

ABSTRACT

CRUISE, SHANE NASH. Reynoldstown: Race, Blight, Disease, Highway Construction and the Transformation of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. (Under the direction of Blair L.M. Kelley).

Reynoldstown: Race, Blight, Disease, Highway Construction and the Transformation of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, contributes to the historiography of the urban South by exploring the transformation of Winston-Salem between 1948 and 1962. In those years, Winston-Salem shifted from a city centered around a segregated slum, to an outwardly progressive city divided by a highway system that destroyed the most prosperous black community and manipulated housing for the poorest African Americans through a rhetoric of blight and disease. I argue that “blight” became another word for blackness in Winston-Salem. Typically, the city’s Urban Redevelopment Commission connected “blight” to poor housing conditions, unemployment, and “laziness,” in order to unite a growing African American middle class voting base concerned with uplift with moderate whites. Atypical of the urban blight narrative was the city’s use of polio to solidify in white minds the need for urban renewal. Framing Winston-Salem’s African American community as a pathogen allowed the Redevelopment Commission to put through a plan that modernized an eighty-year history of geographic segregation, separating the races by four lanes of US 52.

Reynoldstown: Race, Blight, Disease, Highway Construction and the Transformation of
Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

by
Shane Nash Cruise

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Blair L. M. Kelley
Committee Chair

Dr. Matthew M. Booker

Dr. Craig T. Friend

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Meredith. I love you very much.

BIOGRAPHY

Shane Nash Cruise was born in Winston-Salem, N.C. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in History from North Carolina State University in 2007. In the fall of 2011 he will be attending Northwestern University to pursue a PhD in History.

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INTRODUCTION

“They were tearing down his house, because San Francisco is engaging, as most northern cities now are engaged in something called urban renewal. Which means moving the negroes out, it means negro removal.”

-James Baldwin interviewed by Kenneth Clark¹

The American interstate highway system crisscrosses our country's landscape linking the nation's towns, cities, and states. People use the highway system to go to work everyday, drive to vacation spots, or haul goods from one place to another. However, in lived experience, highways also segregate. Highways have served as both a means to silence history and represent a historical silence. This is a segregation that is so profound it seems timeless, because highways also obliterated the past. The highway system, first initiated as a part of Eisenhower's National Highway and Defense Act of 1956 also, was built during a time of massive social change. At the same time that Martin Luther King Jr. and Ella Baker led and organized people to topple oppressive Jim Crow segregation, local cities with the help of the Federal government were building more concrete forms of segregation that are still standing today.

¹ James Baldwin interviewed by Kenneth Clark, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/sfeature/sf_video.html viewed on April 11, 2011.

Highway construction in the United States often followed a racialized pattern. In New Orleans La., city leaders built Interstate 10 through Treme, a historic racially-mixed neighborhood, destroying Claiborne Avenue, the center thru-way of the community; Claiborne Ave was known for its parades and second lines on beautiful tree lined streets.² In Durham, the Durham freeway ran over one the most economically vibrant black communities in the South, Haiti.³ In Philadelphia, leaders chose the route for the highway to go through the poorest black neighborhoods. Today, there are exit ramps to these neighborhoods but no ramp from the neighborhood to the highway.⁴

This study centers on Winston-Salem, N.C. as a case study for this phenomenon. Why were the highways built there? Who were the decision makers? How, and why, were these decisions made? I am interested in both the decision to locate highways and the consequences of highway construction. I argue that these choices made by city planners in Winston-Salem displaced a labor pool that was no longer needed by Reynolds Tobacco Company. The arguments used to justify the displacement were framed as means to “uplift” African Americans trapped in blighted slums; to provide them better housing, better schools, and more jobs. The rhetoric of uplift was deployed to gain the support of the new black middle-class electorate who were interested in improving black life. In reality urban renewal reinforced racial divides in the city and did not provide adequate housing or improved opportunities. Urban renewal and slum clearance are part of an exciting new historiography

² *Fauberg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*, DVD, directed by Dawn Logsdon (2008; San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel, 2008).

³ Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 228.

⁴ Home Owners Loan Corporation, Residential Security Map of Philadelphia, http://www.umass.edu/sadri/ssh-journal/HOLC_1936.html accessed on May 18, 2011. Google Maps, <http://maps.google.com/> Philadelphia, Pa. Accessed on May 18, 2011.

because the effects of those programs have had lasting effects on today's cities. In a company town where an industry had mechanized, eliminating the need for thousands of black workers and in a place where a black elite had a voice for major public policy decisions, an in depth study of the "urban crisis" through the eyes of black and white decision makers is an important contribution to this historical debate.

The first chapter, "Polio in the Pond," traces the roots of slum clearance and urban renewal in Winston-Salem. It argues in 1948, North Carolina experienced its worst polio outbreak up until that time. Although few people in Winston-Salem died from polio, the state totals were unprecedented. In response the local public health department, chamber of commerce, mayor, board of alderman, and planning department used this outbreak as an opportunity to reshape Winston-Salem both physically and mentally. By targeting poor black neighborhoods and black bodies as the source of this disease, city leaders molded a rhetoric that changed white minds from seeing poor black neighborhoods as a necessary byproduct of industrialization to believing that these neighborhoods posed a serious threat to the white way of life. Policy makers in Winston-Salem used these terms--urban renewal, uplift, and slum clearance--in order to calm the supposed "threat" of disease while removing the city's poorest black residents. With black people gone from Monkey Bottom and the Shakes the land could be rezoned and redeveloped as commercial property, industrial space and highway. Urban renewal and slum clearance became euphemisms for acts of power and violence.

Chapter 2, "Constructing Blight," highlights the different methods that city leaders used to turn the term, "blight," associated with disease and living conditions, into another

word for “blackness.” In order to justify the creation of a highway through poor black neighborhoods leaders had to first create a debate around why these communities represented a threat to the city. City leaders saw urban renewal as kind of progressivism that would allow them to shed Winston-Salem’s image as a tobacco metropolis and become an “All-American City.” I argue that these were dangerous progressives because while they did believe that poor black living conditions needed to be improved, they did little to make sure that the poor had better living conditions. Removal was the real reason for urban renewal.

The last chapter, “Jim Crow in Concrete,” explores the debate between black and white political figures over urban renewal. While the city’s slumlords fought urban renewal in order to hold onto their property and profits, white political leaders with the complicity of newly elected black politicians made urban renewal and the construction of U.S. 52 possible. We knew that white politicians and policy makers removed thousands of black people to make room for a highway; this history seeks to flesh out the ways a new black electorate affected Winston-Salem’s urban renewal programs. Past histories have posited a white political body removing thousands of black people to make room for a highway; this history shows that the African American middle-class was complicit in Winston-Salem’s urban renewal programs.⁵ Through newspaper articles, public health department documents, census records, residential security maps, oral histories, planning maps, planning documents, board of alderman meeting minutes, and secondary sources, this chapter finds that the era of highway building was a major watershed in racial thinking for the middle class of both black and white residents when they found they had a common enemy—poor blacks.

⁵Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 110.

The historiography on urban renewal in the United States is weak. While several local studies exist, a thorough exploration of an African American point of view into how urban renewal reshaped black neighborhoods has been absent from much of the historical dialogue. Nor have many historians fully considered the important role of disease in shaping public policy toward African American neighborhoods throughout the twentieth century. Historians have recognized that slum clearance projects contributed to racial segregation, but I argue that urban renewal and highway construction were not just singular factors; rather, they formed the keystones of today's *de facto* segregated cities.

In his groundbreaking *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Thomas Sugrue contends that city leaders championed urban renewal by promoting increased tax revenue for the city, revitalizing the urban core, and eliminating “blight.” On the surface these goals carry no racial connotation. But, historian Nathan D.B. Connolly argues that city leaders used urban renewal to directly target African-Americans who lived in the areas designated for renewal.⁶ Arnold R. Hirsch adds that urban renewal represented a national racialized response from the Eisenhower administration in 1953, to the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement and deindustrialization. This nationwide policy concentrated the poorest African Americans in the urban core and let the “middle class” African Americans take over vacated white neighborhoods.⁷ I build on Connolly's work by

⁶ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 48-51. Nathan Connolly, “Colored, Caribbean, and Condemned: Miami's Overtown District and the Cultural Expense of Progress, 1940-1970,” *Caribbean Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2006): 33. Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 110-111.

⁷ Arnold R. Hirsch, “Less Than Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation in the Age of Brown,” in *The New Suburban Reader*, ed. Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 35.

addressing segregation as a reason for blight and contend that the “white flight” aspect of Hirsch’s argument does not fully explain the supposed vacation of white neighborhoods. This thesis proves that city leaders counted on and encouraged flight from white neighborhoods to fill the need for African American housing created by urban renewal.

Other explanations for white flight exist. Matthew Lassiter asserts that urban renewal represented only a small part of the engine that spurred a white exodus from urban areas. By combining urban renewal and federal subsidies for Federal Housing Authority loans, tax deductions and highway programs, southern whites moved towards new racially-exclusive neighborhoods outside the city limits. These southwide shifts remade racial divides, creating racially separate urban and suburban communities.⁸ Lacking from Lassiter’s argument for the urban suburban divide is an understanding of this process from an African American point of view.

In some cities, activists recognized the danger and protested racially-motivated slum clearance. Robert Self highlights black activists in the decades after WWII who viewed urban renewal as a marker of the inequality between the suburbs and the city. Activists recognized that African Americans had been heavily concentrated in deteriorating urban neighborhoods for years by redlining, restrictive covenants, and discriminatory real estate agent practices.⁹ But, when urban redevelopment and suburban subsidies threatened to destroy communities and further *de facto* segregation, activists fought back. These links

⁸ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 2.

⁹At the request of the Home Loan Bank Board, the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) created color-coded maps for cities across the country between 1935 and 1940 that indicated risk levels for long-term real estate investment. Red was the color that designated the highest level risk of real estate investment. African-American neighborhoods were usually red. Restrictive covenants could be written into the deed of a property that could forbid the sale of a piece of property to someone on the basis of race. *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948) made restrictive covenants illegal.

between activist protest and urban renewal further the argument that racism and urban renewal were inseparable.¹⁰ In this study, redlining, restrictive covenants, and discriminatory real estate practices were all employed to concentrate African Americans in East Winston.¹¹

Self also points out that redevelopment commissions used the term “blight” to characterize deteriorating neighborhoods or business districts. He argues that black neighborhoods were seen as a contractible disease that left unchecked would spread to other areas of the city.¹² The decline of housing and economic value constituted the origins of blight for city leaders. Property owners who took advantage of black residents’ lack of mobility had long neglected the maintenance of rental housing for African Americans. Self believes that racial segregation of housing and labor markets, along with the unequal distribution of political and economic power; compose the reasons for blight.¹³ The use of the term blight by city leaders when referring to slums inhabited almost entirely by African-Americans ties blight to race. In other words, city leaders used blight to mask racial objectives concerning slum clearance. My work on Winston-Salem builds on the work of Robert Self and argues that segregated housing was a synonym for blight. If blight was created by segregated housing conditions, then the clearance of blight meant city leaders exploited the conditions that they fostered through redlining, racial covenants, and discriminatory real estate practices. In turn policy makers used these arguments to remove

¹⁰ Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 139-144, 191-198.

¹¹ Home Owners Loan Corporation Residential Security Map of Winston-Salem, National Archives II Bethesda Maryland. Since I have gotten this map, they can no longer find it at National Archives II, so I might have the only one; *Western (Winston-Salem) Sentinel* May 20, 1913. Shirley Williams Dunlap and Mary Jane Williams, interview by author, Winston-Salem, NC, August 24, 2009.

¹²Self, *American Babylon*, 139-144.

¹³Ibid., 139-144.

African Americans and use the land for what they believed benefited the city's power structure.

While Self's thesis contends that Bay Area city leaders connected the language of disease to blight, Winston-Salem policy leaders actually used a disease to connect poor housing conditions with blight; in this case the disease was polio. The association of African American neighborhoods with disease plays a pivotal role in changing the minds of Winston-Salem whites, from conceiving of poor black neighborhoods as a necessary for the labor demands of an industrial city to understanding the need for slum clearance as a cure for encroaching blight. Historians have completely ignored the role disease has played in the shaping of urban and suburban America. The work of Tera W. Hunter on Atlanta washerwomen argues that tuberculosis played a major role in linking African Americans to disease. Disease served as a convenient excuse for bigotry. Recently Samuel Roberts has argued that tuberculosis, one of the leading causes of death among early twentieth century urban African Americans, was so prevalent among black southerners because of the conditions created by segregation. Given that people died of tuberculosis at such a high rate, Roberts argues, it teaches much about the political, social, and cultural climate of Jim Crow.¹⁴

This thesis contends that city leaders targeted and removed sections of Winston-Salem, not because of the deplorable living conditions, but because of the tax revenue increase that could be brought to city treasuries. Because the city's poor African American neighborhoods became associated with disease, it became easier for city planners to remove

¹⁴ Samuel Kelton Roberts Jr., *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

its residents. This study fills a gap in the historical literature. It is the first in-depth investigation of urban renewal's consequences for African Americans in a southern city. Winston-Salem was chosen because it is a southern city, had a substantial black population, and largely remains segregated to this day because of U.S. 52. City leaders used housing conditions, crime, disease, welfare, and a host of other factors to defend the clearance of slums in Winston-Salem. I argue that urban renewal was not just "negro removal" but poor "negro removal," and set Jim Crow in concrete at the height of civil rights.¹⁵

¹⁵ Baldwin http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/sfeature/sf_video.html

CHAPTER 1

“Blighted” People in a “Blighted” Place

On November 3, 1904 witnesses observed water slowly leaking out of the old Winston-Salem reservoir days before the catastrophe. Ten days earlier city engineers had finished its new water plant and began the process of taking the old reservoir at the north end of Trade Street offline. Weeks later around five o'clock in the morning the entire northern wall of the 180,000-gallon reservoir cracked and sent its contents rushing seven city blocks down a hill to the bottomland below. The water destroyed eight houses, killed nine people and caused untold amounts of damage to property. Commenting on the damage while surveying the destruction and looking at the water that had pooled in the bottomland one city official said, “It looks like a pond.” The African American working class community that developed around this bottomland was called “The Pond.”¹⁶

In 1930 Early Howell, a gardener for the city, and resident at 229 Short Abattoir Street, then 42, and his wife Patsy, 43, their six daughters, seven sons and mother all shared a two bedroom shotgun house in the Pond that rented for \$11 a month. The Howells, like most Pond residents, lived and worked through the hardships associated with the neighborhood

¹⁶ Adelaide Fries, Stuart Thurman Wright, and J. Edwin Hendricks, *Forsyth: The History of a County on the March* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 199; “The Pond” historical marker, found at the corner of Trade Street and Northwest Boulevard, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

and tried to do the best they could; all the Howard children attended school.¹⁷ The Howell's home on Abattoir Street exemplified the type of housing the poorest urban African Americans throughout the South endured in order to survive. Richmond, Atlanta, and Lexington all had their version of The Pond.¹⁸ The poorest African Americans lived in areas that they could afford. Frequently that property bordered a cemetery, railroad line, or bottomland. The topography that surrounded the Pond forced rainwater from an area of 1,500,000 square feet to pass by The Howells front door.¹⁹ The Pond's topography caused rainwater to become a home for stagnant water, mosquitoes, and industrial runoff from nearby tobacco and nail factories. Lack of trash collection in the Pond forced some residents to use Peters Creek as a garbage dump.²⁰ Since 1904 the Pond became home to a host of sanitation problems, poor drainage, and tuberculosis. African Americans were confined to this area by a plethora of sanctions stemming from both Jim Crow and federal loan policies. The racial residential restrictions enforced by Jim Crow and federal loan policies and justified by white supremacy and public health changed the Pond's residents into a "blighted" people living in a "blighted" place.

