CHAPTER 6

The Significance of 20th-Century Urban Renewal Policies for Racially Reparative Planning

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> *If we think of reparations as part of a broad strategy to radically transform society—redistributing wealth, creating a democratic and caring public culture, exposing the ways capitalism and slavery produced massive inequality—then the ongoing struggle for reparations holds enormous promise for revitalizing movements for social justice. (Kelley, 2022)*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In the last chapter, Arrington examined the performative urbanisms of sex trafficking legislation and advocacy. In this chapter, Fraser and Lawlor provide a historical context for the performative, white-racial urban renewal planning, first enacted by the 1949 Housing Act, and the current call for reparations to Black Asheville, North Carolina. Reckoning with the performative urbanism of urban renewal transparently and inclusively is necessary to meet the goal of reparative planning and reparations.

Key Concepts

1. **Reparations:** the action of repairing something; the making of amends for the wrong or injury done.
2. **Reparative planning:** policies and practices to rectify the impacts of harmful planning practices such as urban renewal.

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3. **Slum clearance:** practices of slum eviction and slum removal associated with the urban renewal period; for example, in the United States.
4. **Territorial stigmatization:** the negative portrayal of places and the people who live in them as subversive to cultural norms.
5. **Urban renewal:** a process where private property within a designated renewal area is acquired using eminent domain by government agencies and then razed and reconveyed to real estate developers to revitalize a locality.
6. **Suburbanization:** residential and business growth outwards from a city center accelerated during the urban renewal period, creating segregated neighborhoods by income and race.
7. **Public housing:** government-owned housing stock for low-income people initially gained authorization in the Housing Act of 1937.

Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the current reparations commission in Asheville, North Carolina, and how stakeholders are drawing upon the history of urban renewal in the United States to demand reparative planning policies and practices. The 1949 Housing Act allowed and funded local governments to use the power of eminent domain to tear down housing in Black and Brown neighborhoods under the guise of "Slum Clearance" (Oakley & Burchfield, 2009). This was done with the promise of decent, safe, and quality housing to be rebuilt. That never happened. The rhetoric of urban renewal characterizes performative urbanism at its core. Disproportionately affecting neighborhoods where Black and Brown communities lived, land was taken from property owners and given to developers, and highways were built through these areas, displacing businesses as well. These racially and economically motivated practices of city leaders and development interests are still felt today. In the case of Asheville, North Carolina, where urban renewal lasted until the 1990s, the city council's reparations referendum may be viewed as an attempt to distance the city from this prior period symbolically. Still, grassroots organizers also use urban renewal history to claim that it is not the past and that reparative work must be concretely tied to the material production of the city as much as in the rhetoric of those who imagine a more inclusive and just Asheville.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the current effort and then provides a detailed sociological account of mid-20th-century urban renewal initiatives that did not end in Asheville until 1993. We conclude with lessons from urban renewal that are being used as one orientation for making racial reparations.

In the wake of protests across the country following the murder of George Floyd, the city of Asheville, North Carolina, passed a "Resolution Supporting Community Reparations for Black Asheville." Adopted by the Asheville City Council on July 14, 2020, the resolution acknowledges multiple racial injustices inflicted on Black Asheville. Housing appears prominently in this list, with the Resolution stating, "Black people have been denied housing, displaced, and inadequately housed by government housing policies that include discriminatory VA/FHA practices, Urban Renewal, and a variety of local and federal 'affordable' housing programs" (Resolution No. 20-128, City of Asheville, NC, 2020). In addition to apologizing for sanctioning slavery and enforcing segregation, the Resolution also states that the City Council "apologizes and makes amends for carrying out an urban renewal program that destroyed multiple, successful Black communities (p.1)"

Shortly after adopting this historic public policy initiative, the county surrounding Asheville—Buncombe County—also adopted a Reparations Resolution. These state-led initiatives are complemented by the citizen-led Reparations Stakeholder Authority of Asheville (RSAA), which was formed following the 2020 adoption of the City and County Resolutions to establish an "independent, Black-led institution that guides the distribution of reparations funds in response to community input" (RSAA, 2023, p.3). The RSAA aims to act as a finance authority that can receive and administer public and private funds and act as a financial resource for reparative initiatives in perpetuity, should City and County tax revenues eventually sunset. The RSAA also seeks to build systems that facilitate Black residents' input into how reparations' funds are deployed.

