-housing legislation since she had been first elected in 1963 and who had voted for the ordinance that had been defeated in the spring. Democrats captured all of the remaining seats, including those in the West End. In a number of precincts in the West End’s twelfth ward, for example, the Democratic candidate defeated the Republican candidate by a five to one margin. One African American man offered the Republican candidates an explanation for the poor returns at the polls: “A settlement house here, a park there, or three more Negroes added to the payroll of City Hall is not the answer to the second-class citizenship which we in Louisville are subjected to.” But the candidates ignored his explanation, blaming their loss on dishonesty at the polls instead. As workers finalized ballot totals, Republicans began claiming voter fraud in the West End and asking for a canvass of the totals from the voting machines. When tabulators found no evidence of fraud, Mayor Schmied and the Republican County Chairman Tilford Payne requested that the signatures on ballots cast in the West End be checked against signatures on voter registration cards. According to Payne, the precincts selected for signature investigation were “selected on basis of where we took a bad beating.” Again, no fraud was found and the Democrats remained in

³⁶ *Courier Journal*, October 18, 1967, A30.

office. Now open-housing supporters anxiously and impatiently waited for the new Board's decision on the housing ordinance. "We hope and pray that it can be passed in the next fifteen to twenty days," Reverend Leo Lesser told reporters soon after the election. Fourteen days later the ordinance passed 9 to 3, the same figure by which it had been defeated just eight months ago.³⁷ Open housing now had a legal mandate.

But although it was illegal, housing discrimination persisted in the city and the ordinance demonstrated that public policy could not eradicate private prejudice. Just as the Supreme Court's decision in *Buchanan v. Warley* had failed to bring about social and racial change at the beginning of the twentieth century, the open-housing law failed to prevent white homeowners from refusing to rent or sell to African Americans. Black Louisvillians grew even more frustrated by the persistence of housing discrimination. Indeed, Rabbi Martin Perley, director of the Louisville Human Rights Commission, which processed the housing discrimination complaints, noticed increased racial tensions in early 1968. "I have learned," he wrote, "that there is much to be done to overcome the frustration of a people who are fed up with unfulfilled promises and the philosophy of gradualism."³⁸

Indeed, African Americans were frustrated with the promises of racial justice and the reality of racial oppression. After another unwarranted arrest of a black man by a white police officer, rioting broke out in May 1968 at a mass meeting in the African American community. "Oh baby, it's finally here. It's really happening!" one black demonstrator exclaimed. Rocks and glass bottles danced across the night sky. Although

³⁷ *Courier Journal*, November 18, 1967, A12, November 28, 1967, A6, November 11, 1967, A11, November 16, 1967, B1, December 1, 1967, A1; December 14, 1967, A1; *Louisville Defender*, September 7, 1967; December 21, 1967, A1.

³⁸ Rabbi Martin Perley papers, Folder 6, Director's Reports, 1968-1977.

police contained the crowd, the violence lasted for weeks, and culminated in over four hundred arrests and the deaths of two African American youths. It was the worst incident of racial unrest the city had ever witnessed, and it shocked and alarmed city leaders and the white community. But African Americans were not surprised by the incident. As one black leader explained, “There are people who are dying every day in the ghetto, and no one cares about them.” He bluntly concluded: “I think that some of these persons who are dying are finally letting out their last breath—which turns out to be very hot and angry in many instances—to let those others know that they are not satisfied with the kind of life they have lived.”³⁹

Rabbi Perley recognized the dissatisfaction of many African Americans, especially those in the West End, and chastised the white community for its unwillingness to face the reality of race relations in their city. “It was this denial of equal rights and opportunities, the sense of being relegated to second class citizenship, and of being subjected to humiliation that was at the base of the disturbances last May,” he reasoned. Perley continued: “It’s an easy way to solve our conscience—blaming outside agitators for unrest, for Negro’s unwillingness to ‘know his place and stay there.’”⁴⁰ But city and civic leaders refused to listen and the problems inherent in residential segregation continued to simmer until the busing controversy boiled over in the 1970s.