In 1935, through New Deal legislation, the Federal Public Housing program started a slum clearance program to aid cities in the elimination of poor housing conditions. On May 1, 1935, Charles E. Norfleet, head of Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, and former Mayor

¹⁷ Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census U.S. Government, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Population Schedule Enumeration District No. 34-48 Sheet No. 26B; *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950*, Vol. V. Block Statistics, Winston-Salem, NC, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1950.html> accessed on November 30, 2010.

¹⁸ John Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," *Geographical Review* 67, no. 3 (Jul., 1977): 310-321.

¹⁹ United States Geological Survey, *1954 Topographic Map of Winston-Salem*, May 10, 1955 held at D.H. Hill Library North Carolina State University, Call number I 19.81:36080-A 2-TF-024/994. See topographic map at end of chapter.

²⁰ *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 8, 1948.

George W. Coan, co-presidents of the Chamber of Commerce, led a campaign for a \$1,000,000 housing project to eliminate Winston-Salem slums. Winston-Salem was approved to start a clearance project contingent upon the approval of the Board of Alderman. On July 12th the Board of Alderman under intense pressure from “a former city official” who “owned a block of 32 Negro tenant units served by one cold-water spigot and three outdoor toilets,” declared that the city had no slums and therefore there was no need for a slum clearance project.²¹

By 1948 slum clearance efforts in Winston-Salem had become stagnant. World War II had diverted most of the available funds in the nation away from New Deal social projects to fund the war. Winston-Salem and the United States at large were unprepared for an epidemic. Although America was familiar with Poliomyelitis because of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s battle with the disease, little was understood, making it very scary. Deaths due to child accidents and cancer would kill far more than polio, but its mysterious origins made it the center of a national movement to eradicate the disease. Polio was seemingly an equal opportunity disease that picked and chose its victims in a random manner making it powerful in the minds’ of Americans. David Oshinsky notes, “There was no way of telling who would get it and who would be spared. It killed some of its victims and marked others for life.” But, is this true? Was there no way of telling who would contract the disease? The story of the destruction of the Pond tells a different story; one in which

²¹ *WSJ*, November 2, 1949. Jack Trawick, *Redevelopment in Winston-Salem, NC 1951-1965*, (Winston-Salem: The Redevelopment Commission of Winston-Salem, 1965), 3.

disease, race, and fear work to destroy an African American community and forever changes the racial geography of Winston-Salem.²²

The Pond hugged two converging railroad lines and Peters Creek ran through its center. Living in close proximity to one another, the majority of residents of The Pond were renters who paid between four and twenty-one dollars a month in rent in the 1940s. Out of 1078 dwellings in the neighborhood 946 did not have a private bath and 651 were without running water. Consisting mostly of shotgun-style housing, named for one's ability to shoot a shotgun in the front door and have the buckshot exit the back door without hitting anything, entire families called The Pond's overcrowded houses home.

Although landlords played a major role in making and maintaining the Pond, the limited amount of investment funds given by banks for development in black neighborhoods provided another road block for improving the Pond's conditions. African Americans sought better housing in Winston-Salem outside of areas like the Pond, but city engineers limited their mobility by becoming engaged in what Benedict Anderson calls "imagining communities" by mapping race. Anderson uses nations in his example, but Jim Crow Winston-Salem used maps to designate certain areas of the city as "Negro." In a map designed for the Winston-Salem city government in 1920 titled "Several Phases Of A City Plan" marking areas where city expansion and development would occur planner Harry L. Shaner C.P.W. designated where African Americans lived in the city. Almost the entire eastern side of the city was designated for "negroes" except for a small section around City Hospital, the city's only hospital at the time. This planning map guided city government

²² David Oshinsky, *Polio: An American Story*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

decisions regarding the placement of new parks, roads, and neighborhoods. The Pond had been designated as an African American neighborhood according to Shaner and had no markings for future development according to the map.²³

The passage of the National Housing Act of 1934 redefined the mortgage industry by creating the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) that guaranteed long term, low-interest loans to lenders willing to apply for these types of loans. Because of the lack of credit available for people wanting to buy a house during the Great Depression, government insurance allowed banks to issue loans without fear of losing their investment. In order to nationalize lending practices to federal standards in 1935, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), a branch of the FHA, created what would become one of the most fundamental ways that the federal government denied African Americans the right to improve their own neighborhoods. The HOLC created a map system for 239 American cities, calling them Residential Security Maps. These maps graded neighborhoods from A or green (being the most desirable land) to D or red (the least valuable). As David Freund notes, if the area was home to white middle-class Christians, it normally received an A grade. But if the neighborhoods were older, physically deteriorating, or populated by a minority, the grade was normally a C or D. The Pond, naturally had a red grade.²⁴

By the 1940s the amalgamation of topography, federal real estate loan practices, zoning ordinances, city planning firms, racist slumlords, and non-enforcement of building

²³ Harry L. Shaner, *Several Phases of a City Plan*, 1920 Planning Map of Winston-Salem, Housed at Forsyth County Planning Department and Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art.

²⁴ David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 113; Amy Hillier, "Residential Security Maps and Neighborhood Appraisals. The Homeowners' Loan Corporation and the Case of Philadelphia," *Social Science History* 29 no.2 (2005): 229; Home Owners' Loan Corporation, *Residential Security Map of Winston-Salem*, 1937.

codes made the Pond one of the worst neighborhoods in the South. Historian Karen Ferguson argues that the white community in Atlanta tolerated slums in order to profit from the black labor pool. Winston-Salem was no different. From 1890 to 1920 R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company recruited African American sharecroppers from as far away as Alabama to come work in the Winston-Salem factories whose smokestacks dominated the city's skyline. Southern sharecroppers stepped into crowded boxcars, leaving behind the cotton fields of the South, and rode for hundreds of miles to reach opportunities offered by Winston-Salem's tobacco factories. Once these laborers reached the city they had to find housing anywhere they could afford, often this meant The Pond.²⁵

Throughout the months of June and July 1948 the Winston-Salem Journal printed articles highlighting the increasing incidents of polio cases in North Carolina. On June 10, 1948 Dr. C. P. Stevick of the State Board of Health commenting to the media on the 117 polio cases since January 1st said, "it is very unusual for us to have more than 25 cases during this same period." One week later Dr Stevick reported the state had increased its total to 166. In the June 17th article touting the selection of Kate Bitting Memorial Hospital for Negroes for an infantile paralysis treatment center, Dr. Stevick noted that polio effected white people three times as often as African Americans, but he did not know why. In actuality polio's ratio of white to black was far larger than Dr. Stevick's estimation. While 10,412 people died of polio in the United States between 1940-1948, only 650 of those people were non-white. Although these numbers only refer to instances of death, an oral history of Winston-Salem tells the same story. When remembering their childhood in

²⁵ Frank O'Neal, interview by Robert Korstad, November 28, 1979, interview E-0146, recording, Southern Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC; Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 168.

Winston-Salem sisters Shirley Anne Williams Dunlap and Mary Jane Williams, born in 1926 and 1937, could not remember one person that they knew that had polio growing up. The Williams sisters grew up in an all African American neighborhood experiencing little contact with whites until their adult years.²⁶

Also in the June 17th article Dr. Robert R. Lawson, associate professor of pediatrics at Bowman Gray School of Medicine explained the 1948 knowledge behind the transmission of polio as, “it had been found that the poliomyelitis virus is picked up by mouth, most commonly by children placing their fingers in their mouths. It is likely that it is spread via sewage, flies, and food.”²⁷ Throughout the early twentieth century, newspapers had warned of the danger that insects, especially flies, carried to vulnerable children. In the June 12, 1916 edition of the *Newark Evening News*, the following poem ran in the woman’s page accompanied by a picture of a helpless white infant being attacked by a giant black fly:

I am the Baby-Killer!
I come from gargabe-cans uncovered,
From gutter pools and filth of streets,
From stables and backyards neglected,
Slovenly homes—all manner of unclean places.
I love to crawl on babies’ bottles and baby lips;
I love to wipe my poison feet on open food
In stores and markets patronized by fools.²⁸

Contemporary science now demonstrates the highest incidence of the spread of polio occurs through human contact. Like Hepatitis A, polio spreads through fecal-oral transmission, areas with the highest level of sanitation have the lowest levels of occurrence

²⁶ Scott Summers, “City to Get Negro Center For Polio Treatment,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, June 17, 1948; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *United States Vital Statistics 1940-1948*, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/vsus.htm> accessed on September 24, 2009. Shirley Williams Dunlap and Mary Jane Williams, interview by author, Winston-Salem, NC, August 24, 2009.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *WSJ*, June 17, 1948.

²⁸ *Newark Evening News*, June 12, 1916

and vice versa. But polio is unique in the way it affects people based on age. If a six-month-old baby contracts polio likely he or she will suffer from a simple fever and cough. Once he or she survives these original symptoms, the child will become immune. However, after a person starts to walk and develop muscles; contracting a case of polio can destroy a person's motor function. The disease attacks developed or developing muscles causing paralysis. In areas like the Pond, because of the lack of indoor plumbing, infants' exposure to polio happened at a very early age. Although playing in a creek that contained polio could cause one to contract the disease in very rare cases, the inability of one to wash their hands in a sink caused the majority of the spread of polio. Polio affected African Americans with more regularity at an earlier age in areas like the Pond because of the poor living conditions maintained by planning, zoning, slumlords, and non enforcement of housing codes. Infants born in the Pond that survived the early fever and cough gained immunity to polio. Although the Pond is an extreme example of the types of neighborhoods that African Americans lived in throughout the South, the prevalence of bottomland neighborhoods created areas in the black communities that provided immunity to polio. Close contact in African American neighborhoods due to the spatial restriction of segregation allowed most black newborns some exposure to the disease at an early age; therefore insulating the majority of the black community.²⁹

Even though Dr. Stevick had noted the higher occurrence of polio in the white community, in an article on July 8, 1948 Mayor George D. Lentz and Junior Chamber of Commerce President Wallace Dunham saw the outbreak of polio in North Carolina as an

²⁹ Dr. Tim Monroe, interview by author, Winston-Salem, NC, September 15, 2009.

opportunity to “take action” against the unsanitary conditions in the African American community. Playing to the fears of whites, Dunham said, “If this sort of thing has anything to do with polio, it’s a wonder we don’t have more of it,” commenting on the conditions in the Pond. First and foremost, Lentz and Dunham concentrated on the structural integrity of toilets in the Pond, or lack thereof. Pictures of outhouses showed the poor state of sanitation in the Pond, also noting that one outhouse served as many as 50 people.³⁰

As a result of the July 8, 1948 article Mayor Lentz organized a conference to bring together landlords and real-estate agents from the Pond to discuss the “serious unsanitary conditions.” Mayor Lentz argued that the health of all the citizens of Winston-Salem was at stake and urged landlords to attend. By this time the state polio count had mushroomed to 429. The next day an editorial titled “Time for Action Against Slums” charged all citizens to support the efforts of the mayor and “this action should be directed toward the remedying of any and all conditions in housing which imperil the health and welfare of the people of the community.” The editorial goes on to say, “if we create or tolerate breeding places for disease through unsanitary housing conditions, carriers from those breeding places spread through all the community and imperil the health of all.”³¹

To further link the Pond and polio on July 10th the *Winston-Salem Journal* ran an article titled “Unsanitary Areas Here Breed Crime.” Despite the title of the article, public health was the main theme. City-County Health Officer Dr. Fred G. Pegg noted evidence that areas that failed to follow proper sanitation may cause the spread of polio. Instead of putting the onus on the institutional maintenance of sanitation by city, state, and federal

³⁰ *WSJ* July 8, 1948, and November 2, 1949.

³¹ *WSJ* July, 9, 1948.

officials the tone of article suggests that the residents themselves might be the cause of the spread of polio. Citing residents' failure to properly dispose of their trash and "excreta" the article suggests that polio traveling on flies from the Pond could infect other parts of the city.³²

The association of polio with slums was not a new phenomenon at this time. From 1900 to 1920 polio was associated with eastern European immigrants in northeastern cities. During this era assumptions that poor immigrants carried the disease because of poor hygiene or carelessness linked polio and immigrant slums in those cities. Similar to the inhabitants of the Pond these people were protected from polio because they had dealt with polio at such a young age. The linking of ethnicity and disease in northeastern cities also occurs in Atlanta with African Americans and tuberculosis. In her groundbreaking work on African American washerwomen, historian Tera Hunter argues that white supremacists in Atlanta link disease to African American bodies in order to control labor. These women did the laundry of upper to middle –class white families in their neighborhoods and transported the clothes back to white neighborhoods. The association with poor living conditions and disease contributed to these women being vilified by the Atlanta press during a tuberculosis outbreak. The lack of access to money and power confined the poor to the slums. For immigrants in the northeastern cities, washerwomen in Atlanta, and tobacco workers in Winston-Salem to have a healthy diet, live in sound housing, or properly dispose of waste meant trying to overcome

³² *WSJ* July, 10 1948.

this type of rhetoric. The association with disease, race, and living conditions makes the story of polio in the Pond a continuation of this type of logic in the minds of whites.³³

African Americans who lived in the Pond fought the notion that they were the source of polio in the city. On July 14, 1948, Pond residents asked that their neighborhood be cleaned up. Residents asked the Board of Alderman for garbage collection, but others lamented that things would not change. One Pond resident said she had complained about broken windows the previous winter but her landlord had replied, “You need air.” Other families in the Pond felt agitation for change would not accomplish anything. Mrs. Susie Odom said, “It won’t do us any good to push...I make myself contented and do the best I can here.” She shared a duplex with seven other people. Mrs. Odom had lights and an outside toilet for \$1.75 per week. In covering the Pond residents’ plea for help the *Journal* repeatedly portrayed the Pond as a danger to the white community. When residents asked for trash collection, the *Journal* pointed out that at that moment trash disposal amounted to residents throwing their trash in Peters Creek. The reporter pointed out that once Peters Creek left the Pond it went to Hanes Park, a whites-only park.³⁴ Much like the movement of Atlanta washerwomen between white and black neighborhoods, flies and Peters Creek, with no respect for Jim Crow, could take the disease falsely associated with African Americans to other areas of the city.