Asheville's Racial Justice Coalition, the key civil society organization in the city advocating for racial repair, has played a significant role in enhancing citizen participation in these reparations processes and pushing the City and County to take demands for racial justice seriously. The Racial Justice Coalition of Asheville (RJC), a member of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, is an alliance of individuals and organizations that are committed to a more radical vision of reparations constituted by "dismantling policies and institutions that uphold racism and reimagining a community where justice exists for all people" (RJC, 2022). Shortly after the passage of Asheville's Reparations Resolution, the RJC achieved an important advocacy win by successfully pressuring the City Council to adopt a moratorium on the sale of all City land acquired during urban renewal until the Reparations Commission provides recommendations on the sale or repurposed use of the land (see Asheville City Council Resolution 20-128, 2020). These 75 properties cover approximately 55 acres of highly prized real estate in downtown Asheville (City

of Asheville, 2023). RJC's website features an essay entitled "Reparations Are Due" (RJC, 2022). It provides a chronological historical account of white planning and racism in the city from slavery onward. RJC highlights the inseparability of urban renewal as a particular modality of anti-Black disposability and dispossession from prior eras to the current one, during which they are still petitioning the very state institutions that enacted formal urban renewal policies up to 1993. And while RJC begins this essay on why reparations are due with the statement, "We shouldn't have to explain why," the reality is that many of the white transplants that have recently settled in Asheville are ignorant of how urban renewal worked to systematically exclude and extract from Black Asheville to build Asheville's bustling tourism economy and booming real estate industry.

The Significance of Urban Renewal for Reparations

A Brief Overview of Urban Renewal

We argue that revisiting federal policies associated with urban renewal and how these shaped cities across the country can inform the work of dismantling racial planning and engen-dering reparative planning. In the following sections of this chapter, we provide a brief historical overview of urban renewal in the United States and the City of Asheville and elaborate on a reparative planning orienta-tion. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for the local reparations commission.

While the formal period of urban renewal began with the passing of the 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts, the direct federal intervention to subsidize urban development in U.S. cities started well before. Proposals for providing low-income housing to the urban poor date back to the reform movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The reformers argued that it was imperative to combat inner city slum conditions by establishing codes and sanitary conditions (von Hoffman, 2000). As waves of immigrants arrived in U.S. cities in search of opportunity and employment, housing was scarce. Crowded tenements were not only unsafe—many fires broke out, resulting in devastating consequences for the people inhabiting these buildings—but there grew a moral outlook that slum conditions created social ills. In 1933, New Deal legislation au-thorized the Public Works Administration (PWA), which set out, among other activities, to build approximately 21,000 units of public housing

dispersed among 30 cities across the nation (Aiken & Alford, 1970). The PWA sponsored a series of posters that ideologically conveyed that slum living bred crime, sexual disease, fires, and delinquency. With persistence, the efforts of housing reformers and their coalition, including social workers, organized labor, the Catholic church, architects, and planners pushed through a public housing program as part of the 1937 Housing Act (von Hoffman, 2000).

Firmly based on a social-ecological framework, not too distant from the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, they argued that public housing would produce good citizens by taking them out of the slums. Foreshadowing the 1949 and d1954 housing legislation that deepened subsidies for the private sector to demolish slums on a grander scale, the deal agreed upon in 1937 was that for every unit of public housing built, one slum dwelling would be demolished. Not only did the private real estate sector win this concession, but the real estate industry led by the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) leaders served on the committees that drafted the 1937 legislation garnering additional legal and economic tools to engage in the development of racially segregated suburbs (Freedman, 1969; Gotham, 2001). On the heels of the 1934 Housing Act that created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which had already encouraged rapid suburbanization for whites and containment of Black people in designated urban neighborhoods that were infamously redlined as no-go zones for lending institutions, thus setting the stage for the demolition increased deterioration of inner-city neighborhoods.

