Echoes of Exploitation:

Tracing the Impact of Racial Capitalism in Birmingham's Titusville Neighbourhood

by
Brianna Brown

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis examines the exclusionary planning practices that shaped the urban fabric of the United States through segregation, focusing on the Titusville neighbourhood of Birmingham, Alabama, as an illustrative example. The work highlights how cycles of capitalist oppression adapt and persist, perpetuating socioeconomic disparities among African American residents in pursuit of excess wealth. It investigates how exploitative mechanisms – such as organized abandonment, predatory inclusion, and organized violence – are reiterated and reinforced by municipal and federal policies, continuously restructuring regimes of accumulation to enshrine inequality.

Through this theoretical framework, the research examines the history of Birmingham from its incorporation during the 19th century to its current state in the 21st century. The transformative theory of reparative planning provides parameters for dismantling exploitative capitalist structures. While the city's efforts through the Titusville Community Framework Plan are a start, a lack of accountability and implementation has shifted the burden onto nonprofit community groups in the area.

Insights gathered from interviews with leaders of two contrasting nonprofit organizations, the Titusville Development Corporation and the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust, highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to reparative planning. In the pursuit of anti-racist futures, combining pragmatic and transformative strategies is essential for dismantling the legacy of exclusionary planning. This study seeks to uncover the historical and ongoing impacts of these oppressive structures and advocate for reparative planning that genuinely addresses the needs of the Titusville community and, consequently, the larger American context.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my supervisor, Adrian Blackwell, for helping push the boundaries of this work. Your wisdom, thoughtfulness, and encouragement have made this experience deeply rewarding. I am extremely grateful for your support and patience throughout this process. Your guidance has been invaluable.

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Thank you to my internal reader, Tara Bissett, for providing me with the space during my undergraduate and graduate studies to explore my interests and pursue my academic curiosities.

To my dearest friends, thank you for your unparalleled ability to ground me when I need it most.

Finally, thank you to my family. Thank you to my mother and father, Michelle and John, for your unwavering love and support. It is because of your sacrifices that I am blessed with the opportunity to lead such a fulfilling life. I strive always make you proud.

To my grandmother and late grandfather, whose courage and determination to forge a new life for themselves and their children have afforded me the opportunities I have today. Your resilience, strength, and the legacy you created continue to inspire me daily. I am eternally grateful for everything you've done and the foundation you've built for our family.

And to my siblings—Duane, Taurean, and Jackie—thank you for being my constant source of support and laughter. Your encouragement has been a steady source of strength throughout this journey.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the residents of Titusville, who, despite the challenges and historical injustices faced by their city, continue to demonstrate unwavering resilience and warmth.

This research is also dedicated to those within and beyond the community, who understand its value and work tirelessly to foster meaningful change.

For your hospitality and grace, I am forever grateful.

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Statement of Positionality

The work of this thesis is incredibly personal to me. It manifested out of a desire to understand the structural inequalities that have and continue to shape the lives of African Americans in the United States. Although I was born in the United States, my upbringing took place primarily in Canada, where my own experiences with racism differed considerably from those of my African American father. He is the primary inspiration for this work.

From a young age, I watched how my father moved through space and how he carried himself in public, always aware of his surroundings and how he would take up space. While my upbringing in Canada was different, it was not free from racism. Microaggressions were constantly present, with my peers often speaking about Black people with disdain and perpetuating the harmful stereotype that the hardships faced by Black communities were somehow self-inflicted or indicative of racialized dysfunction. This reductive but prevalent narrative troubled me deeply, especially as I became more aware of the pervasive and often invisible forces that shape the lives of Black individuals and their communities.

My father's stories of growing up in the South and his memories of segregation exposed me to a more direct understanding of how race and class interact in complex ways to create enduring patterns of inequality. His experience, combined with my own curiosities about these systemic issues, was further shaped by my learning about redlining during my undergraduate studies. This was a pivotal moment, as it sparked my interest in understanding how exclusionary policies—while seemingly harmless or misguided—are insidious mechanisms of exploitation that continue to perpetuate socioeconomic disparities today.

As I indulged my academic curiosities, Birmingham, Alabama, continued to enter such exclusionary discourse. For these reasons, its Titusville neighbourhood, a community subject to multiple forms of exclusion and exploitation since the city's conception, serves as the focal point for this thesis. By examining the persistence of exclusionary planning practices, I aim to contribute to the broader discourse on urban inequality and propose pathways for reparative planning to address the historical injustices faced by communities like Titusville.

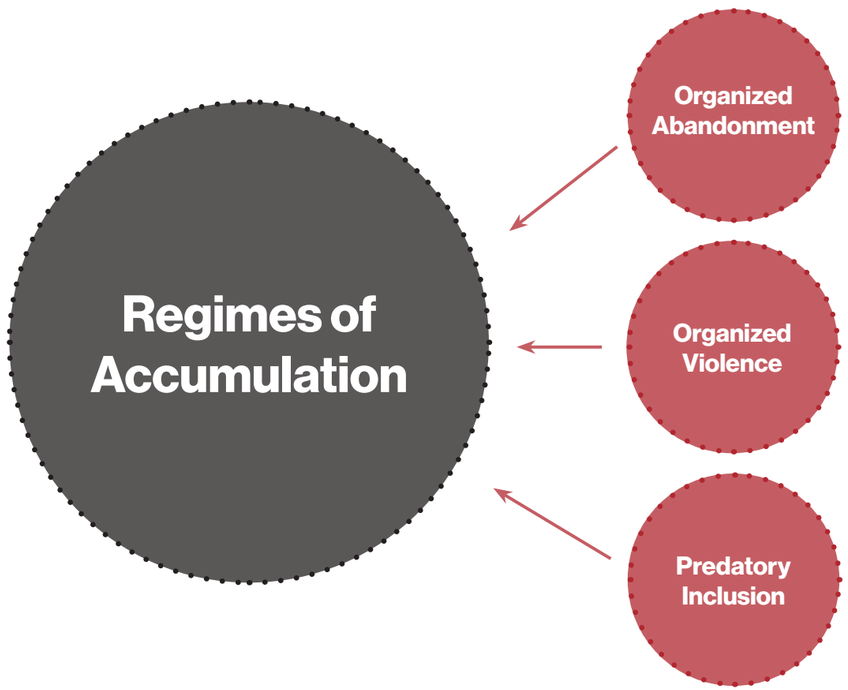
As the researcher, I must acknowledge that my perspective is both informed and limited by my background. The intersections of my Canadian upbringing and my identity as an African American woman, navigating these complex histories, drive this work, but they also frame how I interpret and articulate the events and processes described in this work. I approach this research not as a complete outsider, but as someone with a personal stake in the outcomes and future of Black communities in the U.S., particularly in how we can transform insidious systems that have long been designed to oppress. I hope this thesis contributes to meaningful discussions around race, planning, and the pursuit of anti-racist futures in any capacity.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Fig. 1.1. A Fee Minter sculpture depicting the Middle Passage

Mechanisms of Exploitation



The history of the United States is rife with contradictions. As a country founded on the exploitation of cheap Black labour and the disposability of Black lives, it claims that it is the "land of the free" and a paragon of democracy. These antithetical conditions speak to a deeper set of systemic issues: that the very conditions that facilitate America's guise of freedom are the result of the perpetual marginalization of its most disenfranchised group – its Black citizens.

These systemic disparities can be better understood through the concept of "regimes of accumulation." Drawing on the work of French economist Michel Aglietta, regimes of accumulation refer to the specific economic practices and institutional arrangements that enable and maintain capital growth within a particular phase of capitalism. These regimes are shaped by evolving social structures, economic dynamics, and regulatory conditions.[1] While this definition is prevalent in capitalist discourse, this thesis adopts this framework and imbues it with a racialized dimension as scholars like Bobby M. Wilson and Ruth Wilson Gilmore do. These regimes are designed to disproportionately amas wealth and power in the hands of a privileged minority, at the expense of a marginalized many. Despite the numerous opportunities presented throughout history to rectify these injustices, such options are seldom pursued. When exploitative circumstances are contested, rather than being dismantled, their systems of racialized control are simply reconfigured to preserve the status quo. This is because capitalism thrives off of inequality. For someone to benefit from excess, another must go without. Throughout American history, various mechanisms of exploitation – used at federal and municipal levels – have been used to maintain these imbalances for capital gain.

Mechanisms of Exploitation

This thesis identifies three exploitative mechanisms that are central to the establishment and maintenance of regimes of accumulation. They are:

1. Organized Abandonment
2. Organized Violence
3. Predatory Inclusion

These three mechanisms of exploitation describe circumstances through American history that aid in maintaining the given regime of accumulation of an era. Whether they are explicitly used in combination or isolation, these mechanisms work in tandem to strip resources and value from marginalized communities, leaving them vulnerable while enabling capitalist wealth accumulation.

Fig. 1.2. A diagram depicting regimes of accumulation and the mechanisms of exploitation that sustain them.

Central to American history the concept of "organized abandonment," a term coined by prison abolitionist, Ruth Wilson Gilmore. This concept refers to a governing body's inclination to withdraw its state resources and disinvest in unfavored communities. Integral to this concept is the term "organized," which emphasizes the *intentional*

1 Michel Aglietta, A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience (Verso, 2001), 29, 31.

dimension of these actions. Within the framework of racial capitalism, strategies are conceived to concentrate wealth and power among privileged members of society, while systematically impoverishing marginalized ones. As resources are deliberately diverted from these excluded communities, they are left vulnerable and forced to endure a compounded cycle of neglect, which facilitates further opportunities for capitalist extraction. For instance, urban renewal in American contexts often saw the demolition of poorer communities to make way for newer, more valued developments. These acts, legalized under the Housing Act of 1949, often displaced low-income communities, exacerbating existing inequalities. Beyond their control, these communities become characterized by inadequate housing stock, limited job opportunities, low educational attainment rates, and an absence of social services. Over time, these conditions are perceived not as the result of external manipulation, but as inherent failures of the communities themselves, justifying further exclusion.[2] Furthermore, organized abandonment as an exploitative mechanism promotes self-reliance in its neo-liberal form. By stripping workers of social safety nets under the problematic assumption that social programs are not crucial and breed "indolence," workers are forced to rely more heavily on their own efforts to survive under capitalist systems.

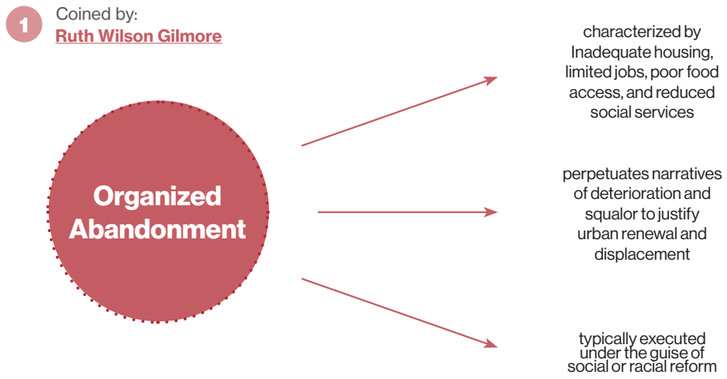


Fig. 1.3. Diagram illustrating the concept of organized abandonment.

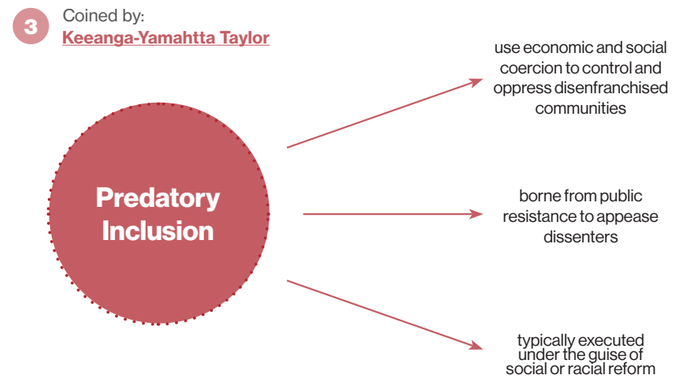
Additionally, “organized violence,” another term developed by Gilmore, can complement organized abandonment and predatory inclusion. Through the strategic use of law enforcement and the threat of criminal conviction, organized violence can be used to maintain social control and suppress resistance from marginalized communities challenging their subjugation. Organized violence can also encapsulate the broader effect of exclusionary systems. For example, the mass extirpation caused by urban renewal – manifesting in the demolition of physical structures and the dismantling of longstanding communal support networks – is a form of state-sanctioned violence.

2 Organized Abandonment Talk by Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-A5G0B8AAs.

Fig. 1.4. Diagram illustrating the concept of organized violence.

When organized abandonment ceases to be effective in establishing new regimes, additional exploitation can manifest in the form of “predatory inclusion.” Coined by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, a professor of African American studies at Princeton University, this term describes the sudden inclusion of disenfranchised groups in a given process but under more insidious and disadvantageous terms than their privileged counterparts. Having been excluded from a given opportunity as long as organized abandonment was in effect, these groups are increasingly susceptible to these new forms of coercion.[3]

Fig. 1.5. Diagram illustrating the concept of predatory inclusion.



3 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 5.

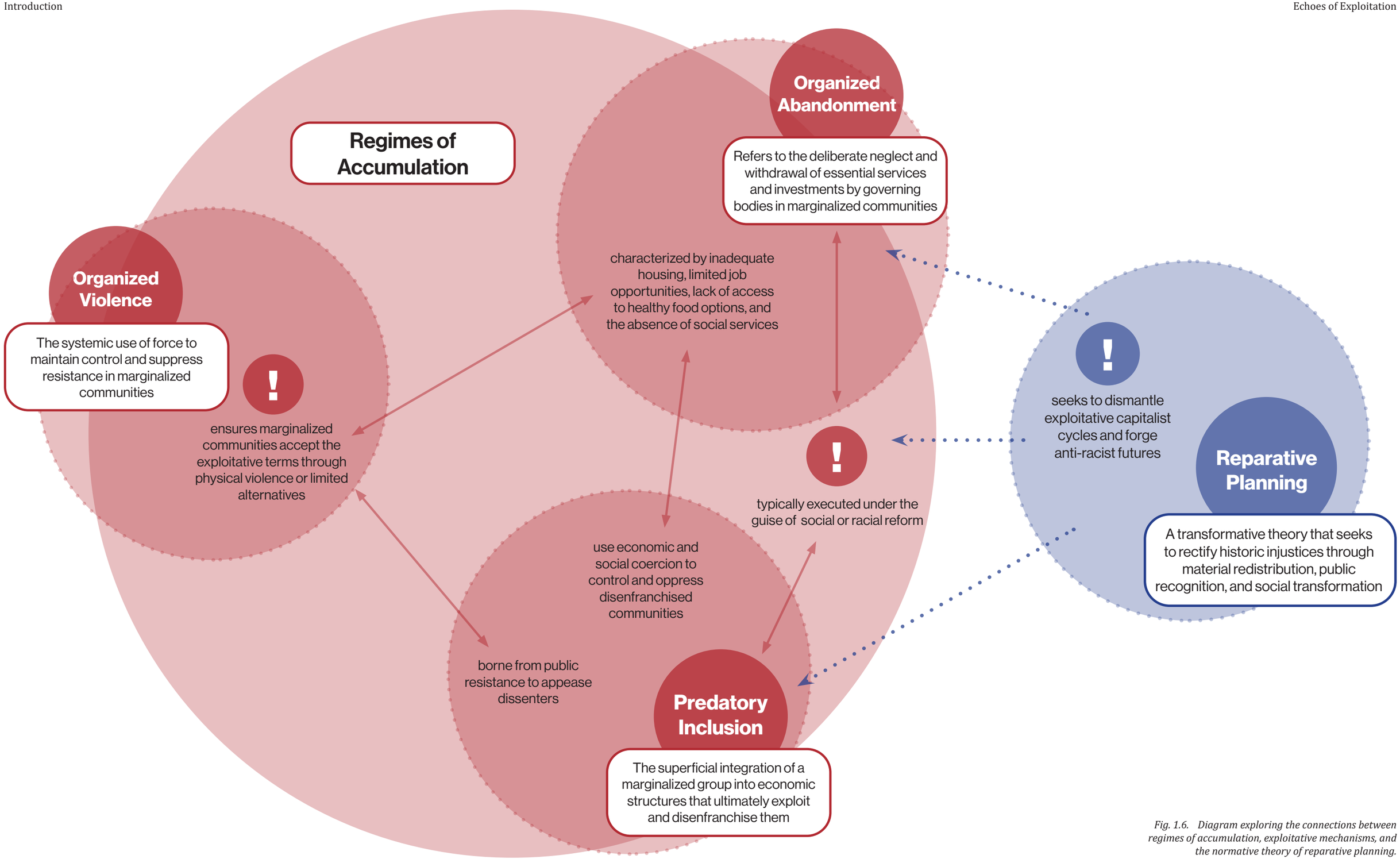


Fig. 1.6. Diagram exploring the connections between regimes of accumulation, exploitative mechanisms, and the normative theory of reparative planning.

In contrast to these exploitative mechanisms, the principles of reparative planning offer a normative solution. Defined by urban planning and racial justice scholars, Rashad A. Williams and Justin Steil, reparative planning refers to a transformative theory that seeks to rectify historic wrongs by way of material redistribution, public recognition of the harms exacted, and the fundamental transformation of the institutions that perpetuate inequalities. Through these three dimensions, reparative planning endeavours to dismantle the enduring effects of organized abandonment, predatory inclusion, and organized violence.

Ultimately, the power of exploitative mechanisms lies in their abilities to work in tandem, manipulating conditions while remaining unseen. To effectively pursue anti-racist futures, it is crucial to understand the interconnected nature of racial capitalism and its impact on evolving institutions throughout history. To gain a deeper understanding of how these exploitative mechanisms operate and affect the lives of marginalized groups, this thesis will apply these concepts to the Titusville neighbourhood of Birmingham, Alabama.

Birmingham, Alabama

Conceived as a city that would predicate its economic success on the exploitation of cheap Black labour, Birmingham was explicit about the future it wished to lead. However, it is important to note, that Birmingham's racialized history is far from an anomaly. Like many other U.S. cities, Birmingham used city planning as a tool to extirpate and limit the rights of Black people to freely live, work, and play where they desired. The city implemented racial zoning ordinances, urban renewal, and pursued interstate highway construction to leave Black communities with limited housing options that would make them fit for predatory inclusion as organized abandonment fell out of favor. Similar to cities like Chicago, Atlanta, and Dallas, Birmingham was not the only American city that endorsed the bombing of its Black residents as they fought for their civil rights.[4] During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Birmingham's landscape would prove pivotal as civil rights activists confronted not only the social implications of segregation but also the urban planning practices that regulate one's access to space and opportunities. This cruel reality led Martin Luther King Jr. to denounce the city, describing it as "the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States."[5]

In essence, Birmingham's history serves as a microcosm of the broader American experience, telling the story of a country that disenfranchised its minorities at nearly every opportunity. As such, Birmingham stands as a prime example of the power exploitative mechanisms have in shaping the urban fabric of the country. The convoluted interplay between these exploitative mechanisms will serve as the theoretical framework that informs the thesis' examination of

4 Charles E. Connerly, "The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 5.

5 Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963, https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf.

historical and ongoing injustices of Birmingham, and by extension, the historic Titusville neighbourhood.

The Titusville Neighbourhood

Just west of downtown Birmingham lies the Titusville neighbourhood – a small community that exemplifies the racial challenges of the city at large. As a predominantly Black neighbourhood established after the Civil War, Titusville endured the effects of organized abandonment, predatory inclusion, and organized violence since the city was conceived.[6] With each successive regime, the neighbourhood's housing quality, job opportunities, and educational attainment, continued to decline to the detriment of its Black residents. Today, in response to these persistent challenges, revitalization efforts have been initiated by both the municipal government and grassroots agencies alike. While the durable legacy of historical exploitation presents its own challenges, the cumulative efforts of these groups aim to reverse the damage.

Thesis Structure

After this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured into four key chapters:

Chapter 2 examines the historic evolution of racial capitalism in Birmingham, tracing its legacy from the city's founding in 1871 through to the Great Recession and subprime lending crisis of the early 2000s. It investigates how the city's efforts to forge new regimes of accumulation – through organized abandonment, organized violence, and predatory inclusion – have effectively entrenched the socioeconomic opportunities of its Black residents across centuries. By detailing each historical era, the chapter reveals how remnants of exclusionary policies, both municipal and federal, are reiterated in new forms and adapted within contemporary contexts. This retrospective analysis demonstrates that exploitative strategies do not disappear but rather evolve under new guises with the same underlying intent.

In Chapter 3, the thesis situates Birmingham's history of Black exploitation within the contemporary context of the Titusville neighbourhood. Despite its proximity to nearly every emergence of a new capitalist regime, Titusville vividly demonstrates the impact of policy exclusion on a community. The chapter will explore the neighbourhood's regional characteristics, notable landmarks, and housing conditions to reveal how the city's persistent implementation of exploitative mechanisms has affected this predominantly Black neighbourhood.

Subsequently, Chapter 4 will analyze the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP) – a comprehensive document from 2015 that was designed to address the various challenges facing the neighbourhood. Building upon the framework established by the 2012

6 "Titusville Community Framework Plan" (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, 2015), 4, https://www.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Titusville-Community-Framework-Plan_final.pdf.

Comprehensive Plan, the TCFP was formed through extensive public outreach with Titusville residents, stakeholders, and community leaders. Despite its holistic approach and detailed proposals, few of its proposals seem to have been implemented, now ten years after its release. This chapter will examine the TCFP through the principles of reparative planning, evaluating whether its scope, goals, and implementation strategies would effectively address the community's needs while trying to determine a cause for the slow progress of its execution.

Finally, Chapter 5 will explore insights gathered from interviews with the leaders of two non-profit organizations in Birmingham: the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC) and the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH-SCLT). The TDC is a grassroots organization that has remained committed to the revitalization of Titusville since its founding. Its work, focused on improving housing stock, ensuring affordability, and creating spaces for Black joy, has been transformative in the Titusville community. In recent years, the organization has described its work as an extension of the TCFP. Given the deep-rooted issues of exclusion within Titusville and reparative planning's call to transform institutions that perpetuate inequality, the latter half of the chapter will explore the DH-SCT's approach to alternative living solutions in a community just north of Titusville.

CHAPTER 2

A History of Injustice

Fig. 2.1. Artist Joe Minter walks with my father through his installation, "African Village in America."

Fig. 2.2. Joe Minter, standing outside the gates of his sculpture garden, 'African Village in America'

It was on a sweltering morning in June that my father and I met Joe Minter. The air had hung thick with humidity, casting a haze over the residential street before us. As we stepped out of our rental car, we saw him – a man of presence dressed in paint-splattered clothing, a rusted paint bucket swinging rhythmically in his hand with each step he took.

As my father and I approached him, my eyes scanned the half-acre yard beside us. It was enclosed by a metal fence and adorned with hand-painted signage recounting biblical scriptures, historical facts, and original prose. Beyond it, I could barely make out the elaborate forms of sculptures assembled out of found objects like scrap metal and discarded tools. Ever so often, intricate sculptures would poke high above the fence, the forms of African masks fashioned out of pot lids and chains with their silent faces staring out over the street. This was all the painstaking work of Joe Minter, a self-taught artist who was born and raised in the Titusville neighbourhood of Birmingham where we met him that day. He refers to this landscape as the "African Village in America."

Fig. 2.3. Joe Minter kneeling at the entry way of his memorial sculpture park

As the distance between the three of us closed, Minter greeted us with a warm smile and open arms. He spoke to us as if he had known us for years, his southern drawl, hospitable and inviting. He swung open the entry gate to his sculpture garden, a transformative landscape that he has been working on since 1989. He guided us through his memorial garden, but more crucially, through the history of Birmingham's transgressions against its Black residents, from the arrival of African slaves to the present day. In this space, each artwork depicts or recounts a significant historical event, figure, or symbol from African American history.

Despite my early efforts to remain engaged in conversation, I found my mind situated in two spaces – caught between the warmth of his character and the sombre weight of his work. There had been a sign that I read on the way in, its bright yellow lettering against a magenta backdrop resounding in my thoughts. The sign read, "African have human rights? Not in USA. No. We have racism. Lost Freedom. Agony. Death."

Fig. 2.4. Signage bearing various pithy texts about the history of Birmingham hang on fence outside of the 'African Village in America'

Through the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a leading scholar and activist in the realm of abolitionist geographies, we understand that freedom is not simply a figurative state of mind. To Gilmore, freedom is a place rooted in material conditions. It is tangible and exists where the collective resources, talents, and energy of a place and its people can foster social welfare institutions that are accessible to all.[1]

As evidenced by the work of Joe Minter, Birmingham is not one of these places. Instead, Birmingham – like many cities across the United States – bears the traces of a built environment that was shaped by terror, displacement, and the systemic exploitation of its minorities. Just as enslaved Africans lost the fundamental right to their autonomy, so did their descendants. Municipal and federal legislation created an entrenched legacy that continues to undermine the socioeconomic successes of African Americans today. Its implications are of long-range consequence, rendering the right to choose where one lives and works, for instance, a matter of constrained choice.

Race lies central to the complexities of this socioeconomic order. In efforts to maintain their dominion, white elites within the ruling class promoted the racial exploitation of Black people. The primary aim of the African-American slave trade was to generate wealth. Consequently, racism, when practiced to its fullest extent, is a tangible exercise driven by the prospect of capital gains. As Gilmore puts succinctly, "[capitalism] requires inequality, and racism enshrines it."[2]

In his exploration of racial capitalism in Birmingham, Bobby M. Wilson, a geography professor emeritus from the University of Alabama, emphasizes the role of capitalist reinvention. He states:

> Capitalism constantly restructures itself to increase accumulation, and it has undergone significant modifications since the nineteenth century. The failure of black liberalism in the twentieth century was its inability to understand the impact of this restructuring on the black community and responded realistically.[3]

In pursuit of economic stasis, capitalists must continuously adapt to evolving conditions. They must attempt to broaden their markets and enact cheaper systems of production and distribution to create new capitalist regimes of accumulation as old ones falter.[4] Following emancipation and the decline of industrialism, the foundation of American wealth shifted its sole reliance on labour to become increasingly rooted in land ownership at the expense of Black lives. As French sociologist, Loïc Wacquant explains: "[racial] division was a consequence not a precondition of slavery, but once it was instituted it became detached from its initial function and acquired a

1 Organized Abandonment Talk by Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-A5G0B8AAs.
2 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), ix.
3 Bobby M. Wilson, America's Johannesburg: Industrialization and Racial Transformation in Birmingham (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2019), 33.
4 Wilson, 29.

social potency all its own."[5] The endurance of race as a notion after the fall of slavery spurred the emergence of new geographies defined and exploited through racialized boundaries, intertwining economic and social hierarchies to give rise to "racial capitalism".[6] The enactment of racial capitalism at the national, state, and municipal levels would allow American capitalists to leverage property in various ways to create new, and more profitable regimes. These regimes were analogous but distinct enough to be enacted with widespread acceptance or, more commonly, under the performative ignorance of their detrimental effects on African Americans.[7]

Within geographies of racial capitalism, the restructuring of regimes of accumulation may appear to bring about social or racial reform but they are typically reorganized solely to improve economic gains.[8] Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes these conditions with the term "organized abandonment." The term describes when a governing entity – be it the state, municipality or otherwise – will abdicate itself of its responsibilities, purposefully disinvesting in unfavourable groups.[9] In Birmingham, this has manifested through the strategic disinvestment of Black neighbourhoods or enactment of policies that undermine their safety, depriving them of necessities like adequate housing, suitable access to food, and social services. Coupled with organized abandonment and predatory inclusion, comes organized violence – the planned and systematic use of force by a state to maintain control and suppress resistors in marginalized communities.

With the work of these scholars in mind, it becomes apparent that the history of Birmingham is a history of state-sanctioned violence. It is a history of injustice where the successes of some manifest out of the exploitation of many. It describes a series of capitalist structures produced and leveraged for disproportionate gain. When one structure falters, another is devised to take its place.

Just as Joe Minter's sculpture garden recounts the history of racial inequity in Birmingham, this chapter will delve into the city's history through the framework of organized abandonment, predatory inclusion, and organized violence as underlying actors in the establishment of regimes of accumulation. To investigate such at the intimate level of a neighbourhood, the chapter will examine the history of Birmingham before investigating how these processes have impacted Titusville – a predominantly Black neighbourhood that has existed adjacent to the city's main economic centers as new oppressive regimes emerged.

5 Loïc Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'race Question' in the US," New Left Review, no. 13 (2002): 45.
6 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 83.
7 Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'race Question' in the US," 42.
8 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 32.
9 Organized Abandonment Talk by Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore.

This chapter is divided into 8 sections: (1) the conception of Birmingham as an industrial epicentre, (2) the establishment of racial ordinances and redlining, (3) urban renewal and the Housing Act of 1949, (4) the interstate highway system, (5) the Civil Rights Movement, (6) the initial subprime lending crisis, (7) the War on Drugs, and (8) the Great Recession. Through these sections, the chapter will trace and scrutinize the historic circumstances that form the repetitive links in Birmingham's chain of oppression.

Period	Regime of Accumulation	Exclusionary Strategy	Exploitative Mechanism of Accumulation
Birmingham's Conception (1871 - 1929)	Industrial Capitalism	Convict Leasing	Organized Abandonment; Organized Violence
Racial Ordinances and Redlining (1930 - 1949)	Real Estate and Finance Capitalism	Carceral Punishment	Organized Abandonment; Organized Violence
Urban Renewal (1950 - 1959)	Urban Redevelopment	Slum Clearance	Organized Abandonment
Interstate Highway System (1960 - 1969)	Investment in Federal Infrastructure	Slum Clearance	Organized Abandonment
The Civil Rights Movement (1954 - 1969)	————	Police Brutality	Organized Violence
The Initial Subprime Lending Crisis (1970 - 1989)	Financial Capitalism	Predatory Lending Practices	Predatory Inclusion
The War on Drugs (1980 - present)	————	Mass Incarceration	Organized Abandonment; Organized Violence
The Great Recession (1990 - 2009)	Financial Capitalism	Predatory Lending Practices	Predatory Inclusion

Table 2.1. Periodization table outlining eight historical regimes in Birmingham's history.

Birmingham's Conception

From its conception, Birmingham's instatement as a planned city was made apparent through its name alone. Incorporated in 1871 by the Elyton Land Company, Birmingham was created to emulate its namesake, Birmingham, England. The Elyton Land Company was comprised of 10 white investors who wished to establish a thriving industrial epicentre built on rich deposits of iron ore and coal. To meet these ends, the group acquired 4,150 acres of farmland in Jefferson County, Alabama. In 1858, the group nominated John Milner, a surveyor and engineer, to create a feasibility study that would ascertain the viability of constructing a railroad to the north of the state where mineral deposits were widespread. Milner's report described possible locations for the railway, its costs, and its subsequent benefits, ultimately proving its feasibility. As a result, Birmingham's location was decided in anticipation of the South and North Alabama Railroad that was slated to intersect the existing Alabama and Chattanooga track. According to Milner, the convergence of these transportation routes would prove

vital to the city's economic growth and industrial development.[10] However, its logistical context was not the only key to economic growth.

Milner's report believed that Birmingham's success would not be solely contingent upon the extraction of raw materials but also that the city would function as a manufacturing hub. For the city to compete with other industrial manufacturers, Milner believed that the city must be predicated on the exploitation of cheap Black labour, akin to slavery. Since the city was created during the Reconstruction period and white populations were grappling with the integration of African Americans, Milner advocated for the compatibility between industrial labour and convict leasing.[11]

'Slavery by Another Name'

Joe Minter describes his work as an African burial ground, a solemn tribute to the 100,000 African Americans who were laid to rest in the cemeteries directly behind his property. His art bears witness to the African Americans who built the nation on their backs and were repaid with oppression until death. While these sentiments are emphasized throughout the sculpture park, his work speaks to his deeper understanding that these conditions did not cease with emancipation but rather evolved into new forms of exploitation.

Fig. 2.5. A sign, created by Joe Minter, reads: "African Ancestry Bury Ground 100,000"

10 Connerly, 13.
11 Connerly, 14.

After the Civil War, President Lincoln enacted the Emancipation Proclamation – an executive order that stated, "all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."[12] While its main intentions seemed clear, its Thirteenth Amendment introduced troubling caveats. The amendment declared that slavery and involuntary servitude were prohibited "except as a punishment for crime," leaving room for former slave owners to exploit its provisions.[13]

The significance of enslaved labour in the United States transcends its role in fueling nineteenth-century capitalist structures; enslaved individuals were not simply labourers; they were commodities themselves. In 1860, the physical bodies of enslaved Black people were appraised at a total value of $3 billion, with the cotton they produced valued at $250 million.[14] Slavery was fundamentally about generating capital, and in such ways, racism, especially within capitalist contexts, was a means to reach a material end.[15] Slavery had been the initial driver of commerce and its abolition did not mark the end of the intersection between race and economics. Former slave masters, unwilling to relinquish their economic dominance, sought alternate methods to maintain their capital advantage. This took on the form of "Black Codes," anti-vagrancy laws intended to disproportionately target Black individuals and legally subject them to conditions reminiscent of slavery.[16] Enacted in 1865, these laws criminalized innocent conduct and deemed Black people "vagrants" for minor offences such as loitering, breaking curfew, lacking proof of employment, or lacking a permanent residence.[17] With the subjective nature of these parameters, those found guilty were criminally prosecuted and subsequently fined, arrested, and bound to a labour contract to absolve them of their "crimes."[18] Despite the legal abolition of slavery, former slave owners had created a new means to guarantee a cheap labour force.

Within a report to the board of the South and North Alabama Railroad Company, Milner asserts:

> I am clearly of opinion, that negro labour can be made exceedingly profitable in manufacturing iron, and in rolling mills. [...] I have

12 "13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865) | National Archives," National Archives, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment.
13 "13th Amendment: Abolition of Slavery."
14 Rashawn Ray and Andre M. Perry, "Why We Need Reparations for Black Americans," Brookings, April 15, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-we-need-reparations-for-black-americans/; Walter Johnson, "King Cotton's Long Shadow," The New York Times, March 30, 2013, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/wjohnson/files/king_cottons_long_shadow.pdf.
15 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 12.
16 Jose Vazquez, "Convict Leasing," Equal Justice Initiative, November 1, 2013, https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-convict-leasing/; Douglas A. Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 53.
17 Vazquez, "Convict Leasing"; "Black Code | Laws, History, & Examples | Britannica," March 14, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/black-code.
18 "Black Code | Laws, History, & Examples | Britannica."

> long since learned that negro labour is more reliable and cheaper for any business connected with the construction of a railroad, than white.[19]

Milner's actions were consistent with his beliefs. He was one of the first to employ convict labourers for coal mining in the state of Alabama, manipulating convict leasing to establish a new form of slavery, one that operated under a different guise.[20] When the state began to sell its Black prisoners en-masse in the 1870s, Milner seized the opportunity, subjecting hundreds to inhumane working conditions within his network of coal mines.[21] Through its cost-effectiveness, Milner not only reaped substantial profits from this corrupt practice but also successfully persuaded his white counterparts to adopt the same methods. Consequently, the use of convict leasing in Alabama's coal and iron mines became a common practice.

The Economics of Convict Labour

Industrial leaders throughout Birmingham swiftly exploited Black labour in their rolling mills and foundries. "The Mineral Wealth of Alabama and Birmingham Illustrated" report outlines that "40 percent of the total Birmingham population is negro" and that conversely "90 percent of labour employed by all furnaces [...was also] negro."[22] Access to an abundance of cheap, labour would facilitate Birmingham's new regime of accumulation, characterized by its low labour wages and long hours.[23] Unlike its northern counterparts, Birmingham was apprehensive about implementing mechanization into their mills and foundries. While mechanization would increase production efficiency, it would simultaneously increase the demand for skilled labour, a demand the city's capitalists were not willing to entertain.[24] If a convict labourer were to use any sort of machinery to complete their tasks, they would be expected to produce twice as much as someone performing all their labour manually.[25]

Despite convict labourers typically performing at only 67 to 75 percent of the capacity of free workers, employers preferred employing them.[26] To increase surplus value, employers would simply extend the length and intensity of the labour performed. Up until the 1900s, the standard work schedule was a six-day workweek consisting of ten-hour workdays.[27] Unlike free labour, convict labour afforded employers what they described as "regularity." Convict leasing ensured that hundreds of

19 John T. Milner, Report of the Chief Engineer to the President and Board of Directors of the South and North Alabama Railroad Co., on the 26th of November 1859 (Montgomery: Advertiser Steam Printing House, 1859).
20 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 115.
21 Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name, 52.
22 John W. DuBose, The Mineral Wealth of Alabama and Birmingham Illustrated (Birmingham: N, T. Green and Co., 1886), 109.
23 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 108.
24 Wilson, 112.
25 Wilson, 116.
26 Wilson, 114.
27 Wilson, 113.