On July 14th Mayor Lentz held his conference. He announced an ultimatum giving landlords thirty days to clean up the conditions of outdoor toilets throughout the city. Lentz said, “We have a duty to perform...We hope for your (the landlords) co-operation.” Letters

³³ Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 201, 198.

³⁴ *WSJ*, July 14, 1948.

went out to the owners of five hundred and ninety three toilets. The letters contained a copy of the city's cleanup policy and schematic drawings of the correct way to build and maintain an outside toilet. The new toilets were advertised to property owners as "flytight."

Alderman W.F. Shaffner, chairman of the City-County Public Health Board, stressed the importance of the fight against poor housing conditions in the Pond by citing an example of a clothesline "hanging over a filthy ditch. On that line were children's clothes that were going to Ardmore or Buena Vista (the names of the richest white neighborhoods)." Repeating the same type of argument used on African American washerwomen in Atlanta, Shaffner never blamed landlords for not trying to provide indoor plumbing for Pond properties citing poor investment in a "shack 30, 40, 50, even 60 years old." The Winston-Salem municipal government had started a public relations campaign to remove the Pond, while the number of polio cases in the state continued to climb, then up to 584.³⁵

The Forsyth County Medical Society met six days later on July 20th to discuss the growing polio epidemic in North Carolina. An organization of practicing doctors in Forsyth County; they recommended that all children under sixteen years old be prohibited from attending public gatherings, movie theatres, swimming pools, churches, and play grounds. The society requested that all garbage cans in the city be painted and then sprayed with DDT along with garbage collection increasing to every other day. The next day the City-County Board of Health adopted a resolution prohibiting child gatherings and asking residents to clean and cover their garbage cans.

³⁵ *WSJ*, July 15, 1948.

That same day, in Raleigh, NC the State Board of Health announced the polio case total had increased to 736. Along with the polio totals, Dr. Roy Norton, a state health officer, reported that polio had been “recovered from sewage although the real effect that this may have on the transmission of the disease is not known. Many of our towns and cities...have neglected to take advantage of a section in the State privy law which gives municipalities the right to enforce immediate sewer connections.”³⁶ Norton went on to stress that many towns did not properly dispose of garbage and that “town dumps” were not an acceptable means for trash disposal. Pond residents did not have municipal sewer connections or trash pickup.

A week and a half later on Sunday August 1st in response to the State Board of Health and the City-County Board of Health’s action concerning the restriction of underage movement and the growing polio case total, now at 1,095 for North Carolina, the Junior Chamber of Commerce organized a garbage can inspection in order pinpoint areas where garbage cans were not being covered and cleaned. Specifically, the group of three hundred would “peer into backyards and alleys, looking for filthy or open garbage cans, open refuse, stagnant water and other breeding places of flies and insects that might transmit disease.” Composed of both African American and white civic leaders; the group divided by race to, search their neighborhoods.³⁷

The survey of city garbage cans yielded grime results for the overall state of sanitation in Winston-Salem. Only forty percent of the cities’ garbage cans could be classified as “good,” with another forty percent meeting the minimum requirements set forth by the public health department and twenty percent of the cans classified as “terrible.” The

³⁶ *WSJ*, July 21, 1948.

³⁷ *WSJ*, August 1, 1948.

African American contingent of the survey group reported that ninety-four percent of the trashcans surveyed did not pass inspection. The convergence of threat of polio in relation to refuse and the apparent lack of proper sanitation techniques in the large majority of African American homes, especially in places like the Pond, meant that the white community at large no longer saw poor sanitation in black neighborhoods as innocuous.³⁸

The following Wednesday an editorial in the *Journal* titled “Progress and Polio?” the editor lays out the problem with polio in America. Starting with the thesis that North Carolina led the South in education and public health, the editor asked the question why did North Carolina also led the South in instances of polio? He concluded that “many of our towns, cities, and suburban areas have grown so fast during the past several decades that effective modern water, sewage and related urban facilities have not kept pace.” He goes on to say:

“Shanty” type privies in thickly populated urban or suburban areas; septic tanks that do not work, with the result that refuse poisons are not properly disposed of in very populous areas; dangerous health habits growing out of the lack of well-planned and thorough health education; the tendency of many families who formerly lived in rural areas to pursue certain health habits after moving to towns of suburban areas—these and other factors incidental to rapid urban and suburban growth in a State whose largest city reached the 100,000 mark as late as 1940, possibly may have played a sinister role in the tragedy of polio in North Carolina.³⁹

By blaming the families who moved to Winston-Salem from a rural area to pursue implied unsavory health habits the editor of the *Journal* directly targets the African American sharecroppers who came to Winston-Salem’s tobacco factories in search of a better life. The editor fails to point out the complicity of whites in the maintenance of working class African

³⁸ *WSJ*, August 2, 1948.

³⁹ *WSJ* August 4, 1948.

American neighborhoods. Throughout the polio epidemic the *Journal* worked to solidify polio and the Pond in the minds of white readers.⁴⁰

While the City-County Public Health Department and the State Board of Health implemented short term solutions to the sanitation problems with trashcan inspections, proper toilet construction, and youth congregation restrictions, the City-County Planning Board developed a preliminary plan for a long term solution to the areas targeted by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Public Health, and the *Winston-Salem Journal*. On August 3, 1948, the Planning Department unveiled its “Master Plan” for development of the city for the next two decades. Designed by Russell Van Nest Black, the plan called for an improved street system to eliminate downtown traffic jams, new and enlarged recreational zones, new public buildings, and housing redevelopment and rehabilitation. Housing redevelopment and rehabilitation to Van Nest Black meant, “get rid of the slums” arguing that these areas should probably be reused for industrial or recreational areas. The map outlined the Pond and two other similar African American neighborhoods for redevelopment and almost all of the black population for rehabilitation. Rehabilitation called for the city to improve housing in those areas rather than clearance. An editorial in the *Journal* praised the “Master Plan” as a “Blueprint for Progress” that would provide “for sane and orderly growth.”⁴¹

Along with editorials praising the planning department for its plan for the city’s future, as if on cue, the *Journal* began running stories reporting the supposed decline in the polio epidemic. The State Board of Health on August 2nd cited that only 16 new cases of

⁴⁰ *WSJ* August 4, 1948.

⁴¹ *WSJ*, August 4, 1948.

polio were reported, tying it as the lowest reported total since July 6th. The state polio case total would continue to increase despite the *Journal's* insistence that polio was on the way out. By mid September North Carolina had 2,004 cases of polio making it the worst outbreak in the state's history. Ironically, out of the 143 people that died from polio in North Carolina in 1948 only four were from Forsyth County and only one of those from Winston-Salem.⁴²

The Junior Chamber of Commerce, *The Winston-Salem Journal*, and the Public Health Department successfully melded the image of poor black neighborhoods and disease, in this case polio, in the minds of Winston-Salem whites. The *Journal* continued to champion slum clearance as a cure-all for Winston-Salem growing public health problem editorialized, "There is no question whatever concerning the need for the elimination of certain slum or substandard housing areas in the city which long have constituted a serious health, fire and crime menace to the community."⁴³ The Pond, long tolerated by the large majority of the white community because housed one of the city's most vital labor pools, had become a liability to the city at large in the minds of most whites.

By the end of September the public health department lifted the ban on underage movement. Another school year for Winston-Salem's children began, albeit a month behind schedule. Polio left a lasting impression on the middle-class white community who felt the brunt of the impact of polio cases. Polio in the Pond had become a reoccurring theme in the *Journal*, which made the neighborhood the target of most of their investigative journalism concerning origins of the epidemic in the entire state. The City-County Planning Board used polio as means to expedite their vision of the future for the city, a vision without

⁴²*WSJ*, September 15, 1948.

⁴³*WSJ*, August 10, 1948.

neighborhoods like the Pond. With the “Master Plan” approved, slum clearance advocates searched for means to accomplish their goals of cleansing Winston-Salem of neighborhoods like the Pond.

At first, slum clearance appeared to be too expensive for the Winston-Salem. Although the Planning Board had given the city a “Master Plan” the municipality lacked the funds to either outright buy the land from landlords or a place for the people who lived in the Pond to go. Even with the landmark Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), which outlawed racial housing covenants, making it illegal to restrict the sale of property based on race, Pond residents could not afford to buy their own home, much less a home in a white neighborhood. The Housing Act of 1949 would give Winston-Salem the financial means and the legal authority to start a massive slum clearance program.

Slum neighborhoods existed across the United States in 1949. Although New Deal legislation had created funds for some cities to clear slums, World War II had diverted available slum clearance funds into the war effort.⁴⁴ The Housing Act of 1949, signed on July 16, 1949, a part of President Harry S. Truman’s “Fair Deal,” offered \$1,000,000,000 in loans and \$500,000,000 in grants to cities to begin slum clearance. This money was made available on a first come first serve basis, meaning if the Winston-Salem city government wanted money to clear their slums they had to request it quickly.⁴⁵

The debate regarding the initiation of a federally funded slum clearance program in Winston-Salem hinged on whether real estate industry, who would be directly affected if the city started tearing down black rental property, could buy in to the idea of public housing or

⁴⁴ Winston-Salem had previously purchased land on Happy Hill the oldest black neighborhood in the city.

⁴⁵ Burnet R. Maybank, *The Housing Act of 1949*, (Washington: The United States Printing Office, 1949).

if the Board of Alderman had enough votes to disregard the realtors. In a meeting on June 17, 1949, Alderman Shaffner, who previously had defended the slumlords lack of effort to clean up Pond residences because of insufficient funds due to the war, asked that the property owners of the Pond and other neighborhoods detailed in the plan be provided an opportunity to review the proposed legislation. Shaffner said, “to see what they think of it. I know they are probably opposed to it...but we could get their side.”⁴⁶

Alderman Kenneth R. Williams, the first African American elected official in North Carolina since the Wilmington race riots of 1898, disagreed arguing instead that “with all due respect to them (real estate), they are looking after their own interests. Much property that belongs to that group ought to be torn down.” Mediating the two sides of the argument by Williams and Shaffner, the newly elected Mayor Marshall Kurfees, whose campaign promises included a slum clearance program, said “I personally have never been in favor of Government entering competition with private enterprise when private enterprise can take of itself” but, “I don’t think we ought to miss a chance of whatever benefits that may arise from it (the bill). If the Government is going to appropriate millions of dollars and other cities are going to get some, we out go to get some, too.”⁴⁷

In preparation to receive funds from the government the city activated its dormant housing authority and on July 8, 1949, Mayor Kurfees swore in Director Stratton Coyner, and Dr. Mark Depp, Jack Atkins, Meade Willis and Charlie Wade. At the special swearing in session Kurfees said, “We want to get started on this at once and get all the benefits we can from it.” Kurfees echoed the sentiments of the *Journal* from the previous year

⁴⁶ *WSJ*, June 18, 1949.

⁴⁷ *WSJ*, June 18, 1949.

commenting that the “greatest percentage of our sickness and crime” came from neighborhoods like the Pond. Calling on the entire city to help with the clearance of slums Kurfees pleaded “If we can eliminate these overcrowded, poorly lighted, poorly ventilated shacks, with their horrible toilet facilities and their generally unhealthy, depressing conditions, we’ll go a long way toward solving...our health and crime problems.”⁴⁸ By reminding people that these neighborhoods fomented disease and crime, Kurfees continues the campaign of the previous year to link disease and African American living conditions.

A July 17, 1949 editorial by the *Journal* viewed the new housing act and subsequent reactivation of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem as a perfect start to the eliminating of slums in the city. Citing the importance of federal aid in creating a new “Negro housing project” the editorial highlighted the ability of the housing project to pay for itself. Most importantly the *Journal* noted how the creation of federal funded public housing would help the city in “its legal process of condemning dangerous, unsafe, insanitary housing.”⁴⁹

Throughout the 1940s The United Tobacco Workers Union, Local 22, FTA-CIO had organized labor at R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. Primarily organizing the large number of African American workers at the factories, Local 22’s public actions represent a voice of the black workers. In August 1949 the union surveyed 294 African American tobacco workers homes. The results of the survey showed that only 13 of the homes had hot running water, 34 had no electricity, only 48 had bath tubs, and 242 had not been repaired in the last 3 years. Robert Lathan, Co-administrator for Local 22, reported the findings of the survey by saying, “People talk of slums...but very few who don’t live in these areas actually

⁴⁸ *WSJ*, July 9, 1949.

⁴⁹ *WSJ*, July 17, 1949.

understand what poor housing means in terms of inconvenience and actual suffering.” Mr. Lathan concluded “the results of our survey show that a broad public housing, slum clearance program is needed immediately, large enough to provide decent homes for thousands of workers’ families.” Local 22’s survey did not accurately portray the living conditions in all African American neighborhoods in Winston-Salem, but the union did report the living conditions of the people they talked to and provide a voice for those people.⁵⁰

The 1950s marked the end of the Pond. Starting in 1951 Pond residents began relocating to the new Happy Hill Gardens public housing project. Bulldozers, architects, and engineers descended on the Pond in order to begin what they called a “Crusade for Better Housing.” Their work would finally eliminate the horrible drainage problems associated with the Pond and put Kimberly Park Terrace, Winston-Salem’s second housing project, in its place.⁵¹

The Pond was the city’s first targeted slum clearance project. Slum clearance destroyed 373 dilapidated dwellings found in the Pond and replaced those dwelling with Kimberly Park. However, this did not account for city planners operating from a destroy-one-build-one premise when recreating the Pond into Kimberly Park. This type of “crusade” disregarded the amount of people who lived per dwelling in the Pond. The Winston-Salem Housing Authority rules stated that only nuclear families could live in a Kimberly Park dwelling, meaning the type of extended family living style that had been so prevalent in the Pond would not be transferred to the projects. The amount of people who were displaced

⁵⁰ *WSJ*, August 25, 1949; Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-12.