The FHA was created one year after the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933, a government organization created as part of the New Deal to assess neighborhood lending risk and guide local lending practices nationwide. Written into HOLC and FHA, color-coded maps and other manuals were distributed to local banks and realtor groups, explicitly guiding these institutions to make loan products available in white, racially-segregated metropolitan areas and avoid rad-coded areas that were home to ethnic and racial others. Many studies find that this practice was associated with the production of white suburban wealth and fostered increased concentrated disadvantage in non-white parts of the city (Fraser et al., 2012). Kimble (2007, p. 431) concludes, "the irony of this story is that the FHA program, conceived to help lift the country out of the Depression, played a central role in creating the African American urban economic depression that persists today." Not only did the FHA in collusion with HOLC create color-coded racialized zones in which they would not insure mortgages (e.g., "redlining"), these federal institutions went to great lengths to normalize this racial imagi-nary for white Americans. These practices exacerbated urban decline by providing white residents with affordable loan products they could use to move into suburban developments while supporting both de jure and de

facto racial covenants prohibiting nonwhites from suburban homeownership participation. Insofar as the federal government institutionalized the production of segregationist landscapes and pulled capital resources out of the cities where Black people had migrated from the South in hopes of a better life, the American Dream was normalized as white.

The crystallization of homeownership, suburban luxury, citizenship, and the perpetuation of racist ideology around residential integration not only provided a vehicle to maintain whiteness as the norm to which others might aspire, but it also created what it described in a performative sense. By claiming that racial integration would result in lost wealth for whites that was tied to property, it maintained and fostered white racial animus toward both Black and white populations that sought to cross the color line while producing the very "slum conditions" in black urban neighborhoods that it claimed as evidence of an objective racial hierarchy. This spatialization of race and the production of territorial stigmatization associated the places Black communities inhabited as uninhabitable and contaminated. As the century progressed, the social-ecological outlook put forth by housing progressives, that slums create social problems which could be addressed with modern housing for all, would give way to a reorientation that claimed contaminated bodies and communities pro-duced unhealthy environments (Ansfield, 2015; Oakley & Fraser, 2016). As politicians, real estate interests, and downtown commerce sought to reimagine and revitalize their cities, the confluence of their city-building ambitions and a belief that slums were associated with the spread of urban decay set the stage for the urban renewal proper, which was enshrined in the 1949 and 1954 federal housing acts.

Following the passage of the post-war 1949 Housing Act, NAREB began proposing slum clearance based on a private-sector approach. Notwithstanding the protracted battle, they took to cities nationwide to demonize public housing, hoping to have it deauthorized in favor of market-based solutions. NAREB addressed slum clearance and urban redevelopment by proposing the federal government include enabling language in the housing act for the local use of eminent domain (e.g., forced takings of property) and to offset the costs of this "land assembly" for the transfer of property rights to private-sector real estate developers at a modest price and provide long-term leases and tax write-downs (Foard & Fefferman, 1960).

The 1949 Housing Act authorized 810,000 additional public housing units and linked housing quality to the nation's health.

> The general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people requires housing production and related community

> development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, [and] the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas. (Lang & Sohmer, 2000, p. 293)

The 1949 legislation has often been remembered and cited for its performative declaration of "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family," and for a significant segment of white families, this was a promise kept. The legislation liberalized mortgage insurance through the FHA by only requiring a 5% down payment and a 30-year loan product that guaranteed lenders a rate of profit through FHA mortgage insurance. Under Title I of the act, cities would make applications to the federal government to acquire land designated as "blighted" in slum areas and demolish any structure built upon it, providing property owners some compensation. Through the Housing and Home Finance Administrator (HHFA), the federal policy authorized $1 billion to be distributed for projects across the country. Under this policy, the federal government would offset two-thirds of the costs associated with preparing the land for redevelopment, with localities able to provide their one-third share in noncash, in-kind allocations in the form of building urban infrastructure, broadly conceived as schools, parks, necessary facilities, utilities, etc. Additional amounts increased yearly from $500 million to $2 billion annually. Altogether, the 1949 Housing Act represented a vehicle for NAREB and private real estate interests to complement the now fast-paced production of suburban areas on undeveloped land by working with local city leaders to implement what in the public imagination is urban renewal.

In actuality, the 1949 Housing Act used the term *urban redevelopment*. However, the Housing Act of 1954 shifted to *urban renewal*, - emphasizing either redevelopment or renewal with regard to the project areas' potential to increase a city's tax base. Thus, renewal could include higher market-rate housing and give the plans for renewal the ability to include additional development beyond residential housing. These changes enabled language to displace, demolish, and renew without the 1949 emphasis on serving lower-and moderate-income displaced populations (Foard & Fefferman, 1960, p. 657).