Black labourers would consistently work 310 days throughout the year.[28] Since they were bound to the state, there was no risk of wage strikes or a loss of productivity from labourers taking leave. Additionally, due to the "unskilled" nature of the work, if labourers lost their lives while working, they could easily be replaced.

This raises the question: without wage incentives or the threat of being fired, what motivated convict labourers to perform their jobs? The answer lies in the state's establishment of a "task system" in 1883. For instance, within Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI) coal mines, convicts were expected to produce three to four tons of coal each day.[29] Following the completion of their task, convict labourers were paid about 30 cents per subsequent ton produced, which would be equivalent to 7.44 USD today.[30] If a Black labourer was unable to complete their task, they would be whipped as punishment.[31] Just as it had during slavery, physical punishment allowed white elites to establish their supremacy over Black people.

The Alice Furnaces

Among the furnaces built across Birmingham, the Alice Furnaces, situated at the northeasternmost tip of Titusville, was the first to prove the economic viability of producing iron using coke in the South.[32] Many were apprehensive about ironmaking particularly due to its high upfront costs and its numerous logistical challenges. Building dedicated transportation systems and production facilities, as well as securing abundant mineral properties presented further challenges. However, Henry DeBardeleben was willing to take on the challenge. DeBardeleben was an industrialist who had previously worked at Oxmoor, one of the first sets of furnaces constructed in Birmingham. After the failure of the furnaces and his own managerial setbacks, he shifted to prospecting, where he found much greater success. Amid the excitement of the city's founding, the Elyton Land Company was keen to entrust entrepreneurs with land, hoping that property values would increase under their care. As such, the organization entrusted DeBardeleben with a triangular lot of land in Titusville, strategically sandwiched where the Alabama Great Southern train tracks intersected with the Louisiana and Nashville train tracks.[33] In 1879, he built the first Alice furnace and named it after his eldest daughter.[34] Out of fear of having contracted tuberculosis, DeBardeleben left the country, leaving the Alice Furnace to Thomas T. Hillman, the son of a Birmingham prospector. Under his stewardship, Hillman erected an additional furnace.[35]

28 Wilson, 114.
29 Wilson, 118.
30 "Inflation Calculator," accessed April 11, 2024, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1800?amount=0.30.
31 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 118.
32 Michael W. Fazio, Landscape of Transformations: Architecture and Birmingham, Alabama, 1st ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 45.
33 Fazio, 45.
34 Fazio, 46, 48.
35 Fazio, 49–50.

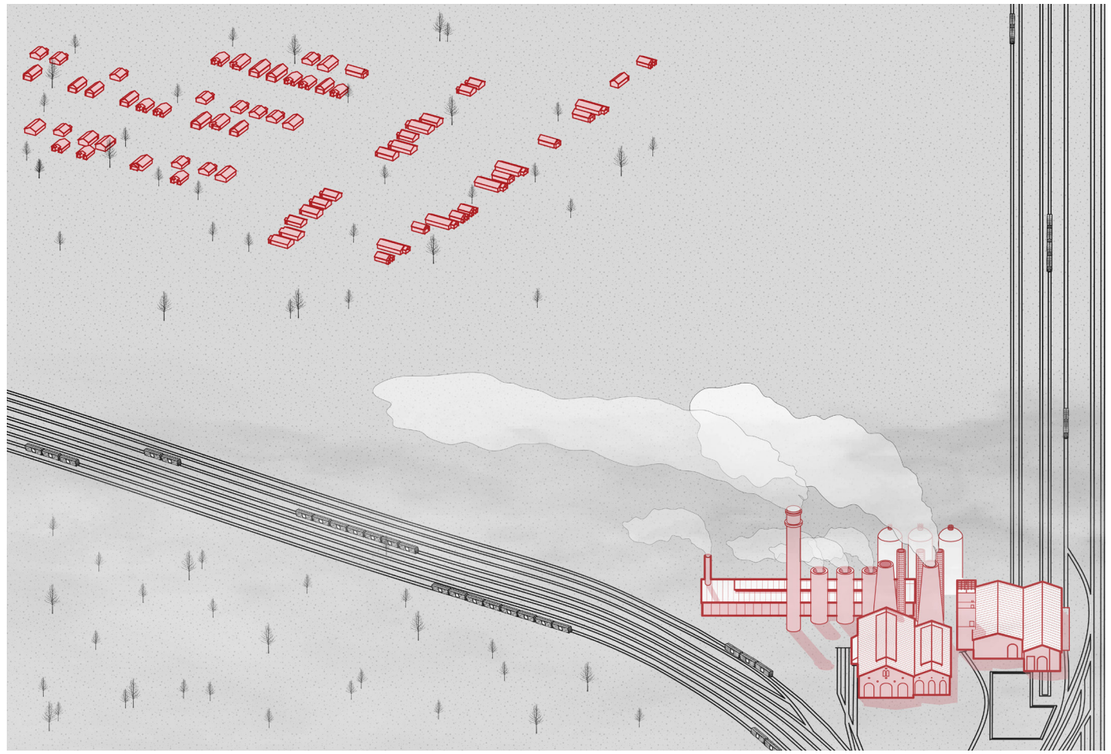


Fig. 2.6. A speculative drawing of the Alice Furnaces and surrounding Titusville homes during 1911

Company Housing

Much to the disdain of Birmingham's white population, these deliberate hiring practices resulted in the city's Black population becoming entrenched in white conceded spaces. The city's population grew by 23,000 from 1880 to 1890, 40 percent of its total comprised of Black people.[36] American historian and academic, Blaine A. Brownell wrote,

> It was in the city's vacant spaces – areas of undeveloped land bypassed for more pleasant sites by industry and white neighbourhoods – that the majority of Birmingham's Negros settled. These black neighbourhoods were generally situated along creekbeds, railroad lines, or alleys, and they suffered from a lack of street lights, paved streets sewers, and other city services.[37]

As coal mines and foundry employers integrated convict leasing alongside free labour in their mining operations, the demand to house this new workforce grew. To meet this need, employers

36 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 17.
37 Blaine A. Brownell, "Birmingham, Alabama New South City in the 1920s," The Journal of Southern History 38, no. 1 (1972): 28, https://doi.org/10.2307/2206652.

created company-built community housing for their workers.[38] Since Black people had already been relegated to the city's conceded spaces, their living options were limited. Due to constrained choice, company housing appeared to be the best among the few available options. These housing arrangements, located close to the foundries, allowed employers to maintain subsumed control over their workers at all hours.[39] In the most extreme cases, employees could be awoken in the middle of the night to tend to broken equipment in the foundries, regardless of the circumstance. This proximity reduced commute times and increased overall efficiency.

The majority of Black residents lived within shotgun houses – narrow homes with two to three rooms arranged in succession.[40] These homes closely resembled the sharecropper homes that many Black settlers were familiar with.[41] Despite African Americans bearing the weight of the city's industrial development, their living conditions, due to deliberate disinvestment, were blatantly inferior. Ethel Armes, a reporter with the "Birmingham News," made the effort to visit the Sloss Quarters in 1912.[42] Upon visiting, she was struck by the squalor that Black families were subjected to:

> These shacks, unpainted, rotting away, with broken windows, split doors, and ashy surroundings, look as if they too were made out of slag. The smoke is ever on the place, like a fallen storm cloud. The ashes from the coke ovens, strewn there for nearly thirty years are more than foot [sic] deep. The 'houses' are builded [sic] on them. The gas and fumes from both furnace and coke ovens fill the air. Before you are there half an hour your throat is affected.[43]

In addition to these homes being of deplorable quality in terms of their construction and maintenance, many of these homes possessed no sanitary provisions and were rampant with health violations.[44] Most company housing across the city was without indoor plumbing or running water, possessing open privies and exterior fire hydrants in their stead. To exacerbate matters further, these spaces were also overcrowded, with Armes describing these homes as "shacks, where, like corralled cattle, the employees [...were] huddled together."[45] In the case of the Ensley neighbourhood, up to ten families might share the same dry closet, and twenty families would use the same water hydrant.

38 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 188.
39 Wilson, 190.
40 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 30.
41 Brownell, "Birmingham, Alabama New South City in the 1920s," 28–29.
42 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 21.
43 Ethel Armes, "How the Smoke Nuisance and Check System Affect Living Conditions of Furnace Employes," The Birmingham News, October 13, 1912.
44 Armes.
45 Armes.

While historical accounts of the Alice Furnaces possessing workers' quarters are not readily available, it was common practice for industrial operations of that era and scale to be accompanied by some form of worker's housing. In 1878, DeBardeleban formed a short-lived partnership with mining engineer Truman Aldrich and industrialist James Withers Sloss to create Pratt Coal and Coke Company. Sloss promptly left the group in the following year and created the Sloss Furnaces.[46] Given the proximity of the Alice Furnaces to the Sloss Furnaces and the short-lived partnership between their owners, one might assume that their operations were similar. This suggests that the Alice Furnaces may have had company housing similar to that of the Sloss Furnaces.

However, if the Alice Furnaces did not have company housing, it is still likely that the Titusville neighbourhood, founded by freed slaves in the 19th century, would have had some residential structures in the area.[47] Historical maps, such as Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad's 1908 map of the Birmingham District, show residential streets near the Alice Furnaces.[48] Furthermore, based on the duplex configuration of Sloss Furnace's workers' quarters in the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of 1911 and the shotgun-style homes present in Titusville's oldest areas, one might presume that the Alice Furnaces' company housing was architecturally similar. The following drawings, based on digital photographs, archival material, historical maps, and recorded oral histories, offer a reimagining of what Titusville looked like during the peak of the Alice Furnaces.

Fig. 2.7. Perspectival street-view of Titusville housing near the Alice Furnaces during 1911

46 Fazio, Landscape of Transformations, 45.

47 "Titusville Community Framework Plan" (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, 2015), 4, https://www.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Titusville-Community-Framework-Plan_final.pdf.

48 Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad, Birmingham District, 1908, 1:35,000, 1908, http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrgn?cat=North%20America%20and%20United%20States&item=States/Alabama/Counties/Jefferson/Jefferson1908b.sid&wid=1000&hei=900&props=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=simple/view-dhtml.xsl.

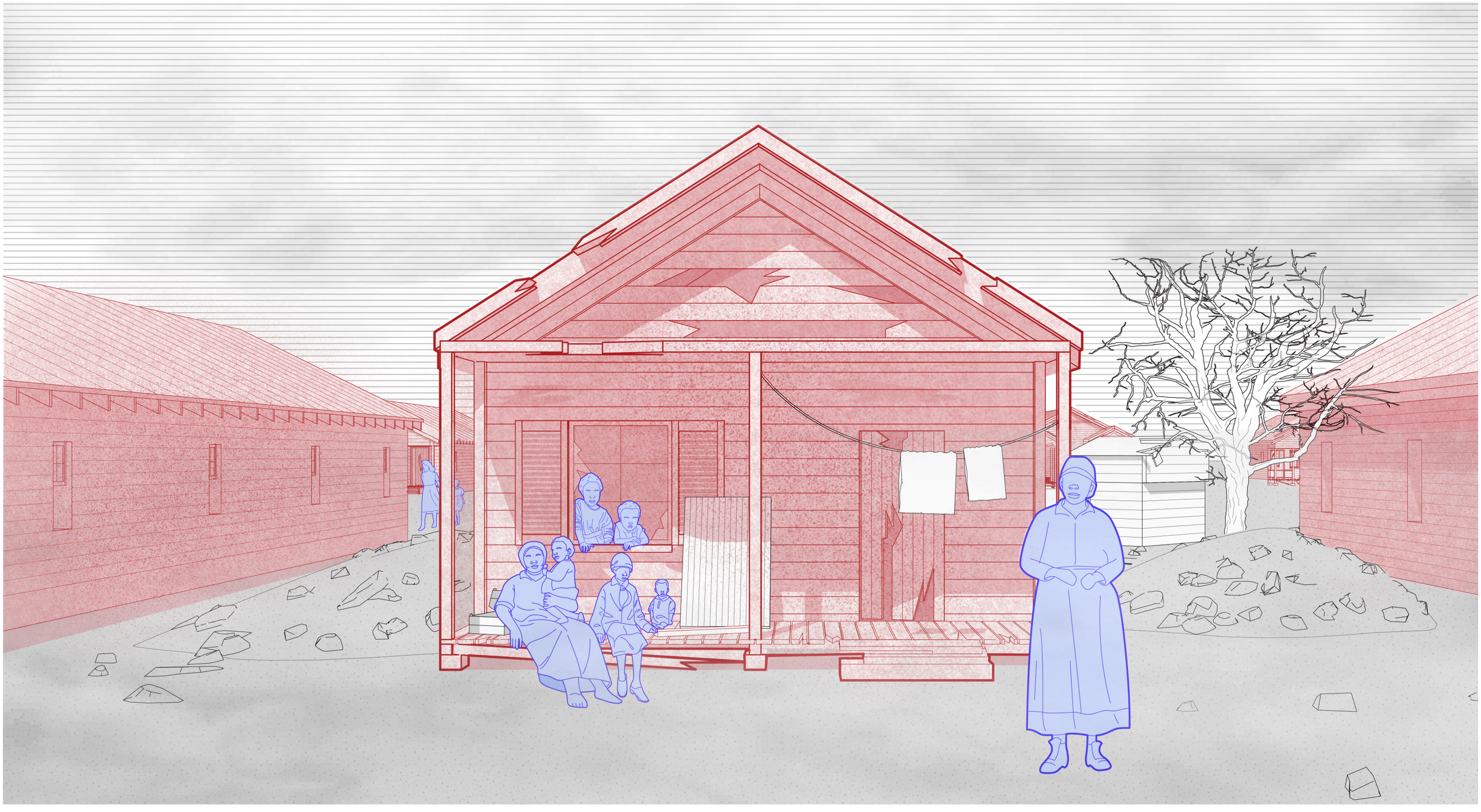


Fig. 2.8. A home in Titusville during 1911, with a family seated on the front porch and two young children peering out onto the street from the home's window.

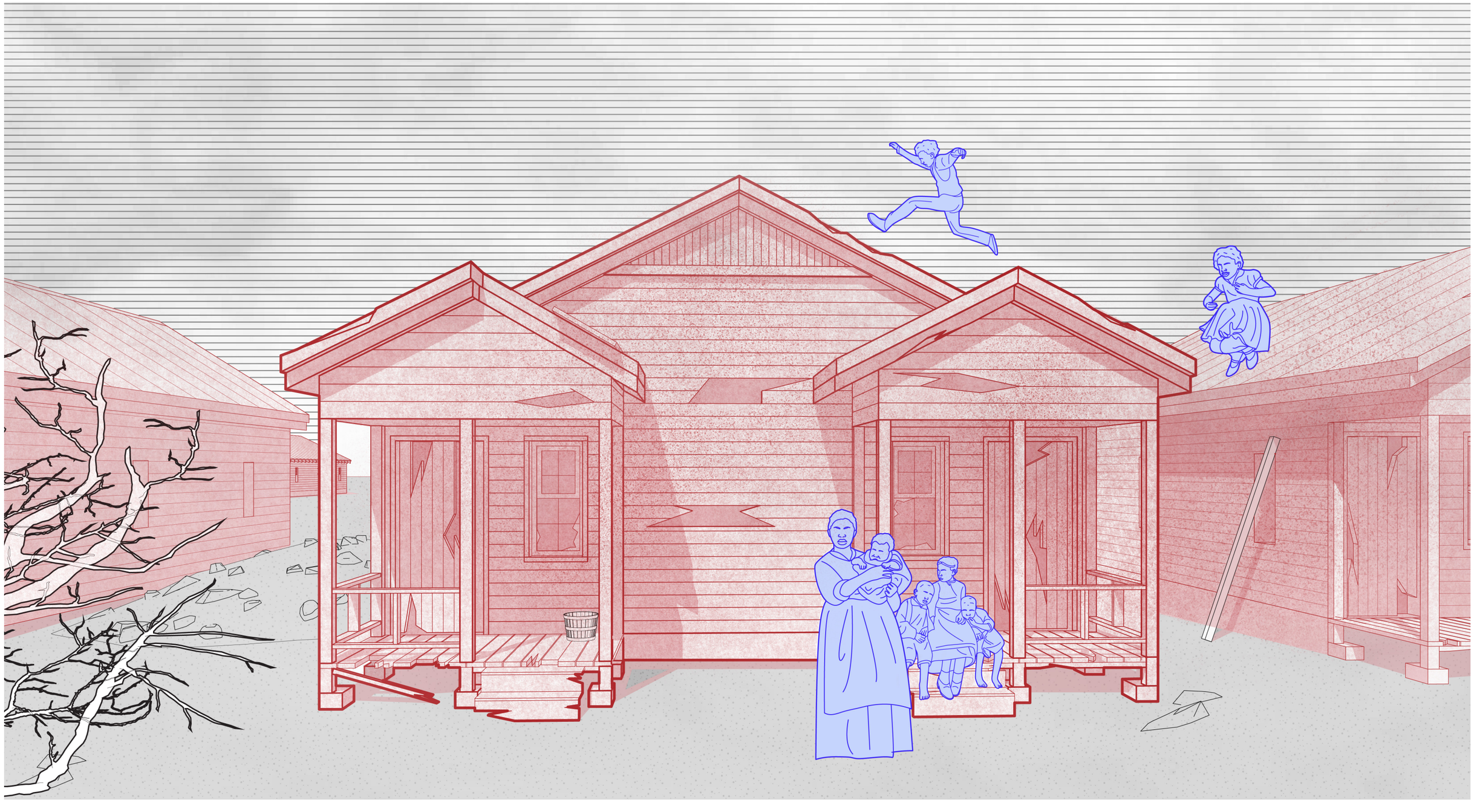


Fig. 2.9. A home in Titusville during 1911, where children are playing tag on the rooftops of neighbouring homes due to their proximity to one another.

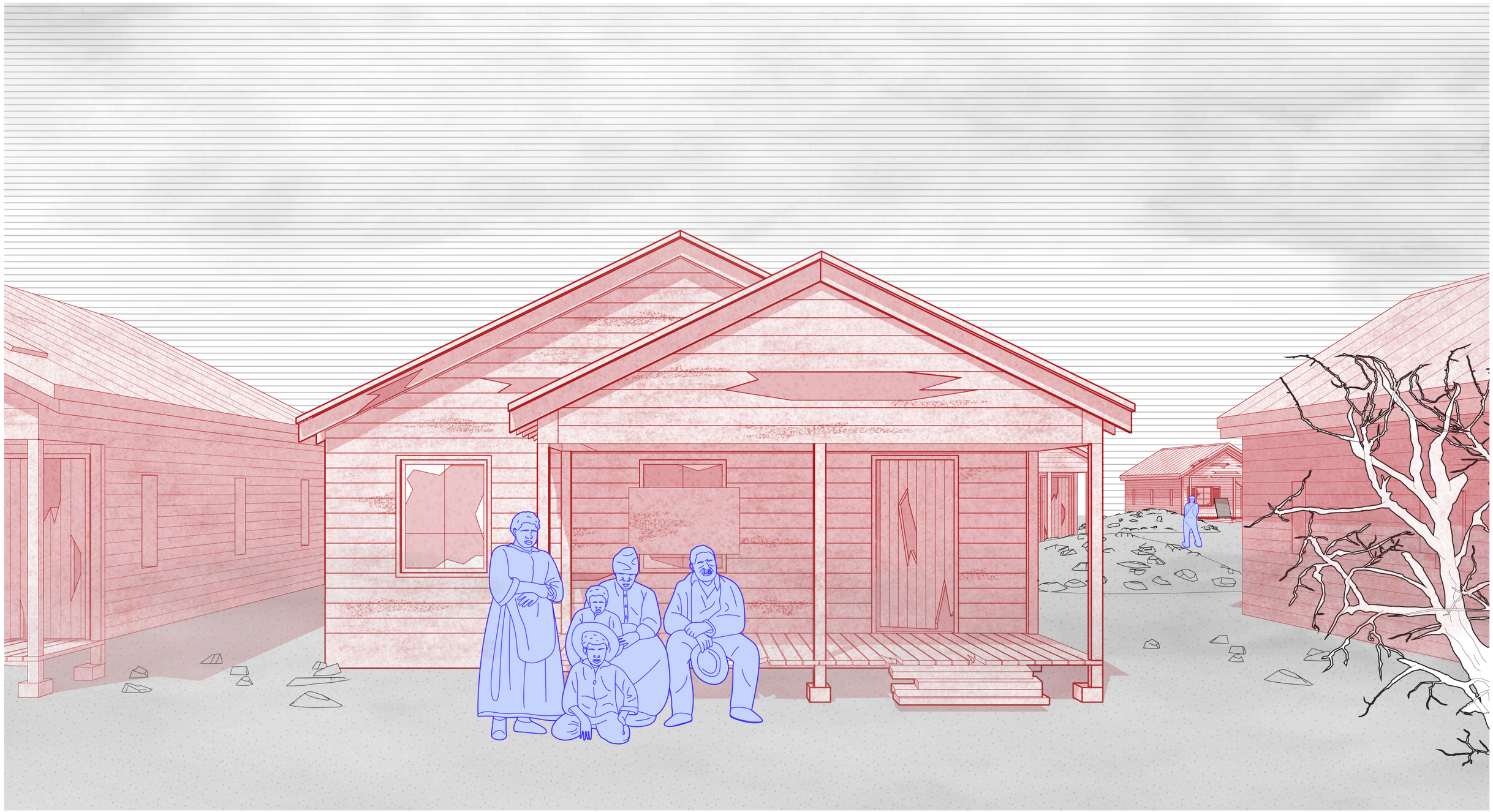


Fig. 2.10. A home in Titusville during 1911, where a family is seated on their front porch, awaiting the return of the home's patriarch, who is working late at the Alice Furnaces.

Birmingham, a city whose name quickly became synonymous with racial discrimination, underwent a successful transition from an agrarian workforce to an accumulation regime centred around a complex industrial workforce predicated on African American oppression. The robust development of labour-delineated class relations, clearly revealed who the intended beneficiaries were. The exploitation was deemed essential, establishing a pattern of inequity and imposing barriers to residential mobility that would endure well into the mid-century. The basis of wealth had effectively shifted from labour to land and real estate capitalism.[49] This set of prevailing notions and social order would not cease to inform the urban planning initiatives of the city in the decades to come.

Racial Ordinances and Redlining

As Joe Minter guided my father and me along the winding pathways of his memorial park, my father and him recounted their memories of living in the Jim Crow South. My father described the persistent trauma he has regarding an instance when he nearly used a white-designated drinking fountain in his childhood. My grandmother had run to quickly snatch him away. He remembered how she pulled him away in haste and chastised him as they walked past disgruntled white families, putting distance between them and the fountain. He described feeling like he and my grandmother had narrowly escaped what could have had a violent end. In response, Minter described a time in his youth during which a loved one of his had been brutally beaten and thrown into prison for breaking Jim Crow laws. It was apparent that these memories were traumatic for both men – it was seldom that my father would even speak about his racial traumas while I was growing up in Canada. However, the act of sharing these moments of pain seemed to offer them some relief and a sense of solidarity.

Fig. 2.11. Joe Minter and my father recounting memories of their upbringing in the South.

49 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 83.

Fig. 2.12. A series of signs addressing the convict leasing system during the Second Industrial Revolution and the era of Jim Crow laws.

Racial Ordinances

As was common throughout the South and evidenced through Minter's experiences, Birmingham adopted and enforced Jim Crow laws to racially segregate its public spaces. In addition to the customary segregation of restaurants, public transportation, and theatres, Birmingham placed particular emphasis on the segregation of recreational activities, especially those occurring in public parks. In 1910, Black residents of the city were barred from using city-owned parks and did not receive their own until 1942 with the creation of the Colored Memorial Park in what is now North Titusville.[50]

These segregationist policies extended further to delineate spaces in the private sector through residential ordinances. City Commissioner, James Weatherly, was a vocal advocate for these racial zoning laws. In a Birmingham News article, Weatherly insinuated the widespread discontent of white residents, remarking that "[the city had] had several complaints that a man building a nice home has had its usefulness and value partially destroyed by negro dwellings." Citing the effectiveness of a similar ordinance in Atlanta, he was of the mind that Birmingham's proposed ordinance would only affect buildings constructed thereafter, thereby protecting the property rights of those already accruing wealth through homeownership.[51] As such, the 1101-C zoning ordinance of 1926 mandated the strict separation of Black and white neighbourhoods, a majority vote dictating a block's eventual designation.[52] Despite the segregationist aims of the ordinance, it still allowed white individuals to purchase homes in Black

50 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 36.
51 "Segregation Ordinance Does Not Violate Property Rights."
52 Wilson, America's Johannesburg, 157.

districts. However, while they were able to purchase homes in Black neighbourhoods, they were not permitted to occupy them, fostering a pattern of white landlordism and Black tenancy.[53] Despite the Supreme Court ruling against such practices in 1917, Birmingham's zoning ordinance continued to enforce racial segregation for twenty-five years, making it likely the longest-standing racial zoning law.[54]

The Infiltration of 'Detrimental Influences'

Across the United States, the 1930s ushered in a series of economic crises that profoundly altered the trajectory of the mortgage market. During the Great Depression, a poor economic climate bore the National Mortgage Crisis, a period characterized by low mortgage renewal rates and unprecedented homeownership losses that reached heights of 273,000 in 1932.[55] As distress reverberated throughout the country, President Roosevelt passed the "New Deal" – a domestic program that sought to ease the burden of American debt by facilitating widespread access to mortgage credit.[56] In response, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) were incorporated and played integral roles in assuaging the homeownership crisis while contributing to the racial wealth gap and the institutionalization of racial segregation in real estate practices.[57]

At this time, the FHA was responsible for insuring American mortgages.[58] To ascertain the credit risk of lending in a given area, the organization relied upon the HOLC's "Residential Security Maps." During their neighbourhood appraisals, members of the Federal Housing Administration would consult the "Underwriting Manual," a document containing the procedure and techniques that should be adopted to assess the mortgage eligibility of a neighbourhood.[59] Its contents provide thorough criteria for assessment, covering factors like borrower eligibility, property condition, and risk evaluation. Amidst these guidelines, numerous statements with racial undertones are made. For instance, paragraph 937 of part II, section 8 entitled "Rating of Property" reads,

> Areas surrounding a location are investigated to determine whether incompatible racial and social groups are present, for the purpose of making a prediction regarding the probability of the location being invaded by such groups. If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally contributes to instability and a decline in values.[60]

53 Brownell, 29.
54 Brownell, 29.; Charles E. Connerly, "From Racial Zoning to Community Empowerment: The Interstate Highway System and the African American Community in Birmingham, Alabama," Journal of Planning Education and Research 22, no. 2 (2002): 99.
55 "Housing 1929-1941 | Encyclopedia.com," accessed April 11, 2024, https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/housing-1929-1941.
56 "New Deal | Definition, History, Programs, Summary, & Facts | Britannica," accessed April 11, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/event/New-Deal.
57 Robert K. Nelson, "Introduction," University of Richmond - Mapping Inequality, 2023, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/; Brianna Brown, "Race, Place, and Public Space: The Implications of Architectural Exclusion on African-American Communities," Essay (University of Waterloo, 2021).
58 Ibid.
59 "Underwriting Manual" (Federal Housing Administration, 1935).

As demonstrated by the quotation, it was believed that the sociospatial delineations of space should be made on a racial basis to protect not only life but the value of property. The presence of Black people was deemed an "invasion."

As part of its "City Survey," HOLC staff collaborated with regional real estate specialists to evaluate perceived credit risk in residential areas across cities with populations exceeding 40,000.[61] This criterion resulted in the HOLC producing residential security maps for over 200 American cities from 1935 to 1940.[62] Each illustrated map was attributed the same colour-coded legend comprised of green, blue, yellow and red to visually signify an area's residential security. Zones shaded in green denoted prime investment areas and were thus deemed the "Best" and given an "A" letter grade. Conversely, areas enveloped in red were claimed to contain the poorest conditions and were subsequently deemed the most "Hazardous" for investment, receiving a "D" grade. Reminiscent of grades given to convict labourers, a collection of field agents had created a fifth rating, "F" for "Other," to outright denote African American neighbourhoods.[63] This was soon consolidated into the D, "Hazardous" category.[64] To systematically classify each neighbourhood, each one was typically assigned an alphanumeric codename. For instance, a neighbourhood labelled "B5," signified that the neighbourhood was the fifth neighbourhood in that city to be assigned a B letter grade. In addition to these residential security maps, the HOLC released descriptions of each appraised neighbourhood. Each document outlines the various parameters that inform a neighbourhood's designated grade. These parameters described regional elements like the quality of the region's housing stock and its projected desirability, but most divisive of all was its assessment of the racial and ethnic composition of its residents.[65]

In 1938, the HOLC issued Birmingham's residential security map.[66] A staggering 4 percent of Birmingham's residential land received an A "Best" rating. Only three areas received this rating, although two of them are no longer within the bounds of Birmingham proper. Conversely, 17 percent of the city was rated C "Definitely Declining" while 7 percent received a B "Still Desirable" rating. An overwhelming 50 percent of its land was deemed "Hazardous and awarded a D. Birmingham demographics readily reflected these ratings. During this period, Birmingham's Black population was steadily increasing, reaching approximately 100,000 and accounting

60 "Underwriting Manual."
61 Nelson, "Mapping Inequality: Introduction."
62 Nelson; Todd M. Michney, "How and Why the Home Owners' Loan Corporation Made Its Redlining Maps," University of Richmond - Mapping Inequality, 2023, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/howandwhy.
63 Michney, "Mapping Inequality: How and Why."
64 Ibid.
65 Nelson, "Mapping Inequality: Introduction."
66 Peter Jones, "Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America: Birmingham, AL," accessed April 7, 2024, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/.2024, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/.

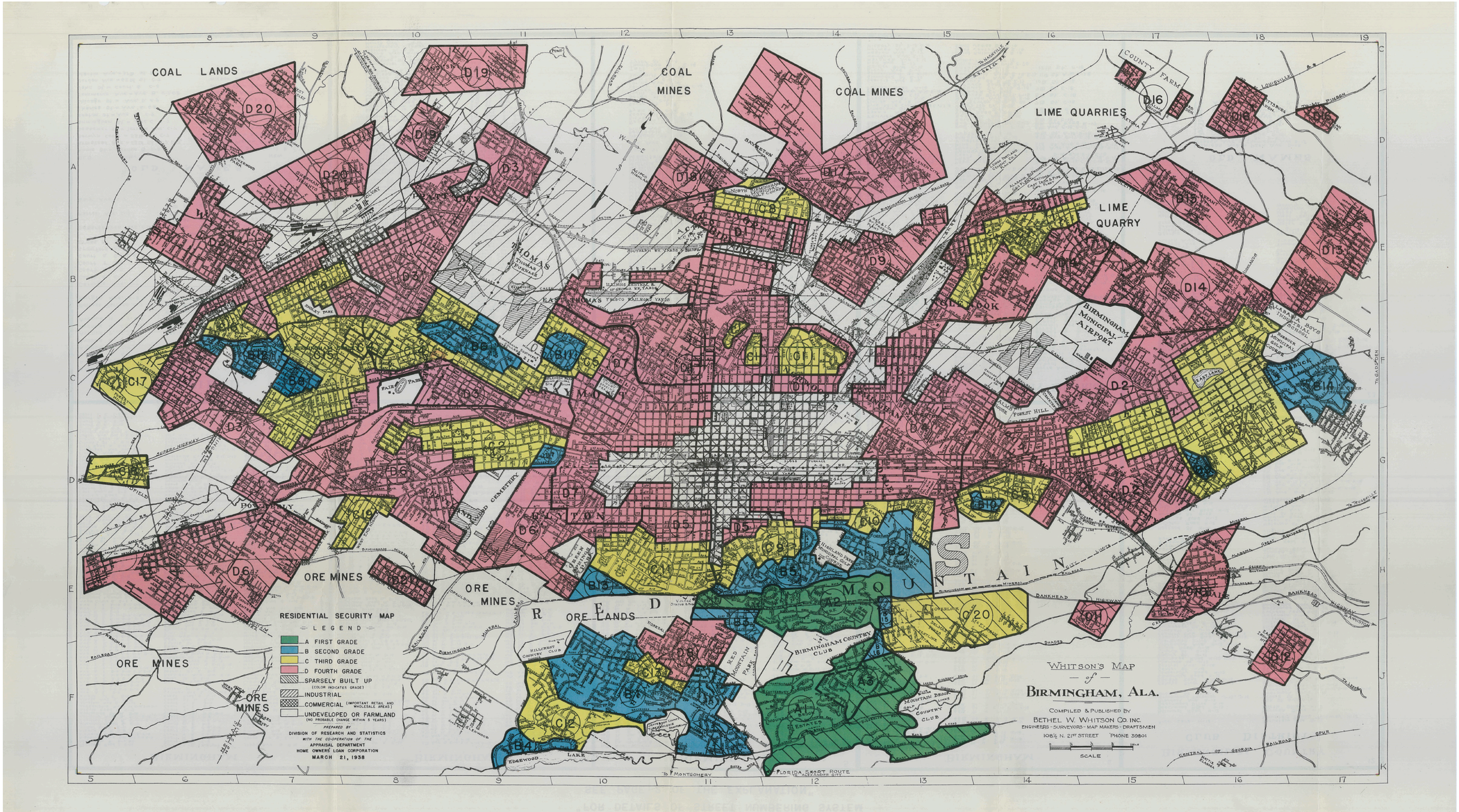
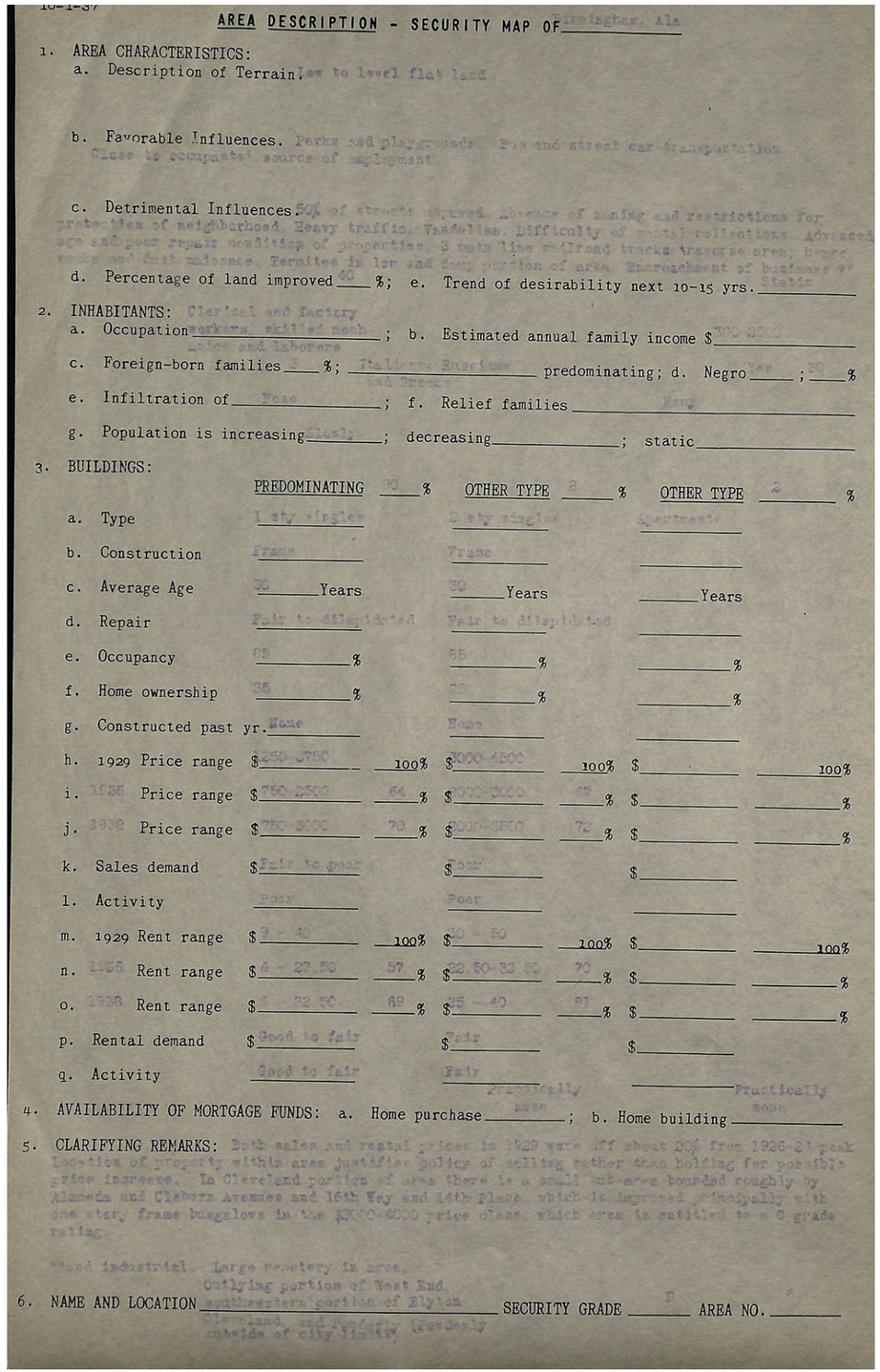


Fig. 2.13. HOLC map of Birmingham, Alabama



AREA DESCRIPTION - SECURITY MAP OF Birmingham, Ala.