⁵¹ Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, “Crusade for Better Housing: Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Winston-Salem, NC” Printed by the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, NC 1954.

without an opportunity to move into Kimberly Park cannot be estimated, but likely was in the thousands.⁵² This lack of housing can be evidenced by the over 800 applicants who were without homes who wanted to enter public housing.⁵³

Slum clearance also destroyed the sense of community found in the Pond. African Americans lacked the familiarity of the neighborhood they had lived in most of their lives. The corner of Trade St. and Northwest Blvd., previously was a place to hear the latest community gossip, however African Americans had to forge new communities among strangers. Those displaced by development or natural disasters often are affected by “root-shock,” a type of traumatic stress due to the loss of one’s environment.⁵⁴ Public housing combined black residents throughout Winston-Salem, not just the Pond. This required African Americans to make new communities inside the inherently transient public housing project.

Both whites and middle-class blacks championed public housing and slum clearance. In the white mind these actions would help eliminate the unsavory health habits associated with black bodies. For middle-class blacks public housing represented a form of uplift. Uplift saw the empowerment of African Americans as evolving from struggle, celebrating hard work in Protestantism, and stressed middle-class moral codes of acceptable behavioral norms.⁵⁵ The black middle-class in the city believed that if the poorest African Americans in

⁵² Most homes in the Pond had an average of six people per unit. Often times these people were distant relations or not related at all. If 373 dwellings were destroyed to make room for Kimberly Park, that means 2238 people (avg.) were displaced.

⁵³ Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, “Crusade for Better Housing: Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Winston-Salem, NC” Printed by the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, NC 1954.

⁵⁴ www.rootshock.org, accessed on November 26, 2010.

⁵⁵ Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 13.

Winston-Salem could find a nice place to live that they would have a better chance of struggling to find a way out of poverty. Middle-class blacks advocated public housing and slum clearance from the beginning of the clearance process.

Over the next two decades slum clearance, public housing, and urban renewal reshaped and remapped black Winston-Salem. Polio played an incredible role in changing the minds of white Winston-Salem into seeing slums as a problem, not as a necessary addition to industrialization. The story of the Pond combines race, class, industrialization, public health and power. This combination augments how historians view the changes in American urban life from one city dominated to one suburban controlled. If polio galvanized Winston-Salem into clearing its slums, likely other cities in America used the same racialized public health rhetoric to initiate the destruction of African American neighborhoods. Polio in the Pond changed the way that Winston-Salem residents viewed the city. The power structure in the city was no longer content with allowing slums to exist because of the threat of diseases like polio. The creation of public housing in Winston-Salem allowed for the betterment of some, but was still out of reach for others. On the horizon for Winston-Salem were the plans for a new North-South expressway. This highway would reinforce the city's white and black racial geography.

CHAPTER 2

Constructing Blight

In his New Year's Day 1951 editorial, Winston-Salem Mayor Marshall Kurfees explained, "by slum clearance I mean the complete clearing of those sections where practically all dwellings are completely unfit for human habitation." Adding that all "attempts at rehabilitation" would only prolong the problem, Kurfees believed that pending legislation from the North Carolina General Assembly allowing cities to participate in a large scale federally-funded slum clearance program could enable Winston-Salem to effectively fight "blight."⁵⁶ According to Kurfees, the Board of Alderman, *The Winston-Salem Journal*, and the City-County Planning Board, blight could only be found in one place, East Winston.

The majority of Winston-Salem's African American residents lived in East Winston. Geographically separated from whites by the Northwest North Carolina Railroad and Liberty Street; the city's largest African American community had its own doctors, lawyers, dentists. It was home to its own college, Slater Industrial and State Normal School, and the only black-owned transportation system in the United States, the Safe Bus Company. However, the majority of East Winston residents made their living in tobacco. African Americans were employed as stemmers, pickers, fillers, weighers, packers, hogshead openers, truck rollers,

⁵⁶ Editorial, *Winston-Salem Journal*, January 1, 1951.

sweepers, janitors, doormen, and mechanics. Drawn by industry and opportunity, black Winston was deeply embedded in the history of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.⁵⁷

From 1890 to 1920 R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company recruited African American sharecroppers from as far away as Alabama to come work in the Winston-Salem factories whose smokestacks dominated the city's skyline. These former sharecroppers stepped into crowded boxcars, leaving behind the cotton fields of the South, and rode for hundreds of miles to reach opportunities offered by Winston-Salem's tobacco factories. Once these laborers reached the city they had to find housing anywhere they could afford, most were funneled toward a neighborhood called Monkey Bottom.⁵⁸

Monkey Bottom was the first African American neighborhood in Winston. Bound to the south and west by the Northwest North Carolina Railroad, in 1950 over three thousand black families called Monkey Bottom home. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the majority of Monkey Bottom residents had worked at the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. During the 1940s the company's African American workers organized and struck for higher wages and better working conditions. While these workers did successfully organize, Reynolds mechanized the prefabrication process eliminating the need for thousands of black women workers. By 1950, in the face of organized black labor, Reynolds decided that the need for African American labor could be greatly reduced. In response, white city leaders argued that the land that had once been home to thousands of black workers was

⁵⁷ Nannie M. Tilley, *The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 146.

⁵⁸ Frank O'Neal, interview by Robert R. Korstad, November 28, 1979, interview E-0146, recording, Southern Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC; Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 168.

suddenly “blighted.” Blight became the means by which the city would destroy Monkey Bottom and dissect East Winston.⁵⁹

The coded language of blight became a catch phrase in city planning to describe the diseased nature that run-down neighborhoods were purported to display. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s special assistant to the administrator of the United States Housing Authority, Robert Weaver used the term blight to describe the results of overcrowding of “Negro ghettos.” He wrote, “in many instances where Negroes enter new areas, the new owner-occupants rehabilitate the property. In other cases, non-resident owners, both Negro and white, decide to achieve quick returns on their investment.”⁶⁰ Weaver believed that the creation of multi-apartment dwellings combined with overcrowding and non-rehabilitation created blight. That is, he argued that crowding and owner neglect led to dilapidated dwellings and unsanitary conditions. Winston-Salem city leaders believed that blight came from a different place.

In the spring of 1951 the North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill to “aid cities in the clearing of blighted—or slum—areas.” That April the Winston-Salem Board of Alderman signed an ordinance “Creating the Redevelopment Commission of the City of Winston-Salem; Finding That Blighted Areas Exist in the City and that the Redevelopment of Such Area is Necessary.” In a letter to the Alderman in support of the ordinance City-County Planning Director Henry C. Moore wrote, “the [city-county planning board] can state

⁵⁹ Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 371.

⁶⁰ Robert Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 281.

without any hesitation that there are blighted areas in the City of Winston-Salem.”⁶¹ If the Planning Board knew where blight existed, they had not told Winston-Salem residents yet. However, all of Winston-Salem, black or white, knew about the “slums.” The *Journal* had spent the last few years connecting “the Pond” with polio, but the term blight was not yet understood as a geographic area in the city.

East Winston had areas that could be easily defined as a slum. Monkey Bottom resident Robert Black believed that his neighborhood “was one of the lowest sections of the blacks in Winston-Salem.” He continued, “there wasn’t room enough between those little rat infested houses for a human being to walk, and when one house would catch on fire, it could endanger the lives of hundreds.” Black blamed the difficult conditions on white absentee landlords; “the rent owners wouldn’t prepare the house.” He recalled holes in his roof and sewage in the streets.

I could lie in bed at night and see more stars than I could if I was outdoors in the yard. They had sewer systems there, outside toilets, and those things would jam and the impurities from these sewer lines would flow through your yards.⁶²

However, not all black neighborhoods suffered from neglect. Alongside neighborhoods like Monkey Bottom, African American East Winston was home to spacious single-family homes, the black-owned Safe Bus Company and hundreds of other local black-owned businesses. Throughout East Winston, African American residents and businesspeople took pride in ownership and built a vibrant community—one of the largest black communities in North Carolina—within the confines of a segregated city.

⁶¹ Board of Alderman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Alderman of Winston-Salem, May 25, 1951*, D-12403.

⁶² Robert Black, interview by Robert R. Korstad, August 24, 1984, interview E-0099, transcript, Southern Oral History Project, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

The day after city aldermen created the Redevelopment Commission, the *Journal* ran an article announcing the commission, outlining which sections of the city would be redeveloped and what was wrong with these areas. The article said, “The program is aimed at cleaning up areas often found in or near the downtown section, which are unsanitary, or conducive to ill health, crime, and detrimental to safety and morals.”⁶³ Unlike Weaver’s description of the causes of blight, Winston-Salem’s definition of “blighted areas” had been expanded to include both behavior and health.

By June of 1951, Mayor Kurfess had filled the positions of the Redevelopment Commission. Kurfess chose Charles B. Wade, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company executive to direct the commission; Tom Davis, president of Piedmont Airlines; Bert Plynt, Wachovia Bank and Trust; Jack Williams, manager of local Sears and Roebuck Store; and E.M. Lewis, an executive of black-owned Mutual Insurance Company. Kurfess selected a group predominated by white business leaders and included a single black businessman in the attempt to gain cross-racial support for slum clearance.⁶⁴ Considering that most of the redevelopment would occur on property where African Americans lived, the complete exclusion of black leaders would have probably killed the redevelopment commission before it was launched. In the article announcing the members of the commission the *Journal* noted, “the Urban Redevelopment Commission...has the authority to plan and execute a program of clearing Winston-Salem’s blighted areas and replacing them with higher type property.”⁶⁵ For Winston-Salem African American middle-class the rhetoric associated with urban renewal i.e. “higher type property,” could have been viewed as a form of “uplift.” The

⁶³ “Alderman Set Up City Agency To Use U.S. Development Aid,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 26, 1951.

⁶⁴ “Urban Group Is Appointed By Mayor,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, June 15, 1951.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

African American middle-class in the United States had seen uplift as one way to gain respectability for the whole race i.e. if the whole race is being judged by the worst examples, if the worst could be uplifted to respectable the whole race would be seen so.⁶⁶

In July the Board of Alderman approved a request made by the redevelopment commission to apply for an \$802,000 grant in order to study the areas where blight existed in order to create a workable slum clearance plan for Winston-Salem. Urban Redevelopment would require the city to pay one-third of the cost of the program with the federal government paying the remainder. The redevelopment commission framed slum clearance as an opportunity for improvement in East Winston; they announced that “the city may include in its one-third the costs of building streets, laying water mains, sewer lines, building parks or even schools”⁶⁷ This must have sounded like music to every African American ear in East Winston. Since the creation of Winston-Salem African American leaders had been asking for more schools, parks, water mains, and sewer lines in East Winston. The denial of these services represented one of the largest markers of just what exactly it meant to be African American and live in a Southern city.

Up to this point there had been little resistance to the idea of slum clearance in Winston-Salem. Both African American and white city leaders seemed united in their pursuit to fight blight. Neither the mayor, nor the redevelopment commission had had any trouble from the landowners of the slums or the Board of Alderman blocking their requests for funds. On July 19, 1951 the *Journal* ran an article titled “Local Slums Slowly Yield To Renovation.” The article centers on slumlord Lee Kinney of Charlotte. Kinney had

⁶⁶ Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 7.

⁶⁷ “Funds Sought For Clearing Local Slums,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 14, 1951.

“volunteered” to bring his sixteen homes up to standard. Before he began work, thirty-two families lived in his sixteen houses with only two water faucets and outdoor toilets for all families. With all the publicity in Winston-Salem on slum conditions the city building inspector had been under pressure to investigate the state of housing in East Winston. Kinney responded to the inspector’s request to bring his homes up to standard. Sixteen homes was a drop in the bucket in a city where ten thousand homes were substandard; the city only had one building inspector.⁶⁸ This means of rehabilitation would have been effective if the building inspector had been inspecting conditions in Winston-Salem for the previous sixty years, but to start this type of process then could only be a means to fight slum clearance.⁶⁹

While the redevelopment commission created its workable plan for slum clearance the *Journal* ran a series of editorials championing clearance. On September 27 the editors applauded the efforts of city leaders and argued that those efforts would “undoubtedly inspire the sort of co-operation and co-ordinated endeavor necessary to complete...the task of ridding the city completely of insanitary, firetrap housing and the evils which it breeds or encourages.”⁷⁰ The editorial added, “Winston-Salem has put its hand to the plow in the slum clearance field. It cannot afford to look back. It won’t.”⁷¹ This editorial continues to evolve the language associated with slum clearance. Far from what Weaver saw as the structural

⁶⁸ Rixie Hunter, “Local Slums Slowly Yield To Renovation,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1951. In the article detailing the efforts of Mr. Kinney Winston-Salem still had at minimum 9,800 “substandard” dwellings. The 1950 census, reported that the city had over 10,000 dwellings that were “dilapidated.” The census also reported that only 4,315 “dilapidated” dwellings were occupied.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Editorial, *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 27, 1951.

⁷¹ Ibid.

problems associated with blight, Winston-Salem's city leaders insisted that blight bred disease, crime, even "evil."

In February 1952, to combat what looked like a growing movement to clear slums in Winston-Salem, the city Board of Realtors, whose membership owned the majority of the dilapidated housing slated for clearance, created a committee to start a campaign of their own to clean up the city's slums. In announcing this new campaign the Board of Realtors said their first step would be to call a meeting of all rental property owners to outline the board's thoughts on neighborhood reclamation. No mention was made of what exactly the board would do to bring their housing up to code, but they did say "We aren't fighting the public housing people... We just want to cut down taxes and free money."⁷² No mention was made of what this meant for their tenants.

The first mention of where exactly the Redevelopment Commission wanted to renew came on May 9, 1952. The Housing and Home Finance Agency informed Mayor Kurfes that \$24,740 in funds had been released to the city for the purposes of setting up an office, hiring personnel and making studies of the first project area. Kurfes said "One area that is high on the priority list in a tract of land in East Winston, south of Fourteenth Street and west of Cleveland Avenue."⁷³ South of Fourteenth Street and west of Cleveland was the heart of East Winston. While including neighborhoods like Monkey Bottom which most agreed needed to be cleared, it also included the backbone of East Winston, the Safe Bus, because clearance would eliminate the need for most of its routes.

⁷² "Slum Cleanup Planned Here By Realtors," *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 23, 1952.

⁷³ "City Gets First Fund for Urban Redevelopment," *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 10, 1952.