Between the years encompassing the formal urban development/ urban renewal period, from 1949 to 1974, the federal government funded $12 billion for clearance and redevelopment activities, which in today's metrics is the equivalent of $53 billion without calculating state and local expenditures on these activities. Additionally, an estimated 910,000 housing units were demolished under federal programs alone, and 300,000 businesses were destroyed by 1970 (Talen, 2014). These totals do not include cities that engaged in slum clearance before or after this period or projects

completed through the 1990s, such as Asheville, North Carolina. Looking at previous projects, in 1943, under the New York Urban Redevelopment Act, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company embarked on an urban renewal plan in Stuyvesant Town where the "project demolished an 18-block area that housed up to 20,000 people and built a new apartment complex" and created 24,000 new units of housing that were twice the rent (von Hoffman, 2000, p. 205).

The housing needs of people experiencing poverty were never met throughout this period. The 810,000 units of public housing authorized in 1949 were not achieved until 1972, well after that program fell out of favor, as demonstrated by the massive complex of high-rises that the government dynamited in July of 1972, Pruitt–Igoe in St. Louis (Parson, 2005). As urban renewal continued through the 1950s and 1960s, public housing began to lose any luster that it once had before the war. It is well documented that public housing was typically developed in poor, segregated Black neighborhoods during the urban renewal period. However, slum clearance and segregationist policies meant that public housing was one of the only relocation options displaced Black communities had (Freeman, 2004). In the minds of many city leaders and the real estate industry, public housing was built, if anything, for Black containment.

By 1965, popular discourse in popular media outlets began to depict public housing using similar vernacular and racialized logic that appeared earlier about slums. For example, as the urban uprisings in the 1960s occurred, the image of public housing was decidedly portrayed as a raced space of pathology. The rhetorical structure of urban renewal in media accounts described slums "as 'cancers' as they also became increasingly defined as areas that contained concentrated populations of blacks" (Tillotson, 2010, p. 14). Likewise, public housing was entirely depicted in the same racialized manner, equating it with recreating the very slums that were being cleared:

> The periodical press . . . [presented] a public housing "underclass," a Lumpenproletariat that was neither white nor elderly, but young, African American, and socially dysfunctional. By doing so, it tended to transform a complex economic issue (providing low-cost housing) into a simple moral one (condemning the behaviors of public housing residents). The periodical press reinforced . . . the long-standing bifurcation in American welfare policy between the deserving and undeserving poor. (Henderson, 1995, p. 32)

In tandem with these representations of a raced space of pathology, in 1965, the U.S. Department of Labor released the Moynihan Report entitled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," stating that

"the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the [Black] family structure" (Moynihan, 1965, Chapter IV).

There is a dearth of writing on 20th-century federal policies associated with slum clearance, urban renewal, and public housing, focusing on the many origins, implementations, and effects of these initiatives in cities across the country. A great extent of this writing provides detailed accounts of Black communities' injuries in which their families, schools, businesses, community centers, and homes were subject to unwanted intrusions.

> As measured by lives disrupted and communities destroyed in American cities from 1930–1965, urban renewal and slum clearance projects affected low-income populations much like war. Like wars, these projects were governed by rules of engagement that defined the enemy, codified the reasons for combat and specified the goals to be attained." (Tillotson, 2010, p. 13)

Many case studies of urban renewal in cities nationwide have been conducted. These community studies offer a greater understanding of how the federal scaffolding of urban renewal policies and concomitant highway acts shaped the metropolitan landscape.

These community studies provide more granular accounts of how localities implemented urban renewal agendas. For example, Hochfelder and Appler (2020), citing the 1,258 localities that have had an urban renewal grant, suggest that there are "far more small cities in the United States than large cities, and while few of these cities have the cultural or economic influence of their largest counterparts, their collective experience more accurately reflects the course and consequences of urban renewal for the nation as a whole" (p. 139).

Two features of urban renewal that transcend locality have already been discussed but are worth reiterating. First, the neighborhoods and businesses targeted for slum clearance were inhabited and owned by Black, immigrant, and poor elderly populations. Second, neighborhood residents were not passive about urban renewal and had plans that shaped neighborhood organizing efforts in cases across the nation (Hochfelder & Appler, 2020). These may appear in the literature as largely unsuccessful if mea-sured by their ability to stop demolition and displacement. However, it is necessary to remember that while city and regional planning emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the local capacity of planning ad-ministrators and politicians was not absolute but experimental in response to community organizing (Jackson, 2008).