Ultimately, this analysis of the struggle over open-housing legislation in Louisville reaffirms the centrality of housing to understandings of race and class by

³⁹ Filson Historical Society Archives, Louisville, Kentucky; Kenneth H. Williams, “Oh Baby...It’s Really Happening!: The Louisville Race Riot of 1968,” *Kentucky History Journal*, vol. 3, 1988; “The Way It Is,” transcript from WHAS Radio and Television broadcast, May 28, 1968. Filson Historical Society Library, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁴⁰ Rabbi Martin Perley papers, Folder 6, Filson Historical Society Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.

showing how African Americans and whites battled over where blacks could—and should—live. It demonstrates again that it was the prospect of integrated housing, rather than school desegregation, voting rights, or public accommodations, that prompted whites in Louisville to take to the streets in violent protest. As Gladys Burrus astutely declared, “White people just hate for us Negroes to live in their neighborhoods, but Negroes cook for, eat with, work with, go to school with and play with whites. If we are good enough to do these things for them, we are good enough to live in their neighborhoods.” Many whites disagreed, and they expressed their disapproval of black aspirations for integrated neighborhoods in various ways. Some admitted that an ordinance was necessary but admonished blacks for being so pushy and demanding. Others wrote angry letters to the newspaper, calling the ordinance unconstitutional and condemning street demonstrations. Still others took to the streets themselves in protest of the ordinance, often causing physical harm to black marchers.⁴¹

The battle over the open-housing ordinance, especially the demonstrations and racial violence, wreaked havoc on the city’s progressive image and this chapter shows how civil rights activists revealed the structural racism that deprived many African Americans of adequate housing in Louisville. Indeed, *The New Republic* frankly questioned the city’s long-celebrated reputation in the wake of the open-housing protests. “What happened in Louisville in the past year before an open-housing ordinance,” a columnist opined, “casts some doubt on how much racial attitudes have changed in a half century.” Despite Louisville’s image, “it was no paradise of tolerance,” especially when it came to housing. The columnist criticized the city government, calling attention to the

⁴¹ *Courier Journal*, May 4, 1967, A8.

progressive mantra behind which local leaders had hidden for most of the twentieth century: “hypocritical expressions of public concern about the deterioration in race relations—but no action.” To be sure, since the beginning of the twentieth century, whites had created and sought to maintain an image of Louisville as a racially progressive community. This image not only impeded racial progress, but it also masked the lived realities of black Louisvillians. In the late 1960s, African Americans, who felt frustrated by the lack of opportunities to live where they wanted, challenged city leaders to help them move into neighborhoods traditionally reserved for whites only. City officials ignored them, though, and as racial antagonism and tension rose in 1967, black Louisvillians and their white supporters demanded local leaders make good on their progressive claim. As one reporter later recalled, “those open-housing demonstrations [were] one of the ugliest darn things Louisville’s ever experienced.... It sullied Louisville’s reputation, no doubt about it.” Indeed, open-housing activists had dismantled the guise of white progressivism that had maintained residential segregation and economically disadvantaged people of color to expose the city’s latent racism. By the end of the twentieth century, the image of Louisville as a progressive southern city had been completely tarnished.⁴²

⁴² William Peeples, “Open Housing” in *The New Republic*, January 13, 1968, 9-10; Interview with Kenneth Rowland, by Ethel White, Kentucky Oral History Commission, June 30, 2001. Tape number 6.

Conclusion

In the end, the battle over where African Americans could live gained the nation's attention and the reality of residential segregation exposed the city's progressive image for what it was. Segregated housing patterns also undermined Louisville's token school desegregation efforts. In 1975, white demonstrators took to the streets to protest forced student busing, a problem ostensibly about education but, at heart, about housing. Despite Omer Carmichael's and Mark Ethridge's bold claims in the 1950s that Louisville's schools were desegregated, informal and institutional housing discrimination had maintained segregation in many public schools. In fact, out of sixty-seven schools in the city system, twenty-seven had a 90 percent white majority and twenty-four had a 90 percent African American majority. Eighty percent of elementary school students attended a school either between 90 and 100 percent African American or between 90 and 100 percent white. In 1973, the federal court ruled that the city's schools were unlawfully segregated. In order to solve the problem and create mixed-race classrooms, the court ordered students to be transported into other districts. Protests escalated, with fifty injuries and almost two hundred arrests. But as Maurice Rabb of the NAACP explained, "There wouldn't be any problem if we had open housing" because "there would be blacks living where whites were living." In short, Rabb argued, if neighborhoods were integrated "it wouldn't be necessary to bus students."¹

¹ "Louisville School System Retreats to Segregation: A Report on Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky 1956-1971," Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, p. 539. Hearing Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Louisville, Kentucky, June 14-16, 1976. Exhibit 26. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