1. AREA CHARACTERISTICS:
   a. Description of Terrain. Low to level flat land
   b. Favorable Influences. Parks and playgrounds. Bus and street car transportation. Close to occupants' source of employment.
   c. Detrimental Influences. 50% of streets unpaved. Absence of zoning and restrictions for protection of neighborhood. Heavy traffic. Vandalism. Difficulty of rental collections. Advanced age and poor repair condition of properties. 3 main line railroad tracks traverse area, hence smoke and dust nuisance. Termites in low and damp portion of area. Encroachment of business on
   d. Percentage of land improved 90 %; e. Trend of desirability next 10-15 yrs. Static
2. INHABITANTS: Clerical and factory
   a. Occupation workers, skilled mech. ; b. Estimated annual family income $ 30
   c. Foreign-born families 30 %; Italians, Russians predominating; d. Negro 20 ; 20 %
   e. Infiltration of None ; f. Relief families Very few
   g. Population is increasing Slowly ; decreasing ; static
3. BUILDINGS:

	PREDOMINATING 90 %	OTHER TYPE 8 %	OTHER TYPE 2 %
a. Type	1 sty single	2 sty single	Apartments
b. Construction	Frame	Frame	
c. Average Age	30 Years	30 Years	Years
d. Repair	Fair to dilapidated	Fair to dilapidated	
e. Occupancy	85 %	85 %	%
f. Home ownership	35 %	35 %	%
g. Constructed past yr.	None	None	
h. 1929 Price range	$ 2500-3750 100%	$ 3000-4500 100%	$ 100%
i. 1936 Price range	$ 750-2500 64 %	$ 2000-3000 27 %	$ %
j. 1939 Price range	$ 2500-3000 70 %	$ 2000-3500 72 %	$ %
k. Sales demand	$ Fair to poor	$ Poor	$
l. Activity	Poor	Poor	
m. 1929 Rent range	$ 2 - 40 100%	$ 30 - 50 100%	$ 100%
n. 1936 Rent range	$ 6 - 27.50 57 %	$ 22.50-32.50 70 %	$ %
o. 1938 Rent range	$ 22.50 69 %	$ 25 - 40 81 %	$ %
p. Rental demand	$ Good to fair	$ Fair	$
q. Activity	Good to fair	Fair	Practically none

4. AVAILABILITY OF MORTGAGE FUNDS: a. Home purchase ; b. Home building
5. CLARIFYING REMARKS: Both sales and rental prices in 1929 were off about 20% from 1926-27 peak. Location of property within area justifies policy of selling rather than holding for possible price increase. In Cleveland portion of area there is a small sub-area bounded roughly by Alameda and Cleburn Avenues and 16th Way and 14th Place, which is improved principally with one story frame bungalows in the $3000-4000 price class, which area is entitled to a C grade rating.
   Mixed industrial. Large cemetery in area.
   Outlying portion of West End.
6. NAME AND LOCATION Southwestern portion of Elyton Cleveland, and Parkwood (Tuscaloosa outside of city limits (Tuscaloosa) SECURITY GRADE D AREA NO. 6

for roughly 40 percent of the city's total population.[67]

In particular, the Titusville neighbourhood lies within appraisal zone "D6." Its area description describes the favourable conditions and shortcomings that contributed to its "Hazardous" designation. With respect to the latter, the report raised numerous concerns, including half of the area's streets remaining unpaved, an "absence of zoning and restrictions for protection," and frequent traffic congestion.[68] Regarding its structures, the document states that the area's properties are aged and in disrepair, with tenants proving difficult to collect rent from. Furthermore, the document claims that the three railway lines that bisect the region produce an abundance of smoke and dust. It would be remiss not to acknowledge that each of these issues is the byproduct of organized abandonment. Public disinvestment in white conceded spaces proved to create substandard living conditions for Birmingham's Black residents. The environmental injustices of Birmingham's zoning ordinances had forced Black residents to live near the mainline railroad tracks, thereby creating the conditions for its alleged credit risk. The only "favourable" influences outlined in the report were the area's parks and playgrounds which Black residents were not allowed to frequent due to racial ordinances.

A comprehensive risk assessment could be achieved solely through objective criteria concerning property conditions, economic indicators, and the like. Instead, the area descriptions scrutinize the demographic composition of each region. These accounts meticulously document the presence or absence of relief families, foreign-born families, and African Americans in their respective fields. Alongside a minority representation of Italians, Russians, and Greeks, the report conveys that 30 percent of the area is populated by "Negros" and an abundance of families relying on relief assistance.[69] With this emphasis on demographic characteristics, it becomes painfully evident that these neighbourhood evaluations have prioritized the preservation of racist ideals over the welfare of the nation.

In essence, this federal policy prevented Black individuals from accessing the very wealth-building opportunities that now account for two-thirds of America's middle-class wealth.[70] By explicitly denying African Americans access to favourable housing and lending conditions, the New Deal and its constituent programs perpetuated the racial wealth gap. While the Fair Housing Act, which prohibited housing discrimination, was passed nearly forty years later in 1968, the precedent of Black exclusion and racial bias had long been set.[71]

Fig. 2.14. HOLC area description for Birmingham's D6 zone.

67 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 17.

68 "Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America: Birmingham, AL," accessed April 7, 2024, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/.

69 Ibid.

70 Christopher E. Herbert, Daniel T. McCue, and Rocio Sanchez-Moyano, "Is Homeownership Still an Effective Means of Building Wealth for Low-Income and Minority Households? (Was It Ever?)" (Homeownership Built to Last: Lessons from the Housing Crisis on Sustaining Homeownership for Low-Income and Minority Familie, Boston: Havard University, 2013), 6, https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hbtl-06.pdf.

71 "Fair Housing Act," History, December 15, 2023, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fair-housing-act; Brown, "Race, Place, and Public Space: The Implications of Architectural Exclusion on African-American Communities," 3.

The greatest complication arises, however, when considering how one's home is so intricately connected with all other facets of living in the 20th and 21st centuries. For example, neighbourhood property values influence the quality of education and healthcare services in an area as they are both funded by taxpayer dollars. Subsequently, the quality of one's education relates directly to their employment opportunities and successes. This interdependence attests to the complex nature of housing equity, where each problem only exacerbates another, creating a perpetual cycle.[72] While these federal policies and their municipal enforcement were historical, their deliberate impact on minorities – particularly African Americans – constitutes an enduring legacy that disenfranchises African Americans today. The current state of Black neighbourhoods was not recognized as a consequence of the government's disinvestment but was instead attributed to the supposed "dysfunction" of the entire race. These prevailing notions gave white elites justification to implement urban renewal projects at the expense of Birmingham's Black residents.

Urban Renewal

Echoes of Racial Zoning

Following the decline of explicit racial zoning and the second wave of globalization, Birmingham experienced a downturn in its status as an industrial epicentre. This compelled the city to reorient its regimes of accumulation to remain viable. Amidst this uncertainty, the enactment of the 1949 Housing Act under the Truman administration started to unveil the potential of urban renewal not only for Birmingham but also for numerous cities nationwide.[73] Upon signing and approving the law, Truman emphasized its significance in the following address:

> This far-reaching measure is of great significance to the welfare of the American people. It opens up the prospect of decent homes in wholesome surroundings for low-income families now living in the squalor of the slums. It equips the Federal Government, for the first time, with effective means for aiding cities in the vital task of clearing slums and rebuilding blighted areas. It authorizes a comprehensive program of housing research aimed at reducing housing costs and raising housing standards.[74]

The Housing Act, and the frequency with which cities used it for nefarious aims, soon rendered the terms "slum clearance" and "urban renewal" as proxies for majority African American neighbourhoods.

Until this point, Birmingham had made minimal efforts to leverage the capacities of urban planning in its pursuit of capital.[75] The city was now well-positioned to identify the multitude of blighted areas it had generated, all of which met the vague federal criteria for

72 Brown, 3.
73 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 102.
74 Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1949," National Archives, July 15, 1949, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/157/statement-president-upon-signing-housing-act-1949.
75 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 102.

urban renewal.[76] Rather than seeking to address the injustices it had inflicted upon its marginalized communities, Birmingham seized the opportunity to increase the wealth and influence of the ruling class, further perpetuating the economic disparities of the underclass. The widespread and systematic neglect of the municipality would ultimately pay off to yield one of the country's most effective urban renewal schemes.

The Housing Act of 1949

In May of 1950, the planning board of the Birmingham City Council Commission of the City of Birmingham voted to create a committee to endorse the best sites for urban redevelopment. Three months later, James Sulzby Jr., the chairman of the planning board, recommended three prospective sites: the Ensley neighbourhood, the Avondale neighbourhood, and, most relevant to Titusville, the Southside Medical Center.[77] These three distinct sites shared two significant characteristics: they all possessed some of the city's most severe housing conditions and their racial composition was predominantly Black.[78]

Most relevant in addressing the blighted conditions of Birmingham was the Title I provision of the act, entitled "Slum Clearance & Community Development & Redevelopment." This section of the law tasked the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) with the responsibility of supporting municipalities in their pursuit to better the quality of housing for their residents. It was expected that municipalities would apply for federal assistance that could be dealt out in one of two ways. First, the HHFA could finance repayable loans over five years to finance the costs associated with obtaining, clearing, and enhancing urban renewal sites for their subsequent use.[79] Second, a municipality could subsidize two-thirds of the difference between the cost incurred during the process of slum clearance and the revenue received in selling or leasing the land for private development.[80]

The City of Birmingham pursued the latter in its endeavours to expand the Southside Medical Center. For the medical center, the cost of obtaining, clearing, and developing the site was projected to cost $4.98 million whereas the projected revenue from its sale was $3.34 million. The difference between the two amounted to $1.64 million, meaning, the federal government would pay $1.09 million, and the city would only be responsible for 10 percent of the overall development costs, in other words, $547,000.[81]

Congress did not intend for development financing to be so straightforward. In its efforts to address slum clearance, it did not overlook the consequences that such redevelopments could have

76 Connerly, 103.
77 Connerly, 108.
78 Connerly, 103.
79 "Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949," Monthly Labor Review 69, no. 2 (1949): 155.
80 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 107; "Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949," 155.
81 Connerly, 107.

on those living in “slums.” To guarantee suitable housing options for those displaced due to slum clearance, the federal government created protective provisions under Title III, “Low-Rent Public Housing.”[82] Title III restored and broadened the public housing program that the Wager Housing Act of 1937 had created by pledging financial assistance to the creation of decent housing for low-income households facing displacement.[83] One such provision under the title prohibited the HHFA from providing financial assistance to municipalities unless they made practical arrangements for the temporary relocation of displaced residents and their permanent housing on the completed project site or elsewhere.[84] As stated by the act, the housing units supplied – whether existing or new – must be “decent, safe, and sanitary and located in areas not generally less desirable in regard to public and commercial facilities than the one vacated.”[85] Additionally, it must also be affordable for those displaced, with rent or sales costs within their economic means.[86]

While the Housing Act of 1949 set out with valiant aims to address the state, standard, and cost of housing across America, its simplistic approach to a complex set of issues would create the perfect conditions to breed further inequities.

The Southside Medical Center

Birmingham’s initial ventures into urban renewal projects prioritized the expansion of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Medical Center. Established in 1944, the medical center originated from the creation of the Medical College of Alabama by state legislation as a four-year school of the University of Alabama.[87] The hospital initially occupied a single block, but its footprint later grew to four-and-a-half blocks to accommodate a veterans’ hospital and a crippled children’s hospital. However, as the medical center sought to expand south of the city’s central business district, the presence of the city’s largest Black neighbourhood had to be addressed. In 1950, census tracts 42 through 46 were home to 21,000 Black individuals, in other words, 16 percent of the city’s residents.[88] Notably, census tract 44 was slated for demolition to facilitate the medical center’s expansion. According to 1950s census data, the region was 76 percent Black and possessed the second-lowest annual household income, $1,241. Southside, in general, was also deemed the third most blighted district in the city.[89] As expected of a city without an explicit housing code, a 1950 census determined that 81 percent of dwellings in census tract 44 were decrepit or without a private bathroom; approximately 62 percent were built in 1919 or earlier; and only 7 percent were owner-occupied.[90] Of the overall site, however, 95

82 “Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949,” 155.
83 Alexander von Hoffman, “A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949,” Housing Policy Debate 11, no. 2 (2000): 310.
84 “Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949,” 155.
85 “Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949,” 156.
86 “Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949,” 156.
87 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 104.
88 Connerly, 104.
89 Connerly, 105.
90 Connerly, 102, 106.

percent of the homes were deemed substandard, each described as “a fire hazard [and] health nuisance" that was "structurally unsound and [...] beyond rehabilitation,” according to City Building Inspector H. E. Hagood.[91] These homes were so dilapidated that a Housing Authority board member remarked, “[he] wouldn’t put a horse in them.”[92]

To better understand how violently urban renewal can displace entire communities and their constituent support systems, I sought to map Birmingham’s Southside region, prior to its redevelopment, as a form of evidence-based testimony. To recreate the layout of the area, I compiled, stitched, and scaled approximately eighty Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1911. While these maps predate the planning and subsequent redevelopment of the area by about forty years, my tracing of them allowed me to produce the most thorough and accurate representation available to me, offering an essential but speculative view into the area’s largest Black community before by urban renewal.

The resulting map substantiates Bobby M. Wilson’s assertions about the predominance of Black people in the Southside region. It reveals a majority residential composition whose architectural layout is comprised most readily of single-family and duplex shotgun homes – once again, typologies deeply rooted in Black southern communities, as seen in Titusville and now in Southside. Beyond residential land uses, the regional plan emphasizes the proximity of light industrial complexes and retail spaces, which were primarily situated at the edges of street blocks. This arrangement further reiterates a pattern of environmental racism that imposes industrial facilities in Black communities to the detriment of health and the quality of living conditions. The map also reveals the presence of coloured schools and churches in the fabric of Southside’s Black community. It can be assumed that the several churches in the area were pillars of the Black community as they are today, providing spiritual support and a space of refuge away from the harsh realities of organized abandonment and systemic violence imposed by white-dominated power structures.

At the end of 1951, the housing authority revealed its intentions to expand the medical center from its original four-and-a-half blocks to nine-and-a-half blocks. To comply with the protective provisions of the Housing Act, the housing authority also announced its intentions to develop 750 public housing units for those who would be displaced in the construction of the Southside Medical Center. It would be constructed just west of the development area, in Titusville.[93] However, eighteen months later in January of 1953, the housing authority released a subsequent report announcing its chief intentions to expand the city’s medical facilities, making no further mention of the public housing units it previously claimed it would construct.[94] The housing authority left the city’s existing public housing stock to accommodate the 523 Black and 92 white families displaced by their development, despite their research

91 Steve Yates, “Medical Center Drama Is Lifting Hundreds from behind Iron Curtain of Gloom, Filth,” The Birmingham News, August 8, 1954.
92 Ibid.
93 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 109.
94 Connerly, 111.

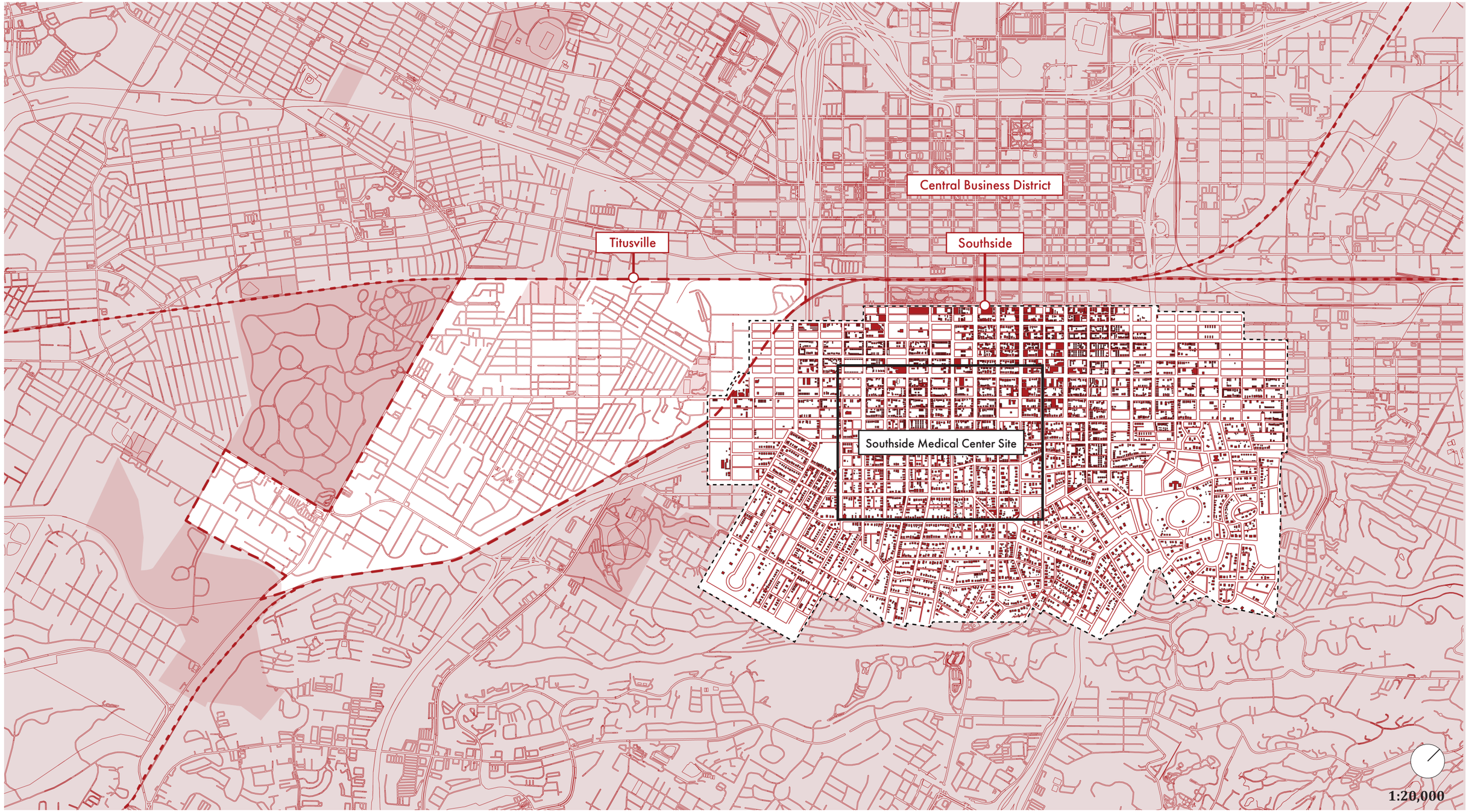


Fig. 2.15. A 2024 plan of Birmingham with its Southside region during 1911 superimposed on top.

Fig. 2.16. Plan depicting building occupancy types in the Southside region as they existed during 1911.

suggesting the contrary.[95]

In 1952, the housing authority conducted a study to assess the state of residents living in the medical center's expansion site. Their findings revealed stark economic disparities between its white and Black residents. While 75 percent of the area's white residents could afford to purchase homes on the private market, only 25 percent of its Black residents could do the same.[96] As expected these statistics spoke to a greater need to house Black residents in suitable living conditions. Upon visiting the city in September of 1955, A. L. Thompson, the racial relations officer for the FHA, said that the City of Birmingham was "lagging behind other forward-moving Southern cities in Negro housing," citing the need for more Black housing amidst the expansion of the medical center.[97] Additionally, their study concluded that most Black residents lived in shoddy dwelling units and were not able to afford standard housing on the private market, leaving public housing as their only viable option.[98]

As a result of the city's historic zoning ordinances, public housing was segregated by race, resulting in three Black public housing projects concentrated in predominantly Black neighbourhoods: Smithfield Court (512 units), Southtown (480 units), and the Joseph H. Loveman Village in North Titusville (500 units).[99] The housing authority was responsible for processing applications for each project, handling 2,186 applications across all three in 1952 alone. While the Loveman Village, constructed in that same year, managed to house 473 families, Southtown and Smithfield Court, could only accommodate 151 applicants combined.[100] It was evident that the city's public housing could not sufficiently meet demand. Despite witnessing a clear, existing demand for public housing, particularly in these Black neighbourhoods, the housing authority remained indifferent and decided not to create more units. One year later, on November 25, 1953, the project's funding application was approved.[101]

Slum clearance had become the means through which Birmingham's leaders could physically extirpate African Americans for the financial gains of more favourable populations. By the end of 1957, the HHFA released a report that disclosed the circumstances surrounding the displacement of the first 527 households, 484 of which were Black.[102]

The Aftermath of the Southside Medical Center Expansion

As the construction of the Southside Medical Center continued to expand throughout the 1960s, Birmingham received praise for its

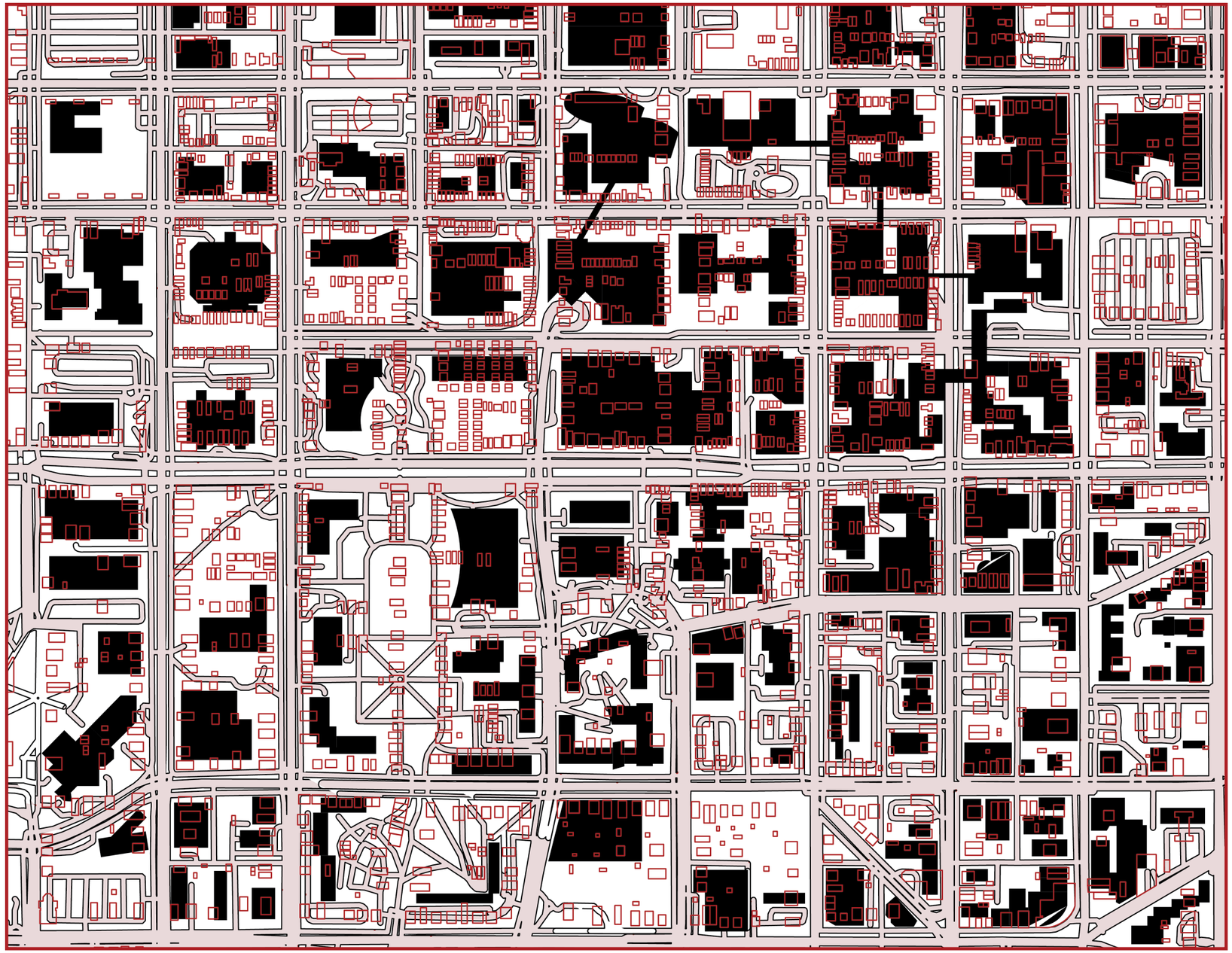
95 Yates, "Medical Center Drama Is Lifting Hundreds from behind Iron Curtain of Gloom, Filth."
96 Connerly, 113.
97 "Better Negro Housing Urged, City Lagging," The Birmingham News, September 14, 1955.
98 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 113.
99 Connerly, 112.
100 Connerly, 113.
101 Connerly, 125.
102 Connerly, 127.

success. Larry M. Cox, the chairman of the urban renewal section of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, had the following to say about Birmingham's urban renewal work:

> Since the inception of urban renewal in the 50s, few cities have gone as far as Birmingham [...] The Medical Center project, the first of its kind in the nation, has helped provide for Birmingham an asset and a service to its citizens unexcelled by any city I am familiar with. Citizens of Birmingham need no longer rely on promises and imagination but can measure in terms of accomplished deeds the great value of a well conceived and intelligently administered urban renewal program.[103]

Today, the UAB serves as Birmingham's greatest employer, boasting a workforce of 28,000 local employees.[104] Through its strategic integration of urban renewal funds provided by the Housing Act of 1949, the city survived its transition from a declining steel-driven economy to one now rooted in a thriving healthcare ecosystem. However, this economic revitalization came at a dire cost. The urban renewal project's success came at the further expense of its Black population, particularly impacting its largest Black neighbourhood. This experience was not isolated as subsequent plans for the Avondale and Ensley communities compounded upon the hardship of Birmingham's Black residents. Birmingham's exclusionary initiatives would not end here. Its segregationist legacy would persist, extending well into the realm of the nation's interstate highway program.

103 Irving Beiman, "City Wins High Praise for Urban Renewal Program," The Birmingham News, January 11, 1960.
104 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 7; "Birmingham Area's Largest Employers," Birmingham Business Journal, July 25, 2023, https://www.bizjournals.com/birmingham/subscriber-only/2023/07/21/birmingham-areas-largest-employers.html.



1:5,000

Fig. 2.17. Plan depicting the building footprints of 1911 overlaid on the present-day Southside Medical Center site.

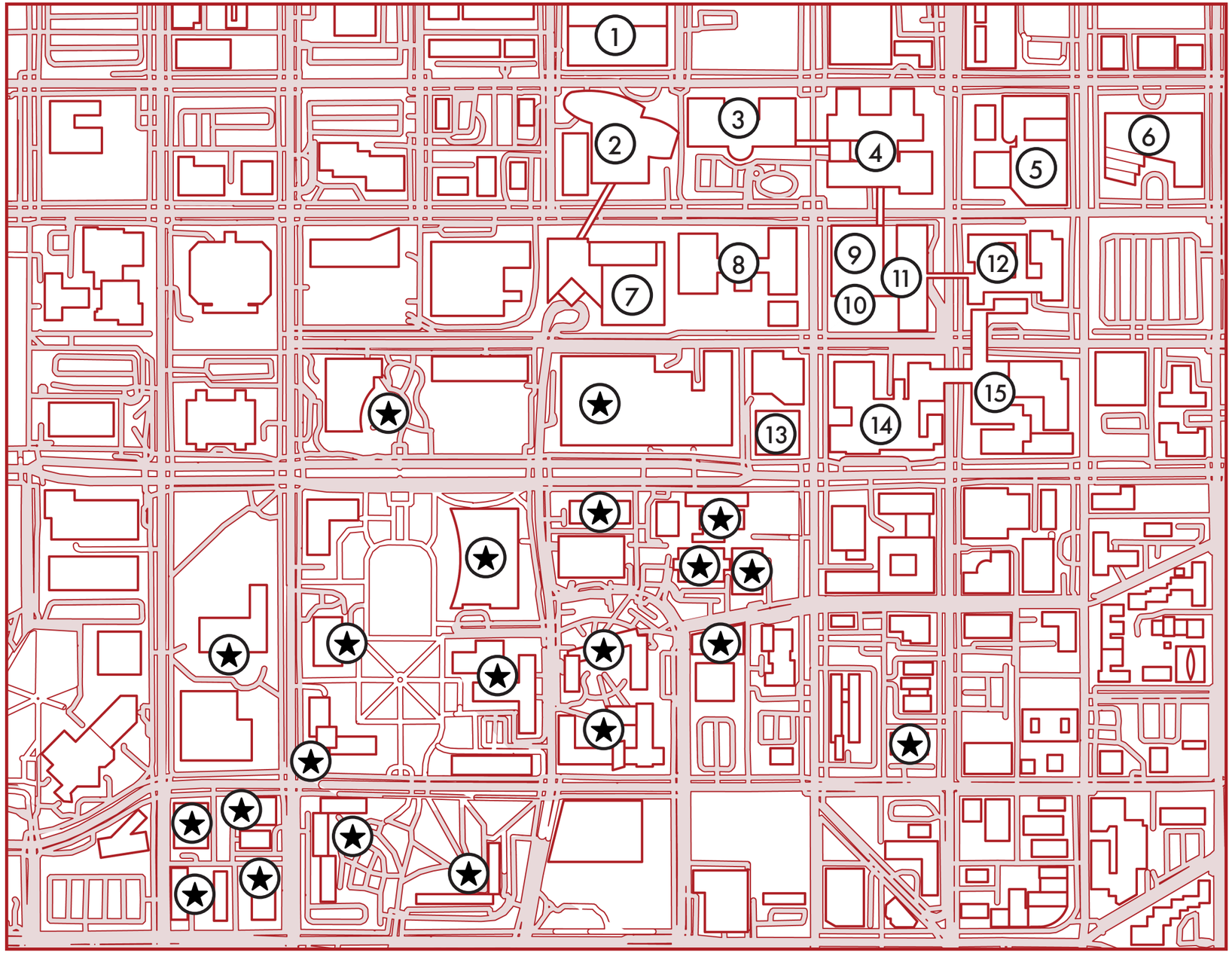
Based on the 1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, it can be estimated that approximately 1,766 residential dwellings, 88 stores, 6 industrial plants, 4 coloured schools, and 9 churches were removed to make way for the Southside Medical Center and its surrounding context. However, this estimation differs significantly from the HHFA's aforementioned 1957 report documenting the displacement of 527 households.

This discrepancy could stem from changes in the number of residential dwellings between 1911 and the start of urban renewal activities. Furthermore, the HHFA's figures represent an earlier estimate that did not account for the continued displacement that occurred well into the 1960s.

Legend

Existing Buildings (2024)

Demolished Buildings (1911)



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Legend

1. Children's of Alabama - Pediatric Allergy & Immunology
2. UAB Pediatric Care Clinic
3. UAB Bone Marrow Transplant
4. UAB Emergency
5. UAB Pathology Department
6. UAB Neurosurgery
7. UAB Pediatric Surgery
8. UAB Palliative & Comfort Care
9. UAB Health System
10. UAB Vascular Surgery
11. UAB Sickle Cell Clinic
12. UAB Hospital Jefferson Tower
13. UAB Eye Hospital
14. Birmingham VA Health Care System
15. UAB Kaul Genetics and Division of Urology

★ University of Alabama at Birmingham

Fig. 2.18. Plan depicting the current extent of the Southside Medical Center alongside the University of Alabama at Birmingham's footprint in downtown Birmingham.

Fig. 2.19. A sign in downtown Birmingham reads: "UAB Medicine: Nation's Eighth-Largest Hospital"

Fig. 2.20. "Thank you UAB" and "[Heros] in scrubs" scrawled in chalk on a brick wall enclosing a UAB medical building's parking lot

The Interstate Highway System

Transportation Apartheid

As urban renewal creates new housing and businesses to stimulate the economy, it is typical for new transportation systems to follow. This pattern was evident in Birmingham with the development of Interstate-65 and the intersecting partner, Interstate-59. Although these highways were intended to improve the city's infrastructure and promote further economic development in line with the rest of the nation, their implementation led to the city's first significant decline in population. The complex interplay between transportation development and racial dynamics further reveals the manners in which the city's capitalistic pursuits intentionally compound upon one another to exacerbate the poor socioeconomic state of its Black residents. This interplay not only intensified existing disparities but also justified the further desecration of Black neighbourhoods, extracting value from these areas without reinvesting in the communities forced to vacate.

At the recommendation of Leslie Williams in a 1961 consultant's report, I-65 was to be constructed between 10th and 11th street as it would "form a suitable central district western boundary without cramping or limiting the room for expansion and developments within the central area of Birmingham."[105] Furthermore, by routing the highway through 10th and 11th street, the "substantial clearance of slum housing could be accomplished along the right-of-way of the freeway" instead of demolishing more "valuable" properties westward toward the downtown core.[106] This would mean that the highway would bisect various Black neighbourhoods in a manner that would reinforce the racial segmentation of the population that was set out by its racial zoning laws of the 1920s. The throughway was designed to mimic the contours of the Louisiana and Nashville railroad that forms the eastern border of the Titusville neighbourhood. The interstate would act as a racialized barrier that would destroy the remaining Black homes lying west of the downtown core with the added benefit of freeing up the space for further development.

A subsequent research report, sponsored by the Alabama Highway Department in 1965, aimed to study the expected economic and social impact of interstate highways on its surrounding land uses. The northern extensions of the highway were surrounded by commercial, agricultural, and residential land uses, while the southern extremities were predominantly residential. The report estimated that metropolitan land values along the highway's routes would increase substantially and have minimal impact on residential land values.[107] It claimed that any loss in residential land values attributable to the construction of the interstate would be offset by the time that it saves its users.[108] The "users" in question, however, were not those displaced but rather the white populations that fled the downtown area to live in

105 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 151.
106 Connerly, 151.
107 "Alabama Highway Research," Box 256, File 1.22 (Birmingham: Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, 1965), 10.
108 "Alabama Highway Research," 10.

Fig. 2.21. The stacked form of the interstate highway system hovering over the landscape of Birmingham.

the suburbs. The report concludes its projections by stating:

> The immediate benefits of the Interstate Highway System provide only superficial measures of impact. To understand what the economic and social impact of interstate highways will be in metropolitan Birmingham, one must recognize the parts and the unity which will be possible through [the] reorganization of activities, institutions, persons, and businesses [...] All segments of society must penetrate the problem of what the new highway will mean to them and initiate the process of adjusting to it.[109]

Contrary to the report's assertions, Interstate-65 and Interstate-59 were responsible for significant impacts, causing unprecedented levels of displacement. Don Pruett of the city's planning department ascertained that the construction of the interstates would cause the displacement of approximately 2200 white and 2500 Black families overall.[110] In reality, Birmingham experienced a significant population decline for the first time in its history, resulting in the loss of approximately 39,977 residents during the decade.[111] Twenty-nine of the city's census tracts faced a loss in population, and while 75 percent of that loss was accounted for by white people, the census tracts with the greatest proportional losses were Black. Of the top ten greatest population losses by census tract, eight were predominantly Black.[112]

Conversely, the intention to route the highways through Black neighbourhoods had the unprecedented effect of forcing Black residents to move into surrounding areas, some predominantly Black like Titusville and others, predominantly white, where possible. This triggered white flight, causing the population of Birmingham to become predominantly Black by 1980.