During the 1960s, urban renewal projects increasingly became sites of organizing, protest, and outright resistance, signaling growing organized opposition toward slum clearance projects that resulted in the displacement of Black communities around the country. More broadly, the ascendence of organizations representing the civil rights and Black Power movements coalesced against programs defined as "negro removal" and formed a national network of localized affiliates to support local Black communities organizing against the destruction of their neighborhoods. Groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), as well as Black Power groups, have all supported Black communities in their plight to save neighborhoods and organize for racial and class-based justice during the latter part of the urban renewal period, focusing efforts on housing justice and related issues (Jackson, 2008).

We now turn to our case study of Asheville, North Carolina, to examine the city's urban renewal efforts between 1965 and 1993. As in many cities nationwide, urban renewal extended decades before the 1949 Housing Act and decades since the federal government deauthorized it under President Nixon in 1974. Insofar as urban renewal involves the dispossession and displacement of Black and immigrant groups of their homes and neighborhood-based communities, urban renewal has yet to be disrupted. Many studies argue that the effects of urban renewal persist sociopolitically, spatially, and economically into the current era.

Urban Renewal in Asheville, North Carolina

In Asheville, urban renewal swept through the city in waves, beginning with the East Riverside project in the mid-1960s. The East Riverside project (1965–1988) was the largest urban renewal initiative in Asheville. The project area encom-passed at least 425 acres and affected the Southside community, home to 3,902 residents living in 1,179 households—about half of Asheville's Black population at the time (Mace, 1967). This was followed by the Pack Plaza Project (1969–1992), the East End/Valley Street Project (1971–1980), the South Pack Square and Pack Place Project (1982–1993), and the Mont-ford Project (1987–1993). The Pack Plaza and South Pack Square projects impacted business districts and residences in the downtown area, includ-ing "The Block," the historically African American business district in Asheville centered around Eagle Street. The East End/Valley Street proj-ect was adjacent and affected the Black residential community of East End, which was home to 1,420 residents. The Montford urban renewal projects impacted the smaller Black communities of Stumptown and Hill Street.

The Black neighborhoods uprooted and destroyed by urban renewal in Asheville had been in existence for at least 100 years. These self-sustaining socioeconomic ecosystems provided a refuge from the white supremacy of Jim Crow. Connected by unpaved roads and waterways, the communities of Southside, East End, Stumptown, Hill Street, and Burton Street (which were fractured by highway construction after the 1956 Federal Highway Act) formed an arc around downtown Asheville. And yet, they were in the way.

Urban renewal in Asheville intersected greatly with the city's plans to make Asheville a tourist destination that appealed to white tourists. As Nickollof (2015) writes about the East Riverside project:

> In addition to urban renewal, the Asheville-Buncombe Metropolitan Planning Board (MPB) advised city officials to initiate programs to help transition the city from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy. Although a residential project, the East Riverside project supplemented this transition as an impetus for change in the demographic landscape of Southside. The MPB argued that Asheville needed to replace the substandard housing units adjacent to the city's downtown business district to attract an in-migration of affluent, educated individuals. . .The location of this neighborhood, adjacent to the proposed Interstate 26 and Interstate 240, contributed to its desirability as a prospective area for urban renewal. The ARC [Asheville Redevelopment Commission] coordinated with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to construct the new interstates near areas selected for urban renewal or areas the ARC could and did designate as blighted. City officials believed the proposed interstates would increase the accessibility of Asheville to potential tourists and consumers. (p. 60–61)

Were these neighborhoods indeed "blighted slums" in need of clearance? While some of the homes were in poor condition, archived photos and appraisal reports reveal many were not (see Figures 4 and 5). What is true is that many of the roads in these neighborhoods were unpaved, many homes were without heat and hot water, and residences occupied by tenants were often not kept up to code by the "slumlords" that dominated these areas (Bacoate, personal communication, January 7, 2023). Therefore, the neighborhood "blight" that city planners observed in these neighborhoods was not due to homeowners and tenants failing to keep their communities clean and safe. Instead, it was the product of neglect at the municipal level to provide oversight of landlords, enforce building codes, and invest in local public goods, including streetlights, proper sewer systems, roads, and public safety. This underinvestment is evident in consulting reports and community surveys conducted during the project planning period for urban renewal in Asheville; residents identified

the lack of such public goods as a more significant problem than the condition of the homes (see Mace, 1967; Butler Associates, 1978).