The African American owned Safe Bus Company represented a profound instance of the African American community's resistance to the "other's" image.⁷⁴ In Winston-Salem the image worked both ways across the racial divide. Even the poorest white person in Winston-Salem imagined themselves as part of the whole white community, superior to the most well educated and economically successful African-American. In contrast, the residents of East Winston saw themselves as a community struggling against the dominant white mindset that attempted to affirm the flawed logic of Jim Crow segregation.

In 1870 the area that would become Winston-Salem had a population of four hundred and forty three people, ninety-five of which were African American. By 1920 the city would contain over forty-eight thousand of which 43% were African-American, making it the largest in the state. Because of the explosive growth experienced by the city as a whole, the city's streetcar system missed entire populations of both black and white people. African American tobacco workers trudged for as many as twenty-five to thirty city blocks in order to reach the factories just to the west of the railroad tracks on Depot Street. In order to combat the lack of transportation options for African Americans in the city E.E. Richardson, a construction contractor, transformed his Model T Ford into a jitney or small bus, forming the first transportation system for the use of black patrons.⁷⁵ This idea changed East Winston.

By 1926 over thirty-five jitneys owned by twenty-two different black businessmen operated in East Winston. Competition over fares was fierce. Traffic accidents and fights

⁷⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6. Historian Benedict Anderson writes, "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."

⁷⁵ U.S Bureau of the Census, *North Carolina- Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990*; Walter Turner, "The Safe Bus Company" (NC Department of Transportation Museum, Salisbury NC, June 27, 2008).

broke out among rival businesses. Mayor Thomas Barber in response threatened to shut down the jitney services if the altercations did not cease. Confronted with the possibility of not being able to run his business any more Clarence T. Woodland, a jitney service operator, who stood to lose his form of income called a meeting of the twenty-two different jitney operators in order to come to a compromise. Twenty-one operators attended the meeting. At the meeting Woodland proposed they combine their assets and form one company to serve East Winston's African American population. Twelve people agreed with Woodland and the "Safe" Bus Company was born.⁷⁶

The charter given to Safe Bus allowed the company to service the North and Northeast sections of the city. The municipal government forbade the company to go into "white" sections of the city and it could not enter the heart of the downtown-shopping district. Those who wished to ride the Safe Bus downtown had to be dropped off at the African American business district located at Third and Church Street and walk to the courthouse, tobacco factories, and white commercial district four blocks away up a steep hill. African American domestic laborers who worked in white neighborhoods, like West End or Buena Vista paid the Safe Bus fare to get downtown then had to walk three blocks to pay a second fare for the city bus operated by Duke Power to get to their employers home. For some this ride took hours.⁷⁷

The creation of the Safe Bus Company represented Black Winston's investment in their community. During the massive migrations to urban enclaves in the post reconstruction South African Americans, faced with oppressive Jim Crow laws in the city, built institutions

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

within their “home sphere.”⁷⁸ Winston-Salem’s streetcar lines completely avoided the African American population of the city. The lines’ hub circled the courthouse downtown with four separate lines emanating to the north, south, east, and west. Streetcar companies’ exclusion of black neighborhoods and the overall lack of public transportation for African Americans composed part of the imagined community trying to be established in East Winston by the white power structure, while the creation of Safe Bus exemplified the conflict that the African American population has with that image and their investment in the “home sphere.”

Urban redevelopment re-imagined Winston-Salem again. But, the language used to re-imagine the city was the most powerful part of this change. City leaders shaped the debate of blight not around what Robert Weaver saw as the result of Jim Crow, overcrowding, lack of bank funds for redlined neighborhoods, and restriction of African Americans to these areas, but on morals, disease, and crime. In much the same way that the *Atlanta Constitution* depicted black laundresses and servants as carriers of tuberculosis through a series of political cartoons in 1914 during a labor dispute,⁷⁹ Winston-Salem city leaders used the language of blight, at first to describe a diseased area, then linked that area to black stereotypes, and thus to African American bodies in white minds to justify urban renewal. In Atlanta, white women were most often seen as victims of TB, however, African American women as carriers. Blight in Winston-Salem, in the minds of whites, came from African American neighborhoods threatening the exclusivity of their neighborhoods. The

⁷⁸ Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3. Historian Earl Lewis defined saw the investment in the “home sphere” as African Americans attempt to transform “the city to meet their needs.”

⁷⁹ Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After The Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 145.

redevelopment commission believed blight, like disease, could infect your neighborhood regardless of the geographic restriction of race.

The reimagining of Winston-Salem would also rebalance real-estate power in the city. Redevelopment would use eminent domain to take private property from rental property owners, slumlords, and redistribute the land to other private interests, but through land zoning the city government could control land use. While slum clearance planning increased at the redevelopment commission the Board of Alderman in an August 15, 1952 meeting, instructed the building inspector to, again, enforce the slum clearance ordinance. As discussed earlier this ordinance required dilapidated housing owners to bring their housing up to code or face condemnation.⁸⁰ Opponents of the slum clearance program believed that if their rental housing could be brought up to code they could prevent such a program from occurring.

On December 16, 1952 the redevelopment commission made a request to the Public Works Committee of the Board of Alderman. They requested that the Slum Clearance Ordinance not be enforced “in an area roughly defined as that area North of Cromartie Street, East of the Norfolk & Western Railway, South of Fourteenth Street, and West of Cleveland Avenue,” because if the proposed slum clearance of that area were to occur, it would be bad business to require those owners to spend money on repairs just to have the government clear the land.⁸¹

On January 10 the Public Works Committee released a report answering the Redevelopment Commission’s request. Citing the constitutional right of the present property

⁸⁰ Board of Alderman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Alderman of Winston-Salem, August 15, 1952*, D-13052.

⁸¹ “Enforcement of Housing Ordinance Is Urged,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, January 11, 1953.

owners in the proposed area of East Winston the Committee said, “It would be ideal, indeed, if all blighted areas in our city could be removed, but it is the responsibility of the government of the City of Winston-Salem to protect those inalienable rights of our citizens to life, liberty, and the enjoyment of their freehold, and the exercise of control over property lawfully acquired by them, as guaranteed by the Constitution!”⁸² The committee made little mention of the life or liberty of those residents who had been in Monkey Bottom for the last sixty years. The committee warned the city government that if the redevelopment commission’s plan to clear East Winston occurs they would be “party to the taking away of the constitutional rights of the present property owners, under the guise of what some may call ‘social progress.’”⁸³ By framing the argument for urban renewal in terms of “social progress” versus “constitutional rights,” the Public Works Committee appealed to white residents’ ideas about who deserved constitutional rights. In other words why should the city value “social progress” i.e. the removal of poor housing conditions and the elimination of blight, over the “constitutional” property rights of slumlords? Which did Winston-Salem care more about the property rights of slumlords, or the ever-present creeping blight, or blackness that could threaten the entire city?

Winston-Salem Journal reporter Chester S. Davis cared about blight. “That was our biggest problem,” he would say years later in an interview when asked about slum conditions in the city during the 40s and 50s.⁸⁴ On February 1, 1953 in a full-page article written by Davis, titled “Redevelopment Program Offers Workable Slum Clearance Plan,” he offered a

⁸² Board of Alderman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Alderman of Winston-Salem, January 16, 1953*, D-13226.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Chester Davis, interview by Robert Korstad, May 5, 1998, E-0112, recording, Southern Oral History Collections, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

view of Winston-Salem. Written from the perspective of standing on top of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company's Skyscraper, Davis described the view to the west as a picturesque mixture of tree lined streets and lovely rolling hills with the occasional church spire leading to the middle and upper-class neighborhoods of Ardmore and Buena Vista.

Davis had a much different description when looking to the east. He wrote,

When you stand before a window that overlooks East Winston you see little that is lovely or gracious... Some 3,000 families—roughly one-third of this city's Negro population—live in those neighborhoods. What they have—and for most of them it's merely a roof and a room or two—they rent... Because they are crowded and littered with waste they are fire traps and disease producers. Flames and germs have no difficulty reaching into the back alleys which the firemen and the garbage collectors can't even find.⁸⁵

This article further connected East Winston with blight and the language of disease. It also continued a process that devalued the East Winston community as a whole. By saying there was “little lovely or gracious” for over 3,000 families in East Winston, Davis confines doctor's offices, the Safe Bus Company, churches, schools, and people to space devoid of meaning; a space that could be “redeveloped” to provide the Redevelopment Commission's idea of worth.

Davis' ideas linking African Americans with blight did not preclude him from a partial understanding its origins. Like Weaver, Davis believed “slum areas are the result of earlier real estate developments that attempted to put too many houses on too little land” to turn a quick profit.⁸⁶ Davis' argument makes sense; from 1890-1920 Winston-Salem's African American population grew from 5,726 to 27,649. Capitalizing on the geographic

⁸⁵ Chester Davis, “Redevelopment Program Offers Workable Slum Clearance Plan,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 1, 1953.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

confines of Jim Crow cities, the low price of bottomlands, and African American migrants need to find a place quick in a unfamiliar location meant that slumlords could create an maintain a system with relative ease. While Davis never points to segregation as the cause, he does point out a flaw in geographic restriction of residence.⁸⁷

The article also gave East Winston their first glimpse of what life would be like after urban renewal. Davis added a set of maps to his article showing the 1953 map of East Winston and the post-urban renewal map of the same area. The 1953 map had a large line drawn around the area being considered for redevelopment. The area encompassed seven hundred acres of East Winston. The City-County Planning Board shaded two areas of the map indicating “that the slum clearance program probably will be concentrated in the shaded area—about 100 acres,” the two neighborhoods were Monkey Bottom and the Shakes.⁸⁸

The post slum clearance map showed the same piece of land in East Winston, but this map had a large line just to the east of downtown dividing the African American community from the rest of the city. The Planning Board had circled the Shakes as a location for a school and Monkey Bottom would be completely engulfed by the intersection of U.S. 52 and I-40. All the land to the west of the highway would be “earmarked for industry.”⁸⁹

Davis closed the article by leaving the citizens of Winston-Salem with a choice. By approving urban renewal city residents could “stabilize large neighborhoods in East Winston

⁸⁷ U.S Bureau of the Census, *North Carolina- Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990*.

⁸⁸ Chester S. Davis, “Redevelopment Program Offers Workable Slum Clearance Plan,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 1, 1953.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

that are now unstable and troublesome.” Davis argued that this choice would “determine the character—both social and physical—of the city we are making for the future.”⁹⁰

The *Journal* article sparked an immediate response from local leaders. In a special meeting of the Board of Alderman on February 3, 1953 citizens debated for three hours for and against urban renewal. Attorney Bryce Parker, a representative of local realtors, asked questions like “why recreation centers would be needed in the area when plans called for removing some 1,400 dwelling units and replacing them with 500; where would the displaced families go?” Another slum property owner representative, Attorney Buford Henderson, admitted the program sounded good when told through words of Redevelopment Commission chairman Charles B. Wade, Jr., but chided, “I haven’t read Chester Davis’ article yet. I stick to the King James version.” Henderson continued to question the type of government that endorsed New Deal type legislation, “I thought we had voted out this schizophrenic, visionary form of government...If there are a few million dollars in this fund that we don’t use and other cities don’t use, then for God’s sake let’s turn it back to the treasury so President Eisenhower can cut taxes.” Winston-Salem slumlords attacked a program that would take from them their precious Jim Crow rental property and “social progress.”⁹¹

Local African American leaders had a different version of what slum clearance would mean for East Winston. Jack Atkins, son of Winston-Salem State University founder Simon G. Atkins and member of the City Housing Authority, argued that the state of black housing in the city had been neglected so long it had become a “Frankenstein.” Atkins’

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rixie Hunter, “Urban Redevelopment Is Debated, But Alderman Postpone Decision,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 4, 1953.

“Frankenstein” analogy exemplifies African American middle-class thought toward the slums. Jim Crow residential segregation laws tied the black middle-class to the poor; sometimes the wealthiest African Americans wished the bond would loosen. Atlanta’s black elite formed the Neighborhood Union in order to “clean up” black neighborhoods. They believed “immoral” behavior in the form of prostitution, gambling, and drinking shamed black neighborhoods and justified Jim Crow segregation laws in the minds of whites.⁹² Too large and unwieldy for local authorities to conquer by themselves Atkins thought federal government intervention was necessary to affect change.

Rev. Kelly Goodwin asked the Board of Alderman to let urban renewal continue because it could offer a form of uplift to those African Americans who needed it the most. He said, “These people are caught in the fell clutch of circumstances—they are the sons and daughters of slaves, they started with nothing, and there have been barricades. If private enterprise has lagged, then let’s take this opportunity to make time.”⁹³ Goodwin saw the elimination of poor slum housing in Winston-Salem as a way to erase the stigma associated with African Americans and dirty living. The fight against blight for the African American middle-class was a fight for respectability.

In a last ditch effort to stop the Winston-Salem Board of Alderman from approving the urban renewal plan submitted by the redevelopment commission the Board of Realtors took out a full-page advertisement in the Friday morning February 6, 1953 edition of the *Journal*. Titled “Another Viewpoint to Urban Redevelopment an Answer to the Article of Chester Davis,” the ad charged that urban renewal was “improper” because of the

⁹² Hunter, *Freedom*, 139.

⁹³ Rixie Hunter, “Urban Redevelopment Is Debated, But Alderman Postpone Decision,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 4, 1953.

“confiscation of property on one individual’s property for the benefit of another.” The Board of Realtors asked, “If Urban Redevelopment progresses as planned, where will the colored people of our city live in the meantime?” Leading them to conclude that urban renewal was really a request for more public housing the ad posited “the truth of the matter is that this will open the door for a further request form the Public Housing Authorities for additional, colored public housing units.”⁹⁴ The ad never questioned the flaw in Jim Crow housing restriction and was primarily concerned with questioning the legality of urban renewal combined with wanting to know who the displaced people were going to rent from.

On February 20, 1953 the Board of Alderman approved two requests by the redevelopment commission. The board unanimously approved the redevelopment commission’s request for \$50,000 to complete surveys of East Winston. The second resolution passed in a 4-2 vote instructed the City Building Inspector to suspend all inspections in the area being surveyed by the commission. H. F. Tucker and Archie Elledge voted against the motion and Carl Chitty did not vote; all were members of the Public Works Committee. For the redevelopment commission this decision by the board ended a standoff with the board of alderman and quelled the citywide debate over whether Winston-Salem wanted urban renewal or not.⁹⁵

With the Board of Alderman’s blessing the redevelopment commission’s fight against blight, shifted back to Raleigh where the State’s slum clearance law needed to be amended during the 1953 General Assembly if North Carolina cities wanted to continue receive funds

⁹⁴ E.A. Nash, “Another Viewpoint To Urban Redevelopment An Answer To The Article Of Chester Davis,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 6, 1953.