Today, Interstate-65 acts as a vital north-south transportation route through multiple states, including Alabama, Kentucky, Indiana and Tennessee. In Alabama specifically, the highway connects the state's major cities: Mobile, Montgomery, Huntsville, and Birmingham. The situation of I-65 between Titusville and the downtown core has now made the connection between this poor Black neighbourhood and the UAB particularly tenuous.[113] The legacy of these highways and the urban renewal projects that justified their construction set the stage for the further exploitation of this community, now shifting the focus back onto the residential sector through the predatory lending practices employed during the subprime lending crisis of the 1970s and 80s.

109 "Alabama Highway Research," 13.
110 George Cook, "4 Factors May Cause Displacing of 13,000 Families," Birmingham Post-Herald, July 7, 1961.
111 Connerly, "From Racial Zoning to Community Empowerment: The Interstate High way System and the African American Community in Birmingham, Alabama," 106.
112 Connerly, 106–7.
113 Connerly, 110.

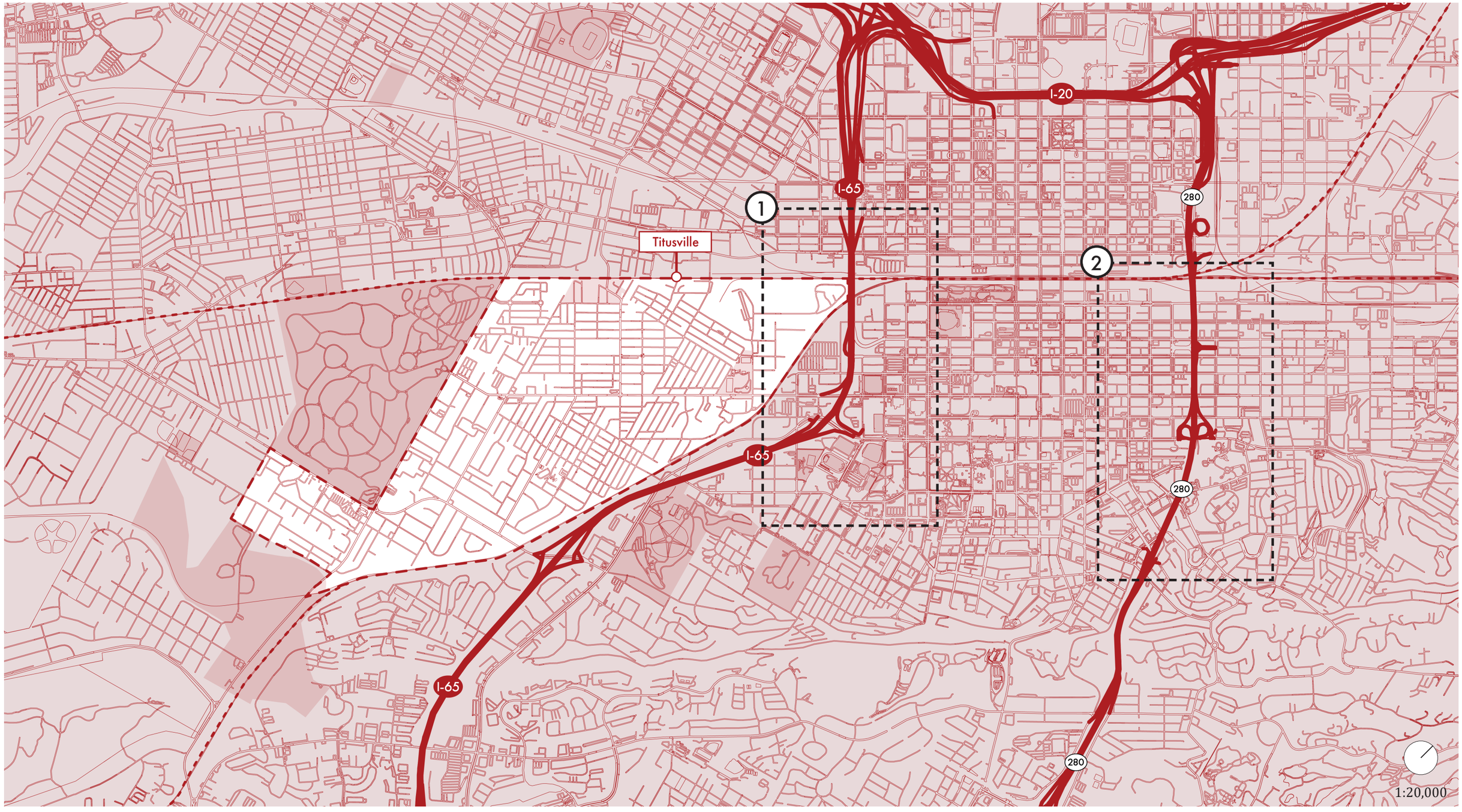
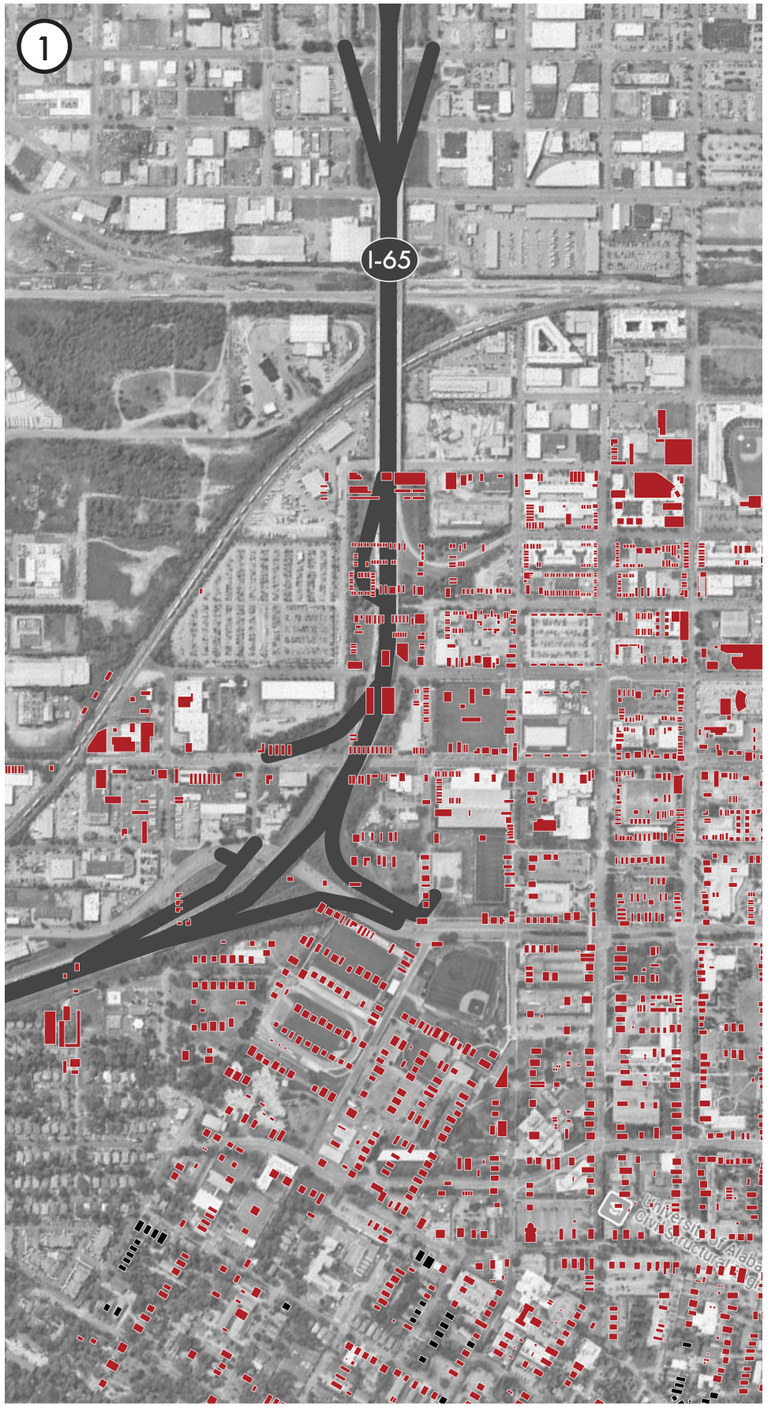


Fig. 2.22. Plan displaying I-65 and US Route 280 defining the western and eastern boundaries of downtown Birmingham.

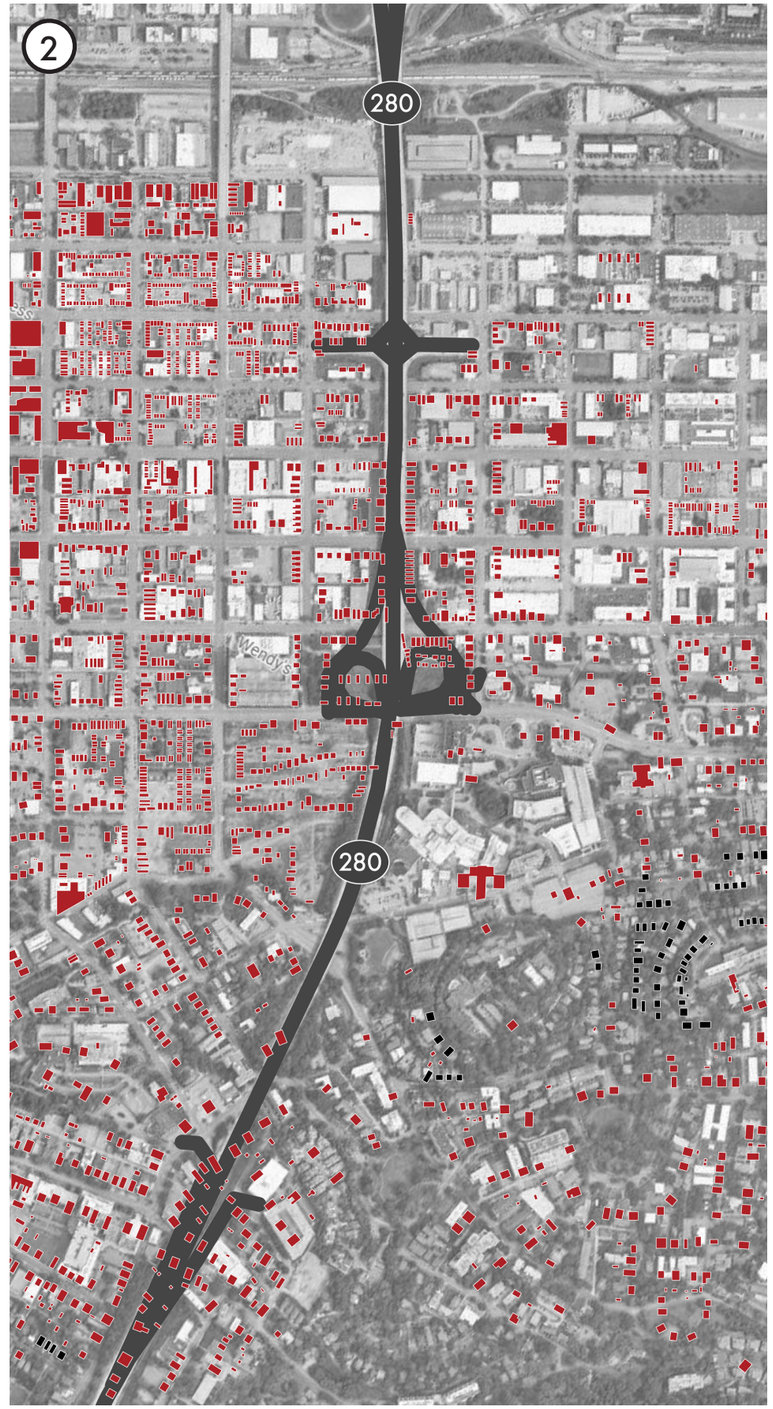


1:10,000

Fig. 2.23. Present-day plan with 1911 building footprints of the Southside region overlaid to highlight the area intersected by I-65.

1:10,000

Fig. 2.24. Present-day plan with 1911 building footprints of the Southside region overlaid to highlight the area intersected by US Route 280.



Legend

Existing/ Renovated Buildings

Demolished Buildings

The Civil Rights Movement

In the 1960s, as national street crime and homicide rates increased considerably, the civil rights movement was identified as a significant threat to public safety.[114] Many sociologists and criminologists today attribute this rise in crime to the post-World War II baby boom generation, which resulted in a larger young male population during this time. This was unfortunate for 1960s civil rights activists and the Black community at large as the association between increased crime rates and the civil rights movement amplified the brutality of organized violence brought down upon them.

As civil rights activists continued to fight the segregation legalized in Birmingham's 1926 racial zoning ordinance, the city became a hotspot for racial violence, affording the city its "Bombingham" nickname. Between 1947 and 1966, the city's Black communities endured fifty bombings, with their frequency increasing during the civil rights era.[115] Spaces that Black people would frequent – like churches, places of business, and even their homes – were prime bombing locations. For instance, on September 15, 1963, the 16th Street Baptist Church within the Smithfield neighbourhood was targeted by two members of the Klu Klux Klan.[116] A bomb, comprised of nineteen sticks of dynamite went off during Sunday School, killing four young girls and injuring twenty others within the congregation.[117] These acts were part of a broader campaign to maintain racial segregation by any means necessary.

Fig. 2.25. The 16th Street Baptist Church today.

114 Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, 10th anniversary edition (New York: The New Press, 2020), 51.

115 Connerly, The Most Segregated City in America, 3.

116 "Baptist Street Church Bombing," Page, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed August 31, 2024, https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/baptist-street-church-bombing.

117 "Our History," 16th Street Baptist Church, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.16thstreetbaptist.org/our-history/.

Fig. 2.26. A Joe Minter sculpture dedicated to the four young girls killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

Since brutalized acts like these were commonplace, civil rights activists began to leverage them to proliferate their cause internationally, hoping it would pressure President Kennedy to support the movement through executive measures.[118] A notable example of this would be the Freedom Rides. Organized by James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE), these non-violent protests would involve activists boarding interstate buses and riding throughout the segregated states of the South, challenging segregation by using white-only spaces along their route. Farmer explained that the protests were "planned [...] with the specific intention of creating a crisis," provoking the racists of the South to act violently at the expense of the demonstrators' lives.[119] For example, when freedom riders arrived in Anniston, Alabama in May of 1961, their bus was attacked by a hundred white supremacists – its tires punctured and the bus bombed and set ablaze.[120] Images of the burning bus and other violent attacks made national and international headlines, leading the Kennedy administration to ban segregation on interstate transport in September of 1961 through the Interstate Commerce Commission. Despite this federal response, the fight for desegregation was far from over. Martin Luther King Jr. was an active supporter of the freedom rides but did not participate as he had other plans for demonstrations in mind.[121]

118 William T. Martin Riches, The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc, 1997), 66.

119 Riches, 66.

120 Riches, 67.

121 The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "Freedom Rides," Stanford University, accessed August 20, 2024, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/freedom-rides.

In April of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. joined Birmingham's civil rights campaign where he taught residents the value of nonviolence and recruited new volunteers to the movement.[122] This effort laid the groundwork for a set of protests that took place during the Easter season, aiming to place strain on retailers during the year's second busiest shopping season. On April 8, 1963, King's brother, Alfred King, led a small protest that was halted due to the Birmingham Police Department using K-9 units to intimidate and assault demonstrators.[123] Two days later, the city received a court injunction to bar further protests.[124] Despite this injunction, King and his fellow demonstrators continued their own non-violent protests, resulting in King's subsequent arrest and confinement in a Titusville prison.[125]

In response to the surge in protests, eight Alabama clergymen released a public statement on April 12, urging the Black community to "show restraint", stating that their demonstrations were "unwise and untimely." The group concluded their letter by praising the "calm manner" with which the Birmingham community, local news outlets, and law enforcement handled the demonstrations while failing to acknowledge the organized violence incited by these parties.[126] While detained in his prison cell, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a letter in response. In a portion of his letter, he stated:

> In any nonviolent campaign, there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation.[127]

The following year, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law, prohibiting discrimination in the workforce, public accommodations, and schools based on race, skin colour, religion, sex, or place of national origin.[128] This act served as a precursor to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned discriminatory practices, like "good character checks" and "crimes of moral turpitude" that had disenfranchised the voting rights of Black

122 The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "Birmingham Cam paign," Stanford University, accessed August 20, 2024, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/birmingham-campaign.
123 Riches, The Civil Rights Movement, 72.
124 The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "Birmingham Cam paign."
125 Riches, The Civil Rights Movement, 72.
126 C. C. J. Carpenter et al., "Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," April 12, 1963, https://ibs.cru.org/files/7814/9063/9009/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf.
127 Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963, https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf.
128 "Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," U.S. Department of Labor, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/civil-rights-center/statutes/civil-rights-act-of-1964.

Americans up until this point.[129] However, after this law was ratified, public debate simply shifted from segregation to criminal offences, with the same discriminatory rhetoric that validated segregation being used to support harsher criminal justice policies during the "War on Drugs" era of the 1980s. Just as "slum clearance" had become a proxy for the demolition of Black communities in the urban renewal era of the 1950s, the notion of "criminality" has since become coded language for Black people.

The Subprime Lending Crisis

In the aftermath of the homeownership boom, incited by policies like redlining and urban renewal, white communities had all but saturated the peripheral suburbs of Birmingham. The nation had successfully twisted notions of land and property into commodities, facilitating an economy that would become one of the strongest in the world. However, it was unprecedented that the oversaturation of the housing market would eventually reduce profitable opportunities for real estate companies and mortgage lenders. Although President Truman described the Housing Act of 1949 as a "far-reaching measure [...that...] opens up the prospect of decent homes [...] for low-income families," the reality of Black neighbourhoods during the 1960s starkly contrasted his claims.[130] The effects of organized abandonment – from the manipulation of the Act's Title I and Title III provisions to the effects of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 – created an economy that thrived off of the inequities of Black exclusion. Even when housing options began to emerge for African Americans, the racial economy would continue to incentivize the perpetuation of these conditions, whether intentionally or not.

In the civil rights movement's fight for desegregation, the FHA faced criticism for promoting a "dual housing market" – one where African Americans are met with an inferior set of real estate conditions and procedures compared to their white counterparts.[131] The administration acknowledged the need for new policies targeted to support non-white and low-income homeownership but maintained the belief that the private sector should be held accountable for managing and implementing federal housing policies.[132]

Much of this legislative work began with the 1968 Housing Act, which was initiated through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) homeownership programs. Programs like Section 235 were the first of their kind, aiming to shift federal policy away from funding public housing and toward providing subsidies to

129 The United States Department of Justice, "Before the Voting Rights Act," archive.ph, August 8, 2013, https://archive.ph/hrN70.
130 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 28.
131 Kevin Fox Gotham, "Separate and Unequal: The Housing Act of 1968 and the Section 235 Program," Sociological Forum 15, no. 1 (2000): 17, 20.
132 Gotham, 20.

the private sector, thereby making homeownership more affordable for low-income minorities.[133] To encourage private lenders to take on high-risk borrowers, Section 235 transferred financial risk to the FHA through a special risk insurance fund, which would protect lenders from losses due to foreclosures.[134] Although these programs were meant to increase homeownership among minority families, they instead laid the framework for a new regime of accumulation, concentrated in the hands of private lenders and mortgage banks throughout the nation.[135]

Since the redlining era, African Americans wanted the same life-changing loans that the FHA afforded to more favourable populations. Instead, they were given subprime loans. These loans, typically offered to individuals with poor credit, come with terms that are less beneficial to the borrower due to the higher lending risk.[136] The terms include higher interest rates that can be raised without notice and potential prepayment penalties if a borrower wants to refinance their loan at a lower interest rate.[137] Moreover, subprime loans were offered to prospective homebuyers through mortgage banks – unregulated entities that depended on contractual fees and high sales levels to generate profit.[138] To African Americans, subprime loans, while not as beneficial as traditional loans, would finally afford them a chance at homeownership and wealth accumulation. However, they did not realize that these loans were designed with predatory intent that would exploit their aspirations for financial gain in an imminent subprime crisis.

With respect to the state of housing stock in Birmingham, a metropolitan audit from 1960 revealed that the city had a 50.7 percent homeownership rate, with 35.4 percent of white residents and 11.4 percent of Black residents owning their homes. Despite ranking second in the South for homeownership, Birmingham also had the highest percentage of dilapidated dwelling units.[139] The U.S Census Bureau reported that of Birmingham's 194,788 housing units, approximately 18 percent were deteriorating, 9 percent were dilapidated, and 6 percent of sound units, lacked plumbing.[140] Notably, African American families were disproportionately represented among those living in these dilapidated units. While these conditions were unfavourable for these families, real estate agents could strategically manipulate the existing housing stock to their advantage.

In a typical homebuying scheme, a real estate agent would buy a series of vacant or dilapidated properties and repair them superficially to give the appearance of a sound dwelling.[141] Using inside connections

133 Gotham, 14.
134 Gotham, 21.
135 Taylor, Race for Profit, 91.
136 Jackelyn Hwang and Michael Hankinson, "Segregation and Subprime Lending within and across Metropolitan Areas," Social Forces 34, no. 4 (2015): 11.
137 Hwang and Hankinson, 11.
138 Taylor, Race for Profit, 18.
139 "Birmingham Nearly at Top in South Homeowner Roll," Birmingham News, August 15, 1960.
140 Gene Wortsman, "Many Birmingham Homes Found In Need of Repair," Birmingham Post-Herald, April 9, 1961.
141 Gotham, "Separate and Unequal," 29.

with appraisers of the FHA, these agents would attempt to receive inflated appraisals on their properties and sell them to low-income families with little knowledge of the expectations of homeownership.[142] Black women were frequently targeted in these schemes. While these women were Black and poor, it was their desperation and dedication to supporting their loved ones that was weaponized against them. Real estate agents and mortgage lenders placed stakes onto African American women because their economic vulnerability increased the likelihood that they would pour their meagre income into trying to fix the damage of their dilapidated homes. In doing so, they would quickly fall behind on their mortgage payments and eventually face foreclosure.[143]

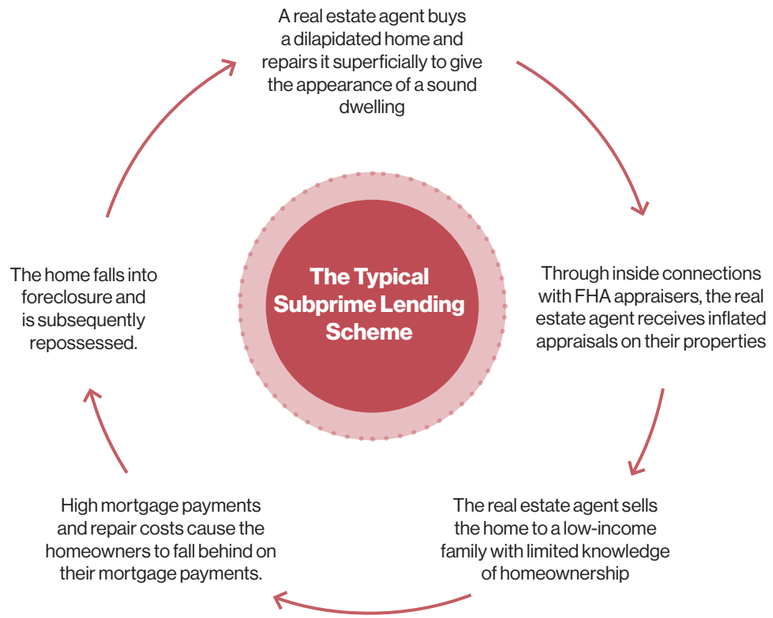


Fig. 2.27. Diagram of the typical subprime lending scheme

As African Americans continued to lose their homes under the manipulation of Section 235, their neighbourhoods deteriorated further, and their private lenders grew wealthier. With each foreclosure, real estate agents could restart the process in a manner conducive to high rates of turnover through FHA-backed loans. Now that African American integration was the responsibility of the private sector, federal-level regulation grew difficult. Not only had organized abandonment created the prime conditions for Birmingham to exploit urban renewal legislation at the expense of its marginalized communities, but it also became the foundation of mortgage lenders' business strategies. While

142 Gotham, 29.
143 Taylor, Race for Profit, 5.

race was not explicitly described during the subprime lending crisis, the collective effect of historic policies has, up until this point, made Black Americans more susceptible to these forms of capital exploitation within the framework of racial capitalism.

In her dissertation, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, a Professor of African American studies at Princeton University, refers to these conditions as acts of "predatory inclusion."[144] The term describes situations where members of a marginalized group are granted access to benefits or opportunities that they have been historically excluded from. However, distinct to this definition is that this access comes under insidious terms. In American history, redlining was a form of predatory inclusion. African Americans were included in the New Deal but were discriminated against and used as a barometer for the pseudoscience of real estate property valuation. However, in the subprime lending crisis of the 1970s, Black people were favoured because they represented a new clientele in homeownership that had yet to be used. It is under these conditions that the perception of African Americans in the 1970s shifts from being that of a "detrimental influence" to a "profitable risk." From the beginning, it was never about true inclusion or righting historical wrongs. Black inclusion was now of capital interest and racial discrimination would continue to prove fruitful in establishing the newest regime of accumulation.

By 1972, high foreclosure rates and mortgage defaults had grown to unprecedented levels, speaking to the failure of HUD's homeownership programs. Distinctly, foreclosures brought about under Section 235 reached heights of 4.45 percent and simultaneously, 244,000 units fell into default in 1972.[145] The alarming increase in these figures not only emphasized the systemic failures of the program but set the precedent for the persistence of subprime lending that would continue to affect the nation's economy well into the 21st century.

The War on Drugs

As we meandered further into Minter's sculpture garden, he led my father and I to a series of wooden planks mounted onto a stick. These planks were designed to resemble street signs with names like "Crack Street USA" and "Gun Warfare USA." Minter explained that these signs represented the "War on Drugs" – an era characterized by increased crime rates and mass incarceration. This display reminded my father of his time working as a police officer in the Houston Police Department. He shared with Minter and I how this era had made his job increasingly difficult. He recounted an incident where he had been on duty and pulled over on the highway to assist an elderly woman with a flat tire. As he knelt to help, he was nearly hit by stray gunfire as passengers from a passing car tried to shoot him. He understood that the political climate had increased the public's distrust of police officers. My father also noted how these experiences changed when he was out of uniform. When off duty, he often faced harassment from fellow officers for minor infractions, such as failing to signal within a certain distance of a turn.

144 Taylor, Race for Profit, 5.
145 Taylor, 170.

Fig. 2.28. Wooden planks, resembling street signs, convey Joe Minter's perception of Birmingham's condition during the War on Drugs.

For him, the War on Drugs was a period of relentless challenge, with no reprieve, both as a Black man and as a police officer in the United States.

This personal struggle of my father's reflects the wider impact of the "War on Drugs", a federal campaign launched under the guise of combating drug trafficking and dependency, which would continue to constrain the socioeconomic opportunities of low-income Black communities nationwide. While presented as a means to ensure public safety, the "war" and its constituent policies were wielded as a deliberate tool of state-sanctioned violence against minorities, shaping the nation into the globe's leader in mass incarceration.[146] The term, "mass incarceration," is not solely concerned with the United States' existence as the first prison society in history.[147] It also refers to the federal and state-led policies that manipulate and legalize the permanent discrimination of deemed criminals within and beyond prison walls. In her book, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," American attorney and civil rights activist, Michelle Alexander, explains that "[as] a criminal, you are afforded scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a Black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we merely redesigned it."[148]

This redesigned system of racial control began during the Nixon administration of the early 1970s when he first declared the war on drugs, claiming that they were "public enemy number one." Although Nixon failed to propose any transformative policies to support his claims, his intent to sway public opinion through rhetoric alone was clear.[149] Nixon was a master of precise yet race-neutral language, speaking about manners like crime, federal aid, and states' rights with a racial ambiguity that was universally understood but could afford him a level of reasonable doubt.[150] In a 1994 interview with American journalist, Dan Baum, President Richard Nixon's former domestic policy advisor, John Ehrlichman, revealed the true motives behind the war on drugs:

> You want to know what this [war on drugs] was really all about? The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. […] We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news.[151]

Following the precedent set by Nixon, President Reagan declared

146 "Growth in Mass Incarceration," The Sentencing Project, September 8, 2022, https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/.
147 Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'race Question' in the US," 60.
148 Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, 2.
149 Alexander, 60.
150 Alexander, 61.
151 Dan Baum, "Legalize It All," Harper's Magazine, accessed August 28, 2024, https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/.

a renewed war on drugs in 1982. Unlike Nixon, Reagan would escalate matters to a level of organized violence that had been unseen since the Jim Crow era.[152] His bold sentiments emerged during a period of declining drug use, where only two percent of Americans considered it the greatest issue facing the county. Consequently, the administration would have to justify their claims to the public.[153] As the budget for federal law enforcement surged and the budget for rehabilitative agencies fell, the Reagan administration began their media campaign. Amid deindustrialization and rising rates of unemployment, the administration dramatized stories about the spread of crack cocaine in low-income communities, framing it as a crisis born out of desperation.[154] Articles quickly spread, their contents seeped in racial undertones that successfully perpetuated Black stereotypes about "welfare queens" and "gangbangers" lying central to the so-called "epidemic."

The campaign's success resulted in the allocation of $2 billion for anti-drug efforts and harsher legislation under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. A portion of this legislation introduced the death penalty for some drug-associated cases and mandated minimum sentences for cocaine dealers. Despite being chemically identical, crack cocaine was punished more severely than powder cocaine due to its higher prevalence in Black communities than in white ones.[155] In 1988, Congress revised the act to increase the severity of legislation and add "civic penalties." The new act introduced a five-year minimum sentence for the possession of cocaine, even to those without previous convictions. With respect to the act's civic penalties, one portion allowed public housing authorities to evict anyone involved in drug-related activities and the other purged various forms of federal aid, like student loans, for anyone convicted of a drug-related crime.

With the framework established by Reagan, subsequent administrations were well-positioned to exploit these conditions for their own aims. In the case of the Clinton administration, Clinton replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). As its name suggests, TANF limited welfare assistance to five years and most crucially, placed a lifetime ban on those convicted of any drug offense – changing the landscape of welfare for those who need it the most. To exacerbate matters further, the administration would decrease its public housing budget by $17 billion while simultaneously increasing its law enforcement budget by $19 billion.[156] These policies paralleled the practices of the Jim Crow era, where an unfavourable group is subjected to legalized discrimination through housing, federal aid, employment and educational attainment.

Overall, these policies have had durable effects on the American prison population, which is predominantly male. A study examining the extent of people with criminal records from 1948 to 2010 determined

152 Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, 6.
153 Alexander, 62.
154 Alexander, 63–64.
155 Alexander, 65.
156 Alexander, 72.

that nearly half of all Black men have been arrested at least once before reaching young adulthood, compared to 38 percent of their white counterparts. Furthermore, of Black men aged 20-34 who do not have a high school diploma, 68 percent are more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. In contrast, white men within the same age group and similar education attainment levels only have a 28 percent likelihood of imprisonment.[157] This means that incarceration has become an almost inevitable milestone in the life of an average Black man, even more so than educational attainment.

Further exacerbating the issue, in his article, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration," Wacquant explains that inmates are victims of a "threefold movement of exclusionary closure."[158] In addition to being barred from educational attainment opportunities and exclusion from federal aid programs, convicts are disenfranchised, which prevents them from participating in the democratic process through voting. Among the 48 states that restrict voting rights for convicted criminals, 11, including Alabama, go as far as to deny the voting rights of individuals even after they have fulfilled their probation, parole, or prison sentences.[159] In 1980, Alabama boasted the highest rate of felony disenfranchisement in the country, at a rate just short of 5 percent.[160]

By 1990, the crack epidemic began to decline in Birmingham. A 1997 report from the National Institute of Justice, which outlined the trends in drug use across twenty-four major American cities, revealed that the percentage of young crack users had fallen from 37 percent in 1989 to 21 percent by 1992. Trends were similar across the twenty-four American cities in the study. As crack's rate of use declined across the country, one might also expect incarceration rates to fall concurrently. The reverse happened. In the ten-year period between 1985 and 1995, the nation's prison population grew by 7.9 percent annually.[161]

When confronted with rising crime rates, the United States has remained steadfast in its consistent decision to simply rid the body politic of its convicted criminals. While other countries may use non-custodial measures and rehabilitation for minor offences, the United States implies that its criminal population is irredeemable. Non-violent charges continue to be the leading cause of arrests in the country, the majority tearing Black men from their communities for drug possession alone. The systemic nature of organized violence in the country does not afford its citizens the opportunity to change the trajectory of their lives. Once someone is deemed a criminal, their future and rights as a citizen have been determined for them. By choosing to commit a crime, an individual forfeits their rights to adequate housing, education,

157 Sarah K. S. Shannon et al., "The Growth, Scope, and Spatial Distribution of People With Felony Records in the United States, 1948-2010," Demography 54, no. 5 (2017): 1797.

158 Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'race Question' in the US," 58.

159 Christopher Uggen et al., "Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction," The Sentencing Project, 2022, 3.

160 Uggen et al., 7.

161 Darrell K Gilliard and Allen J. Beck, "Prison and Jail Inmates, 1995," US Department of Justice, 1996, 2.

and jobs in the legal economy. These factors feed into the seeming inevitability of recidivism, especially for the country's young Black men. According to a report released by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2021, of the prisoners released in 2012, 71 percent were arrested within five years with the cumulative arrest rate of Black people being the highest.[162] This statistic is unsurprising given the circumstances surrounding one's life after the fulfillment of a prison sentence further limit the already limited range of choices available to African Americans under the effects of organized abandonment, organized violence, and predatory inclusion. While these circumstances do not justify a life of crime, they make it increasingly difficult for Black people to forge legal, sustainable futures.

The carceral system once played a supplementary role in controlling Black bodies in space during the Jim Crow era. Now, through the appropriation of this former penal system, the United States begins to relinquish its pursuit of capital gains to simply force the unfavoured into a state of permanent marginalization, effectively "cleansing" the social body.

The Great Recession and Escalation of Subprime Lending

As the 21st century began, America harboured new ambitions for its economic prosperity. However, the unabated growth of its housing sector, often called the "housing bubble," would lead to the greatest economic downturn the country had endured since the Great Depression. In the early 2000s, the housing market was characterized by an overabundance of low interest rates and risky loan practices perpetuated by subprime lending.[163] Unregulated subprime lending, which had been a concern since the 1970s, continued to inflate real estate prices while making homeownership more accessible to those with lower incomes.

Following the initial subprime lending crisis, these lending practices in the United States only increased in their breadth. Homeownership rates reached heights of 69 percent in 2004, reflecting the accessibility of mortgage attainment. Moreover, the presence of subprime loans across the country rose to 21 percent in 2005. [164] The persistence and predatory nature of subprime lending in the 21st century was bound to "burst." The bubble burst in December of 2007, precipitating the onset of the Great Recession.

From 2007 to 2009, the Great Recession led to a surge of foreclosures and financial instability that devasted the most vulnerable of communities. In response, the City of Birmingham sued major mortgage lenders through a fair housing complaint that cited discriminatory

162 Matthew R. Durose and Leonardo Antenangeli, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012–2017)," US Department of Justice, 2021, 1,4.

163 Brian Keeley and Patrick Love, From Crisis to Recovery: The Causes, Course and Consequences of the Great Recession (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/finance-and-investment/from-crisis-to-recovery_9789264077072-en.