The municipality's underinvestment in Asheville's Black communities was compounded by the racial rules of housing that worked to keep these neighborhoods segregated and under-resourced: redlining and racial covenants (Flynn et al., 2017). When the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) created maps in the 1930s that marked Black neighborhoods as high risk for federally backed mortgages, the decline of these neighborhoods was almost guaranteed. The racism present in housing market transactions was engendered by the federal government, further de-preciating property values for African American homeowners and curtail-ing their ability to make investments and improvements in their homes. Racial covenants in white neighborhoods restricted where Black people could live, confining them to redlined neighborhoods; the inability to get an affordable mortgage (with a low-interest loan and payments spread out over 15 to 30 years) in redlined neighborhoods disincentivized whites from moving into these neighborhoods. The result was the segregation of the races and the segregation of resources, leading to neglected Black neighborhoods in need of repair and investment.

And so, how did urban renewal play out in Asheville? Tighe and Opelt (2016) describe how Asheville's urban renewal projects engaged in less extreme forms of clearance and community dislocation than earlier urban renewal projects executed in Northern cities. These "first wave" urban renewal projects tended to bulldoze entire neighborhoods and replace them with civic centers and commercial districts, displacing entire Black communities from the urban core to isolated public housing complexes on the periphery of cities. Urban renewal in Asheville instead aimed to keep the neighbor-hoods residential. The Asheville projects extended grants to rehabilitate some homes, and the new housing to replace what was torn down was pri-marily built within the project area. However, this new housing consisted entirely of public housing units. During the time of the East Riverside and East End/Valley Street projects, Asheville built much of its public housing. Between 1965 and 1980, the Housing Authority of the City of Asheville built five public housing complexes comprising almost 900 housing units. While most of these public housing complexes were in or near the project area, these new residences were now dislocated from the rest of the city, often situated on "one way in, one way out" streets or encircled by highways.

Urban renewal also contributed to declining homeownership amongst African Americans in Asheville. Today, 38% of Black people in Asheville own their homes, whereas 53% of whites do (U.S. Census, 2020). Yet in 1967, before urban renewal, 58% of residents in the Southside,

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including 52% of the neighborhood's poor, owned their homes (Mace, 1967).[1] While homeowners were compensated for the to some extent for taking their property and provided a supplemental payment to help purchase a new home, it's unclear how many homeowners in the Southside retained homeownership. Some may not have been able to purchase a new home and ended up renting or relocating to public housing if they found the compensation payments insufficient or the supply restricted by racial cov-enants, racism, and other market conditions. The Housing Authority also created a "Dollar a Lot" program for the East Riverside project that al-lowed people (from the project area or otherwise) to purchase a newly cleared lot for only one dollar if they planned to build a home on it; it appears that few ended up participating in this program, likely finding the costs of building a new home to be cost prohibitive.

We know from Mace's (1967) pre-project survey of Southside residents that the East Riverside project planned to displace 524 households, home to 1,655 people. These households accounted for 54% of the neighbor-hood's adults, 25% of its children, and over half of the neighborhood's poor. Out of the 524 households to be displaced, 55% (288) were home-owners. Analysis of acquisition records archived at the University of North Carolina Asheville's Special Collections and University Archives reveals that the city acquired at least 292 owner-occupied homes during the East Riverside project (see Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, 1940). However, because the relocation records for this urban renewal project were not preserved, we do not have a clear account of how many of these homeowners could retain homeownership and how many lost this oppor-tunity to build generational wealth, ending up in public housing.

Were 292 homes available for purchase in Asheville between 1969 and 1971, the years of acquisition and displacement? And were 292 available at an affordable price point for displaced families? Given that this forced surge in demand would have driven up home prices even further, it seems highly likely that not all these displaced homeowners would have been able to purchase new homes. The accounts of those who lived through urban renewal in Asheville prove this was true. According to Tighe and Opelt (2014), Dr. Charles Mosley, who was the Reverend of Nazareth First Mis-sionary Baptist Church in Asheville for 43 years and served on the Citizen Advisory Committee for the City's urban renewal projects, reported that the compensation payments homeowners received were insufficient.

[1] Mace (1967) reports that the 58% homeownership rate in Southside (which was 98% Black) was higher than both the Asheville area average homeownership rate for non-Whites (49%) as well as the average homeownership rate for non-Whites in the South (37%).