⁹⁵ “Aldermen Back Two Requests From Redevelopment Agency, To Seek Completion of Survery,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 21, 1953.

from the federal government. The law created by the General Assembly in 1951 did not allow cities to use eminent domain on entire tracts of land if 100 percent of the houses in that area were sound according to the U.S. Census of Housing. North Carolina city leaders wanted the law amended to give cities the power to condemn a tract of land if two-thirds of the houses in that area were dilapidated or blighted.

Mayor Kurfees, Redevelopment Commission Director Wade, City Manager John Gold, and Planning Director Harry C. Moore appeared before the General Assembly representing Winston-Salem. Kurfees said before the House Judiciary Committee, “We need it badly. We have some places so bad we can’t even get to them to collect garbage, much less send police cars to stop crime.” Winston-Salem never offered garbage pick-up or paved streets in Monkey Bottom. Winston-Salem resident and former House Representative Spruill Thornton said, “the city has cesspools which need cleaning out.” Titled, the “Blighted Areas” measure, the amendment would have to be passed in order for cities to continue fighting blight.⁹⁶

On April 23 the amendment was approved in their second reading, but on the third reading the next day they were killed. Without amendment North Carolina urban renewal advocates questions weather major slum clearance project would ever be a reality. By August the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency wrote redevelopment commission director Wade, “because of the limitations of the North Carolina Redevelopment Law,” they could no longer disperse federal funds in Winston-Salem. The *Journal’s* article announcing

⁹⁶ “Redevelopment Act Changes Are Assailed,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, April 1, 1953; “Cities Approve House’s ‘Blighted Areas’ Measure; One Attorney Objects,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, April 2, 1953; The Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, *Urban Renewal in Winston-Salem 1951-1965* (Winston-Salem: Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, 1966).

the federal agency's decision announced that redevelopment in the city had been "killed." Wade said, "obviously the members of the commission are...disappointed at being unable to...improve the conditions within the redevelopment areas...The commission feels that it is now time for the real estate interests, who so vigorously opposed Urban Redevelopment...to pursue their program with the greatest possible effort."⁹⁷

According to Wade North Carolina's slumlords had stopped urban renewal. The defeat of urban renewal in Winston-Salem put slum clearance plans on hold in Winston-Salem. The creation of U.S. 52, a new African American school, and more industrial space for Reynolds would have to wait. But the redevelopment commission, the board of alderman, and the *Journal* had successfully linked East Winston with blight. The Winston-Salem city government had agreed that the city's blight had to be eliminated, but how and when?

⁹⁷ Rixie Hunter, "Redevelopment Gets Ax in City," *Winston-Salem Journal*, August 5, 1953.

CHAPTER 3

Jim Crow in Concrete

Former Winston-Salem, NC city-council member Evelyn Terry grew up in East Winston. The area she represents today does not resemble the African-American community she remembers from her youth. Recollecting one neighborhood in particular, The Shakes, Terry said “It was bad, they were awful slums, but that is where people lived, we did not have a choice.” But they also had “beauty schools, doctors’ offices, and great big houses and mixed between was a shantytown. I can remember (houses made of) brown boards and you could smell the good food cooking, collards and beans, but there was raw sewage running. Can you imagine the stench and that good food? It was surreal.” Even though these conditions existed Terry points out “that is what people had but, people were working, but they did not have anything.” The city of Evelyn Terry’s youth started to crumble under the weight of urban renewal beginning in 1956.⁹⁸

City directories, U.S Census records, and secondary sources bare witness to Evelyn Terry’s memory of East Winston. Ola Mae Forte established the La Mae Beauty College in 1937; she stayed in business for over 35 thirty-five years. The Kate B. Reynolds Hospital for African Americans, opened in East Winston, provided adequate health care for all of black Winston-Salem, who could not receive care at City Hospital to other local hospital that only served white patients. Highland Avenue had shotgun houses and black-owned single-family

⁹⁸ Evelyn Terry, interview by author, Winston-Salem, NC, March 6, 2009.

homes on the same street. East Winston's mixture of African American success and the harshness of Jim Crow housing segregation created a community where even the most successful businessman could identify with its most oppressed.⁹⁹

Because of Jim Crow most African Americans in Southern cities that developed after the Civil War found themselves "clustered" together in strictly defined geographic limits. Unlike New Orleans, Louisiana or Charleston, South Carolina two older Southern cities where African Americans usually lived in back alleys behind white homes, Birmingham, Alabama, Durham and Winston-Salem, North Carolina developed at a time when antebellum norms of white and black living space were in flux. In cities African Americans of the lowest economic means were concentrated in bottomlands throughout the South after the Civil War. Because of their low residential value, likely due to their association with disease, mosquitoes, standing water, swamps and smells, bottomlands represented one of the few places African Americans could afford to buy land close to the city. African American neighborhoods had also been restricted in some fashion to locating neighborhoods near cemeteries, city dumps, land with a steep slope, and land at the city's edge with low economic appeal. Bottomlands generally lie next to a water source where local rainwater flows. Subject to flood, bottomlands represented the worst residential areas. Monkey Bottom exemplified the cause of residential segregation and the type of area the redevelopment commission wanted to destroy because it was: located beside railroad tracks, in a bottom land with sewage from the local tobacco factories running through it, and near one of the oldest (white) cemeteries in the South. Because African Americans had little

⁹⁹ Lenwood G. Davis, *African Americans in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1999), 67-97.

choice over whether they should or should not live in a bottom, near railroad tracks, or beside a cemetery; these same areas were dubbed “blighted” by the redevelopment commission, whether or not African Americans had a choice about their “blighted” conditions becomes less plausible.¹⁰⁰

Since the General Assembly had not passed the amendment to the State slum clearance law in 1953 Winston-Salem’s fight against “blight” had all but died. The Board of Alderman had stopped ordering the building inspector to actively search for dilapidated housing to be condemned. Mayor Kurfees continued to nominate people to the redevelopment commission, but they had little power to affect change. By November 1956 it looked like the city’s slumlords could count on the marriage of “blight” and Jim Crow to continue in Winston-Salem. However, *Winston-Salem Journal* reporter Chester S. Davis and others had not given up the fight to rid Winston-Salem of its “biggest problem.”¹⁰¹

On Sunday November 4th the *Journal* published a Davis article titled “The Invisible City: Behind Winston-Salem’s Façade” with the subtitle, “Squalor for 7,000 Families, Subsidized by the Rest of Us.” Davis continued to add to the early 1950s “blight” rhetoric by identifying East Winston as an “ugly” place representing “a miserable existence” for the people who lived there. But perhaps the most powerful link between East Winston and the

¹⁰⁰ John Kellog, “Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South,” *Geographical Review* 67, no.3 (July, 1977): 313; Ruth L. Mace, *Renewing Winston-Salem* (Winston-Salem: Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, 1965).

¹⁰¹ Chester S. Davis, interview by Robert Korstad, May 5, 1998, interview E-0112, transcript, South Oral History Project, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill, NC.

“squalor” described by Davis were a series of pictures of the one of the poorest neighborhoods in the South, Monkey Bottom.¹⁰²

Accompanying the article were an assortment of pictures of the neighborhoods in Davis wrote about. The first picture has two young African American boys riding down a dirt hill on homemade skateboards. In the background can be seen the back of a house divided into multiple apartments with an outhouse attached. Typically, one outhouse would service anywhere from six to sixteen families. The second picture shows a boy in his backyard surrounded by cardboard and other trash with an overgrown area behind him and the Reynolds Tobacco Company skyscraper in the background. Under these pictures the caption said, “Back yards like these, breeding a good deal more than discontent, can be found only a mile or so from your home.”¹⁰³

Housing in Monkey Bottom rented for six to fourteen dollars a month. There was no indoor plumbing in Monkey Bottom and residents could count on slumlords denying them any maintenance services. But, like Evelyn Terry said, because of Jim Crow, “that is what people had.” Growing up in East Winston Bravett E. Lyles Jr. remembers making toys for himself. If someone had a broken pair of skates then he would take the skates apart and nail them to a piece of wood to make skateboard. Lyles remembers making his own football out of a burlap bag, old rags, and tape.¹⁰⁴ Although Davis saw a “miserable existence” and Jim Crow had horrible consequences for African American living conditions, East Winston was a community. Only a few roads in East Winston were paved, the city did not offer trash

¹⁰² Chester S. Davis, “Squalor for 7,000 Families Subsidized by the Rest of Us” *Winston-Salem Journal*, November 4, 1956. See Page 74 and 75 for pictures.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Bravett E. Lyles Jr., interviewed by author, May 14, 2008.

collection, residents who had the most menial jobs might live down the street from a lawyer or doctor. Because the line between classes in Winston-Salem was difficult to find, Davis' article had an immediate impact on the entire black community.

Davis' caption also implied that the backyards "Behind Winston-Salem's Façade" had a pathologic nature to them capable of spreading to "your," white, home. While there was no serious threat of an imminent outbreak, Davis' reference to disease played on white fears of the polio outbreak of 1948. By this time Jonas Salk had perfected his cure and little boys and girls around the country were being inoculated, however Davis' disease rhetoric still resonated with Winston-Salem's white population. Within two months the Alderman Archie Elledge who had been staunchly against urban renewal in 1953, had changed his mind. He said, "Legislation will enable the city to proceed with the repairs of many of the blighted individual tracts of ground located in various sections on the city."¹⁰⁵

Besides the public health threat posed by these neighborhoods Davis argued that "blight" or "negro rental property" cost the city's taxpayers over \$500,000 a year to subsidize slumlord's profit. He reasoned that since the average cost for the city per year to provide services to a home was \$93.00 and most "sub-standard" homes in East Winston only provided \$20.00 in taxes that the city was losing around \$70.00 per home. Davis goes on to say, "The landlords have a good thing and they want to keep it. The chances are that most of us, had we happened to own property, would share their understandable distaste for change."¹⁰⁶ Davis never openly questioned the policies that created Jim Crow slum rental

¹⁰⁵ Article, *Winston-Salem Journal*, January 8, 1957.

¹⁰⁶ Chester S. Davis, "Squalor for 7,000 Families Subsidized by the Rest of Us" *Winston-Salem Journal*, November, 4, 1956.

housing, but he did think his readers would understand the dollars and cents of his “blight” math.

Davis does not define what services the city provided in places like Monkey Bottom. Monkey Bottom had no paved streets, indoor plumbing, or garbage collection. From as early as 1890 Monkey Bottom residents had worked at the tobacco factories making Winston-Salem into a “tobacco metropolis.” Pictures from places like Monkey Bottom are devoid of paved streets not to mention cars. The lack of garbage collection is evidenced by both residents using creeks and open lots to dump their trash and lack of paved streets for trucks to drive on.¹⁰⁷ Davis’ article does not suggest one perfect solution to the city’s “biggest problem” and the “miserable existence” of those who live on the other side of “Winston-Salem’s Façade.” He wrote, “No one tool—city planning, zoning, public housing, urban redevelopment or rehabilitation—will accomplish the job of slum clearance by itself.” He argued that all of these tools would be necessary for the city to fight “blight.”¹⁰⁸

Mayor Marshall Kurfess agreed with Davis’ notions concerning the drain “blight” had on the city. In a Board of Alderman meeting on January 7, 1957 Kurfess reappointed members to the Redevelopment Commission in anticipation of a change in the upcoming General Assembly toward the state slum clearance law. He appointed Charles B. Wade, by this time a R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company executive and Tom Davis of Piedmont Airlines to run the commission. In response Alderman Elledge, old-opponent of redevelopment, asked the Board to support legislation that would allow the city to buy “blighted” dwellings

¹⁰⁷ Chester S. Davis, “Squalor for 7,000 Families Subsidized by the Rest of Us” *Winston-Salem Journal*, November, 4, 1956; Nannie M. Tilley, *The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 144.

¹⁰⁸ Chester S. Davis, “Squalor for 7,000 Families Subsidized by the Rest of Us” *Winston-Salem Journal*, November, 4, 1956.

make necessary repairs and sell them on the open market. Elledge argued, “it would maintain sole control of the property within the confines of Forsyth County and the City of Winston-Salem, and would not of necessity call upon the Federal Government for assistance.”¹⁰⁹

Two weeks later Elledge withdrew his proposal amid attacks from City Attorney Irving Carlyle who declared, “You have the law to do the work if this Board of Alderman will have the courage to do its duty.” Carlyle implied that the Board did not have the courage to stand up to city slumlords and “crackdown on slums.” At this meeting the Board asked the City Building Inspector to, as they did from 1951 through 1953, bring before them all property owners who refused to bring their rental property up to the Federal standard. After withdrawing his proposal Elledge said, “I’m getting tired of seeing slum houses spread all over the newspaper.”

Alderman William R. Crawford, the only African American member of the Board, understood slum clearance and urban renewal in other terms. He said, “It all depends on where our values are, is it on money or is it on human beings?” Crawford added, “Give a person a decent place to live in and he will come up with aspirations.” Like early twentieth century middle-class African American uplift ideology, the idea that African Americans could refute racist stereotypes by stressing the respectability of an African American elite, Crawford saw the removal of East Winston’s slum housing as a way to “uplift” the entire African American community of Winston-Salem.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Article, *Winston-Salem Journal*, January 8, 1957.

¹¹⁰ Victoria S. Walcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 6; *The Winston-Salem Journal*, January 22, 1957.

This meeting was a watershed moment in the determining whether urban renewal would occur in Winston-Salem. Up to this point Alderman Archie Elledge had been the biggest ally that slumlords had on the Board. With Elledge intimating that he would be willing to support legislation that would clear the city's slums, it began to look like urban renewal, as far as the city's power structure was concerned, had found all the support it needed.

At the next meeting the Board asked Forsyth County legislatures to support a change in the state slum clearance law that would make it possible to redevelop an area if only two-thirds of the homes were "blighted." Elledge added at the meeting, "Winston-Salem deserves to get rid of [slums] one way or the other. Alderman Crawford led the meeting's vote by being the first to ask vote for the motion. Once again the slum clearance question shifted to Raleigh, where the General Assembly of North Carolina met to discuss the change.¹¹¹

In March 1957 Kurfees and Wade went to Raleigh to speak in favor of urban renewal and to plead for a change in the slum clearance law, much the same way they had spoke in 1953. Unlike the 1953 General Assembly, this time Governor Luther Hodges supported urban renewal. Hodges saw urban renewal as a way to unit the growing North Carolina cities with rural Eastern counties. In September of 1956 Hurricane Flossy ravaged the Gulf crossing Georgia and landed on Cape Hatteras, NC. Eastern county politician needed money to rebuild the coast and Hodges saw urban renewal as just that opportunity. On April 30,

¹¹¹ Article, *The Winston-Salem Journal*, February 5, 1957.