164 Marvin M. Smith and Christy Chung Hevener, "Subprime Lending over Time: The Role of Race," Journal of Economics and Finance 38, no. 2 (April 2014): 321–44.

subprime lending practices as disproportionately targeting Black residents. Through the Jefferson County Court, Birmingham sought $10 million in damages from Argent Mortgage, Countrywide, Wells Fargo Bank, and Regions Financial.[165] In its claim, the city described how the subprime lending crisis had resulted in a loss of tax spending dollars due to the increased number of foreclosures and the funds required to upkeep vacant lots, demolish dilapidated properties, and increase law enforcement in these areas as crime rates increased.[166]

Foreclosure rates in Birmingham continued to escalate into 2011. In neighbourhoods where loan quantities exceeded 500, foreclosure rates rose across 51 ZIP codes with the ten highest rates of foreclosure presented in the poorest communities such as Ensley, Five Points West, and East Lake. While the average foreclosure rate across the country was 3.63 percent, these three areas nearly reached rates of 5 percent. In the case of Titusville, foreclosure rates averaged 2.57 percent, sitting just about the overall city's average of 2.05 percent.[167]

While the more affluent were able to gradually recover from the financial turmoil of the Great Recession, the effects of protracted poverty, particularly following the chain of historical events in America's history would be hard for the disenfranchised to overcome the economic fallout of the recession. Through predatory inclusion, vulnerable populations were exploited through risky lending practices and faced extended barriers to recovery, the matter deepening existing inequalities and further perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

Conclusion

Through these various historic periods, mechanisms of exploitation have been used by white elites to create evolving regimes of accumulation that adapt to the conditions of a given era at the expense of the Black community. While swift in their enactment, these exclusionary practices have had lasting consequences on African Americans, their effects continuing to ripple throughout the Birmingham and Titusville landscape today.

165 "Birmingham Sues Major Mortgage Lenders,|Alleging Outrageous Racial Redlining," Courthouse News Service, November 14, 2008, https://www.courthousenews.com/birmingham-sues-major-mortgage-lendersalleging-outrageous-racial-redlining/.

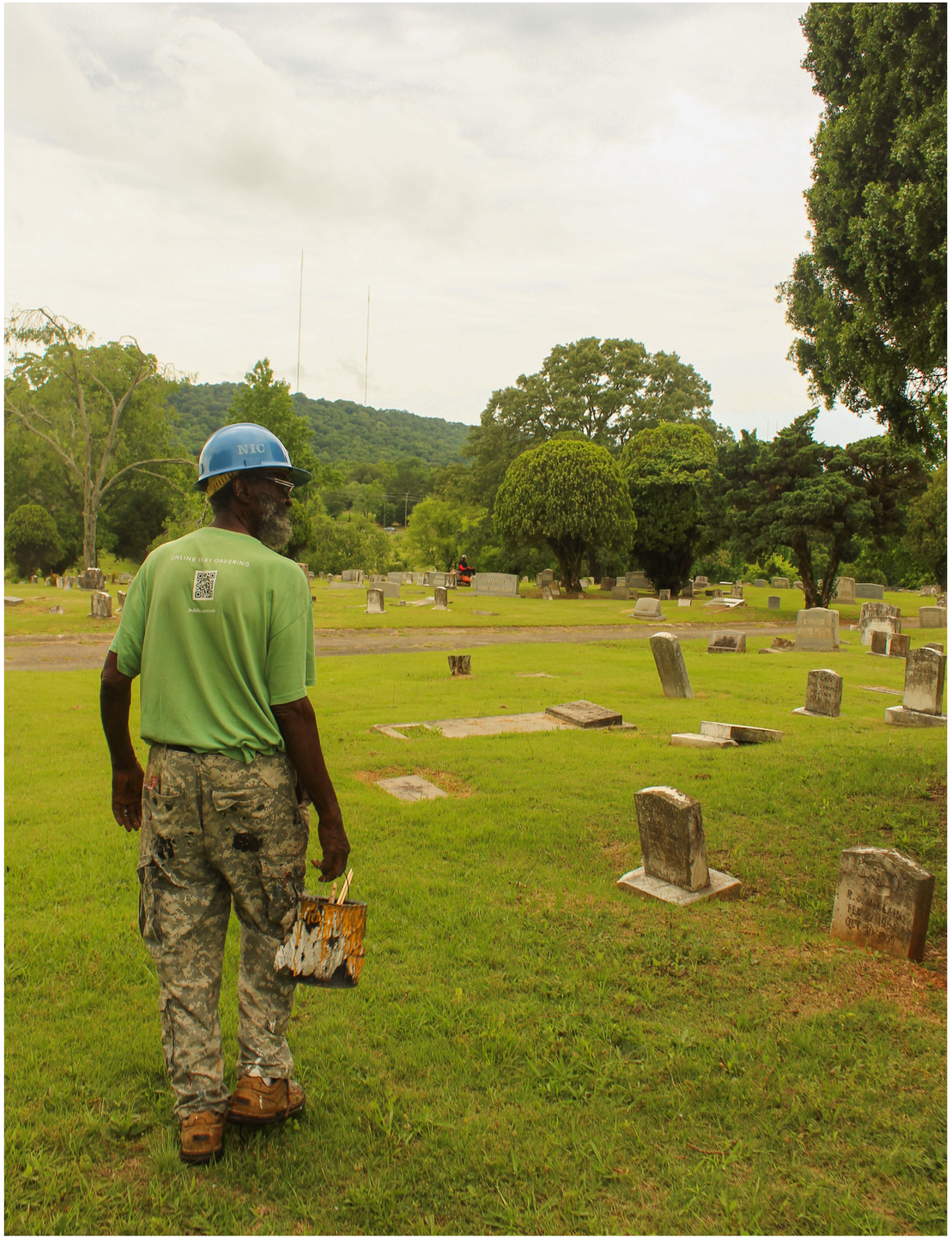
166 Erin Stock, "Updated: Birmingham Sues Mortgage Lenders, Cites Predatory Practices," AL, November 13, 2008, https://www.al.com/spotnews/2008/11/birmingham_sues_mortgage_lende.html.

167 Dawn Kent Azok, "Foreclosures Remain a Problem in Core of Birmingham with No Relief in Sight (Interactive Map)," AL, April 10, 2011, https://www.al.com/businessnews/2011/04/foreclosures_remain_a_problem.html.

CHAPTER 3

Titusville Today

Fig. 3.1. A swing set hung on a tree in North Titusville



Just before our time with Joe Minter came to an end, he brought my father and me into the Grace Hill and Shadow Lawn Cemetery that backed his sculpture garden. Unbeknownst to my father and I, this cemetery is where his late father, wife, and son were laid to rest, among the nameless 100,000 African slaves his sculpture garden is dedicated to. He explained to us that his late wife, Hilda, who passed away in 2021, remains one of the greatest sources of inspiration in his life. Minter recalled how she uplifted him in his moments of demotivation, reminding him that "his work was important and a vision from God." Even now, he said he hears her voice, telling him that when he can not find the motivation to do this work for himself, he must do it for the people who continue to travel to great lengths to experience his work in the Titusville neighbourhood.

As we stood in the cemetery, Minter turned his back to my father and me, drawing our attention to a newer subdivision in the Glen Iris neighbourhood that sat high above the cemetery like a watchful sentinel. Minter's voice carried a weight of unease as he explained to us that this affluent white neighbourhood, with its manicured lawns and two-storey homes, is a constant presence – one that seemingly looms over Titusville, acting as a perpetual reminder of the city's divides under racial capitalism. The wealth and privilege of those living on the periphery of Birmingham are greatly contrasted by the circumstances faced by the residents of Titusville. This geographic juxtaposition did not happen by chance. Instead, it is the result of the calculated regimes of accumulation, shaped by successive eras marked by organized abandonment, organized violence, and predatory inclusion. The effects of this disinvestment continue to ripple through the Titusville neighbourhood today, from the quality of its housing stock to the overall quality of life of its residents.

Fig. 3.2. Joe Minter leading my father and I into the Grace Hill and Shadow Lawn Cemetery

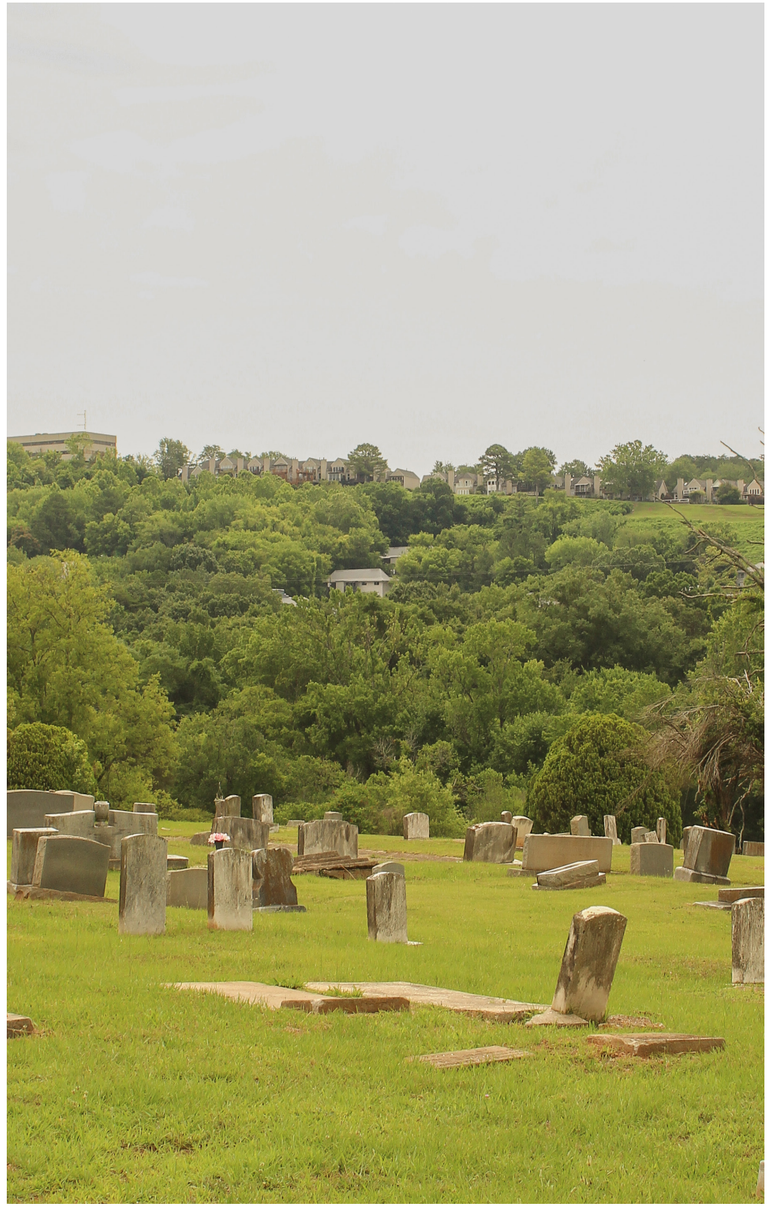
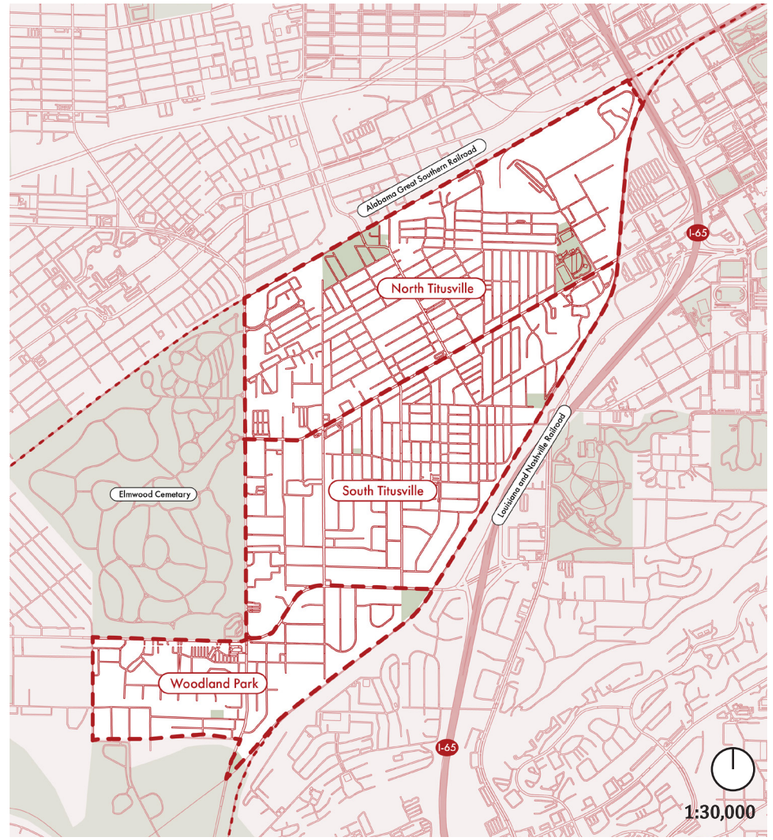


Fig. 3.3. An affluent subdivision looms over the Grace Hill and Shadow Lawn Cemetery from the southeast.

In these ways, Titusville serves as a microcosm for the larger Black experience in much of Birmingham, a city whose landscape bears the traces of state-sanctioned violence. Despite these challenges, Titusville is also a place of joy, where the resilience of its people has fostered unparalleled levels of solidarity and community strength.

Fig. 3.4. A plan of the Titusville neighbourhood in Birmingham, Alabama.



An Introduction to Titusville

In June of 2024, my father accompanied me to conduct my fieldwork in Titusville. Given his experience as a police officer, the lessons he taught me about safety, and the recommendations of some Birmingham residents I had been in contact with, we decided to stay in a hotel in Gardendale, a city that neighbours Birmingham. Each morning, we would travel on the I-65 into Birmingham and make our way back each evening. During the day, my father would drive through the streets of Titusville, allowing me to document its current state and reflect on its historical significance.

Lying just west of I-65 and the Louisiana and Nashville (L&N) Railroad is the Titusville community. At its northern boundary lies a second active railroad, the Alabama Great Southern Railroad. As my father and I travelled through Titusville, cargo trains frequently passed by on the railroads, sometimes acting as barriers that momentarily confined us within the neighbourhood. Established by freed slaves in the late 19th century, Titusville has since become an African American enclave that is enriched by its civil rights history and the resilience of its

residents.[1] Titusville's significance extends far beyond its community spirit as it played a crucial role in Birmingham's industrial development. Notably, the neighbourhood's northeastern tip was once home to the Alice Furnaces, the first iron-making blast furnace in the city.[2]

Titusville is comprised of three distinct regions: Northern Titusville, Southern Titusville, and Woodland Park. Northern Titusville lies directly south of the Alabama Great Southern Railroad and north of Green Spring Avenue. The region possesses the greatest diversity of land uses of the community at large. It contains the neighbourhood's largest park, sole active public school, two small grocery stores, and the Loveman Village public housing re-development, the "Villas at Titusville." The region simultaneously possesses the greatest concentrations of blight in the Titusville community. Southern Titusville lies north of Green Spring Avenue and south of 6th Avenue South. Compared to northern Titusville, South Titusville contains more residential land uses.[3] It also contains the jail from which Martin Luther King Jr. penned his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a letter addressed to "fellow clergymen," that denounced Birmingham as the "most thoroughly segregated city in the United States."[4] The final region of the community, Woodland Park, is situated at the southernmost edge of the community, bordered by the Louisiana and Nashville Railroad to its southeastern edge, 14th Street to its west, and the Elmwood Cemetery and Green Springs Avenue to its north. Woodland Park is almost entirely comprised of residential land use apart from a collection of churches, a retail plaza containing the neighbourhood's largest grocery store, and Joe Minter's "African Village in America." The region consists solely of single-family homes, with its newest subdivision, the Heritage Center Homes, contrasting greatly with the poor housing conditions of its southwest corner.[5]

Currently, the Titusville neighbourhood is situated at the threshold of substantial social transformation. The anticipated loss of the neighbourhood's vast elderly population, the majority of which have lived in Titusville for many years, will give way to a new prevailing demographic and subsequent uncertainty. While Titusville sits primely at the centre of the city, it faces numerous issues such as failing infrastructure, crime, and a deteriorating housing stock. These challenges stem from an enduring legacy of racial segregation and its ongoing effects, hindering the neighbourhood's potential for a brighter future.[6]

1 "Titusville Community Framework Plan" (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, 2015), 4, https://www.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Titusville-Community-Framework-Plan_final.pdf.
2 John Stewart, "Alice Furnace," BhamRails, July 23, 2006, http://www.bhamrails.info/index.htm; "Titusville Community Framework Plan: Existing Conditions" (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, 2015), 4.
3 "Titusville Framework Plan: Existing Conditions," 2.
4 Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963, https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf.
5 "Titusville Framework Plan: Existing Conditions," 4.
6 "Titusville Framework Plan: Existing Conditions," 4.

Fig. 3.5. A plan of the Titusville neighbourhood highlighting various neighbourhood landmarks.

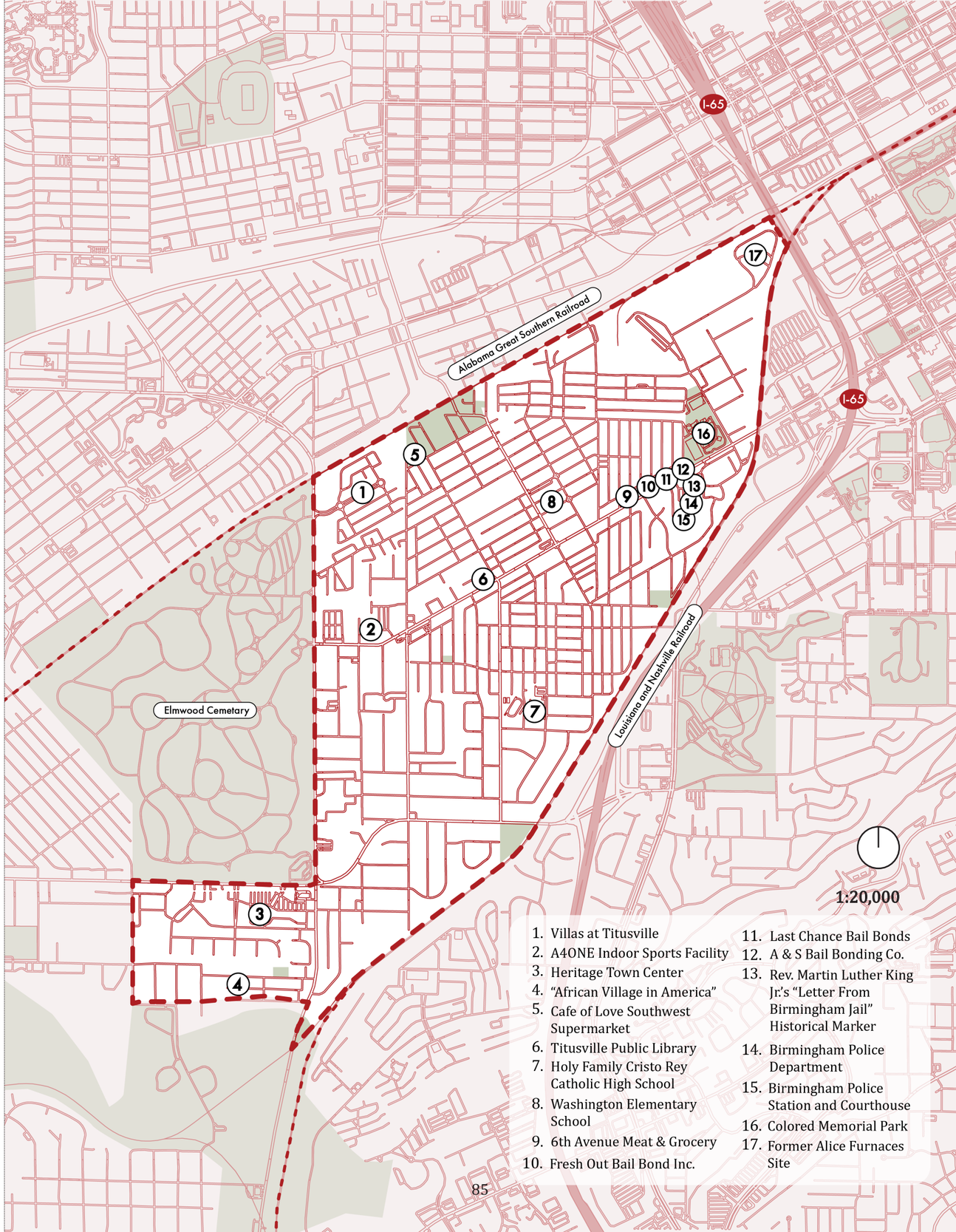


Fig. 3.6. The view of the Birmingham Police complex's buildings as seen from the Colored Memorial Park

Public Green Space and Carceral Landscapes

Much of my fieldwork was conducted in North Titusville due to its wide array of landmarks. A notable landmark is the Colored Memorial Park, the neighbourhood's first and largest municipal park that was awarded to Birmingham's Black residents during the Jim Crow era. This park remains that community's largest recreational greenspace and is equipped with a recreation center, four tennis courts, a baseball diamond, a basketball court, a swimming pool, and a field for both soccer and football.

During my fieldwork, I observed that the park's outdoor amenities were largely vacant, despite it being the mid-summer. This emptiness could be attributed to the region's intense heat or the potential discomfort residents might feel in these spaces. As I walked throughout the park, I experienced a similar sense of unease as police vehicles frequently entered and exited the parking lot. Moreover, my attention was consistently drawn back to the vicinity of the Birmingham police department and prison, which, like the affluent homes over the Grace Hill and Shadow Lawn Cemetery, looms over the memorial park from across 6th Avenue South. As one might try to enjoy the park, the institutions act as an ever-present reminder of the carceral state and its reign over the community. This reminded me of Joe Minter's son, Alfonso, who had lost his life while serving a lifetime prison sentence in Birmingham. I could not help but imagine the many individuals who, instead of living within their communities, were confined to jails because of decisions they made out of constrained choice.

Reflecting on Birmingham's history, particularly how disinvestment reduced the job and educational opportunities of its Black residents, it becomes clear that the issue is not solely concerned with the effects of one's individual choices. American attorney and civil rights activist, Michelle Alexander, argues that the insidious brilliance of the criminal caste system in America lies in the illusion that "joining it" appears voluntary.[7] It is commonly believed that criminal acts are the result of personal choices, suggesting that those who choose to commit crimes are punished accordingly through the legal system. This common perspective implies that the responsibility lies solely with the individual and that criminality can be avoided with good behaviour alone. However, this view overlooks the systemic factors and movements that shape the choices that perpetuate the cycle of mass incarceration throughout the country. As evidenced by the war on drugs, being convicted as a criminal for any crime, non-violent or otherwise, can turn one mistake into the greatest prognostication of the outcome of one's life without the chance for rehabilitation.

In 1980, Alabama boasted the highest rate of felony disenfranchisement in the country, at a rate just short of 5 percent.[8] This trend continued well into 2022 with this rate increasing to now sit beyond eight percent.[9] The percentage of persons under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities increased by approximately 5.5 percent from 2021 to 2022.[10] In 2022, Alabama had the eleventh -highest imprisonment rate in the country, with 390 prisoners per 100,000 people.[11] What I had yet to realize until visiting Titusville, was the way that mass incarceration had shaped the landscape. On the same side as the Colored Memorial Park, 6th Avenue South is lined with a series of twenty-four-hour bond bail agencies. These entities, facing the Birmingham Police Department and courthouse, provide bail to individuals in Jefferson County to facilitate their release. While bail bond agencies are illegal throughout the world, the United States possesses them in legal abundance around the nation's jails.[12]

7 Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, 10th anniversary edition (New York: The New Press, 2020), 267–68.
8 Christopher Uggen et al., "Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction," The Sentencing Project, 2022, 7.
9 Uggen et al., 8.
10 E Ann Carson, "Prisoners in 2022 – Statistical Tables," Statistical Tables, 2022, 7.
11 Carson, 15.
12 Adam Liptak, "Illegal Globally, Bail for Profit Remains in U.S.," The New York Times, January 29, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/29/us/29bail.html.

Fig. 3.7. "Last Chance Bail Bonds" agency situated across from the Birmingham Police complex.

(Landmark 11 in Figure 3.5)

Fig. 3.8. "Fresh Out Bail Bond" building situated across from the Birmingham Police complex.

(Landmark 10 in Figure 3.5)

Churches as Community Nexuses

Throughout our time in the Titusville neighbourhood, my father and I were struck by the sheer quantity of churches that existed throughout. In our travels, we found nearly twenty-five churches ranging from smaller shotgun-style structures to larger, more contemporary styles that are now common in the South. In conversation with Dr. Ronald Bayles, the Executive Director of the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC), he explained that churches are the cornerstone of African American communities across the nation.[13] As evidenced by the city's exclusionary history, Birmingham's African American communities endured boundless forms of exploitation and adversity at the hands of the government and white supremacist groups. When joy was difficult to find in the tangibility of everyday life, faith became the greatest source of empowerment for these communities. These churches, plentiful in number, continue to serve as sanctuaries for Titusville residents. Acting as nexuses for community support, these spaces help to feed the hungry, raise funds for the impoverished, and offer temporary medical services. For instance, in 2020, Living Church Ministries partnered with the TDC and the University of Alabama at Birmingham's (UAB) Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center to provide COVID-19 testing to those unable to meet drive-through stipulations.[14] In these ways, these churches transcend their spiritual roles, actively embodying and reinforcing the resilience of the Titusville neighbourhood.

13 Dr. Ronald Bayles, Titusville Development Corporation Interview, June 6, 2024.
14 "Community Involvement," Titusville Development Corporation, accessed May 3, 2024, https://www.titusvilledevelopment.org/activities.

Fig. 3.9. A plan of Titusville showing the location of churches in the neighbourhood.

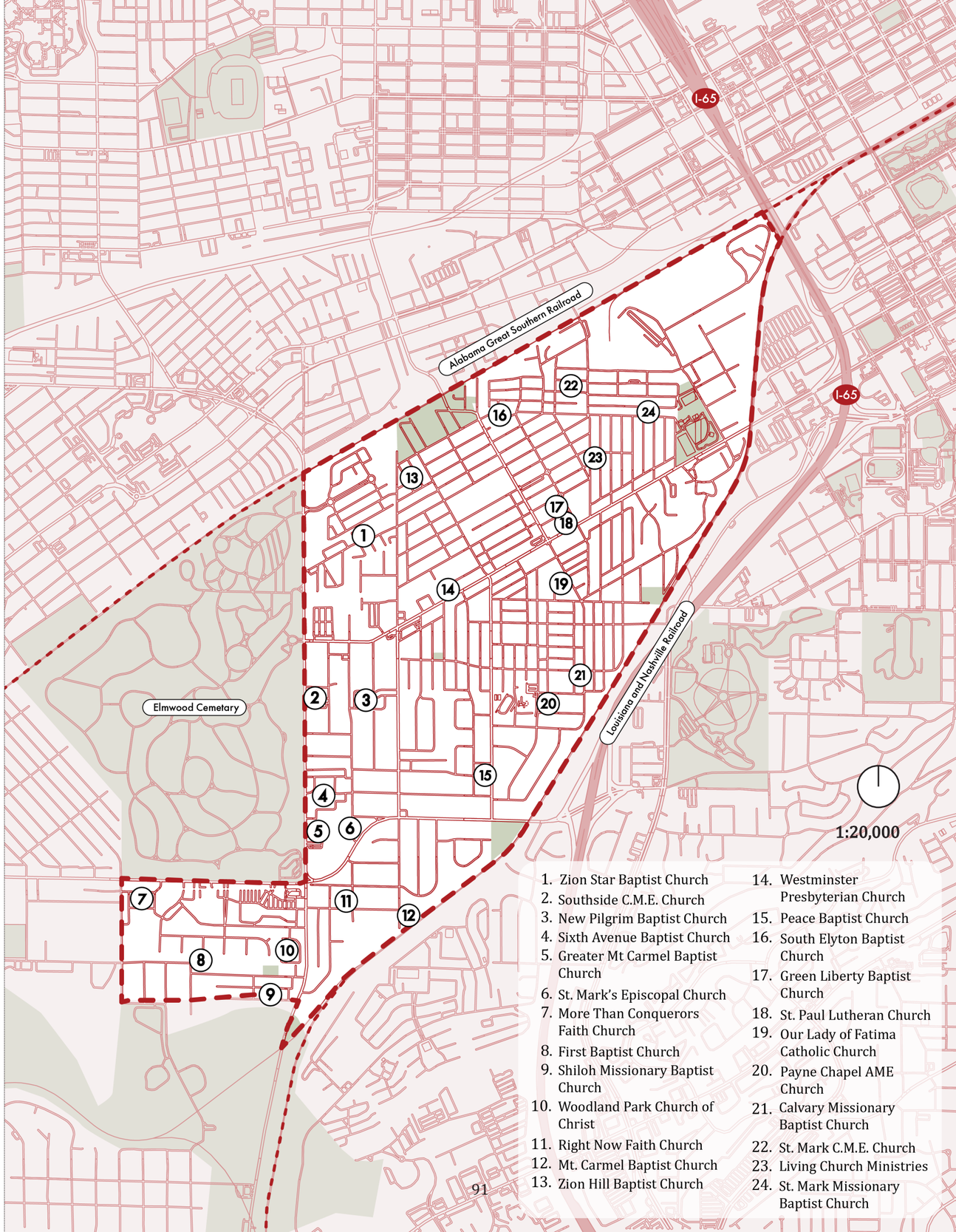


Fig. 3.10. St. Paul Lutheran Church in North Titusville

(Landmark 18 in Figure 3.9)

Fig. 3.11. New Pilgrim Baptist Church in South Titusville

(Landmark 3 in Figure 3.9)

Fig. 3.12. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Woodland Park

(Landmark 9 in Figure 3.9)

Fig. 3.13. Sixth Avenue Baptist Church in South Titusville

(Landmark 4 in Figure 3.9)

From a “Village” to “Villas”

The former Joseph H. Loveman Village public housing project, constructed in the 1950s, was once a source of inspiration for many of Birmingham’s Black residents.[15] Once situated at the northwestern tip of Titusville, the complex and its constituent homes were once considered architectural signifiers of the neighbourhood. Everyone knew everyone else – it was a tight-knit community in which hierarchy did not exist. However, in conversation with the WBHM radio station, Michael Lundy, the Director of the Birmingham Housing Authority, stated that the Loveman Village had effectively “warehoused the poor.”[16] The complex, with its tall, barrack-style housing, isolating location, and fence, isolated it from the rest of the neighbourhood. Over time, the project became a physical testament to the city’s disinvestment in Black public housing. By the end of its operational life, the complex was rife with infrastructural issues and only 246 residents were living on the site.[17]

As a result, in 2016, the Birmingham Housing Authority announced its $80 million redevelopment plan to the remaining residents of the Loveman Village.[18] This redevelopment was made possible by the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) HOPE VI program – a 1992 initiative that provides grants to local public housing authorities to address deteriorating developments through demolition and creation of mixed-use communities.[19] The organization intended to replace the compound’s 500 units in three phases.[20] While the first and final phases would be comprised of 184 collective units constructed on two other sites, the second phase was concerned with the redevelopment of the site itself.[21] In 2017, the Loveman Village was demolished to make way for the “Villas at Titusville” redevelopment.

15 “Loveman Village Redevelopment, Birmingham,” Alabama Housing Finance Authority, June 27, 2018, https://www.ahfa.com/news/development-spotlight-loveman-village-redevelopment-birmingham.

16 Mary Scott Hodgin, “A New Direction for Birmingham’s Largest Public Housing Complex,” WBHM, September 6, 2016, https://wbhm.org/2016/re-shaping-birminghams-largest-public-housing-complex/.

17 “Replacing Aging Public Housing in Birmingham, Alabama,” Office of Policy Development and Research, April 6, 2020, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-inpractice-040620.html.

18 Hodgin, “A New Direction for Birmingham’s Largest Public Housing Complex.”

19 “HOPE VI: Building Communities Transforming Lives” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 1999).

20 “Loveman Village Redevelopment, Birmingham.”

21 “Replacing Aging Public Housing in Birmingham, Alabama.”

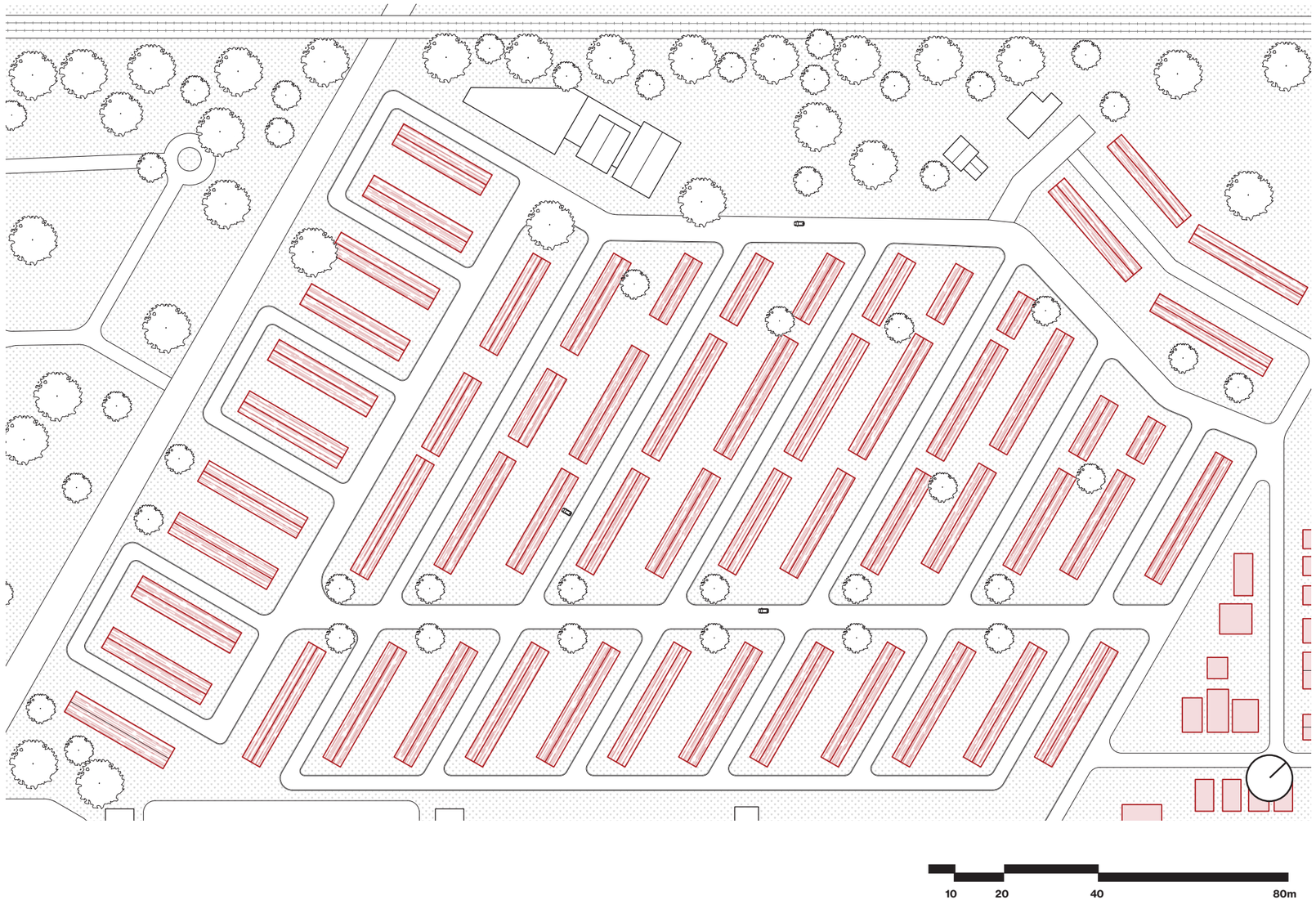


Fig. 3.14. The former Loveman Village public housing complex

Today, the Villas at Titusville is a mixed-income community that offers its residents a variety of amenities like parks, a recreation center, and a series of programs designed to support resident well-being. One such initiative is the "Family Self-Sufficiency" (FSS) program which aims to help residents reach their financial, educational, or professional aspirations.[22] While these programs have the power to be transformative, their current effectiveness is unclear. Moreover, in 2019, the Housing Authority of Birmingham District (HABD), was awarded $500,000 from the Housing Affordability Trust (HAT) to renovate the site's existing daycare center.[23] As of the summer of 2024, revitalization efforts have yet to begin.

Additionally, the redevelopment's reduction in the complex's unit count had led to larger unit sizes but displaced former residents as the urban renewal era of the 1950s had. Furthermore, while the residential structures are more contemporary in their architectural form, they stand in contrast to the prevailing character of the neighbourhood, just as its predecessor had. While this contrast may act as a precursor to the entire neighbourhood's redevelopment, some long-time residents of Titusville may find it unsettling like the former Loveman Village.