After two days of demonstrations, state and local police were unable to restore order, so Governor Julian Carroll dispatched 800 National Guardsmen on September 7th to tame a crowd of 2,500 white anti-busing demonstrators in the southwestern part of the county. The centrality of housing to the protests quickly became obvious. During the hearings to mediate the situation, William Kellerman, president of Citizens Against Busing, openly told the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “Children are simply being bused because of housing patterns in this community.” Certainly that was true, but Kellerman and others like him refused to admit that African Americans could not find housing outside of the West End. William McGee, president of the Okolona Area Merchant and Business Association, told the commission that the reason African Americans made up only two percent of the population of the Okolona neighborhood in the southern part of the county was because of “people choosing where they want to live.” An African American minister, Reverend Walter Stitt, had a different explanation, though: “out in Okolona we have had a cross burned in the yard of a black family and people shooting through the windows.” Even further, “a family on our street... put their house up for sale a few years ago, and when a black family showed up to buy, they jacked the price way up.” In short, even after the open-housing law, individual and institutionalized discrimination maintained residential segregation, as African Americans lived mostly in the West End and whites lived everywhere else.²

Thirty years after the busing controversy, and over fifty years after the city received presidential praise for school integration, Louisville’s desegregation plan gained

² Maurice Rabb, interviewed by Dwayne Cox, 1977, University of Louisville Oral History Center, Louisville, Kentucky; *New York Times*, September 7, 1975; Hearing Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Louisville, Kentucky, June 14-16, 1976. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

national attention again in 2006. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on the constitutionality of the school board's policy that used race as a factor in pupil placement. The case came from a plaintiff who claimed her son was unconstitutionally denied equal protection because he was refused admission to the public school in his neighborhood because he is white. The school board argued that in order to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education* and a federal court order in 1973 to fully integrate schools, race must be considered. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed *amicus curiae* briefs in support of the school board's policy, drawing attention to the centrality of housing patterns in school integration. The LDF wrote that the board of education wanted to avoid the creation of all-white elite schools and devised a plan that considered the "practical reality and challenges of continued, intense residential segregation and poverty concentration in the district's urban core."³

This study of race and housing in Louisville throughout the twentieth century demonstrates that the city's residential spaces were not always divided so starkly across racial lines. At the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans and whites lived side-by-side in the downtown area of the city. Increased black migration and efforts at economic uplift alarmed working-class whites, who sought to legalize residential segregation through a city ordinance. When the Supreme Court declared the ordinance unconstitutional, white Louisvillians found other ways to keep African Americans from moving out of the downtown area. Private prejudice circumscribed public policy as white homeowners refused to sell or rent to African Americans. Over the course of the next

³ *New York Times*, June 6, 2006; *Washington Post*, June 6, 2006, September 4, 2006; Brief of *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Appellees & Affirmance, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 27-28.

forty years, individual discrimination worked in tandem with institutionalized discrimination—in the form of real estate procedures, federal lending policies, and urban renewal programs—to create an ever more fixed residential pattern in Louisville, in which African Americans were concentrated in the West End.

Residential segregation upheld segregation in other venues, especially schools. After the *Brown* decision, Louisville's leaders rallied the community to support school desegregation. It was an easy sell, for everyone knew that school desegregation would have little real effect if segregated housing patterns were maintained. When Andrew Wade tried to move into an all-white working-class neighborhood, however, whites from all economic classes united to protect their neighborhoods from encroaching African Americans. Housing, then, served as the last bastion of white supremacy. It not only maintained segregated schools, but it also reified whites' social status and economic standing. Ultimately, in this "All-America" city, residential spaces served as the terrain on which African Americans and whites battled over racial equality and economic opportunity.

Louisville's story reveals the intersection between a local movement for open housing and the national movement for racial equality to broaden the geographical parameter, and it lengthens the timeframe of the traditional civil rights narrative. In the early twentieth century—well before the Montgomery bus boycott or the Greensboro sit-ins—African Americans in this border city organized against housing discrimination. Although the strength of their protest waxed and waned over the course of sixty years, housing was always central to their civil rights agenda. Black Louisvillians understood that where and how they lived was crucial to securing racial and economic equality.

When they took to the streets in the 1960s to demand an end to housing discrimination, it was not a spontaneous outburst of anger. Nor was it simply a reactionary response to the civil rights activity in the Deep South. Rather, the open-housing protests of the 1960s reflected the convergence of a century-long struggle against residential segregation and the national campaign for racial justice.