1957 the General Assembly passed a redevelopment act allowing for condemnation of an area if only two-thirds of its structures were “blighted.”¹¹²

At this point no one in Winston-Salem needed an explanation for what “blight” meant. Newspaper reports at this time rarely gave an explanation for what “blight” was or where it could be found. All of Davis’ readers in the *Journal* remembered his recent “Façade” article, but they also remembered Davis article in 1953 that explained just where “blight” could be found and what would replace it. City officials took little time officially outlining East Winston as the target of their first urban renewal program. On July 31, 1957 the *Journal* published an article detailing the study area. Reporter Rom Weatherman wrote, “The City County Planning Board designated more than one square mile of blighted territory in East Winston yesterday as an urban renewal study area.” The article noted that 4,722 housing units existed in the area with 69 percent of them “without private bath or dilapidated,” a condition considered as a symptom of blight.” Weatherman also noted that most of the people in the area rented and less than five percent were white. If the lack of an indoor toilet was a prerequisite for “blight,” then Jim Crow housing segregation, and therefore slumlords could be held directly responsible for the marking of East Winston residents as a “blighted” people in a “blighted” place.

The article also clearly spelled out that once clearance took place the centerpiece of redevelopment would be the “North-South Expressway.” This highway would bisect the city from north to south, connecting the new suburbs north and south of the city, and serve as a major truck route for companies moving goods through the state. Highways in the United

¹¹² The Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, *Urban Renewal in Winston-Salem 1951-1965* (Winston-Salem: Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, 1966).

States created a network of roads for the armed forces to move about the country in times of crisis and allowed major cities to maximize suburban growth by providing routes for commuters to reenter the city. Attached to the article was a map showing the proposed highway route that would separate East Winston from the rest of the city. Census records indicate that one of the geographic lines of segregation between races in Winston-Salem ran north to south and was composed of the Norfolk & Western Railroad line until it crossed Liberty St., at that point Liberty Street separated the races until it reached the city limits. The proposed route of the highway that would later become U.S. 52 ran parallel to the railroad and hugged Liberty St until well past African American East Winston. The route of the highway, combined with the urban renewal plan, would move the line of segregation further east into East Winston; meaning the amount of space that was available for African American living would shrink.¹¹³

By September the Redevelopment Commission still needed to have its plan approved by the Housing and Home Finance Agency and a public hearing concerning the proposed “workable plan” had to be held. Regardless of these requirements at a September 3rd Board meeting the Alderman voted to start buying property along the proposed truck route. The Board of Alderman believed they could save money by buying property before improvements had to be made on the property; improvements would have to be made if the Housing and Home Finance Agency did not approve the plan or if something unforeseen happened at the public hearing.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Article, *WSJ*, July 31, 1957.

¹¹⁴ Article, *WSJ*, September 4, 1957.

At the next meeting Tully D. Blair, President of the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, appeared before the board and gave his and his association's support for urban renewal. He said, "The Chamber of Commerce believes that it is imperative that Winston-Salem prepare itself for a new and spectacular growth. A key to this preparation is elimination of our growing blighted areas." In fact Winston-Salem's African American community had not been growing as fast as it had been. From 1890 to 1930 the city's black community grew from 5,726 to 42,705, but from 1930 to 1950 only 9,000 more black people moved to the city. Blair added, "slum areas create a serious problem because of their economic consequences." For Blair East Winston created an overall environment in the city that stunted the growth of the city. He believed that the "dreary environment" created a "drag on productivity for those living or working" there. The dramatic rise in population in the African American community from 1890 to 1930 was testament to just how productive these people were for the city of Winston-Salem. Until the mass mechanization of the stemming department at R.J. Reynolds, an aftermath of the 1940s tobacco workers strike, the productivity of the people living in these neighborhoods was never questioned. The city often touted itself as the "Tobacco Metropolis," while African Americans received no credit, performed most of the manual labor at Reynolds.¹¹⁵

That same day the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency approved Winston-Salem's application for federal funds. The administrator Albert Cole wrote, "I have determined that the Workable Program you have formulated for the elimination and

¹¹⁵ Article, *WSJ*, September 11, 1957; Home Owners' Loan Corporation, *Residential Security Map of Winston-Salem*, 1937; Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 371; *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950*, Vol. V. Block Statistics, Winston-Salem, NC, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1950.html> accessed on November 30, 2010.

prevention of slums and blight in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, meets the requirements of the Housing Act of 1949.” City-County Planning Department Director J.B. Rouzie believed slum clearance offered the only opportunity for Winston-Salem to fight “blight.” He said,

For a planner redevelopment (doing physical repairs on an already existing home) is not enough; subdivision review, zoning, capital improvement programs and all those things are ok, but when you want to do something about the slums, parts of the city that are not fit to live in...mostly in East Winston...in Monkey Bottom people lived hand to mouth, in some cases in housing that had dirt floors, most cases with no plumbing, and may have had no electricity.¹¹⁶

He added, “It was a cesspool, an armpit. They needed to be cleared, and replaced with something a lot better.”¹¹⁷ Most of Monkey Bottom would be replaced with U.S. 52.

“Blight” was a national language. All of the Winston-Salem’s correspondence with the Housing and Home Finance Agency used the term “blight” when talking about slums, but rarely defined it. However, they did offer of vision of what a city without “blight” looked like. According to Cole, “decent, safe, and sanitary,” housing composed a neighborhood without “blight.” Winston-Salem’s city leaders saw nothing “decent” in East Winston. Now that the federal government had given Winston-Salem’s plan approval, the Board of Alderman looked for a place to experience urban renewal first-hand.¹¹⁸

On October 3, 1957 the Board of Alderman and Mayor Kurfees took a trip to Roanoke, Virginia. Gathering around a set of three “shacks,” the board watched as Kurfees applied the torch to one of the gasoline soaked houses. The group cheered when the buildings toppled in on each other. The Roanoke area and Winston-Salem’s proposed

¹¹⁶ J.B. Rouzie, interview by author, August 15, 2008; Board of Alderman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Alderman of Winston-Salem, October 7, 1957*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Board of Alderman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Alderman of Winston-Salem, October 7, 1957*.

redevelopment area were very similar, African Americans predominated in the area and both neighborhoods were adjacent to industry. One Roanoke official said their area was at, “the heart of the city’s worst slum, with a high concentration of fire hazards, crime and juvenile delinquency, delinquent taxpayers, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and other diseases.” The language of “blight” in Roanoke echoed the rhetoric of Winston-Salem’s Redevelopment Commission, newspaper, city government, and planning department.¹¹⁹

For the rest of the year and all of 1958, the Redevelopment Commission and Planning Department prepared for the public hearing and waited for the final approval from the Board of Alderman. The Redevelopment Commission continued to file for grants from the government to complete its final plan and received them; on April 2, 1958 the city received \$1.8 million for use in the city’s plan. Mason Swearingen, newly appointed commission director, noted that the largest cause for delay was lack of standard housing to house those families African American families being displaced. He said, “If we can get enough people interested in building houses, we can move right along. We’ve been planning this thing for a long time and we are ready to move.” Swearingen added that he thought the city had enough public housing and it was up to private citizens to create the new housing.¹²⁰ But, Winston-Salem contractors did not build new housing. If they had wanted to build new housing for the families that would be displaced by renewal they would have had to build housing for African Americans in white neighborhoods in the city or white suburban neighborhoods outside the city. Because of the Jim Crow restriction of African American living space there simply was not any place to build new houses for black residents under Jim Crow.

¹¹⁹ Article, *WSJ*, October 4, 1957.

¹²⁰ Article, *WSJ*, April 3, 1958.

In September the city intensified its purchase of property along the proposed route of U.S. 52. Displaced East Winston residents along the route had to search for new housing, but with no new housing being built in East Winston, the city's public housing completely full, and Jim Crow housing segregation constricting residents to already existing black neighborhoods, most residents along the route crammed into already densely populated areas. The city's purchase of dwellings along the route of the highway was separate from any urban renewal purchase of property, meaning the city was not responsible for residents' relocation.¹²¹

The spring of 1959 marked the unveiling of the redevelopment commission's General Neighborhood Renewal Plan. Covering 606 acres in East Winston, at a cost of \$24,820,00 of which the city would play \$7,440,000, and requiring ten years to complete, the plan completely laid out the clearance and redevelopment of East Winston. From the railroad on the South and West to Eleventh St on the North, the first project would completely destroy Monkey Bottom and replace it with U.S. 52. Though the first project was the smallest of the five proposed in terms of acres, it would displace the most people and the highway's structure would literally wall-off East Winston from the rest of the city.¹²²

On August 10th the Redevelopment called a hearing to discuss urban renewal with the public. In the Municipal Courtroom at City Hall the Board of Alderman listened for three hours to those for and against urban renewal. Most of the people who came were black homeowners who worried that their property might be taken without compensation. The

¹²¹ Article, *WSJ*, September 28, 1958.

¹²² The Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, *Urban Renewal in Winston-Salem 1951-1965* (Winston-Salem: Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission, 1966).

crowd of people interested filled the courtroom beyond capacity. The board decided to adjourn the hearing until a large enough space could be found for all interested to attend. City officials chose the Memorial Coliseum, an 8,500-seat arena, for the meeting to be held on September 11, 1959.

Before the meeting, on August 30th, the redevelopment commission put a full-page advertisement in the *Journal* explaining why urban renewal would allow for “dreams of a better life” for Winston-Salem residents. It said:

Up from the mud...Sixteen thousand people live there in 606 acres of East Winston, a neighborhood with more than its share of shacks, mud, poor plumbing, and newspapered walls, but lacking in playgrounds, parks, paved streets and just plain elbow room. Urban Renewal won't change a way of life overnight, but it will bring better housing standards to more people quicker than any other program that's available. And at less cost to the city.¹²³

The ad promised less population density, higher tax revenues, less overall streets, and the movement of 1,500 of the 3,920 families to standard housing. The ad made no mention of the construction of new housing to replace what would be destroyed. A map within the ad zoned entire areas of East Winston as residential, but did not explain how construction would be carried out. The ad closed by saying, “From small ideas, worthwhile projects grow, and the future takes on a purpose and a direction that give meaning to the forces of progress.”¹²⁴ Winston-Salem's “forces of progress” had come along way since 1948. Changing the mind of whites and blacks from no one caring about African American housing to the entire city ready to debate a million dollar slum clearance project that would forever change the city;

¹²³ Article, *WSJ*, August 30, 1959.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Winston-Salem urban renewal advocates entered the arena on Friday, September 11th ready to convince the city of their “purpose” and “direction.”

More than 400 people came to the coliseum to debate urban renewal on that Friday night. From the beginning of the meeting African American alderman William R. Crawford made sure those in attendance knew the importance of what they were debating. He opened the meeting with a prayer, he said, “as we prepare for mansions with Thee may we have an opportunity for mansions here on earth.” In covering the event Charles Richards wrote, “most of the actual opposition to the proposed program was voiced by white people.” He noticed that most of the argument against urban renewal centered on the reticence of people to want the federal government involved in local politics. After the opponents of urban renewal spoke for the first hour of the meeting Rouzie showed slides of Monkey Bottom and said, “The whole idea is to provide the area with things it never had.”¹²⁵

After Rouzie Alderman Crawford spoke at length in favor of urban renewal. Crawford grew up in the Rag Shakes neighborhood of East Winston. Parts of this neighborhood would become U.S. 52, making it an extremely important part of the renewal plan. He described conditions in the neighborhood where he grew up; shooting at rats with sling-shots, playing baseball in the street. He said, “these are things that are real. When I hear people in other sections of town tell me how I should live—they don’t know what they are talking about. Don’t tell me urban renewal isn’t good. Give a person a fit place to live and you’ll have a fit person to live with.” Crawford firmly believed that urban renewal would provide a form of uplift for black citizens who lived in places like Monkey Bottom or

¹²⁵ Article, *WSJ*, September 12, 1959.

the Shakes. He concluded by calming the fears of the African American middle-class who might have seen urban renewal as a threat to their home ownership, “Stop scaring the home owners. They’re going to be taken care of.” The federal government’s use of the eminent domain within urban renewal would only provide for those people who owned their homes, meaning if you rented, when the government bought the home you had to find a new place to live. If an African American homeowner in East Winston lived in an area that the commission deemed “blighted” and targeted for renewal, by law the homeowner still had to be paid fair market value for their home.¹²⁶ The meeting concluded with the board referring the motion of whether the board should favor urban renewal to the Finance Committee.

A week later the finance committee recommended the adoption of two resolutions. First, “to approve the general neighborhood renewal plan for 606 acres of East Winston.” Second, “to approve a detailed final plan for the redevelopment of a 67-acre tract east of the central industrial district.” The 67-acre tract would become known as “Project I” and would compose most of the land for the right of way for U.S. 52, it included Monkey Bottom and the Shakes. City attorney clearly explained the Board of Alderman that the adoption of these resolutions would give general approval for the entire plan. On September 21, 1959 the alderman gave approval to the redevelopment plan, the destruction of Monkey Bottom and the Shakes, and the construction of U.S. 52.

Over the last year the city had been buying property along the proposed route of the highway. By year-end bulldozers would be clearing the “blight” to make way for “progress.”

¹²⁶ Ibid.

The third picture¹²⁷ shows Monkey Bottom after some partial clearance has taken place and the path of U.S. 52 can be seen, although it is not paved. This photo was probably staged; the highway the police car is traveling on has not been opened yet. A few remnants of the shotgun style housing prevalent in Monkey Bottom remain. An aerial photograph shows the Monkey Bottom area in 1948 and another shows the same area in 1971.¹²⁸ This before and after juxtaposition illustrates just how drastic an effect urban renewal would have on East Winston. Thousands of homes would be replaced with open space for the next ten years.

The language of “blight” reshaped Winston-Salem. The maintenance of Jim Crow housing conditions could no longer operate in a city that saw living conditions as communicable. The highway erased Monkey Bottom, leaving a gaping hole at the center of what was once an African American community.

¹²⁷ See Appendix VI.

¹²⁸ See Appendix V and VI.