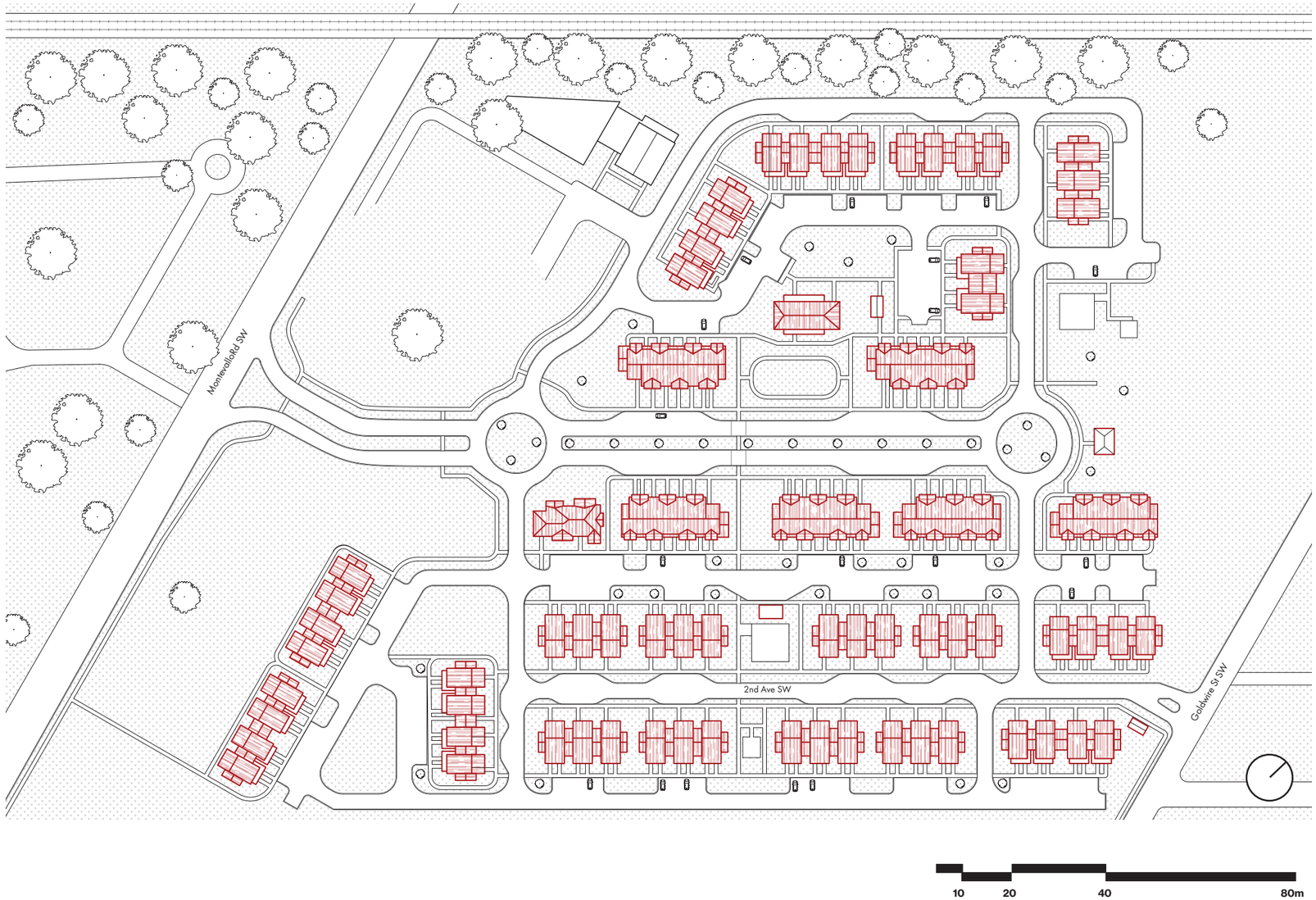


Fig. 3.15. The current Villas at Titusville complex

22 "Replacing Aging Public Housing in Birmingham, Alabama."

23 "HABD Awarded $500K to Renovate Daycare Facility at Loveman Village," The Birmingham Times, June 13, 2019, https://www.birminghamtimes.com/2019/06/habd-awarded-500000-renovate-daycare-loveman-village/.

Fig. 3.16. The entryway to the Villas at Titusville

The State of North Titusville's Housing Stock

Despite the neighbourhood's proximity to the downtown core, North Titusville's housing stock exhibits a high concentration of deterioration due to historic exclusion and organized abandonment. Neglected areas, condemned structures, and tax-delinquent properties in various states of disrepair exist to the detriment of the neighbourhood's stakeholders, business owners and, most importantly, residents.[24] To exacerbate matters further, over 72 percent of crimes within the neighbourhood are property-related, including burglaries, vehicular theft, and arson.[25]

Given the significant impact of one's home on various aspects of life in the 21st century, the city's average resident income, education level, and employment rate have all been affected by these conditions. According to the United States Census Bureau, approximately 20 percent of Birmingham's residents are living in poverty.[26] This is dismal when compared to the 11.5 percent national average.[27] In terms of educational attainment, only 26.8 percent of Birmingham residents above 25 years old possess a high school diploma. This figure reflects the city's median household income, which is $54,000 and has seen little change since 2012 when it was estimated at $45,436.[28] Furthermore, in 2012, the average household income for the city was $45,436 with approximately 82 percent of households in Titusville earning less than $50,000 annually and 54 percent earning below $25,000.[29]

24 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 17.
25 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 38.
26 "Birmingham CCD, Jefferson County, Alabama - Census Bureau Profile," accessed September 2, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Birmingham_CCD,_Jefferson_County,_Alabama?g=060XX00US0107390324.
27 Emily A. Shrider and John Creamer, "Poverty in the United States: 2022" (U.S. Department of Commerce, September 2023).
28 "Birmingham CCD, Jefferson County, Alabama - Census Bureau Profile"; "Titusville Framework Plan: Existing Conditions," 33.
29 "Titusville Framework Plan: Existing Conditions," 33.

Representation of North Titusville: Drawing as Testimony

The following illustrations depict a series of homes on a block in North Titusville and their range of conditions. These homes, in various physical states, have been deliberately shown in elevational perspective. The view provides a direct and unobstructed view of the façade of each building, offering insights into both the physical state of the home and the humanizing elements that tell the story of those who live within it. These details, while requiring speculation, serve to reflect the socioeconomic status of residents while affording them privacy by virtue of being represented through the medium of drawing.

The homes and the shadows they cast have been tinged in shades of red to highlight the role of property speculation in affecting the lives of Titusville residents. Any material possessions, rendered in Black, have been witnessed either through Google Street View or during fieldwork. The placement of these objects on the front and rear of the property paints a picture of the lives being led within them. These personal belongings, visible from the street or laneway, narrate stories of joy amidst resilience, reflecting the tenant's experiences in the neighbourhood and the ways they have made it home. Finally, any figures included in the drawings are purely speculative and have been imagined based on the material possessions examined. Figures have been depicted in blue, contrasting the red of the homes, to emphasize the nuance and individuality of residents within their racialized geographies.

Fig. 3.17. The current state of the Titusville neighbourhood presents various signs of life and joy that are punctuated throughout the deteriorating landscape.

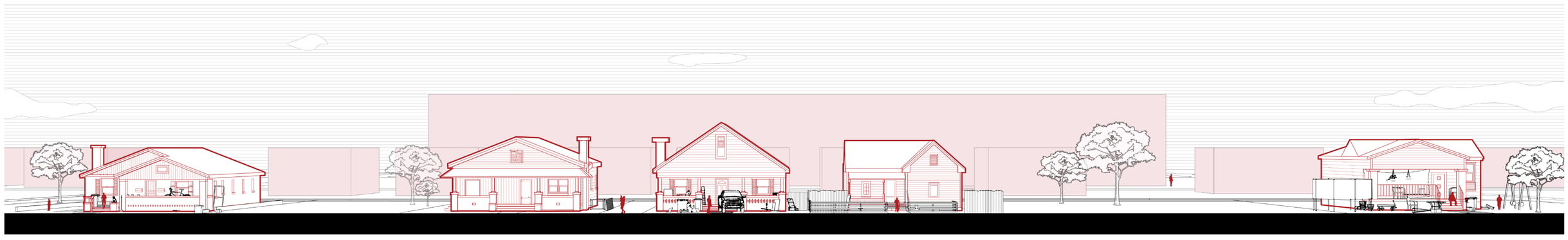


Fig. 3.18. Overview of a residential street block in Titusville as seen from the street

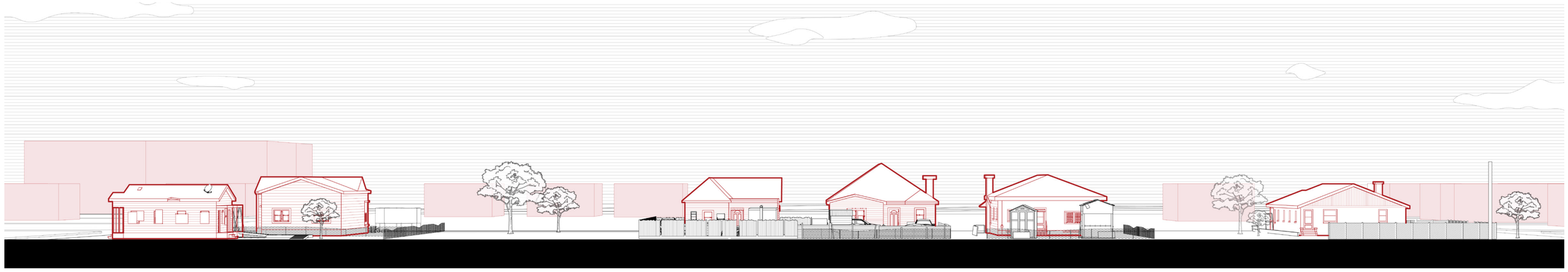


Fig. 3.19. Overview of a residential street block in Titusville as seen from the laneway

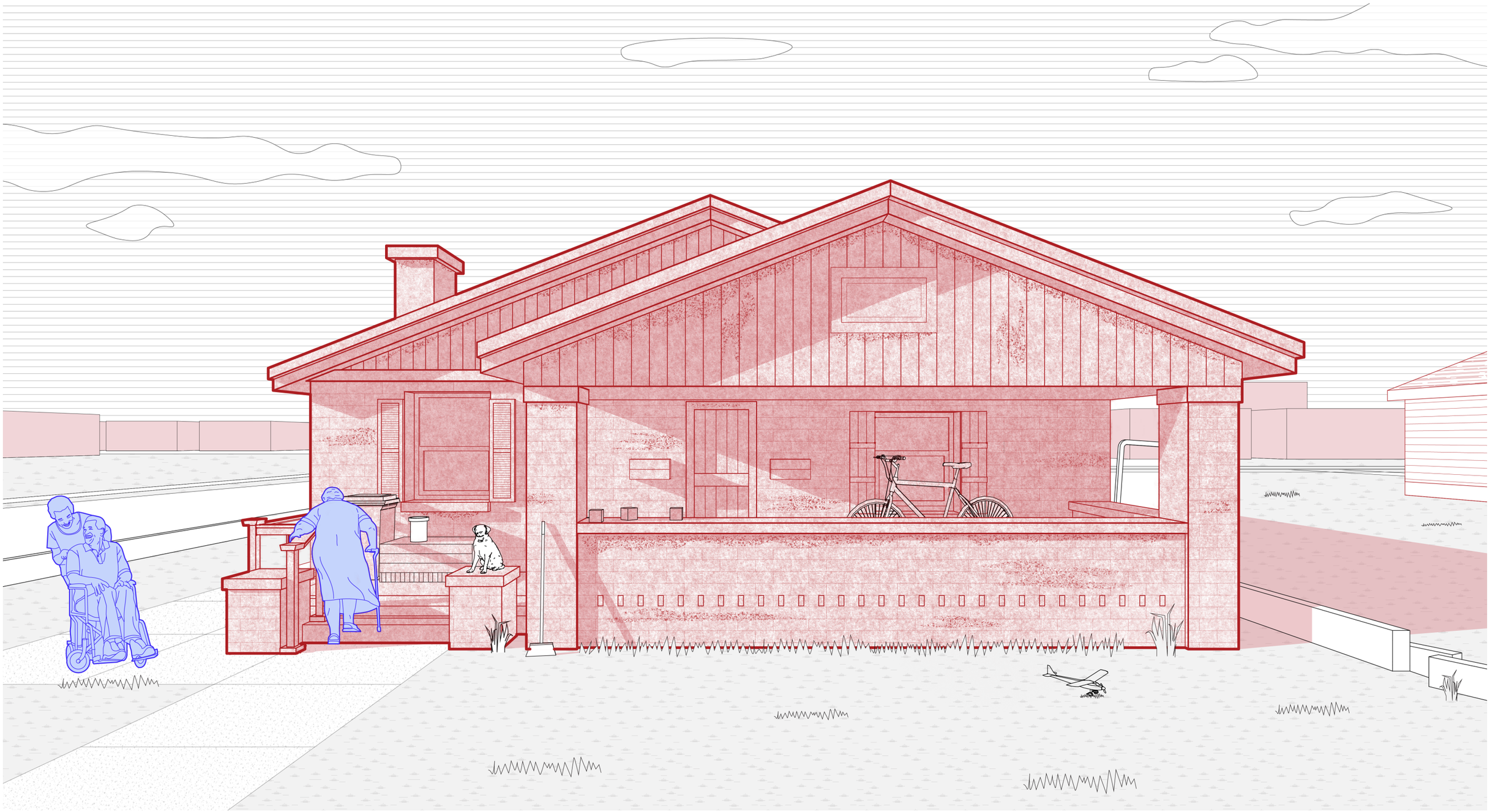


Fig. 3.20. A home in North Titusville

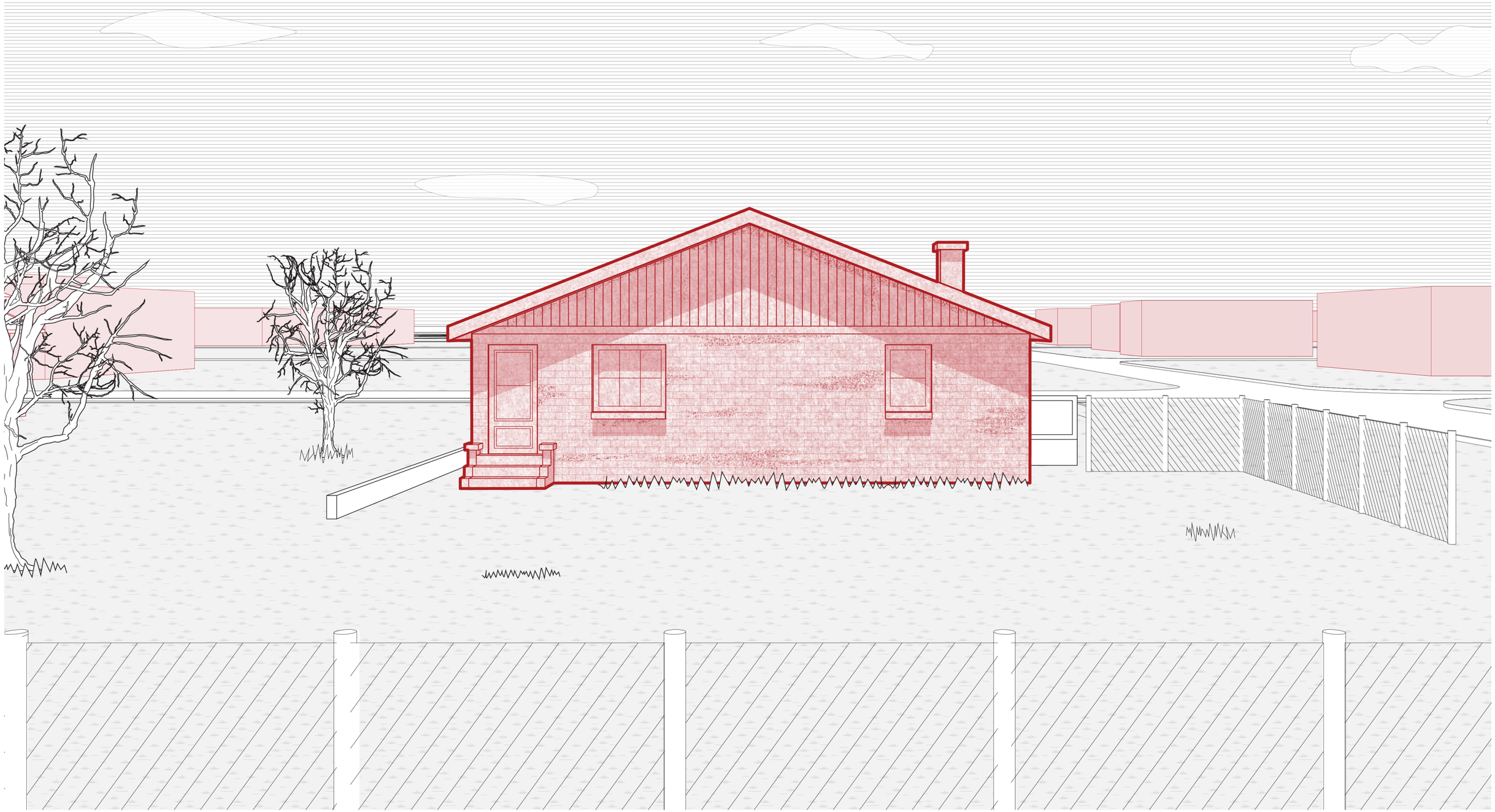


Fig. 3.21. The rear of a home in North Titusville, with its backyard empty.

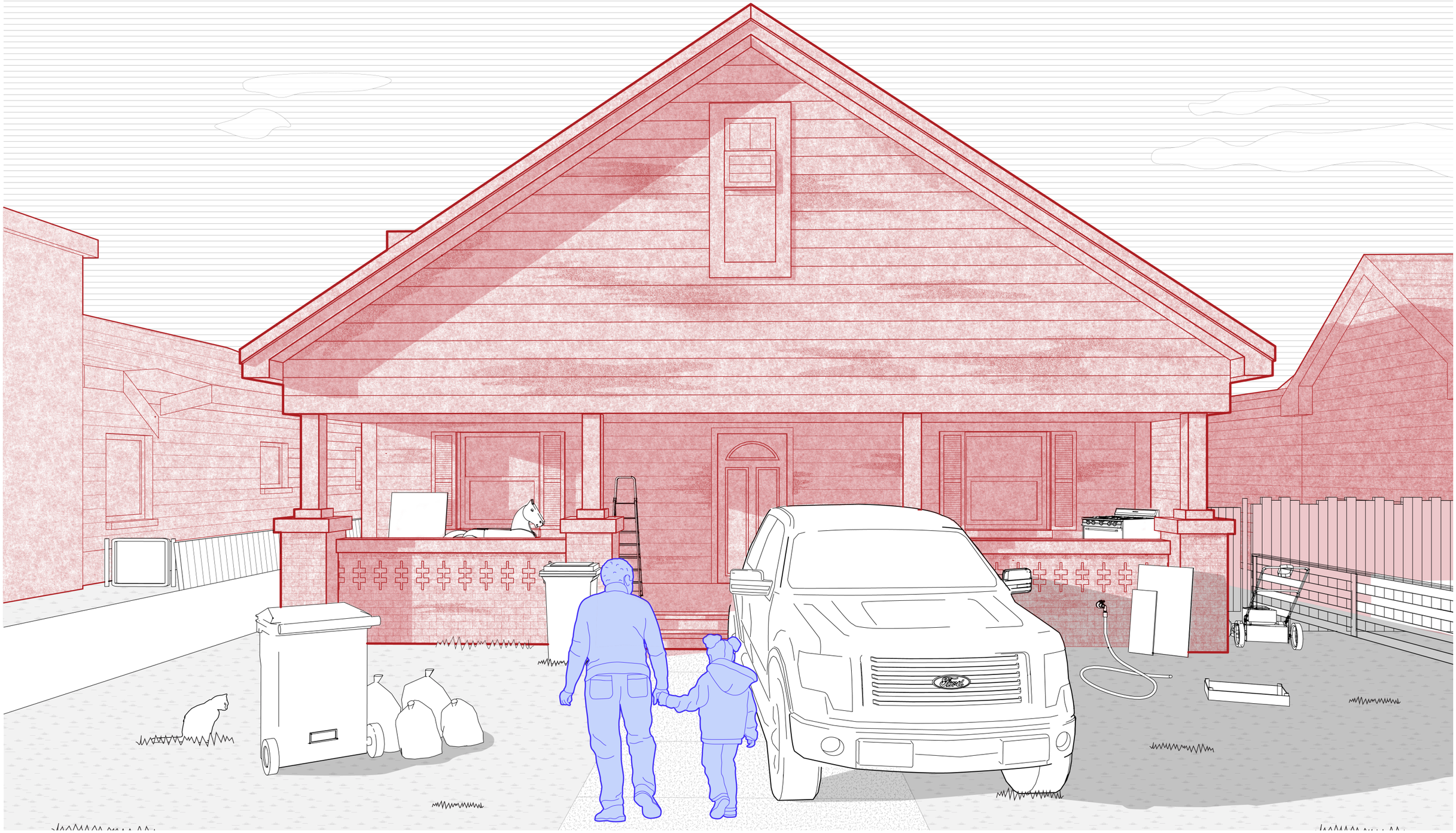


Fig. 3.22. A second home in North Titusville, with its front yard featuring a vehicle, yard maintenance supplies, and children's toys.

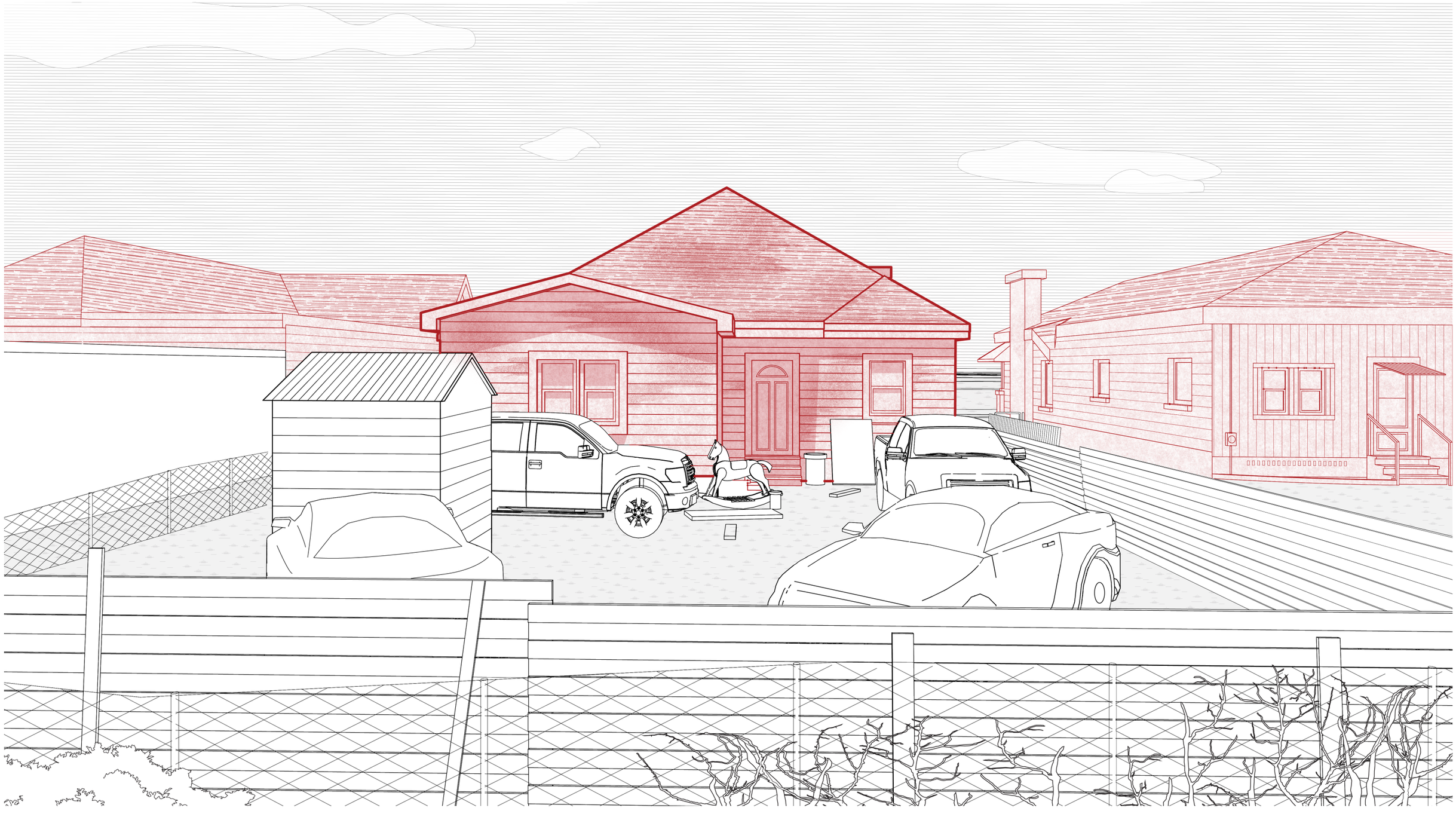


Fig. 3.23. The rear of a second home in North Titusville, with its backyard containing numerous cars and children's toys.

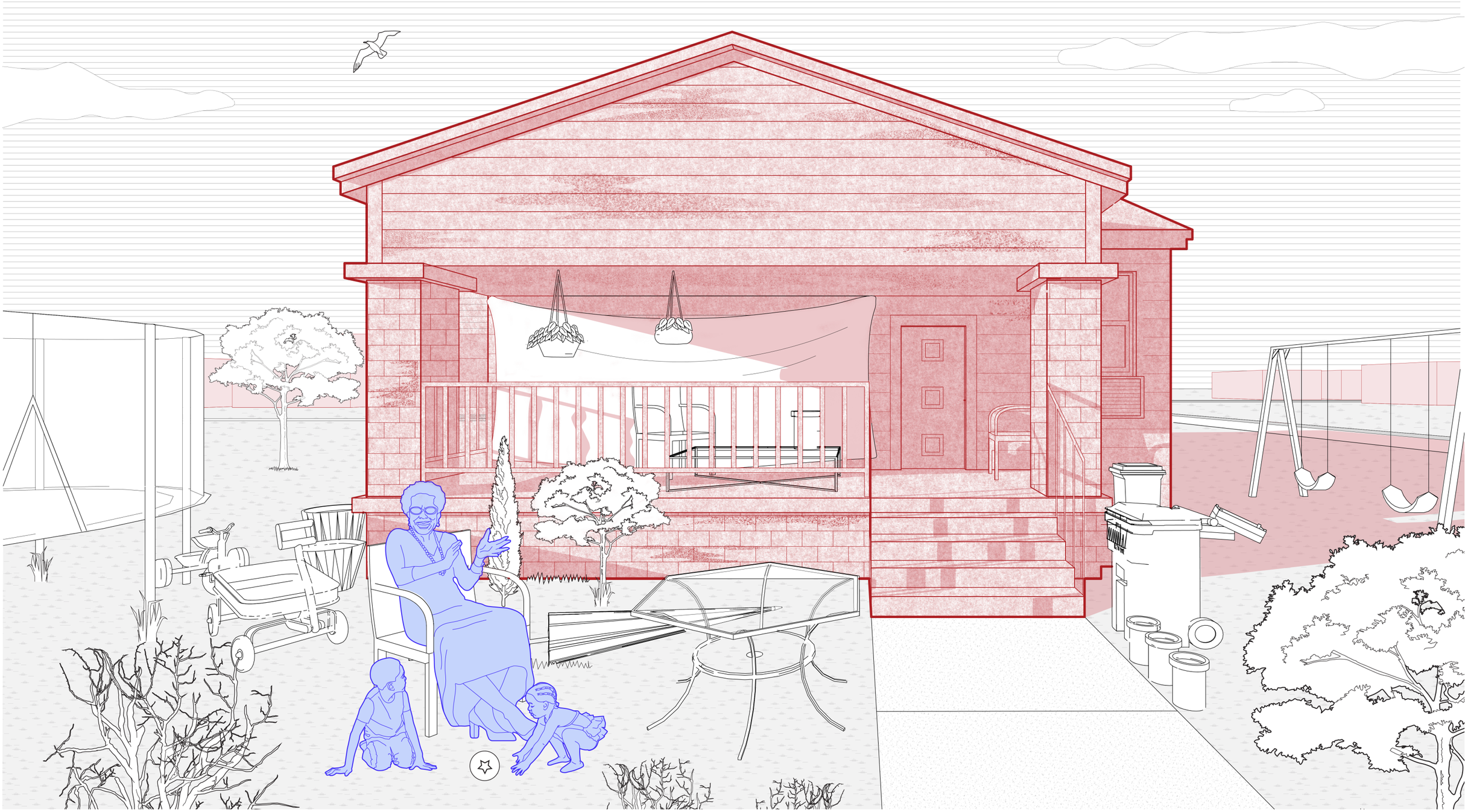


Fig. 3.24. A third home in North Titusville, a grandmother and her grandchildren play in the front yard of the home.

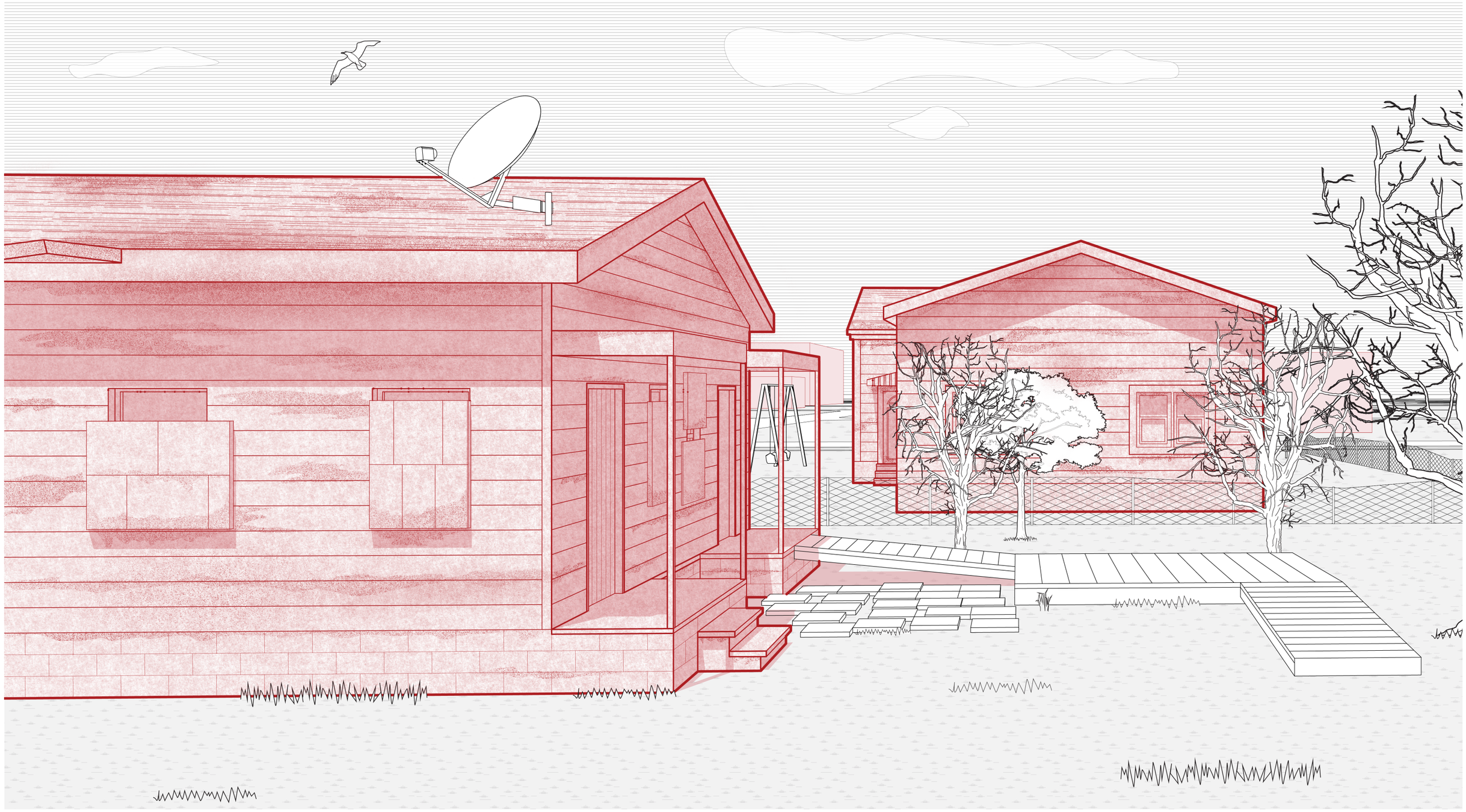


Fig. 3.25. The rear of a third home in Titusville, with an abandoned house situated close to the laneway.

An Impetus for Change

Countless times while my father and I were listening to the wisdom of Minter, he would turn to me and say that his work was made for me. For the hour or so that my father and I were with him, this reiterated statement did not resonate with me. It was only at the end of our visit, as Minter led my father and me back to the yard's exit and showed us one final piece, that its meaning became clear. This piece, he said, was the result of God's calling. It was a sign, adorned with an angel that reads: "Thank you, God. For the Holy Ghost, faith, vision, and dream in 1989 to be a worker in this vineyard built by Your hand, my Lord. Thy God, in love and peace, to open thy [children's] eyes. [Amen]." This sign emphasizes that his work, meticulously crafted over the past thirty-odd years, was created to impart the history of Black people onto the youth, so that they may commit themselves to envisioning justice in their lifetimes.

While the work of Joe Minter testifies to the transgressions that the City of Birmingham has inflicted on its Black residents since its inception, it is also marked with great benevolence. Several of his pieces call upon God to remain merciful in His judgment against Black transgressors, asking Him to forgive them and let His love encompass them as well. In a similar vein, grassroots organizations throughout Titusville are working to confront and reverse an enduring legacy of exclusion. This cumulative effort hopes to forge a future rooted in justice and inclusivity.

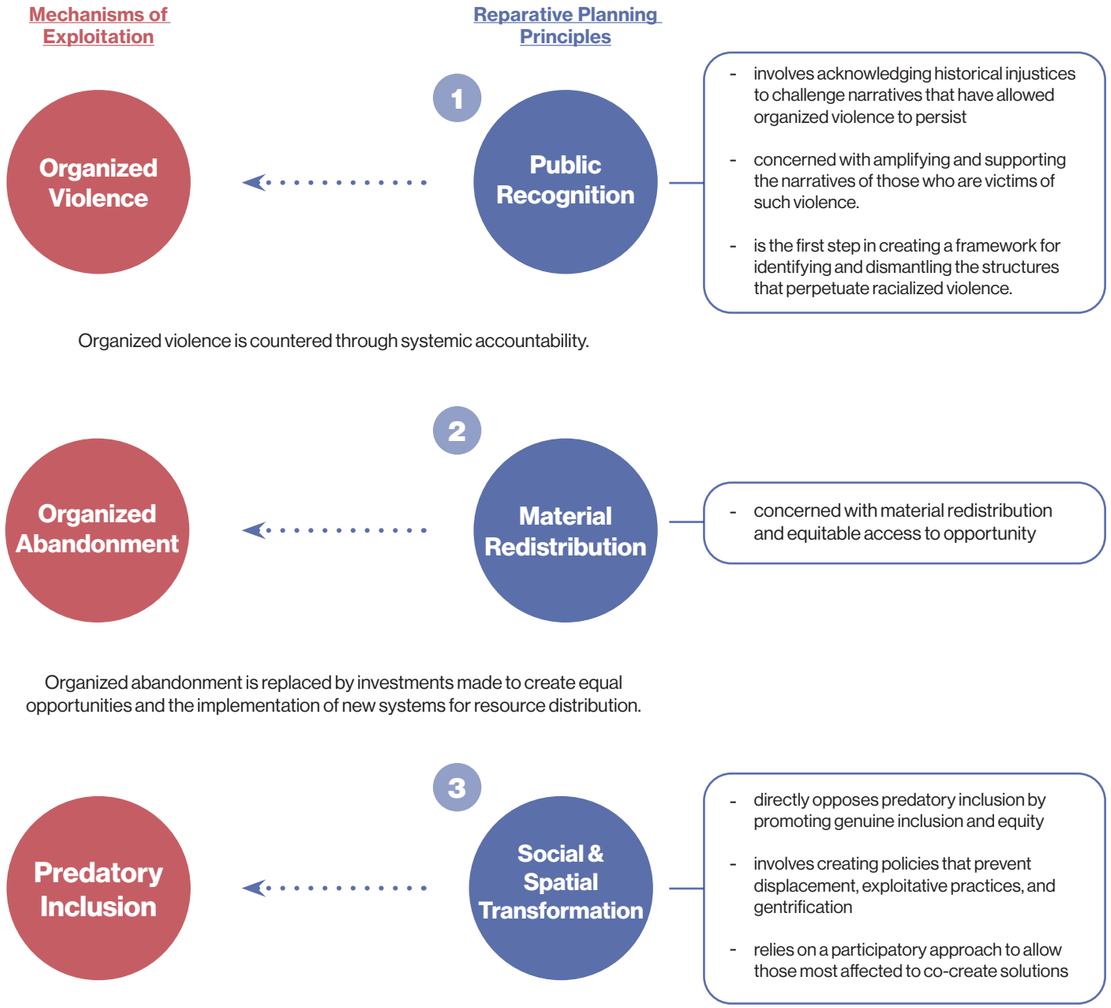
In alignment with these community-driven initiatives, the city of Birmingham developed the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP). This plan, released in 2015, is the city's most holistic attempt to address the systemic inequities its history has forced upon its African American residents. Formed with significant input from Titusville residents, the TCFP represents the city's first step toward reconciliation.