The evidence uncovered in Louisville complicates the received literature surrounding the creation of the urban underclass. From Daniel Moynihan to William Julius Wilson, policymakers, sociologists and historians have sought an explanation for how and why poor African Americans are concentrated in inner cities. In the 1960s, scholars such as Moynihan and Oscar Lewis blamed the structure of the black family for the creation of the ghetto. In his studies of Hispanics, Lewis identified a “culture of poverty” of social and psychological pathologies that are difficult to overcome. In the 1980s, neoconservative scholars, such as Charles Murphy, claimed that economic dependency, such as welfare programs, sustained the black urban poor and their culture of poverty. In 1987, sociologist William Julius Wilson challenged these studies that essentially blamed African Americans for their own poverty. In *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, Wilson suggests that post-World War II economic restructuring led to the concentration and isolation of impoverished African Americans in decaying inner cities. Wilson charges that the structural economic conditions after World War II, particularly the shift from a producer-oriented economy to a consumer-oriented one, prescribed economic opportunity for unskilled workers, many of whom were African American. The weakening of employment and housing restrictions allowed middle-class and professional African

Americans to move out of the inner cities, leaving a concentrated area of black poverty isolated from economic opportunity. In short, Wilson contends that this isolation, more than racial prejudice, created and has sustained the African American underclass.

This dissertation is informed by and complicates Wilson's study of the black ghetto. In his analysis, Wilson emphasizes the result of impersonal forces of the post-World War II era, such as economic and geographic change. More than impersonal forces were at work in the process by which African Americans moved—and in many cases, were moved—out of the inner city and into the West End. This residential shift began in the early twentieth century, as whites from all economic classes united to keep African Americans out of their neighborhoods. After World War II, the process of ghettoization was simply expedited through a maze of real estate procedures, lending policies, and urban renewal programs. Indeed, this dissertation suggests that the creation of the West End as a predominately African American low-income area was the result of deliberate actions on the part of homeowners, politicians, real estate agents, urban planners, and lenders before World War II. In short, whites created and maintained segregated residential spaces to economically disadvantage people of color.

One of Wilson's central arguments is that the decline of employment and housing discrimination after the civil rights struggles of the 1960s facilitated the movement of middle-class African Americans out of the inner cities and into the suburb. This exodus from the urban core, according to Wilson, further isolated poor blacks and left them without models of racial and economic uplift. In Louisville, however, open-housing legislation did not fundamentally alter housing patterns in the city. The busing controversy of the 1970s and the school desegregation case before the Supreme Court

presently demonstrates that residential segregation was firmly in place long after local and federal legislation to criminalize housing discrimination. Even further, reports from the 2000 census confirm that African Americans remain predominately in the West End, while whites live elsewhere. In fact, a study by the Brookings Institution in 2002 showed that the white population in the downtown area dropped 14% compared to a similar study in 1990, making the concentration of blacks in the downtown area more obvious. The study also ranked Louisville the fifty-second-most segregated metropolitan area out of 272 cities across the nation. Ultimately, the residual effects of structural racism have prescribed the economic opportunities of African Americans in Louisville and maintained residential segregation.⁴

* * * *

In the end, the struggle over residential spaces in Louisville reveals the intimate relationship between civil rights and economic justice, the limitations of public policy to affect private prejudice, and the importance of housing in defining and maintaining racial and class categories. Whites from all income levels had a social, material, and psychological investment in their homes and they united to protect their neighborhoods from African Americans. Homeowners, real estate agents, politicians, and urban planners deliberately acted to spatially separate themselves from black Louisvillians. As a result, Africans Americans were moved to the West End to live in substandard housing away from viable employment opportunities. African Americans, however, challenged the individual and institutional racism that prevented them from living where they chose. In

⁴ U. S. Census reports, 2000; “Beyond Merger: A Competitive Vision for the Regional City of Louisville,” The Brookings Institution, Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2002.

the end, however, residential segregation was so entrenched in Louisville that in spite of their efforts, a color line continues to divide the city.

This scenario was repeated over and over in cities all across the nation, as whites barred blacks from certain neighborhoods and trapped them in ramshackle housing. In the 1970s, James Baldwin explained to sociologist Margaret Mead the process by which the black ghetto had been created. “It was not, it is not, being done by accident,” he stated. Even further, “it is not something like an act of God.” Baldwin then laid it out very clearly: “It is something that has been done deliberately and is *being* done deliberately.” Although Baldwin spoke in generalities, he accurately described the making of modern Louisville and many other cities across the United States. For, although local whites in Louisville promoted a policy of racial justice and economic opportunity for all citizens, they practiced a policy of racial discrimination and economic oppression. Ultimately, *Look* magazine had been correct in 1963—Louisville *was* an “All-America” city.⁵

⁵ Margaret Mead and James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race*, (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1971), 23.

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