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of creating U.S. 52 city leaders turned their urban renewal efforts downtown. While the majority of Winston-Salem's downtown area was owned and operated by white business men, African American businesses in the downtown district were located on a block at the corner of Third and Church Streets. Many of the cities most prominent African American business were located here. Harriston's Drug Store, Mr. Harriston was rumored to be a descendent of R.J. Reynolds, was the only African American pharmacy in the city.¹²⁹ The Lincoln, The Rex, and the Lafayette theatres catered to African American moviegoers who did not want to go to the segregated Carolina Theatre. In order to see a movie at the Carolina Theatre African Americans had to first by a ticket at a segregated window then walk to the side of the building and walk up a metal staircase to reach the balcony. A dance hall, a dry cleaner, restaurants, and a grocer made up the rest of the Third and Church Street block.¹³⁰

In March 1965, the Board of Alderman were at the center of a city-wide debate over clearing the block to make room for parking spaces and a new five-story retail and office building. Proponents of the plan argued that this "business slum" was "unsightly" and needed to be relocated in order, "to provide the most economical way to widen Third and Church streets (to provide highway access) and to provide for additional parking

¹²⁹ Shirley Williams Dunlap and Mary Jane Williams, interview by author, Winston-Salem, NC, August 24, 2009.

¹³⁰ Robert Allen, *Main Street North Carolina*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/gtts/map/?city=winston-salem> accessed on April, 17, 2011.

facilities.”¹³¹ Opponents of the plan charged that it “was conceived to appease developers of the new Wachovia building (a recently built skyscraper) and others who feel that the block is unsightly and that there are no suitable places to relocate business now operating in the block.”¹³² The notion of a “business slum” was ironic given that Successful businesses make money and add economic benefit to the entire city. John Surratt, former mayor and opponent of the plan, said, “the block may be unsightly and that the building, in some cases, may not be up to par, but, there is more trade by business in the black section than by many other downtown businesses.”¹³³ If economic success did not shield a business against becoming a “business slum,” where did the proponents of this plan think these successful businesses be located?

City attorney Weston Hatfield argued that these African American businesses could be relocated to the newly created East Winston Shopping Center. A large component of one of the city’s urban renewal projects, this shopping center sat on what was once part of Monkey Bottom and home to hundreds of African American families. It was also on the other side of U.S. 52 from downtown. However, Hatfield was quick to point out at a March 8, 1965 Board of Alderman meeting that “no attempt was being made to push Negro tenants in the block back into East Winston.”¹³⁴

At the same meeting Surratt argued, “if you tear up this block many of the existing businesses will not survive.” He was right. On March 15, 1965 the Board of Alderman decided to approve the destruction of this historically significant block of African American

¹³¹ Article, *WSJ*, March 8, 1965.

¹³² Article, *WSJ*, February 16, 1965.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Article, *WSJ*, March 9, 1965.

businesses to make room for a new office building. No attempts were made to relocate African American businesses in this new building. The only business that survived was the cleaner who took up space in the East Winston Shopping Center. The Lincoln, Rex, and Lafayette closed due to lack of relocation space.

Today, U.S. 52 still divides the city's races into blacks on the east and whites on the west. No evidence remains that a black business district existed in Winston-Salem. No historic marker exists in Winston-Salem that celebrates this significant African American community. The only historic marker in the city that talks about an African American neighborhood is one for the Pond. It does not mention African Americans but instead celebrates the 180,000 gallons of water that descended into the bottomland below. The percentage of non-whites that live east of U.S. 52 is between ninety and ninety-five. Just to the west the percentage drops to thirty-five and continues to drop the further to you travel to the west bottoming at five percent in the wealthy "island" suburb of Buena Vista.¹³⁵

Evelyn Terry witnessed, "the construction of this road (U.S. 52) contributing to the isolation (of races)" from the viewpoint "that this is our world (black) and this is their world (white) and we will live in peace and harmony as long as we stay separate. And of course it is constructed by the powerful, because no one gets road money who is not powerful."¹³⁶ Because Terry believed that the destruction of parts of East Winston allowed for the building of a new line of *de facto* segregation, the intersection between the improvement of the city and the maintenance of segregation through *public* space becomes clear. U.S. 52 and urban

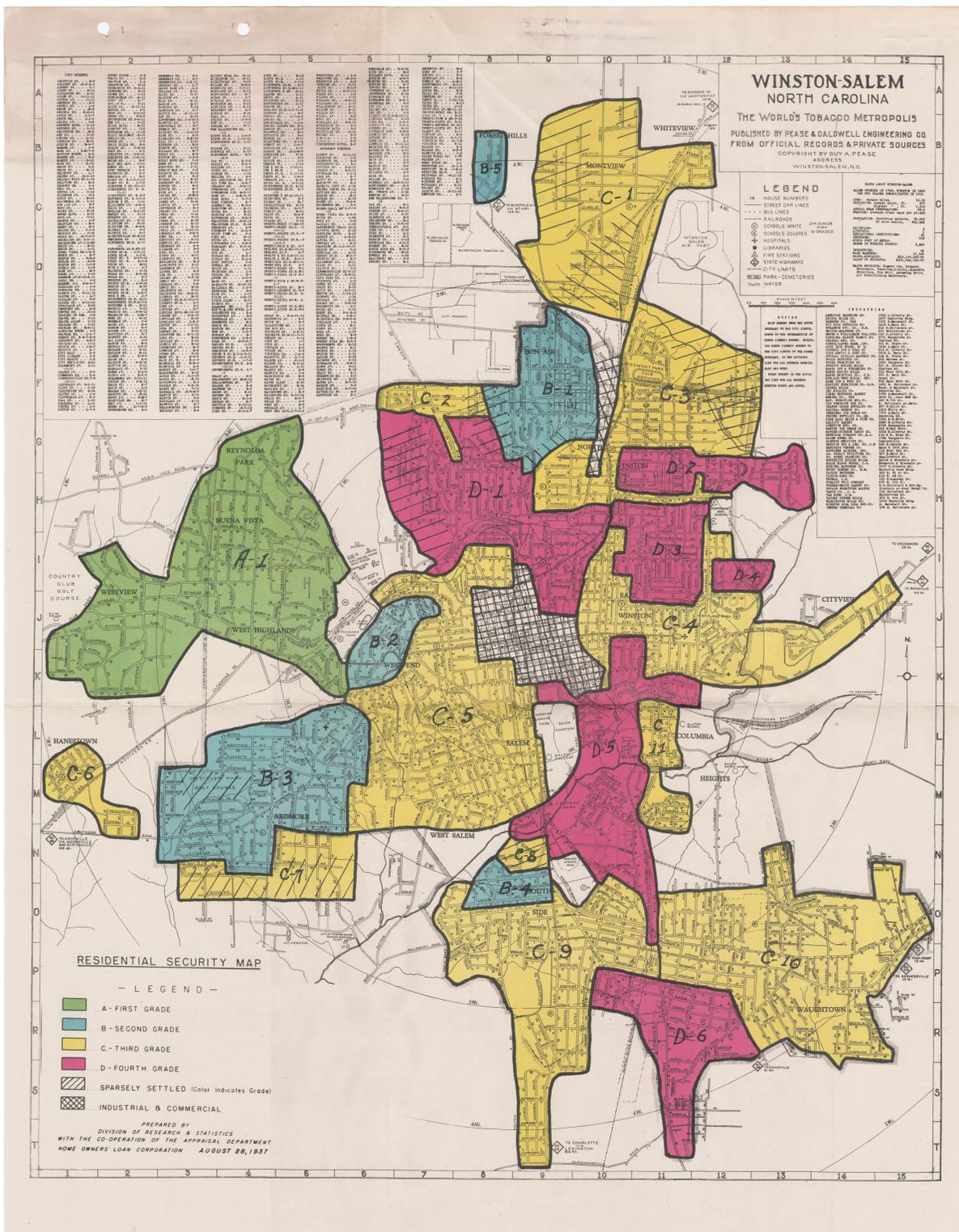
¹³⁵ Social Explorer, <http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/maps/map3.aspx?g=0&map=SE0012>, accessed on May 18, 2011. This website shows demographic data through maps.

¹³⁶ Evelyn Terry interviewed by author, March 6, 2009.

renewal created a new line, but this line was drawn in four lanes of concrete patrolled by the constant movement of 55 miles per hour sentries.

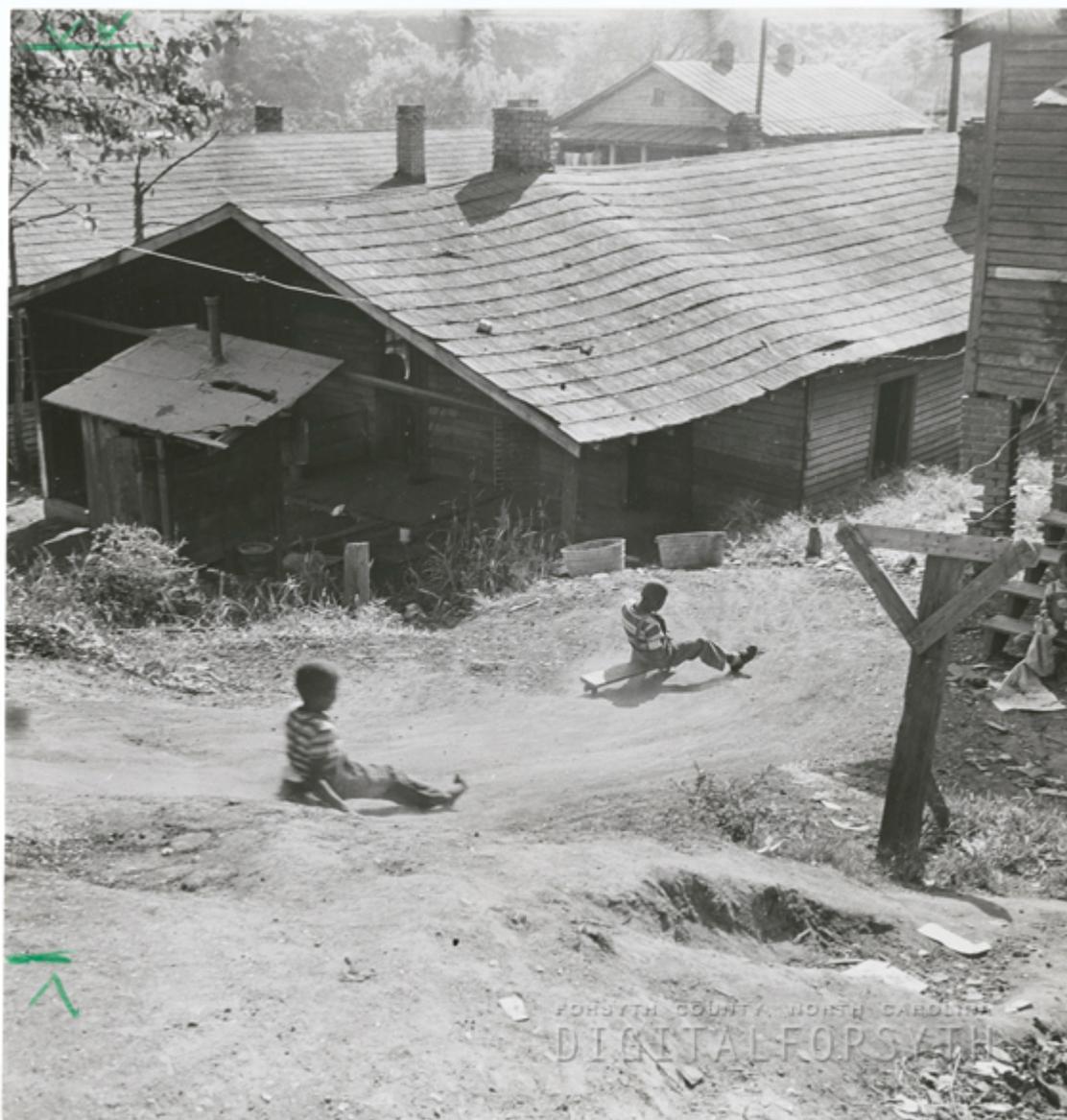
APPENDICES

APPENDIX I.



Residential Security Map of Winston-Salem, N.C.

APPENDIX II.



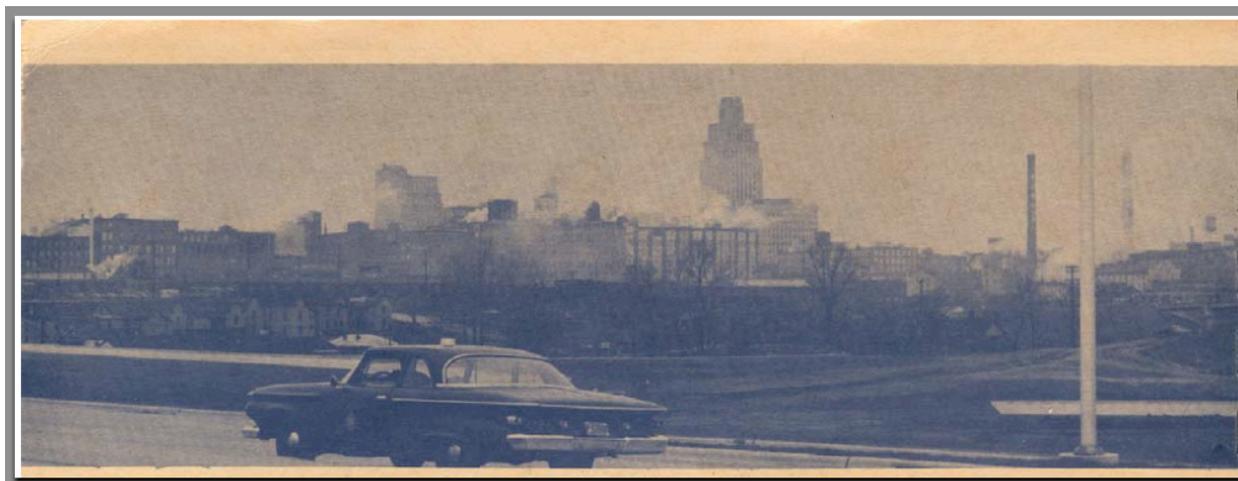
Part of Chester S. Davis' Article "Behind Winston-Salem's Façade."

APPENDIX III.



Part of Chester S. Davis' Article "Behind Winston-Salem's Façade."

APPENDIX IV.



Cover of 1960 City of Winston-Salem Police Department Annual Report.

APPENDIX V.



Aerial Photograph of Monkey Bottom 1951.

APPENDIX VI.



Aerial Photograph of Monkey Bottom 1971.