Fig. 3.26. Joe Minter reads a sign in his memorial sculpture park, which thanks God for the divine inspiration received to create the sculpture garden.

CHAPTER 4

A Plan for Community Justice

Fig. 4.1.. An abandoned building at the edge of North Titusville



Reparative Planning

In recent years, ample work has been done across the United States to address the exclusionary impacts of racial capitalism on African American communities. Despite progress in procedural and distributive justice – through advocacy, equity initiatives, and general city planning – academics have recognized the limitations of these frameworks in holistically addressing racial injustices.[1] While procedural justice is concerned with transparency and objectivity in governmental decision-making processes, it is often tokenistic, allowing members of marginalized communities a chance to voice concerns without granting real power or influence. Conversely, distributive justice is focused on the equitable allocation of resources, but redistribution often provides temporary benefits without attending to the underlying issues that perpetuate inequality.[2] Overall, traditional frameworks lack the reparative measures necessary to achieve lasting equity.

To address these shortcomings, Rashad Williams and Justin Steil – scholars within the field of urban planning and racial justice – have theorized a normative framework that defines essential principles that should guide all efforts to deal with racial capitalism. According to Williams and Steil, reparative planning must involve the following three components: (1) public recognition, (2) material redistribution, and (3) social and spatial transformation.[3]

Public recognition first requires that the history of racialized state violence, in all capacities and as the means that shaped the urban fabric of the country, be acknowledged. This process must be undertaken to properly challenge the narratives that have contributed to the justification of organized violence's persistence. By amplifying and supporting the voices of those who have fallen victim to such violence, reparative planning can begin to counter the very structures that perpetuate racialized violence. The work must center these realities if it wishes to conceive of a future free from them.[4] Reparative planning, therefore, embodies a commitment to equitable and inclusive design, such that it acknowledges that both historic and recent policies have enacted and perpetuated inequities.

Beyond public recognition, reparative planning must also address structural inequalities through material redistribution.[5] This is distinct from reparations, which can be divisive and divert focus from larger-scale reparative actions. Material redistribution, rather, encompasses more than just wealth. It is also inclusive of access to opportunities like education, health care, housing, and employment. Since material redistributions aim to correct imbalances and ensure fair access, reparations can complement this work but are inadequate

Fig. 4.2. Diagram illustrating how reparative planning principles dismantle the power of exploitative mechanisms

1 Rashad Williams and Justin Steil, "'The Past We Step Into and How We Repair It': A Normative Framework for Reparative Planning," Journal of American Planning Association 89, no. 4 (2023): 580, https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2022.2154247.
2 Williams and Steil, 586.
3 Williams and Steil, 580.
4 Williams and Steil, 580.
5 Williams and Steil, 580.

in addressing historical injustices alone.[6] In doing so, material redistribution can counter the state's abandonment of marginalized communities and their contribution to their deterioration.

Above all else, a framework for reparative planning must endeavour to bring about social and spatial transformation that dismantles existing institutions, thereby undermining the entrenched race-class hierarchy.[7] Their work suggests that reparative efforts, even if they involve temporary wealth distribution, will fail to make meaningful reparations if they do not fundamentally transform institutions to enact genuine inclusion. These efforts also rely on a participatory approach that allows those most affected by state-sanctioned violence to co-create solutions. In referencing traditions of Black radical thought – such as Black Marxism and abolitionism – Williams and Steil identify five additional subsections of social and spatial transformation. They are: (1) creating spaces for Black joy, (2) advancing economic and multiracial political democracy, (3) recognizing intersectionality, (4) critiquing state violence and building democratic institutions, and (5) building environmental justice to address the ecological harms of racial capitalism.[8]

With Williams and Steil's normative framework in mind, the following chapter will critically assess the Titusville Community Framework Plan – the City of Birmingham's most extensive effort to address the contemporary challenges within Titusville. Despite its ambitious objectives, nearly a decade has passed since the document's release with seemingly little implementation. This critique will examine how well the plan meets the essential components outlined by Williams and Steil with respect to public recognition, material redistribution, and social and spatial transformation.

The Titusville Community Framework Plan

In 2012, the City of Birmingham released a new comprehensive plan, its first since 1961. The plan was created to chart the city's hopeful trajectory into the 21st century, envisioning a future rooted in a revival of its neighbourhoods, a strengthened economy, increased job opportunities, and the enhancement of overall quality of life for residents.[9] To better inform these efforts, the City embraced the following affirmations for its future:

(1) The City of Birmingham is a place where people will choose to live.
(2) It will possess a connected system of walkable spaces.
(3) It will be a city deemed innovative and prosperous as indicative of its differentiated and sustainable economy.
(4) The city will be dubbed the "greenest" in the South
(5) And Birmingham's success will be contingent upon strong local and regional partnerships.[10]

6 Williams and Steil, 586.
7 Williams and Steil, 580.
8 Williams and Steil, 586–87.
9 "Birmingham Comprehensive Plan - Executive Summary" (The City of Birmingham, 2012), 1, https://www.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ExecutiveSummary.pdf.

Unlike its predecessors, the 2012 Comprehensive Plan was the first of the city to actively engage the community in its development, with its creation involving 2,300 individuals met through its public outreach efforts.[11]

To extend the aims of this plan, the city collaborated with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) to create three framework plans for the Titusville community, the North Birmingham community, and the western area, which of Smithfield, Five Points West, and West End communities.[12] These plans sought to symbolize the precise future of these communities, each outlining a robust set of action items that could be undertaken in the twenty years following.[13] The objective was to establish a framework for the community's future development as imagined and desired by its residents.

To honour the ideals of Titusville residents, the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP) was meticulously developed through the careful examination and implementation of socioeconomic, transportation, environmental, and land use data.[14] Akin to the city's comprehensive plan, the TCFP placed a strong emphasis on community involvement to better center the unique ideals of those living in the neighbourhood. Overall, the plan is meant to serve as a guide for elected officials, who are responsible for addressing its financial backing and integration.

Community Engagement in the Framework's Planning Process

The creation of the TCFP unfolded in the winter of 2013 across three phases, the first being "community assessment."[15] Within this phase, the RPCGB compiled and analyzed quantitative data concerning Titusville's demographics, housing, infrastructure, and transit. In this process, the RPCGB emphasized data tied to land-use patterns and the quality of existing buildings. From this information, the TFCP's companion document, entitled "Existing Conditions," was created.[16] This document became the basis upon which the TCFP and its constituent strategies were born.

The second phase, "public involvement," formed the foundation of the TCFP as it aimed to accurately capture the desires of Titusville residents. The process engaged with residents in an "all-encompassing" manner, engaging a wide range of participants from city agencies, and semi-public agencies to the private sector and more customary public stakeholder meetings. The RPCGB began the process in December 2013 with a series of stakeholder interviews, involving various city departments and external agencies working to revitalize the city.

10 "Birmingham Comprehensive Plan - Executive Summary," 1.
11 "Birmingham Comprehensive Plan - Executive Summary," 1.
12 "Titusville Community Framework Plan" (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, 2015), 2, https://www.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Titusville-Community-Framework-Plan_final.pdf.
13 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 6.
14 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 2.
15 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 5.
16 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 5–6.

Some of the City departments interviewed included Community Development, Economic Development, Planning Engineering and Permits. Conversely, the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD), the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA) and Birmingham City Schools were also involved. These interviews prioritized understanding the difficulties that each department or agency experiences while working in Titusville and providing recommendations for initiatives to rectify these issues.[17]

In February 2014, a "kick-off" meeting was held at the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church to ask Titusville residents to describe the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats present in their community. Residents highlighted the community's prime location within the city, its churches and spirituality, and the friendliness and initiative of its residents as key strengths. Conversely, abandoned homes, vacant lots, crime, poor street lighting, an absence of grocery stores, and the Loveman Village were cited as some of the area's greatest weaknesses. Titusville residents articulated its crime rates, poor transit, a lack of homeownership, and the University of Birmingham as threats to the area's development.[18]

To shape the vision of the framework plan, two subsequent meetings were then held in March and April at the Washington K-8 School and Woodland Park Church respectively. These meetings aimed to progressively identify resident concerns associated with community walkability, transit effectiveness, and the character of architectural development. Within residential and commercial contexts, meeting participants were presented with a variety of street infrastructure arrangements to ascertain their visual and typological development preferences and where they would wish for them to be developed.[19]

To ensure the success of the plan's future implementation, a second stakeholder meeting convened church leaders and business owners to form a partnership that would work collaboratively with the community's leaders.[20]

Finally, in January 2015, a final open-house meeting was held at Living Church Ministries to give the public the chance to revise the goals, strategies, and actions that would be documented in the final plan.[21]

The third and final phase, "Plan Development & Adoption," saw the completion of the Titusville Community Framework Plan on February 4, 2015.[22]

17 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 6.
18 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 6.
19 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 8.
20 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 9.
21 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 9.
22 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 9.

The Structure of the Plan

The final Titusville Community Framework Plan is comprised of seven chapters, five of which denote different urban planning sectors and their corresponding goals, strategies, and concluding initiatives:

(1) Community Renewal
(2) Green Systems
(3) Economic Vitality
(4) Transportation and Infrastructure
(5) Future Land Use[23]

To address these goals, the framework plan proposes a variety of measures, ranging from large-scale urban planning initiatives to smaller community-led efforts. For every action listed, a corresponding time-frame has been included to indicate the expected duration of implementation once the initiative commences.

Community Renewal

The first section of the Titusville Community Framework Plan concerns itself with community renewal, the process of revitalizing the Titusville neighbourhood to foster a higher quality of life for its residents. This section identifies blight, wellness and security, mixed-income housing, and community engagement as paramount areas to address.[24]

The first goal of this section is to achieve community beautification by observing and addressing the state of blight in the twenty years following the plan's development. The section cites blight as one of the primary conditions acting to the detriment of the community and the quality of life experienced by its residents. These abandoned lots and dilapidated homes exacerbate crime, strain the City's services, and pose a health and safety risk to adjacent residents. Property values continue to decline in response, further disincentivizing stakeholders from investing in the redevelopment of the area. As a result, the framework plan believes that the prevalence of blighted properties must first be addressed.[25]

One strategy listed is to directly deal with blight through renovation efforts, adaptive reuse, or the demolition of condemned properties.[26] For instance, to achieve these aims, the document recommends that a community group, like a "Community Beautification Coalition" (CBC), be created to oversee. In a subsequent, listed action, the TCFP recommends that the potential CBC forge partnerships with local churches, the Jefferson County's Volunteer-Based Housing Rehabilitation Program, and other non-profits to organize renovation efforts. Through these collaborations, the CBC would facilitate community equipment rental systems and programs assisting the elderly and disabled, alongside conducting traditional renovation efforts to repair buildings in

23 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 13.
24 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 16.
25 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 17.
26 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 20.

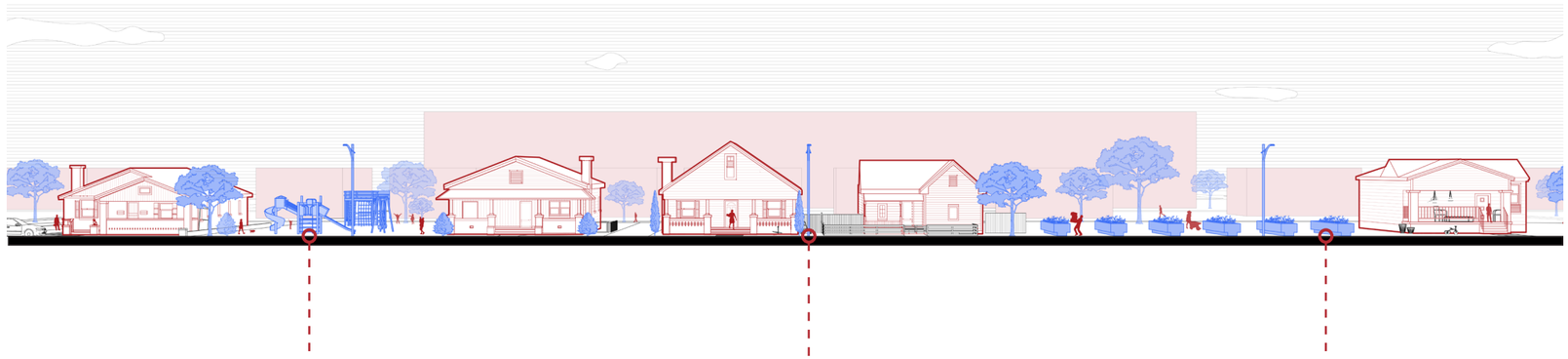
the area.[27] Another action listed would see the conversion of vacant lots into facilities that better meet the present needs of residents. Around 19 percent of Titusville's lots are vacant, creating prime opportunities to repurpose them. For example, these lots could be transformed into recreational spaces with playgrounds or community facilities. Alternatively, they could become public green spaces that act as sites of stormwater management in areas that are prone to flooding or spaces that house community gardens to educate residents about food cultivation.[28]

The second goal in achieving community renewal is to improve resident well-being and security by enhancing access to support services, recreational amenities, fresh food, and better security measures. Given that the Titusville community only possesses one active health facility in the form of a family dentistry, the plan proposes transient healthcare stations to promptly service its residents. It recommends the implementation of mobile health clinics and temporary clinics at the Washington K-8 School and Memorial Park Recreation Center. These transient facilities would provide vital services to residents who may lack health insurance, consistent transportation, or trust in conventional healthcare organizations. The actualization of this initiative is particularly crucial to Titusville's African American residents, especially considering the concerns that were raised about the University of Alabama being perceived as a threat to community revitalization.[29]

Achieving mixed-income housing is the third goal outlined to achieve community renewal as it will provide various housing options for residents of varying income levels and household sizes. As one method to achieve mixed-income housing, the TCFP outlines its desire to collaborate with the Housing Authority of Birmingham (HABD) to secure a "Choice Neighbourhood Grant" that would fund their joint redevelopment of the Loveman Village. The document describes the RPCGB's desire to convert the Loveman Village complex into a mixed-income development that would create a more walkable community because of its public amenities and community center.[30]

The final goal to accomplish community renewal in Titusville is rooted in facilitating the engagement of the community at large. The document cites the vested participation of the city and the community as integral to the TCFP's actualization. One action item within this sub-section calls for the development of partnerships between the RPCGB and thirteen regional organizations. These partnerships include the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC) to combat blight and create new-builds; the Housing Authority of Birmingham District (HABD) for its rental assistance program and lease-purchase homeownership programs; the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) for its education and career advancement programs; and local faith-based and non-profit organization that provide community services and organize volunteer groups. Simultaneously, the document expresses the RPCGB's desire to create a "Community Feedback Loop," an information network designed to keep the city, residents, and other community stakeholders updated on ongoing and completed community renewal efforts.[31]

27 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 21.
28 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 26.
29 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 29–42.
30 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 42–46.
31 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 47–49.



Parks & Playgrounds

vacant lots can become recreational green spaces that increase access to neighbourhood amenities and the permeability of the urban fabric

Streetlights

increasing the number of streetlights in the neighbourhood can reduce crime rates in the area and foster community well-being

Urban Teaching Garden

a shared space used to educate residents about the fundamentals of cultivating produce, where neighbours can collectively grow and harvest crops for personal or group consumption

Fig. 4.3. Vacant lots on a residential block in Titusville, redeveloped according to the suggestions of the TCFP.

Green Systems

During the plan's development, countless Titusville residents expressed the community's hopes for more recreational opportunities and flood mitigation in the area. As a result, the TCFP's second section, "Green Systems," was developed out of this community desire. Specifically, residents requested larger parks, additional recreational facilities and programs, and robust systems to manage stormwater to reduce flooding.[32] To alleviate flood-prone areas in Titusville, the plan recommends installing green systems on vacant or blighted properties. The systems listed include rain gardens, bioretention systems, and green parking. In addition, the plan proposes that rights-of-way be retrofitted to reduce storm-water run-off through elements like bioswales and permeable pavers.[33]

With respect to recreational amenities, the framework plan reiterates its proposal to acquire and convert blighted properties into recreational amenities, ensuring that they are regularly maintained and safe for all. However, the document subsequently recommends that surveillance of the parks be "maximized" through the creation of a "park ranger division" in the City's police force and complemented by citizen patrol groups.[34] This recommendation fails to consider its potential to perpetuate systemic racism in a community already grappling with its effects. In "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," attorney and civil rights activist, Michelle Alexander, asserts that Black people are typically less supportive of punitive criminal justice policies than white people, despite being more likely to be victims of crime.[35] This is to say that an increased police presence in the community, especially in areas of recreation, will do little beyond strengthening institutional mistrust and forcing more individuals into a permanent undercaste. While this does not excuse behaviour that endangers others, it highlights the need for more mindful initiatives. Studies show that when unemployment is accounted for, drug and violent crime rates between young Black and white men present little disparity, suggesting that higher crime rates in poorer Black communities are often born out of economic necessity and not inherent criminality.[36]

While the "Green Systems" section of the document addresses the need for reparative planning to include initiatives targeted at fostering environmental justice, its recommendation for increased policing contradicts a critique of state violence. It would be remiss if this initiative undermined those in the remainder of the document that aims to increase access to educational and employment opportunities.

32 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 52.
33 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 60–61.
34 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 56.
35 Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow : Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, 10th anniversary edition (New York: The New Press, 2020), 259.
36 Alexander, 261.

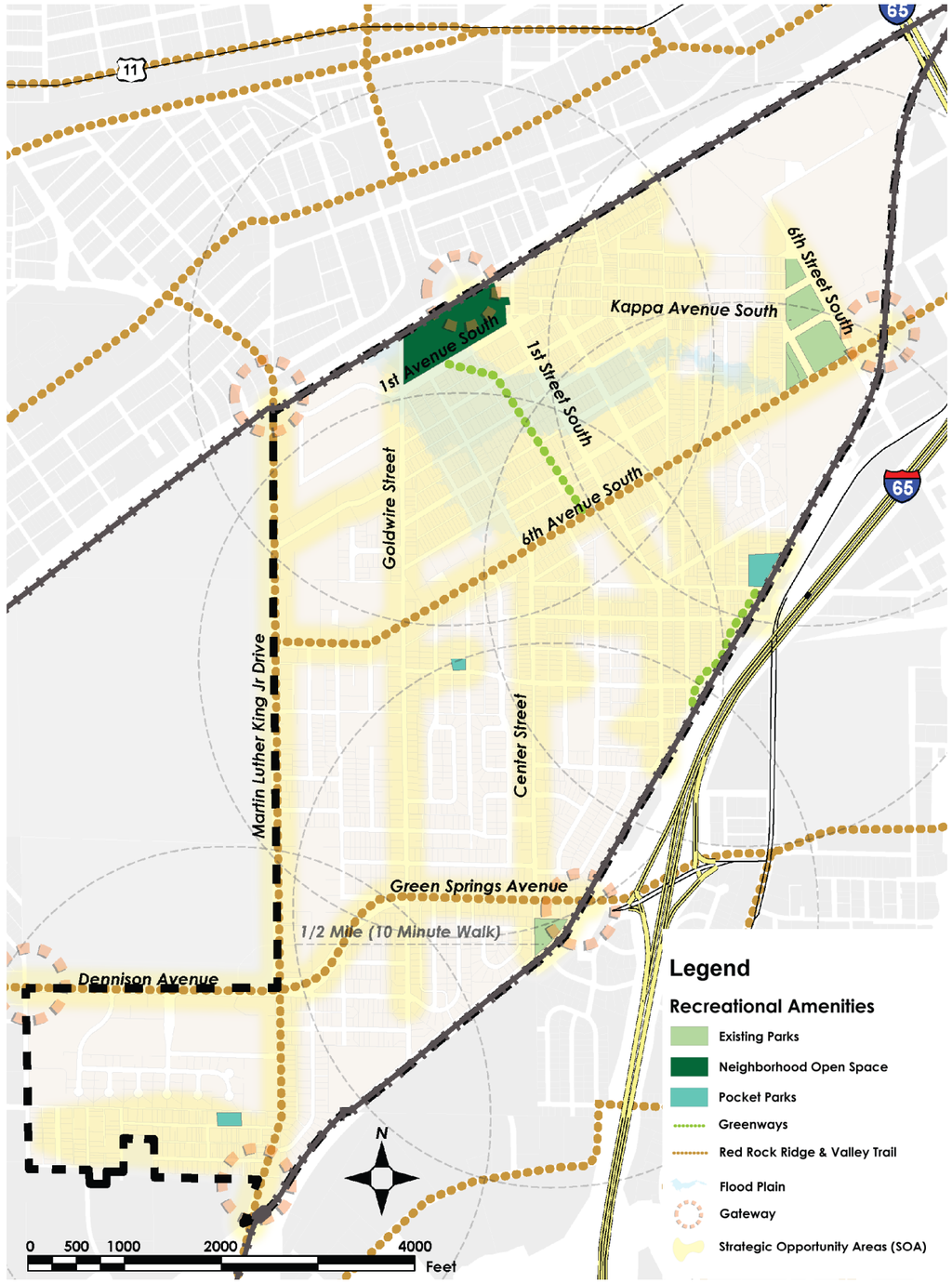


Fig. 4.4. 'Recreational Amenities Map' from the Titusville Community Framework Plan

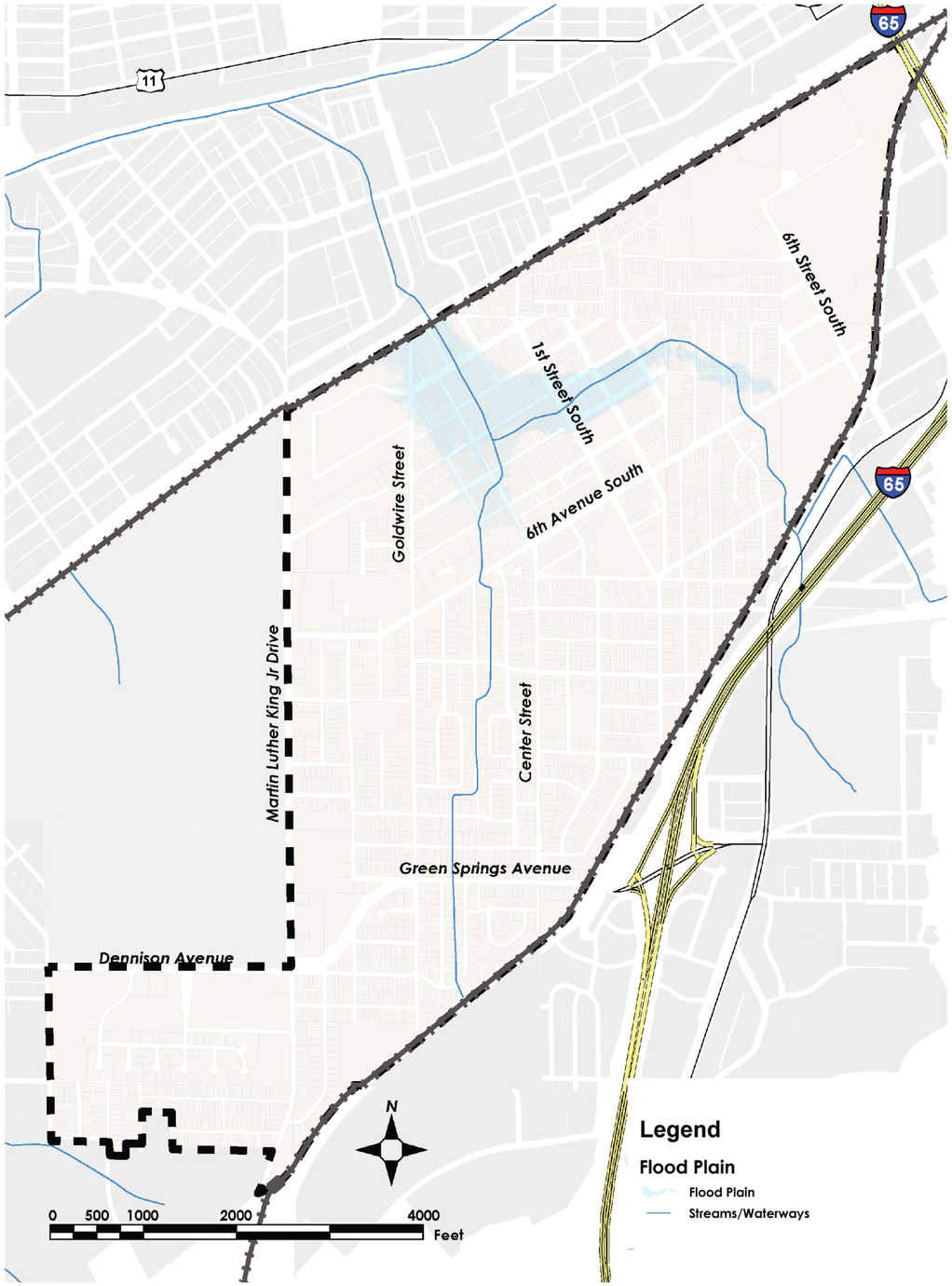


Fig. 4.5. 'Flood Map' from the Titusville Community Framework Plan

Economic Vitality

The subsequent section, "Economic Vitality," seeks to strike a balance between educational attainment, workforce development, and industry diversity to improve the neighbourhood's economy.[37]

As such one strategy regarding education hopes to expand resources that enhance educational opportunities. One method to achieve such proposes that new post-secondary programs be created through the UAB, Lawson State Community College, Jefferson State Community College, and Birmingham Southern. These programs would prepare low-income residents for college by offering PSAT and SAT preparation courses. Additionally, a GED satellite program could be established in local schools or churches to provide residents with more convenient access. A complementary strategy aims to create programs and services to improve workforce development. Specifically, the framework plan recommends the city make partnerships with local organizations to provide Titusville residents with career training, job certifications, and job placement assistance. For instance, the HABD hosts two workforce programs for the residents living on a HABD Public Housing Lease, like those formerly living in Loveman Village. The framework plan recommends the program extend its reach to include Titusville residents outside of HABD jurisdiction.[38]

To address economic growth, the framework plan wishes to support business development and entrepreneurship throughout the neighbourhood. One such method is the establishment of a Titusville Merchants Association that, in conjunction with the City, would encourage and incentivize business expansion through financial assistance or loans. Another strategy describes encouraging a variety of employment opportunities along the central 6th Avenue corridor. Through a detailed analysis of the street's state during the plan's development, the document describes working with private developers and local business owners to create mixed-use developments that inspire reinvestment in the area at large.[39]

37 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 64.
38 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 65–68.
39 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 68–79.

Transportation and Infrastructure

To enhance quality of life, a community must ensure that education, employment, goods and services, and recreational spaces are readily accessible to its residents. In pursuit of a more accessible neighbourhood, the framework plan suggests that the community needs more non-motorized transportation options, safer streets, and more sidewalks overall. To achieve this, the framework plan emphasizes the improvement of Titusville's active transportation and public transit, coupled with the maintenance of these systems.[40]

One crucial strategy is to develop a multimodal transportation network, offering residents more active forms of transportation like walking and cycling.[41] To support these modes of transportation, the plan recommends improving intersections to handle increased traffic more effectively. It outlines various precedents for intersection types and where in Titusville they should be incorporated. Another strategy is to improve the neighbourhood's urban form through the creation of a form-based code and the development of "complete streets," which integrate multiple modes of traffic all whilst improving resident safety and accessibility.[42]

Conversely, to remedy issues with public transportation, the framework plan proposes a more comprehensive planning approach that involves increasing building density within a half-mile of transit stations, streamlining services, and planning for high-capacity systems.[43]

To ensure that the active and public transportation systems are well maintained, the city plans to invest directly in these areas. Numerous streets throughout the community are in grave disrepair and present signs of stormwater damage and general deterioration. The plan seeks to create a multi-year maintenance and infrastructure program to determine worthwhile infrastructure projects, secure funding sources, and conduct a cost versus impact analysis to help the City prioritize its investments.[44]

Overall, this section of the document further aligns with reparative planning by emphasizing material redistribution and confronting the interconnected nature of resident opportunity and access.

40 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 82.
41 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 83.
42 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 83–98.
43 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 98–105.
44 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 105–7.

Fig. 4.6. 'Transit Map' from the Titusville Community Framework Plan

Future Land Use

The final urban planning sector covered by the framework plan is entitled, “Future Land Use.” This section features a map that consolidates the analysis of existing land use patterns, environmental conditions, and the community’s vision to propose arrangements for a well-planned community. This section is clear in mentioning that its future land use map is not a definitive document but rather a guide that deals with effective zoning adjacencies. Its content should not supersede any other initiatives established through proper contextual site analysis, especially in the case of large-scale developments.[45]

Generally, the future land use map aims to confront the neighbourhood’s need for more mixed-use areas, a greater diversity of housing options, and improved design quality. As such, the map recontextualizes much of the existing zoning patterns of North Titusville to shift its low-rise residential housing to multi-family, medium-density housing. It additionally converts a portion of low-rise residential housing to open green space to further introduce green space into the neighbourhood. In contrast, the plan maintains much of South Titusville and Woodland Park’s single-family detached dwellings. The parameters that the framework plan believes comprise a well-planned community are integrated with these various zoning designations.[46]

By adhering to the normative reparative planning framework, the proposals of the future land use map promote material redistribution. It would provide residents with more equitable living options, and improved access to amenities, while promoting environmental justice through the conversion of flood-prone spaces into green space.

45 “Titusville Community Framework Plan,” 110.
46 “Titusville Community Framework Plan,” 111–16.

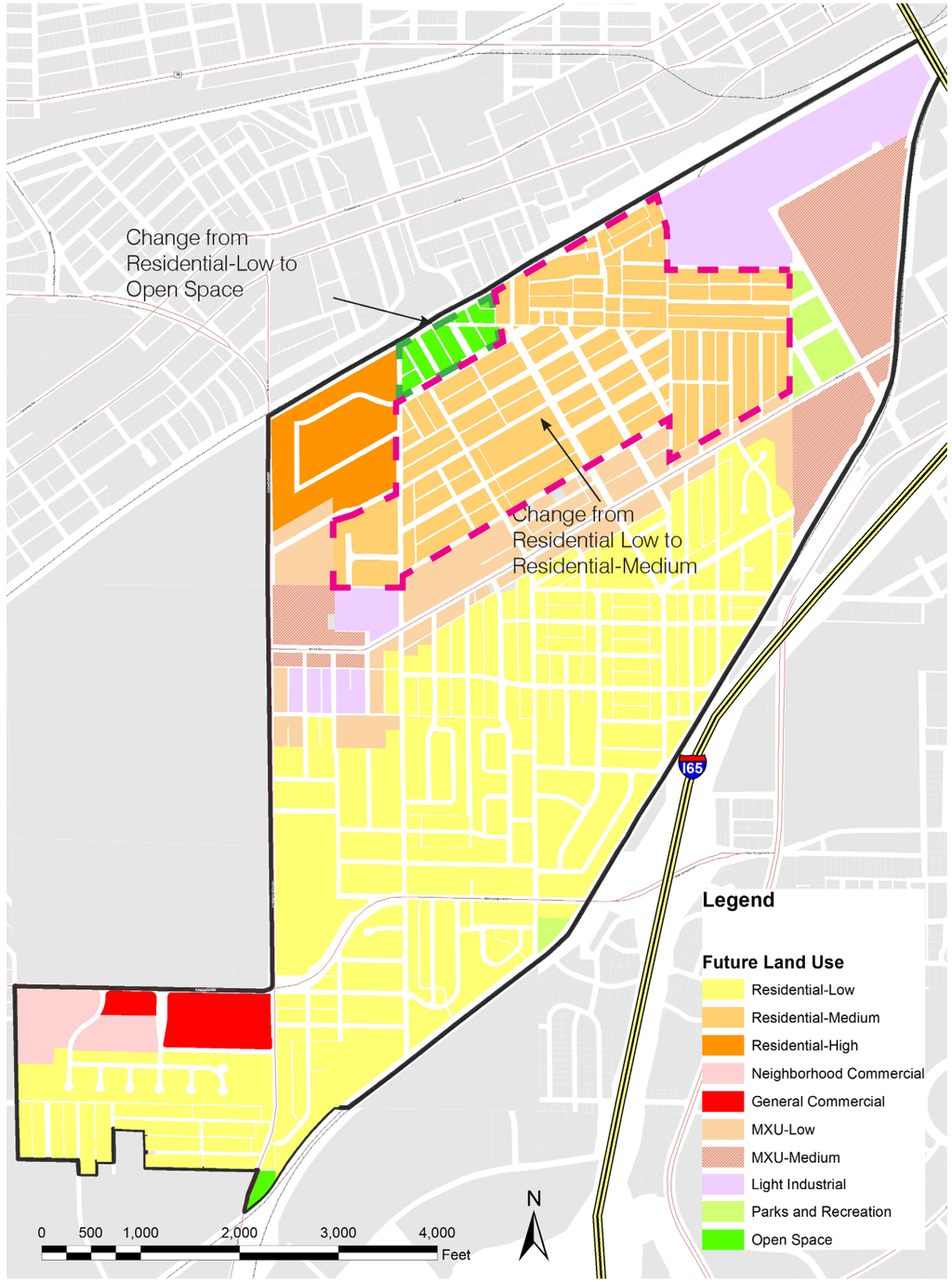


Fig. 4.7. ‘Future Land Use Map’ from the Titusville Community Framework Plan

Implementation

The final portion of the document, entitled "Implementation," contains an extensive chart that reiterates the actions of each section, now identifying the parties responsible for undertaking the work. These groups range from various departments of development to local faith-based and non-profit organizations.[47] While the section of the framework plan acts as a call to action, there are no structures in place to hold said individuals accountable for the work.[48] The framework plan puts the onus on the entities it deems responsible, relying solely on their good faith, moral obligation, and familiarity with the plan to do the work. As a result, many of the initiatives outlined in the TCFP do not appear to have been actualized halfway into the plan's projected twenty-year timeline.

Some progress has been made, such as the HABD undertaking the redevelopment of the Loveman Village complex in 2017. This redevelopment involved modernizing the built form of housing onsite and reducing the complex's number of units from 500 to 184.[49] While the building quality has been enhanced, the new Villas at Titusville continue to be isolated from the rest of the community, raising concerns about whether it will concentrate poverty as its predecessor had. The new complex endeavours to help residents succeed through amenities like playgrounds, a basketball court, and a new community center that hopes to offer educational and job training services.[50] However, the implementation and effectiveness of these services remain unclear.