A decade after the East Riverside project began removing Southside residents from their homes in 1969, the East End/Valley Street project acquired properties in 1979. A decade later, in 1987, the Montford urban renewal projects began. Some families were, therefore, likely forcibly displaced by urban renewal multiple times over 3 decades. Through these three urban renewal projects, the City seized 1,240 homes, businesses, and vacant lots: 808 properties in East Riverside, 394 in the East End, and 38 in Montford. Of the properties seized in the East End and Montford, 69% were vacant lots. This tremendous loss of Black land in the urban core represents a significant loss of intergenerational wealth, mainly when we see vacant lots in the contemporary Asheville real estate market selling for $150,000 to $300,000 per lot (Zillow, 2024). A rough estimate of the present-day financial value of just the vacant lots alone produces a lost wealth estimate of $45,150,000.

By relegating Black households to public housing, removed and out of sight from main thoroughfares and displaced from downtown locations, Asheville has been very successful at building a tourism economy—and building the property values of the white households and businesses that now occupy these neighborhoods today. The mixed-income communities that nourished Black life in Asheville no longer exist. The poor were shipped off to live in concentrated poverty in public housing. While some of the middle class initially remained in the neighborhoods, the many Black-owned businesses that populated these spaces did not survive the loss of their customer base. Today, within the boundaries of the urban renewal project areas, some of the original housing and public housing complexes still sit, as well as many of the city's medical facilities and an increasing number of breweries, restaurants, and luxury condominiums. The city also retains ownership of at least 81 parcels acquired through urban renewal, now as public parks, parking lots, or vacant lots (City of Asheville, 2023). In 1960, before urban renewal, Asheville was 19% Black; by 2020, this number was down to only 10.5% Black (U.S. Census, 2020).[2] Black erasure from downtown was likely achieved in Asheville, just like in other cities.

Conclusion: Towards reparative policies

Reckoning with the legacy of urban renewal is necessary for the ongoing journey to enact meaningful reparative policies in Asheville. The work of the joint Asheville City and Buncombe County Reparations Commission continues. Following the passage of the Reparations Resolution in July

[2]This percentage decline is due to both an influx of white residents and a decrease in absolute numbers of Black residents.

2020, the 25-member Reparations Commission was seated in March of 2022. These Commission members represent Black Asheville's six historical legacy neighborhoods (Burton Street, East End/Valley Street, Heart of Chestnut, Shiloh, Southside, and Stumptown) and contemporary public housing communities, with these members being nominated and selected by these communities. The Commission also includes five members appointed by the City Council and five appointed by the County Board of Commissioners. While the 2-year delay in seating the Commission was criticized by many and led to community skepticism of the Reparations Commission's difficulties in recruiting applicants to serve on the Commission were a key reason for the delay. Black Asheville's deep distrust of city government, which has its roots in urban renewal, explains much of the community's hesitation. Embarking on truly participatory and racially reparative public policy requires asking people to trust a system that has thus far shown it is unworthy of their trust. Building trust in the wake and midst of exclusion and extraction takes time.

The Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission is focused on five impact areas: criminal justice, economic development, education, health and wellness, and housing. Commission members serve on five workgroups covering these areas and are responsible for analyzing relevant data and policy options and reporting these findings to the full Commission. The full Commission is tasked with making short, medium, and long-term recommendations to Asheville City Council and the Buncombe County Commissioners on policies to repair the damage caused by systemic racism.

In March 2023, the Commission had issued two recommendations: the first, to fund reparations in perpetuity, and the second, for the City and County to fund an external audit of City and County practices and policies that may be perpetuating harms against Black residents. The second recommendation was developed in response to the impact focus area workgroups' repeated attempts to procure data from the city that would allow them to analyze disparate outcomes and practices, yet the city repeatedly failed to provide such data (Honosky, 2023). The City and County have subsequently funded the external audit of their policies and practices. Asheville City has committed to providing $2.1 million in funding toward reparations with Buncombe County pledging an additional $2 million in its 2023 budget and at least $500,000 per year for "as long as needed" (Jones, 2022).

While it remains to be seen what specific recommendations the Commission will make regarding housing and land, additional questions remain regarding funding levels and whether they will be sufficient to implement

the Commission's recommendations. New Paragraph - Will reparations in Asheville and Buncombe be a performative gesture, or will meaningful efforts be made to repair the damages of systemic racism in Asheville? This is a question best put to white Asheville—how much are you willing to pay to seek atonement and restitution for Asheville's Black residents? Understanding and acknowledging how urban renewal in Asheville effectively engineered an economic transfer of land and wealth from historic Black communities to present-day white communities must be the first step so that we may contemplate this question.

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