Conclusion

Overall, the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP) is a comprehensive document that endeavours to improve the Titusville community across various urban planning sectors. Following the precedent set by the City's 2012 comprehensive plan, the TCFP and its two regional counterparts foreground public involvement as having been crucial in the document's creation. By virtue of implementing community involvement in a predominantly Black neighbourhood, the TCFP inadvertently reflects desires that promote Black joy, aligning with reparative planning's normative framework. Most of its proposals align with material redistribution for the manners in which they repurpose space and propose programs that would provide residents with greater access to opportunities, thereby increasing their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the plan's environmental section readily addresses the need for environmental justice as a part of reparative efforts.

However, the document falls short by never addressing the city's exclusionary history and its connection to Titusville's present-day challenges. It does not recognize the intersections of race and capitalism that have contributed to the neighbourhood's decline. Instead, it

47 "Titusville Community Framework Plan," 120–27.
48 Dr. Ronald Bayles, Titusville Development Corporation, June 6, 2024.
49 "Replacing Aging Public Housing in Birmingham, Alabama," Office of Policy Development and Research, April 6, 2020, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-inpractice-040620.html.
50 "Replacing Aging Public Housing in Birmingham, Alabama."

Table 4.1. Application of the Reparative Planning framework to the Titusville Community Framework Plan

Application of the Reparative Planning Framework to the TCFP	
(1) Public Recognition	The TCFP does not acknowledge the history of racial injustices in the City of Birmingham and the ways it has characterized its development since conception.
(2) Material Redistribution	Most proposals focus on redistributing resources by repurposing space and introducing programs that increase residents' access to opportunities, raising their socioeconomic status.
(3) Social and Spatial Transformation and Repair	As a municipal document, the TCFP does not endeavour to transform the very institution that created it.
(3.1) Values Black Community and joy	By incorporating community involvement in a predominantly Black neighborhood, the TCFP unintentionally reflects the community's aspirations that promote Black joy without exceeding expectations.
(3.2) Advance economic democracy	Under its "Economic Vitality" section, the document proposes various measures aimed at economic growth. However, these proposals focus on promoting economic diversity rather than economic democracy.
(3.3) Recognizes intersectionality	The document fails to recognize the intersections of race and class within the framework of capitalism.
(3.4) Critique state violence and build democratic institutions	The document does not critique state violence, but instead endorses it.
(3.5) Build environmental justice	The TCFP's extensive "Green Systems" section thoroughly addresses the community's need for environmental justice.

supports the carceral state in a predominantly Black neighbourhood. In this omission, the City implies that the conditions of Titusville are no more than a series of unfortunate circumstances. From a reparative planning perspective, failing to address these realities in Titusville's history will likely undermine its ability to make lasting change.

Furthermore, the plan is without the mechanisms to hold the parties it deems responsible for various initiatives accountable for implementing changes in Titusville. While it names many organizations, within and beyond the community, these entities now bear the burden of rectifying the effects of the city's organized abandonment individually. Some endorse the TCFP while others pursue equitable, anti-racist futures through alternative approaches.

While the TCFP represents a major step towards Titusville's revitalization, its limitations speak to a need for more nuanced and inclusive approaches. Today, the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC) is a non-profit organization that is enacting great change in Titusville through its endorsement of the TCFP. If the TCFP has its own limitations, how does an organization like the TDC fair in addressing issues of racial capitalism? Are there alternative approaches, like a community land trust (CLT) that could fundamentally address these systemic issues? In contrast, the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH-SCLT), located just north of Titusville, presents an alternative approach to community-driven efforts in a similar context to Titusville. Examining the operations of a CLT in a comparable context could provide insights for addressing the contemporary challenges faced by Titusville residents.

CHAPTER 5

The Counter Plan

Fig. 5.1. The Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust's "Sugar Hill Community Farm"

Fig. 5.2. Dr. Ronald Bayles, The Executive Director of the Titusville Development Corporation

Care as a Means to Resist

In the face of persistent disinvestment, the work of caring hands seeks to resist the chill of organized abandonment. Through the normative framework for reparative planning, proposed by Rashad A. Williams and Justin Steil, this chapter will examine the efforts made by two complementary non-profit organizations. The first is the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC) which operates within the confines of capitalist regimes and the markets they have created. Its work aims to forge openings for Titusville's residents through its support and actualization of the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP). The second organization is the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH S-CLT), an organization just north of Titusville that works to counter these capitalist systems by creating a regenerative eco-housing complex that removes its land from the speculative market. This work hopes to foster a more inclusive and equitable future for its members.

The Titusville Development Corporation

While in Titusville, I had the honour of meeting Dr. Ronald Bayles, the Executive Director of the TDC, within the organization's headquarters. The TDC is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1984 with the dream of revitalizing, preserving, and further promoting the development of the Titusville neighbourhood.[1] The organization currently consists of a board of seven members and is supported by three full-time employees, including its executive director, Dr. Ronald Bayles.[2] While Dr. Bayles has worked with the TDC for the past thirteen years, his familiarity with the Titusville community began much earlier. Thirty years ago, he started attending church services in the neighbourhood, and despite not living in the community himself, he felt a deep spiritual connection to the area and its residents. This connection to the community and his desire to enact change compelled him to serve the community that had been such a source of support to him through the TDC.[3]

Fig. 5.3. The Titusville Development Corporation Headquarters

1 "About Us," Titusville Development Corporation, accessed June 21, 2024, https://www.titusvilledevelopment.org/about.
2 "About Us."
3 Dr. Ronald Bayles, Titusville Development Corporation Interview, June 6, 2024.

Dr. Bayles brings his background in education to the work of the TDC. His professional career began in education, serving first as a high school science teacher, then progressing to assistant principal, and most recently, serving as an adjunct professor at Lawson State Community College. Throughout his work with youth, Dr. Bayles observed that academic success is not solely determined by a student's inherent prowess but is instead informed by the state of their home life and surrounding community. These insights informed his 2012 dissertation which explored the factors contributing to high school dropout rates and their decisions to pursue a GED. As such, he believes that education is crucial and transparency, essential. While speaking with him, he stated:

> Without everybody being educated to a degree about the particular things they have interests or questions about, one cannot make a fair assessment, nor request about anything […] Just to get to the point of presenting a question of need, you have to have some knowledge about what it is.[4]

His statement stresses the importance of accessible education and knowledge sharing within disenfranchised communities. For the residents of Titusville, being informed is not solely a path to personal advancement but also the root of one's ability to advocate for their rights. As such, the TDC offers education programs that emphasize financial literacy to work in tandem with their efforts to replenish and preserve the neighbourhood's housing stock.[5]

Dr. Bayles explained that the TDC is not solely about the work that it is doing for others, but also about teaching residents about how their work can benefit them and prime them for financial success. For instance, in bringing new housing stock to Titusville, he wants residents to understand that homeownership significantly increases their economic capacity. He is committed to teaching about equity and debt, emphasizing how these notions can build financial stability and wealth. Without these tools, he fears that residents might not fully capitalize on the opportunities that owning a home can bring, potentially squandering their newfound wealth. "You don't need to be a homebuyer," he says. "You need to be an educated homebuyer."[6]

When speaking with Dr. Bayles, he mentioned that the work of the TDC is an extension of the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP). He explained that the document, while nearly a decade old, acts as an authoritative voice that speaks to the dreams of Titusville residents due to its extended outreach period and the detailed nature of the final document. From its proposals about pocket parks to those about future land use, the document has allowed the TDC to work with a defined purpose, the document embracing what residents found most important to them in the truest sense. However, Dr. Bayles also noted that most neighbourhoods lack the driving force necessary to fully implement such plans. He believes "community work is the language of

4 Bayles.
5 Bayles.
6 Bayles.

your hands," which is to say the TDC hopes that its work will precede its words and inspire others to follow suit. He likened this to a shared burden that is reminiscent of when Jesus carried his cross and others felt compelled to carry it for him. "If you are passionate about something," he says, "someone will get up under that burden with you." The group does not wish for its requests of the City Councillor to be deemed complaints or aimless requests, but rather appeals substantiated by the work they are already undertaking.[7]

Setting an example for the rest of the community, the TDC has collaborated with various partners to enact change in the neighbourhood. These partners include organizations like the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), Build Up, Common Threads, Design Initiative Architects, and Navigate Affordable Housing. A part of the organization's work with Navigate Affordable Housing Partners and Design Initiative Architects has culminated in the Greek Streets Initiative, a $10 million proposal aimed at fulfilling some of the TCFP's objectives.[8] The initiative began with a proposal to the Land Bank Authority to acquire blighted properties in some of the oldest streets in the neighbourhood, those on the neighbourhood's Greek-named streets. The plan envisions introducing fifty new homes to Titusville in ten years, with the hope that this development will inspire similar projects throughout the community.[9] The initiative has three main objectives: repairing infrastructure, creating community-centered public spaces, and providing diverse housing options geared toward various income levels.[10]

Conversely, the TCFP calls for non-profit organizations like the TDC to not only address the state of blight but also introduce neighbourhood amenities on vacant lots. With a property portfolio encapsulating approximately twenty-four lots throughout Titusville, the TDC has taken up this mission.[11] For instance, one of these sites possesses a small orchard with sixteen fruit-bearing trees and another, a community garden. Otherwise, all TDC-owned properties possess signage indicating their ownership and possible future use. With Titusville's approximate 561 abandoned or tax-delinquent properties, these signs speak to the area's promising future. Dr. Bayles explains that when people drive through the neighbourhood, the organization does not want them to see vacant lots but instead a community on the brink of positive transformation, with better opportunities on the horizon.[12]

7 Bayles.
8 Titusville Development Corporation, "Titusville Greek Streets," accessed April 8, 2024, https://app.box.com/s/7v6dy13z5mawdw7rhqomxfpn4djgqwxq.
9 Titusville Development Corporation.
10 design initiative, "Titusville Development," accessed May 2, 2024, https://app.box.com/s/7v6dy13z5mawdw7rhqomxfpn4djgqwxq.
11 "About Us."
12 Bayles, Titusville Development Corporation Interview.

Fig. 5.4. A sign for the Titusville Community Garden, created through a collaboration between the Titusville Development Corporation and its partners.

Image Below:

Fig. 5.5. The Titusville Community Garden.

Fig. 5.6. Signs installed by the Titusville Development Corporation to inform the public about upcoming developments in the area.

Against the backdrop of its empowerment programs and efforts to improve the housing stock of the area, the primary mission of the TDC is rooted in providing affordable housing options to Titusville's young families and senior citizens. The organization sees these demographic categories as the pillar of any community – the elderly for the wisdom and oral histories they preserve, and young families for the prosperity they will bring about. Dr. Bayles explained that the organization's greatest achievement is the senior's rental property that it developed with HUD funds and has managed for the past twenty years.[13] Through verifying the incomes of those living in the program's thirty-two units, the TDC has learned that had it not maintained consistent rent prices, its residents would have been without housing.[14]

Regarding the introduction of new, affordable housing into the Titusville neighbourhood, Dr. Bayles explained that receiving grants or funding from sources like the city or Navigate allows the TDC some flexibility in setting final market prices. The organization hopes that its financial literacy classes will equip residents with the knowledge needed to navigate financing their down payments once these homes are on the market. However, this left me questioning what happens after these new builds have been completed, placed on the market at lower values, and sold to Titusville residents. Beyond the TDC working to help residents navigate the current capitalist systems that are in place through financial counselling and life skills classes, there is little that can be done to keep these properties within the community. When property speculation and the commodification of housing bear its

13 Bayles.

14 "TDC Community Framework Holistic/Empowerment Implementation Program," Titusville Development Corporation, accessed August 18, 2024, https://www.titusvilledevelopment.org/tdccommunity; Bayles, Titusville Development Corporation Interview.

influence, to what end and for how long can property speculation and catalytic development be kept at bay? The TDC is doing remarkable work, introducing high-quality housing stock at more affordable prices and tending to the immediate needs of residents. However, from a reparative planning perspective, this may not be able to safeguard the community's future and prevent displacement.

Like the TCFP, the TDC does not explicitly acknowledge Titusville's history under racial capitalism in its work. This omission may be due to its affiliations with the City of Birmingham's Community Development Department, the UAB, and its role as a holder of HUD CDBG funds.[15]

If the aim is to prevent existing power structures from continuing to favour white interests over others, would it not then be imperative to eliminate property speculation to address the issue at its root? The concept of a community land trust (CLT) could offer some insights. Could an entity like the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH-SCLT), which exists just north of Titusville, present contextual strategies that could help Titusville overcome its challenges? Examining how the DH-SCLT operates could uncover ways to enact long-term, reparative change in the neighbourhood.

15 "About Us."

Table 5.1. Application of the Reparative Planning framework to the work of the Titusville Development Corporation

Application of the Reparative Planning Framework to the TDC

Reparative Framework	The Titusville Development Corporation
(1) Public Recognition	The TDC does not explicitly address the historical racial harms suffered by Titusville residents, but its current efforts aim to improve and rectify these ongoing conditions.
(2) Material Redistribution	The TDC works tirelessly to introduce affordable, quality housing stock to the Titusville neighbourhood.
(3) Social and Spatial Transformation and Repair	The organization currently focuses on working within existing capitalist frameworks rather than seeking to fundamentally transform capitalist institutions.
(3.1) Values Black community and joy	The TDC enhances the community's quality of life through its development efforts and as the host of various community events like the annual Titusville Day.
(3.2) Advance economic democracy	While the TDC advocates for and conducts programs to increase the financial literacy of Titusville residents, its work as a non-profit organization does not yet advance economic democracy.
(3.3) Recognizes intersectionality	The work of the TDC acknowledges the intersections between race, age, and class in their work.
(3.4) Critique state violence and build democratic institutions	The TDC does not appear to critique state violence or build democratic institutions.
(3.5) Build environmental justice	Environmental justice is fostered by the TDC through various initiatives such as community gardens and community cleanup events.

Community Land Trusts

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are a form of tenure that emerged from the civil rights movement in the South.[16] CLTs restructure property ownership in ways that are distinct from typical practice. Under a CLT, a collection of land parcels is owned by a non-profit organization and permanently removed from the real estate market.[17] This act ensures that these lots are free from the pseudoscience of real estate appraisal and that they remain within the community. Under a CLT, land acts as a shared resource that supports life and not solely capitalist interests.

For a leased land arrangement to qualify as a CLT rather than a traditional land trust (LT), it must possess the following characteristics:

(1) The owner of the land must be a private, nonprofit organization that accommodates membership from individuals living within the CLT's scope.
(2) The board governing the CLT must be elected by the CLT's constituent members.
(3) The tripartite governing board of the CLT should equally reflect the various interests of different stakeholders. This includes governing members that represent the CLT's leaseholders, those not living on the CLT's land, and the general public interest.[18]

Through the integration of these principles, a landscape fraught with issues of property speculation, like Birmingham, can create a model for land stewardship that promotes everyone's right to shelter over capital gains.

The Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust

While in Birmingham with my father, I also had the privilege of meeting Susan Diane Mitchell, the Co-founder and Executive Director of the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH-SCLT). During this conversation, she first began to share the origins and mission of the non-profit organization. Mitchell explained that the community land trust was formed in 2016 by her and fellow activist, Marjadi Baruti, to combat the organized abandonment of the city. The organization credits its development to the Magic City Agriculture Project (MCAP) for providing "seeds both in money and education." The MCAP was a non-profit organization that would support communities in their endeavours to establish community land trusts. While the organization is no longer active, Mitchell sees the work of the DH-SCLT as a continuation of its strategies in the Smithfield community.[19]

In the face of Smithfield's contemporary state, the DH-SCLT set out with three primary objectives, with the first being to create permanently affordable housing. As opposed to the Titusville Development Corporation (TDC), which aims to offer affordable housing through

16 John Emmeus Davis, Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States, 2014, 4.
17 Davis, 5.
18 Davis, 13.
19 Susan Diane Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview, June 5, 2024.

new developments that are sold at lower rates on the open market, the DH-SCLT approach involves building a "regenerative eco-housing" complex on collectively owned land, removing these homes from the speculative real estate market entirely. Following the incorporation of the community land trust, there were numerous properties available for the community to develop through the Birmingham Land Bank Authority. This changed, however, as property speculators swiftly acquired ninety percent of it in a process that Mitchell describes as inevitable "catalytic development."[20]

Mitchell shared that although her thirty years in Birmingham have been filled with rich experiences and warmth, she has been displaced numerous times throughout the city at the hands of these processes. She explained that these experiences can leave you in a debilitating state of depression or ignite a passion to fight for everyone's right to secure housing, as it had for her. In remaining resilient to survive in the city, she believes that a similar resilience is necessary for the regenerative architecture of the community land trust. This involves using affordable and renewable materials, like hempcrete, to build eco-housing that not only harmonizes with the land but also remains affordable into perpetuity.[21]

Fig. 5.7. "The Sugar Hill Community Farm," a beacon of hope for members of the community land trust.

20 Mitchell.
21 Mitchell.

Aligned with the goal of regenerative eco-housing, the organization's second objective is urban agriculture and the stewardship of the land. Mitchell emphasized that Black people have deep ancestral ties to agriculture, and given current environmental challenges, it is crucial for individuals to have the space and knowledge necessary to grow their own food. However, this simple act is further complicated by the environmental racism that has been exacted on the Black residents of Birmingham since its industrial conception.[22] In conditions such as these, the question arises: how suitable is the soil for food growth?

Mitchell explained that residents have limited access to fresh food due to long-term municipal disinvestment that resulted in fewer grocery stores and healthy affordable options for residents. She explained that one member of the DH-SCLT resides in a "Superfund" site – a term coined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1980 to denote thousands of contaminated sites across the country that pose significant risks to public and environmental health.[23] Under the "Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act" (CERCLA), organizations deemed responsible for hazardous waste dumping are required to personally clean up these sites or reimburse the government for cleaning efforts managed by the EPA.[24]

In the case of Birmingham's 35th Avenue Superfund site, remediation efforts have been entangled in great controversy. 100 years of pollution in the Collegeville, Harriman Park, and Fairmont neighbourhoods of North Birmingham resulted in residential soil testing positive for elevated levels of carcinogens like arsenic and benzo(a)pyrene in 2011.[25] Various cleaning efforts were undertaken by the EPA, culminating in the organization's 2014 proposal to add the 35th Avenue site to its "National Priorities List" and expand the site to include the Inglenook and Tarrant neighbourhoods.[26] However, this proposal incited controversy when an executive from the Drummond Company and two of Balch & Bingham's lawyers to bribed state legislator, Oliver Robinson, to oppose the EPA's efforts by all means necessary.[27] Robinson went on to persuade North Birmingham residents not to have their soil tested and used scripted talking points during official meetings, which ultimately led to his trial and subsequent imprisonment in 2018.[28] Due to these conditions and the controversy surrounding their resolution, residents, like the aforementioned member of the CLT, have been unable to grow fresh food around their homes, forcing them to resort to isolated containers

22 Mitchell.
23 OLEM US EPA, "What Is Superfund?," Overviews and Factsheets, November 9, 2017, https://www.epa.gov/superfund/what-superfund.
24 US EPA.
25 Dennis Pillion, "North Birmingham's 35th Ave EPA Superfund Site Explained," AL, May 11, 2017, https://www.al.com/news/birmingham/2017/05/north_birmingham_35th_ave_superfund.html.
26 Ivana Hrynkiw, "Oliver Robinson Testifies during Bribery Trial: 'They Wanted Me to Use My Influence,'" AL, July 3, 2018, https://www.al.com/news/birmingham/2018/07/oliver_robinson_testifies_duri.html.
27 Hrynkiw.
28 Hrynkiw; Ivana Hrynkiw, "Oliver Robinson Sentenced to Less than Three Years in Prison," AL, September 27, 2018, https://www.al.com/news/birmingham/2018/09/oliver_robinson_to_be_imprison.html.

Fig. 5.8. A storage locker located on the land of the Sugar Hill Community Farm

instead.

To regain some semblance of control over their environment, the DH-SCLT, acquired a lot in 2023 at the heart of Dynamite Hill's history. This particular lot, adjacent to the site of the city's first white supremacist bombing, is now home to the community land trust's "Sugar Hill Community Farm." Mitchell highlighted the significance of the farm's name and the dreams that it represents.[29] The name "Sugar Hill" is reminiscent of the once prosperous Black community in Harlem prior to the area's gentrification.[30] In its prosperity, wealth, and concentration of Black culture, the neighbourhood has become synonymous with Black pride, success and resilience beyond Harlem, Mitchell stating this community farm will be another instance of such.

Since the inauguration of the Sugar Hill Community Farm, the group's organizers and volunteers have worked to set up the site by installing irrigation systems and remediating the soil by planting sunflowers, the land trust's emblem.[31] Having gathered resources to fully equip its tool library, seed bank, and storage unit, the site is now in prime condition for the community land trust to actualize its vision.[32] Through a reparative planning approach, the community farm will empower residents to regain control over their local food systems and health. Beyond providing fresh, affordable food, the farm will strengthen the community's resilience, challenging the longstanding history of municipal and federal disinvestment to ultimately lay the groundwork for the community's more equitable and sustainable future.

With all of this in mind, the third and final aim of the community land trust lies in what Mitchell calls "emancipatory education." She explains that empowering residents through education has always been the central focus of the organization's work.[33] Through every initiative and program, the DH-SCLT has dedicated itself to using its spaces to educate youth about things like horticulture, agriculture, and urban farming, in addition to water and soil remediation.[34] Currently, the organization Is preparing to launch its first youth community scientist project. This will take on the form of a three-week after-school program called "Going Bat Crazy" launching in the fall of 2024.[35]

Additionally, the organization has devoted itself to teaching residents about the impact of exclusionary policies on the community, believing that genuine community healing and revitalization must begin with an understanding of the root causes of their challenges. Each Wednesday morning, Wilhelmina Thomas, the CLT's Director of History and Culture, conducts historic walking tours, sharing oral histories of the neighbourhood to preserve these stories in the consciousness of the

29 Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview.
30 "Sugar Hill," CityNeighborhoods.NYC, accessed August 14, 2024, https://www.cityneighborhoods.nyc/sugar-hill.
31 "Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust," accessed August 14, 2024, https://dynamitehillclt.org.
32 "Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust."
33 Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview.
34 "Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust."
35 Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview.

community.[36] While conversing with Mitchell, she would often describe the land of Birmingham as sacred, emphasizing that it remains in a state of unrest due to the injustices inflicted upon those who had passed. In addition to lying adjacent to the site of Birmingham's first bombing, the Sugar Hill Community Farm is situated next to the Enon Ridge Odd-Fellow and Pioneer Cemeteries – two African funeral grounds. Through their weekly cemetery cleanup days, the active preservation of Black histories, and the socially transformative qualities of the DH-SCLT's work hope to honour the dead.[37]

The work of the DH-SCLT is inherently reparative, unabashedly acknowledging the inequities caused by the city's planning policies, striving to redistribute material wealth, and fundamentally transforming the very ownership models of the speculative property market that exacerbated the community's conditions today through the community land trust model. The work fundamentally rethinks the role of Black people in setting their own planning goals through the microcosmic act of forging a regenerative eco-village.

Today, the organization collaborates with like-minded organizations, including the Greater Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution (GASP), SWEET Alabama, Alabama Rivers Alliance, Freshwater Land Trust, and Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN). As Mitchell puts so beautifully, through this "network of education and garnering resources […] people are working together to make a louder voice for our environment, for our ecology, and for our right as citizens to have a good quality of life." Together, these groups are working tirelessly to make a difference in a convoluted system much larger than themselves.[38]

While speaking with Mitchell and observing the intensity of her work amidst various other obligations, I could not help but question how she managed to carry herself with such grace. When asked about the challenges of engaging in this kind of work, Mitchell was candid, sharing that she often feels overwhelmed and burnt out. To combat these feelings, she must constantly remind herself that this work is important, transformative, and above all else, necessary.[39]

It is evident that operating under an ethics of care, especially in this context, is labourious and at times, unrewarding. Like many who have been marginalized in this social hierarchy, these historic capitalist structures rob her of her time, energy, and well-being. As a result, many initiatives, like the DH-SCLT, are lost to the relentless routine of capitalism. Each core member of the organizing team must still work full-time elsewhere to make ends meet. Mitchell described how wearing protracted poverty is, how one must "live creatively" just to get through each day.[40]

36 "Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust."
37 Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview.
38 Mitchell.
39 Mitchell.
40 Mitchell.

She likened her experiences to that of Langston Hughes' poem "Mother to Son," which reads:

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.

But all the time

I'se been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I'se still goin', honey,

I'se still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.[41]

Through this poem, Mitchell acknowledges the harsh realities faced by her and the other core members of the DH-SCLT as they grapple with organized abandonment and the enduring effects of policy exclusion. Despite these challenges, they continue to persevere, working to actualize a future that is not lofty in its extent but simply inclusive of all. Mitchell envisions a future where "all of [her] children will have a sense of warmth, pride, and love for the city and that they can afford to live here and live well, because, at this point, that's not the truth. It's not the truth for [her]."[42]

Despite the tireless efforts of countless dedicated individuals, like the DH-SCLT, the Black populations of Birmingham and many American cities continue to face the durable effects of capitalist structures that perpetuate white advantage. "It takes advocacy, such as what we have done and continue to do to speak for those who are most vulnerable," Mitchell asserts.[43] If these communities had more time, resources, and leverage, they could become as generative as they desire, but this is precisely how capitalism thrives – by exploiting inequities.

41 Langston Hughes, "Mother to Son," 1922.
42 Mitchell, Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust Interview.
43 Mitchell.

Application of the Reparative Planning Framework to the DH-SCLT

Reparative Framework	Dynamite Hill-Smithfield CLT
(1) Public Recognition	Each week, the CLT's Director of History conducts walking tours to educate people about the racial history that formed the Smithfield community.
(2) Material Redistribution	The DH-SCLT works to acquire land and properties in Smithfield to ensure they are controlled by and benefit the local community, but is limited by a lack of funding.
(3) Social and Spatial Transformation and Repair	The DH-SCLT endeavours to create spaces that no longer serve capitalist interests through the CLT model to fundamentally undermine racial capitalism.
(3.1) Values Black community and joy	The DH-SCLT values its Black community and joy by empowering residents through the prospect of a transformative community model and through community programs like "Going Bat Crazy"
(3.2) Advance economic democracy	As a community land trust, the DH-SCLT aims to advance economic democracy through its community ownership model and participatory governance structure.
(3.3) Recognizes intersectionality	The DH-SCLT acknowledges the intersections between race, age, and class within a capitalist framework.
(3.4) Critique state violence and build democratic institutions	The DH-SCLT addresses state violence through its educational efforts, and by establishing a CLT with a democratic governing structure. It creates a democratic institution that empowers and serves the Smithfield community.
(3.5) Build environmental justice	Environmental justice is fostered through the Sugar Hill Community Farm and the organization's intentions to create a regenerative eco-housing complex for residents.

Table 5.2. Application of the Reparative Planning framework to the work of the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust

Advancing Reparative Efforts

In comparing and contrasting the work of the TDC and DH S-CLT, a number of insights can be drawn. The TDC, in its work to replenish the housing stock of Titusville and create affordable housing, works within the confines of capitalist structures to bring about change with greater immediacy. The limitation of this, under the framework of reparative planning, is that these pursuits may not make lasting changes as they cannot keep the volatility of the housing market and the contrived sciences property speculation at bay. In time, the affordable homes placed on the market may increase in price to a point at which the low-income residents they were designed for, can no longer afford them.

In contrast, the DH-SCLT attempts to create spaces that no longer serve capitalist interests, through the CLT model. The act of removing land from the market could fundamentally undermine the effects of property speculation. While this approach could transform the institutions that perpetuate racial injustice, the effects of racial capitalism on the CLT's members, require that they work full-time elsewhere to make ends meet. As a result, these historical capitalist structures inherently foster incrementalism as one attempts to combat its effects.

Since each non-profit organization is a non-municipal entity, its capacity to redistribute resources and rebuild infrastructure in Birmingham is limited. Despite this reality, the painstaking efforts of both groups are remarkable. Both organizations, while different in their approach, share the same goal: to resist and rectify the legacy of exclusion. If the pragmaticism of the TDC and the methodical reform of the DH-SCLT were combined, it could help pave the way for an anti-racist future.

To enhance their impact, as well as that of the city and other organizations striving to address Birmingham's historical injustices, additional principles of reparative planning could be integrated to tap into the full potential of the city and its resilient community. For instance, in the case of public recognition, a "truth and reconciliation" board could be elected by the community to help acknowledge the city's history of organized violence and guide collaborative initiatives between governing bodies and the community. Addressing material redistribution, the Titusville community could begin to explore the expansion of the DH-SCLT into the neighbourhood or the establishment of a Titusville Community Land Trust to provide more equitable housing in a community historically undermined by property speculation. Most importantly, however, a significant redistribution of funds by different levels of the government is needed to support the non-profit organizations working toward anti-racist futures. As demonstrated by the work of the DH-SCLT, without proper funding and endorsement, the work needed to socially and spatially transform the urban fabric of Birmingham cannot be accomplished. Finally, to enact social and spatial transformation in a city where property speculation has acted to the detriment of its Black residents, anti-displacement measures, like rent control or eviction moratoriums, should be implemented to deter the further displacement of its residents. Combined efforts of this nature can address the immediate needs of the city while laying the necessary groundwork for its long-term equity.

Application of the Reparative Planning Framework to Advance the Reparative Efforts of the TDC and DH-SCLT

Reparative Framework	Policies & Planning Strategies for Enhancing Reparative Efforts
(1) Public Recognition	Establish a locally elected truth and reconciliation commission to acknowledge racial injustices experienced by minority groups in Titusville and to advise governing bodies seeking to collaborate with the community.
(2) Material Redistribution	Explore the expansion of the DH-SCLT into Titusville or establish a Titusville Community Land Trust to provide more equitable access to housing. Additionally, a significant redistribution of funds by different levels of government is needed to support the non-profit organizations working toward anti-racist futures. Their work is promising but cannot be completed without proper funding.
(3) Social and Spatial Transformation and Repair	Implement anti-displacement measures, like rent control, eviction moratoriums, and tenant protections, to deter displacement caused by new developments or predatory practices. Additionally, increase opportunities for the Titusville community to choose how public funds are allocated for developments and initiatives to ensure the community is shaped by the needs and desires of residents.
(3.1) Values Black community and joy	The work of the TDC and DH-SCLT to uplift and empower Black communities is robust and requires no further recommendations.
(3.2) Advance economic democracy	Empower residents economically by providing grants and tax incentives to develop worker-owned cooperatives, particularly in housing and agriculture.
(3.3) Recognizes intersectionality	The efforts of the TDC and DH-SCLT to acknowledge intersectionalities in their respective contexts are already sufficient and require no further recommendations
(3.4) Critique state violence and build democratic institutions	Disinvest from police forces to reinvest in community-based programs, mental health care, rehabilitation services, and other restorative justice initiatives.
(3.5) Build environmental justice	Enhance financial incentives for non-profit organizations and private developers to implement green infrastructure projects in neighbourhoods like Titusville that have historically faced environmental racism.

Table 5.3. Application of the Reparative Planning framework to advance the reparative efforts of the TDC and the DH-SCLT

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Fig. 6.1. Joe Minter and my father recounting memories of their upbringing in the South.

The work of this thesis sought to examine the convoluted systems – wielded at the municipal and federal levels of the American government – that enshrined racial capitalism at the expense of its most vulnerable racial group. By using Birmingham's Titusville neighbourhood as a point of analysis, the thesis first explored the effects of organized abandonment, predatory inclusion, and organized violence, the combined effects of which reverberate through the city's impoverished communities. The historical analysis of Birmingham's exploitation and disenfranchisement of its Black residents reveals an insidious pattern of racial and economic oppression. It illustrates how various regimes of accumulation are never dismantled, but instead evolve, building on the structure left by its predecessor.

From its incorporation as an industrial epicentre during the late 19th century, Birmingham's white elites used organized violence and convict leasing to recapture the wealth that was lost the moment slavery was abolished. This established the foundation upon which all the city's subsequent regimes would compound.

The city then transitioned into an era of real estate and financial capitalism characterized by its racial zoning ordinances that made the occupation of space illegal to some and not others. This same era brought about redlining, which would act as a precursor to the predatory lending practices of the subprime loan crisis that began in 1970.

Following redlining, the Housing Act of 1949 was passed, leading Birmingham, along with countless other cities in the U.S., to capitalize off its disinvestment in impoverished communities. The manipulation of Title I and Title III federal funds allowed the city to demolish the slums it had created, displacing numerous Black households in pursuit of the city's largest employer through the UAB Southside Medical Center.

With investment in urban redevelopment, came investment in infrastructure through the Interstate Highway systems that would further employ organized abandonment to clear additional Black neighbourhoods and create a racialized border between Titusville and Birmingham's downtown core.

At this time, the Civil Rights Movement was well underway, with civil rights activists fighting to desegregate the public and private sectors throughout the city. As crime rates increased due to the baby boomer generation introducing an influx of young males into the American populace, the civil rights movement was blamed. This resulted in the War on Drugs which made mass incarceration a common practice to rid the body politic of Black males. Reminiscent of Jim Crow laws, this new system of mass incarceration facilitated by organized violence, would forever strip convicted criminals of their rights to adequate housing, education, employment, and their right to vote.

Finally, as organized abandonment was no longer useful in the creation of new regimes of accumulation, predatory inclusion came into favour during the 1970s. By effectively denying Black homeownership across the city during the 1930s, Black residents became vulnerable to

the ploys of greedy real estate agents and mortgage lenders who were backed by FHA-insured loans during this time. The mobility of easy credit persisted into the early 2000s, resulting in the Great Recession.

This historic trajectory shows how Birmingham's white elites consistently adapted their regimes of accumulation to maintain economic dominance over the city's Black communities. Each era of exploitation – from convict leasing to predatory lending – sought to find new opportunities for exploitation that had yet to be tapped into. The manners in which each era built off of one another, created a deeply entrenched system of oppression that continues to plague Birmingham's Black residents today.

The current landscape of the Titusville neighbourhood bears the traces of its city's exclusionary legacy. In the city's greatest effort to address these historical wrongs, the city released the Titusville Community Framework Plan (TCFP). While some of the plan's proposals were inadequate in addressing the specific needs of Titusville, the majority were sound and well-considered. However, the plan's effectiveness has been undermined by the lack of mechanisms in place to hold various agencies and organizations accountable for implementing its proposals. This shortcoming places the responsibility on these groups to make themselves aware of the plan and take the initiative to implement its suggestions. As a result, nearly halfway into the plan's projected timeline, only a few of its recommendations appear to have been executed.

The Titusville Development Corporation (TDC) is an organization that is working to extend the vision of the plan. Through interviewing the organization's Executive Director, Dr. Ronald Bayles, it became evident how crucial their efforts are to the joy and success of the community. Operating within the constraints of the city's capitalist structures, the TDC strives to meet the immediate needs of the community while advocating for greater autonomy and self-sufficiency among residents. By addressing the material redistribution component of reparative planning – through replenishing the neighbourhood's housing stock, conducting food drives, and teaching classes on financial literacy – the TDC embodies the practical applications of the normative framework.

Conversely, the normative framework of reparative planning calls for the profound transformation of the very institutions that perpetuate racial injustice. This led the thesis to explore the possibilities of a community land trust (CLT) as a viable alternative through the example of the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH S-CLT). In pursuit of anti-racist futures against a city once complicit to the plights of its most vulnerable racial group, the DH-SCLT, represents an innovative approach that would undermine the effects of property speculation, the root cause of the city's economic disparities.

Both organizations highlight the tension between immediate reform and incremental radical transformation, each with its own benefits and drawbacks. In the case of the TDC, since its work operates within capitalist frameworks, it can address the pressing needs of

residents much faster and with the financial backing of grants from the government, but this may limit the scope of its work as a result. The DH-SCLT, on the other hand, represents a more radical approach that aims to dismantle system inequalities at their basis. While the work of the DH-SCLT is slower and faces challenges such as limited funding and the need for its members to balance other work commitments full-time, it embodies the potential for long-term systemic change. Without the city redistributing its funds to transformative groups, its racialized legacy will never be fully addressed or rectified.

Overall, the history of Birmingham and the work of organizations like the TDC and the DH-SCLT offer valuable insights for equity work across the country. It highlights the importance of short-term and long-term strategies operating simultaneously. This two-fold approach – striking a balance between pragmatism and idealistic reform – is promising. It is apparent that the pursuit of an equitable and anti-racist future will not be quick or easy. Just as the exploitative systems of the city's history were swift, careless, and of convoluted effect, the efforts to dismantle these mechanisms will require a deliberate and sustained approach to shape a truly equitable future.

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